

**DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**BUILDING PEACE VIA SCHOOL PEACE CLUBS IN UMLAZI, ETHEKWINI  
REGION**

**ISHEACHIDA MANATSA**

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**ISHEACHIDA MANATSA**

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**APPROVED FOR FINAL SUBMISSION**

Supervisor: Dr J Davis

Signature :

Date: 08 - 06 - 2024

Co-Supervisor: Professor JT Harris

Signature :

Date: 08 - 06 - 2024

## **Declaration**

I, Isheachida Manatsa declare that:

1. This Thesis herewith submitted to the Durban University of Technology has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination at any university.
2. The research reported in this thesis is my original research.
3. All data, pictures, graphs, or other information sourced from other sources have been acknowledged accordingly both in-text and in the reference's sections
4. In the case where other written sources have been quoted, then:
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  - b) Where their exact words have been used, their writing has been placed inside quotation marks and duly referenced.

## **Dedication**

With profound reverence and commitment, I dedicate this research to the unsung heroes of the South African educational landscape: the unheard and suffering children in schools. In the face of daunting adversities and relentless trials, these young souls continue to carry the flame of hope and persevere, with determination towards the promise of a brighter future. May the insights gathered within these pages be a testament to their resilience, a beacon of inspiration and a call to action for a world where every child's dream should not only be heard but nurtured into reality.

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## **Abstract**

School violence stands as a pressing global concern, notably within the South African educational framework, with a particular focus on secondary schools. Existing literature and media representations have attempted to illuminate the disconcerting prevalence of violence within the high school setting. The causal factors underpinning this phenomenon are multi-faceted, encompassing aspects such as the geographical context of the school's location and the internal school environment itself. Additionally, the family and community setting assume a significant role in exacerbating incidents of school violence. The harmful repercussions on the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional well-being of both educators and learners have been extensively documented, observed, and experienced. Consequently, the effect of this issue necessitates the implementation of evidence-based interventions grounded in developmental principles. This research study, therefore, adopted an evidence-based approach in its efforts to mitigate the pervasive culture of school violence within four high schools situated in the Umlazi District of Kwa-Zulu-Natal, South Africa. To acquire baseline data, a questionnaire was administered to 603 learners. Subsequently, a series of interviews were conducted with four parents, seven teachers, and eight security personnel to gain deeper insights into the intricate dynamics of school violence. Following this phase, a Peace Club for twenty-eight learners was established within three participating schools, serving as a dedicated platform for learners to articulate their concerns. Regrettably, one of the four schools opted to discontinue its involvement in the study. In the remaining three schools, learners were actively engaged in a six-month series of focus group discussions. The findings unveiled a distressing pattern of recurrent violence within the vicinity of these schools. Predominantly, manifestations of violence encompassed threats, physical assaults, and theft. Moreover, learners frequently reported instances of verbal abuse perpetrated by educators. The causal factors of school violence were identified as stemming from various sources, including social media, drug and substance abuse, community, and family-related influences.

Drawing upon the principles of Action Research, participants from two distinct Peace Clubs voluntarily undertook the task of formulating peace projects tailored to their

respective schools. Unfortunately, one school decided to not formulate a peace project. Through the implementation of these peace projects, heightened awareness concerning school violence was created, underscored by an increased emphasis on the importance of a positive learning environment. This process demonstrated that even schools facing resource constraints can successfully initiate and sustain social initiatives. Notably, an observable improvement in learner behaviour was reported, thus substantiating the contention that viable solutions to complex issues can indeed originate at the grassroots level. Considering these outcomes, it is advisable to consider the effectiveness of Peace Clubs in mitigating school violence, with the added benefit of requiring relatively modest resource allocation in these strained economic conditions.

*Key words: school violence, action research, peace clubs*



# Table of Contents

|                                               |      |
|-----------------------------------------------|------|
| Declaration .....                             | i    |
| Dedication .....                              | ii   |
| Acknowledgements .....                        | iii  |
| Abstract .....                                | v    |
| Table of Contents .....                       | vii  |
| List of Figures.....                          | xv   |
| List of Tables .....                          | xvii |
| CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY .....   | 1    |
| 1.1 Introduction .....                        | 1    |
| 1.2 Problem Statement .....                   | 4    |
| 1.3 Research Aims and Objectives .....        | 5    |
| 1.3.1 Objectives.....                         | 6    |
| 1.3.2 Research Questions .....                | 6    |
| 1.4 Significance of the Study.....            | 6    |
| 1.5 Contents of the Research Report.....      | 7    |
| 1.6 Chapter Summary .....                     | 8    |
| CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW.....            | 9    |
| 2.1 Introduction .....                        | 9    |
| 2.2 The Nature of School-Based Violence ..... | 9    |
| 2.3 Forms of School Violence .....            | 12   |
| 2.3.1 Physical Violence.....                  | 13   |
| 2.3.2 Gang Violence .....                     | 13   |
| 2.3.3 Sexual Gender-Based Violence.....       | 15   |
| 2.3.4 Verbal and Emotional Violence .....     | 16   |

|       |                                                       |    |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 2.3.5 | Institutionalised Violence .....                      | 21 |
| 2.4   | Factors Contributing Towards School Violence .....    | 22 |
| 2.4.1 | School Environment .....                              | 22 |
| 2.4.2 | Community Environment .....                           | 25 |
| 2.4.3 | Family Environment.....                               | 29 |
| 2.4.4 | Peer Pressure.....                                    | 31 |
| 2.4.5 | Media.....                                            | 32 |
| 2.5   | Theories of Aggression .....                          | 33 |
| 2.5.1 | Social Aggression Learning Theory .....               | 34 |
| 2.5.2 | General Strain Theory .....                           | 36 |
| 2.5.3 | Frustration-Aggression Theory .....                   | 38 |
| 2.5.4 | Cognitive-Neo-Association Towards Aggression .....    | 39 |
| 2.5.5 | Social Identity Theory .....                          | 39 |
| 2.6   | Consequences of School Violence.....                  | 41 |
| 2.6.1 | Health Consequences .....                             | 42 |
| 2.6.2 | Psychological Consequences.....                       | 42 |
| 2.6.3 | Educational Consequences .....                        | 44 |
| 2.6.4 | Economic Consequences .....                           | 46 |
| 2.6.5 | Social Consequences.....                              | 47 |
| 2.6.6 | Teacher Consequences .....                            | 47 |
| 2.7   | Local Policy and Legislation on School Violence ..... | 48 |
| 2.7.1 | International Declarations .....                      | 49 |
| 2.8   | The Constitution of South Africa.....                 | 52 |
| 2.8.1 | Bill of Rights.....                                   | 52 |
| 2.8.2 | Section 9: Equal Protection .....                     | 53 |

|                                          |                                                                                                              |    |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 2.8.3                                    | Section 12: The Teachers, Freedom, And Security .....                                                        | 53 |
| 2.8.4                                    | Section 28: Best Interests Of The Child .....                                                                | 54 |
| 2.8.5                                    | Section 29: The Right to Education .....                                                                     | 54 |
| 2.9                                      | The Legislation .....                                                                                        | 55 |
| 2.10                                     | Common Law .....                                                                                             | 57 |
| 2.11                                     | Case Law .....                                                                                               | 57 |
| 2.12                                     | National policies .....                                                                                      | 59 |
| 2.12.1                                   | National School Safety Framework .....                                                                       | 60 |
| 2.12.2                                   | Safety in Education Partnership Protocol .....                                                               | 61 |
| 2.12.3                                   | Intervention Strategies .....                                                                                | 62 |
| 2.13                                     | Alternative Programmes .....                                                                                 | 67 |
| 2.13.1                                   | The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) (Youth<br>Violence Prevention Programme) ..... | 67 |
| 2.13.2                                   | Alternative to Violence Programme (AVP) .....                                                                | 67 |
| 2.13.3                                   | Peace Education/Peace Clubs .....                                                                            | 68 |
| 2.14                                     | Chapter summary .....                                                                                        | 69 |
| CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK..... |                                                                                                              | 70 |
| 3.1                                      | Introduction .....                                                                                           | 70 |
| 3.2                                      | Conflict Transformation Theory .....                                                                         | 72 |
| 3.3                                      | Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.....                                                              | 74 |
| 3.3.1                                    | Micro-System.....                                                                                            | 77 |
| 3.3.2                                    | Mesosystem .....                                                                                             | 80 |
| 3.3.3                                    | Exo-System .....                                                                                             | 80 |
| 3.3.4                                    | Macro-System .....                                                                                           | 81 |
| 3.3.5                                    | Chronosystem .....                                                                                           | 81 |
| 3.3.6                                    | Peace Clubs an Extra Curriculum Activity, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological. ..                                    | 82 |

|                                         |                                                                       |     |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 3.4                                     | Systems Thinking Theory .....                                         | 84  |
| 3.5                                     | Transformative Learning Theory .....                                  | 86  |
| 3.6                                     | Social Learning Theory .....                                          | 90  |
| 3.7                                     | Chapter Summary .....                                                 | 94  |
| CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ..... |                                                                       | 96  |
| 4.1                                     | Introduction .....                                                    | 96  |
| 4.2                                     | Research Design.....                                                  | 96  |
| 4.3                                     | Research Paradigm .....                                               | 97  |
| 4.3.1                                   | Constructivist Worldview.....                                         | 98  |
| 4.4                                     | Action Research.....                                                  | 101 |
| 4.4.1                                   | Action Research Stages .....                                          | 103 |
| 4.5                                     | The Roles of the Researcher and Participants in Action Research ..... | 106 |
| 4.6                                     | Mixed Methodology .....                                               | 107 |
| 4.6.1                                   | Selecting a Mixed Methods Approach .....                              | 110 |
| 4.6.2                                   | Explanatory Sequential Design.....                                    | 112 |
| 4.7                                     | Data Collection Methods .....                                         | 114 |
| 4.7.1                                   | Sampling methods.....                                                 | 117 |
| 4.7.2                                   | Questionnaire .....                                                   | 117 |
| 4.7.3                                   | Interviews .....                                                      | 119 |
| 4.7.4                                   | Focus group discussion .....                                          | 120 |
| 4.7.5                                   | Data Analysis.....                                                    | 121 |
| 4.8                                     | Validity and Credibility of Data.....                                 | 122 |
| 4.8.1                                   | Quantitative Research .....                                           | 122 |
| 4.8.2                                   | Qualitative Research .....                                            | 122 |

|                                       |                                                                          |     |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 4.9                                   | Ethical Considerations .....                                             | 124 |
| 4.10                                  | Study Location .....                                                     | 125 |
| 4.11                                  | Researchers' Reflection on The Research Process in Umlazi District ..... | 126 |
| 4.12                                  | Conceptualisation of Key Terms.....                                      | 128 |
| 4.12.1                                | High School.....                                                         | 128 |
| 4.12.2                                | Teachers/Educators.....                                                  | 128 |
| 4.12.3                                | High School Learners.....                                                | 129 |
| 4.12.4                                | School-Based Violence .....                                              | 129 |
| 4.12.5                                | Action Research.....                                                     | 130 |
| 4.12.6                                | Peace Clubs.....                                                         | 130 |
| 4.12.7                                | Programmes.....                                                          | 131 |
| 4.13                                  | Chapter summary .....                                                    | 131 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION ..... |                                                                          | 133 |
| 5.1                                   | Introduction .....                                                       | 133 |
| 5.2                                   | Quantitative Data Analysis and Interpretation .....                      | 134 |
| 5.2.1                                 | Sample distribution in schools .....                                     | 134 |
| 5.2.2                                 | Safety among learners.....                                               | 136 |
| 5.2.3                                 | Types of Violence in Schools.....                                        | 139 |
| 5.2.4                                 | Frequency of violence in schools.....                                    | 143 |
| 5.2.5                                 | Effects of violence on Learners .....                                    | 147 |
| 5.2.6                                 | Victimisation .....                                                      | 148 |
| 5.2.7                                 | Types of Violence Encountered by Learners .....                          | 151 |
| 5.2.8                                 | Frequency of Violence Among Learners.....                                | 156 |
| 5.2.9                                 | Effects of Violence on Learner Victims .....                             | 158 |
| 5.2.10                                | Section Summary .....                                                    | 162 |
| 5.3                                   | Qualitative Data Interpretation.....                                     | 162 |
| 5.3.1                                 | Analysis of Data.....                                                    | 163 |

|                                                        |                                                   |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 5.3.2                                                  | Demographic Profiles .....                        | 163 |
| 5.3.3                                                  | Interviews .....                                  | 163 |
| 5.3.4                                                  | Process of Analysing Interviews .....             | 164 |
| 5.3.5                                                  | Data Analysis and Findings .....                  | 164 |
| 5.3.6                                                  | Teachers' Interviews.....                         | 165 |
| 5.3.7                                                  | Parents' Interviews .....                         | 180 |
| 5.3.8                                                  | Security Guards.....                              | 193 |
| 5.4                                                    | Focus Group Discussions .....                     | 210 |
| 5.4.1                                                  | Introduction.....                                 | 210 |
| 5.4.2                                                  | Analysis of Data.....                             | 211 |
| 5.4.3                                                  | Demographic Profiles .....                        | 211 |
| 5.4.4                                                  | Discussion guide .....                            | 211 |
| 5.4.5                                                  | Process of Analysing Focus Group Discussion ..... | 212 |
| 5.4.6                                                  | School A .....                                    | 212 |
| 5.4.7                                                  | School B .....                                    | 218 |
| 5.4.8                                                  | School C .....                                    | 228 |
| 5.5                                                    | Chapter Summary .....                             | 238 |
| CHAPTER SIX: QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS ..... |                                                   | 239 |
| 6.1                                                    | Introduction .....                                | 239 |
| 6.2                                                    | Interviews.....                                   | 240 |
| 6.2.1                                                  | Current Situation in School .....                 | 240 |
| 6.2.2                                                  | Causes of School Violence .....                   | 245 |
| 6.2.3                                                  | Personal Effects of School Violence .....         | 251 |
| 6.2.4                                                  | Effects of Violence Learners.....                 | 255 |
| 6.2.5                                                  | Current Security Status.....                      | 258 |
| 6.2.6                                                  | Perceptions of Alternative Programmes .....       | 261 |
| 6.2.7                                                  | Peace Clubs .....                                 | 264 |

|                                     |                                                     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 6.3                                 | Learner perspectives.....                           | 268 |
| 6.3.1                               | Current Situation.....                              | 268 |
| 6.3.2                               | Causes of School Violence.....                      | 271 |
| 6.3.3                               | Effects of Violence.....                            | 275 |
| 6.3.4                               | Curbing School Violence .....                       | 277 |
| 6.4                                 | Chapter Summary .....                               | 282 |
| CHAPTER SEVEN: ACTION RESEARCH..... |                                                     | 283 |
| 7.1                                 | Introduction .....                                  | 283 |
| 7.2                                 | Feedback from the Focus Group Discussions.....      | 284 |
| 7.3                                 | Action Research.....                                | 284 |
| 7.3.1                               | Researchers' Role and Position in Peace Clubs ..... | 285 |
| 7.4                                 | Entry into the Group .....                          | 287 |
| 7.4.1                               | School A .....                                      | 287 |
| 7.4.2                               | School B .....                                      | 290 |
| 7.4.3                               | School C .....                                      | 292 |
| 7.5                                 | Project planning .....                              | 294 |
| 7.5.1                               | Situation Analysis .....                            | 295 |
| 7.5.2                               | Devising the Action Plan.....                       | 296 |
| 7.6                                 | Project Implementation .....                        | 299 |
| 7.6.1                               | School A .....                                      | 299 |
| 7.6.2                               | School B .....                                      | 300 |
| 7.7                                 | Project Evaluation .....                            | 301 |
| 7.7.1                               | School A .....                                      | 303 |
| 7.7.2                               | School B .....                                      | 305 |

|                                                              |                                                      |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 7.8                                                          | Researcher's Thoughts About the Peace Projects ..... | 307 |
| 7.9                                                          | Conclusion .....                                     | 308 |
| CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..... |                                                      | 309 |
| 8.1                                                          | Introduction .....                                   | 309 |
| 8.2                                                          | Findings .....                                       | 309 |
| 8.2.1                                                        | School-Based Violence.....                           | 310 |
| 8.2.2                                                        | Causes and Factors Influencing School Violence.....  | 312 |
| 8.2.3                                                        | Effects.....                                         | 315 |
| 8.2.4                                                        | Peace clubs .....                                    | 316 |
| 8.3                                                          | Summary.....                                         | 318 |
| 8.4                                                          | Conclusion .....                                     | 320 |
| 8.5                                                          | Recommendations .....                                | 322 |
| 8.6                                                          | Future research gaps .....                           | 327 |
| REFERENCES.....                                              |                                                      | 328 |
| APPENDICIES .....                                            |                                                      | 367 |
| Appendix 1 IREC Letter .....                                 |                                                      | 367 |
| Appendix 2 Permission Letter .....                           |                                                      | 368 |
| Appendix 3 Ethics Training Certificate .....                 |                                                      | 369 |
| Appendix 4 Logbook .....                                     |                                                      | 370 |



## List of Figures

|                                                                                                                      |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Figure 2-1</b> Conceptualizing School-Based Violence (Self-Generated). ....                                       | 12  |
| <b>Figure 2-2</b> Law Framework (Hlatshwayo 2018). ....                                                              | 49  |
| <b>Figure 2-3</b> South African Policies on School Violence (Self-Generated). ....                                   | 59  |
| <b>Figure 3-1</b> The Five-Way Step Process (Self-Generated). ....                                                   | 71  |
| <b>Figure 3-2</b> Five Interlocking Contextual Systems that Influence Child Behaviour<br>(Bronfenbrenner 1979). .... | 76  |
| <b>Figure 3-3</b> School Microsystem (Self-Generated). ....                                                          | 76  |
| <b>Figure 3-4</b> Systems Theory an Extra Curriculum Perspective (Self-Generated). ....                              | 82  |
| <b>Figure 3-5</b> School's Ecosystem (Self-Generated). ....                                                          | 84  |
| <b>Figure 4-1</b> Umlazi Research Methodology Structure (Self-Generated). ....                                       | 97  |
| <b>Figure 4-2</b> Knowledge Construction in Constructivism (Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah<br>2016). ....                   | 100 |
| <b>Figure 4-3</b> Action Research Cycle (Ferrance 2000). ....                                                        | 104 |
| <b>Figure 4-4</b> Mixed Methods Approach Factors (Self-Generated). ....                                              | 110 |
| <b>Figure 4-5</b> Explanatory Sequential Design (Creswell and Creswell 2018). ....                                   | 113 |
| <b>Figure 4-6</b> Data Collection Threatening Factors (Self-Generated). ....                                         | 114 |
| <b>Figure 4-7</b> Data Collection Process (Self-Generated). ....                                                     | 116 |
| <b>Figure 4-8</b> Umlazi District (Google maps 2023). ....                                                           | 126 |
| <b>Figure 5-1</b> Discussion Layout (Self-Generated) ....                                                            | 134 |
| <b>Figure 5-2</b> Safety Index in Schools (Self-Generated) ....                                                      | 136 |
| <b>Figure 5-3</b> Violence in Schools (Self-Generated). ....                                                         | 139 |
| <b>Figure 5-4</b> Frequency of Violence (Self-Generated). ....                                                       | 143 |
| <b>Figure 5-5</b> Victimization Index (Self-Generated). ....                                                         | 148 |
| <b>Figure 5-6</b> Violence Encountered by Learners (Self-Generated). ....                                            | 151 |
| <b>Figure 5-7</b> Frequency of Violence (Self-Generated) ....                                                        | 156 |
| <b>Figure 5-8</b> Effects of Violence (Self-Generated) ....                                                          | 159 |
| <b>Figure 6-1</b> Diagram 6:1 Current situation in school (Self-Generated). ....                                     | 240 |
| <b>Figure 6-2</b> Causes of School Violence (Self-Generated). ....                                                   | 245 |
| <b>Figure 6-3</b> Personal Effects of School Violence (Self-Generated) ....                                          | 251 |

|                                                                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Figure 6-4</b> Effects of Violence on Learners (Self-Generated).....               | 255 |
| <b>Figure 6-5</b> Current Security Status (Self-Generated).....                       | 258 |
| <b>Figure 6-6</b> Alternative Programmes (Self-Generated). ....                       | 261 |
| <b>Figure 6-7</b> Peace Clubs (Self-Generated). ....                                  | 264 |
| <b>Figure 6-8</b> Situations in Schools and Shared Experiences (Self-Generated). .... | 268 |
| <b>Figure 6-9</b> Spheres of School Violence (Self-Generated).....                    | 271 |
| <b>Figure 6-10</b> Effects of Violence (Self-Generated).....                          | 275 |
| <b>Figure 6-11</b> Curbing School Violence (Self-Generated). ....                     | 278 |
| <b>Figure 7-1</b> Areas Needing Intervention (Self-Generated). ....                   | 296 |
| <b>Figure 8-1</b> Peace Club Organogram (Self-Generated). ....                        | 324 |

## List of Tables

|                                                                            |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Table 2-1</b> South African Intervention Strategies Summary. ....       | 63  |
| <b>Table 4-1</b> Quantitative and Qualitative Methodology Comparison. .... | 109 |
| <b>Table 4-2</b> Establishing Validity. ....                               | 123 |
| <b>Table 5-1</b> Sample Distribution According to Schools. ....            | 134 |
| <b>Table 5-2</b> Safety Among Learners. ....                               | 137 |
| <b>Table 5-3</b> Types of Violence in Schools. ....                        | 141 |
| <b>Table 5-4</b> Frequency of Violence in Schools. ....                    | 144 |
| <b>Table 5-5</b> Effects of Violence on Learners. ....                     | 147 |
| <b>Table 5-6</b> Gender Distribution. ....                                 | 148 |
| <b>Table 5-7</b> Gender and Violence. ....                                 | 150 |
| <b>Table 5-8</b> Types of Violence Encountered. ....                       | 152 |
| <b>Table 5-9</b> Gender and Violence. ....                                 | 155 |
| <b>Table 5-10</b> Frequency of Violence. ....                              | 157 |
| <b>Table 5-11</b> Effects of Violence. ....                                | 159 |
| <b>Table 5-12</b> Gender and Violence. ....                                | 161 |
| <b>Table 5-13</b> Demographic Profiles. ....                               | 163 |
| <b>Table 5-14</b> Drug Usage Timeline ....                                 | 169 |
| <b>Table 5-15</b> School Demographics. ....                                | 211 |

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

*“I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent.”*

*– Mahatma Gandhi*

### 1.1 Introduction

The mitigation of school violence is crucial for a nation's progress and the achievement of the United Nations Development Goals, particularly goal number four, which emphasises the provision of quality education for all. Despite the pivotal role of high schools in facilitating the holistic development of learners, South Africa's educational system has been plagued by violence. The South African Council of Education (2011: 4) explains that high schools are not only expected to impart knowledge but also to instil values of self-awareness, responsible behaviour, and positive peer interactions. However, the persistently escalating violence in schools has raised concerns about the effectiveness of the institutions as environments for socialisation and learner growth. The gravity of this issue is reflected by the extent of media coverage of school-based violence (Netshitangani 2014: 1394; Khumalo 2019: 1).

Notably, it can be argued that school violence in South Africa should not be viewed as a recent phenomenon but rather an enduring issue that may have persisted since the establishment of formal educational institutions. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 1) point out that school violence in South Africa has been present even before the emergence of literature and initiatives on school safety; it has continued to increase at alarming levels, resulting in loss of lives in extreme cases. In support, Duma (2013: 1); Mgijima (2014: 198); Masinga (2016: 2), argue that school-based violence has become pervasive and showed no signs of decreasing over time.

Forms of violence observed in South African schools, include physical, psychological, and emotional. Ncontsa and Shumba (2013: 11) note that older male learners were often the

perpetrators of school violence, while younger learners, especially those in Grades 8 and 9, were more susceptible to experiencing violence in educational settings. A study conducted in two high schools in the Umlazi District, eThekweni Municipality in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, South Africa revealed that older learners engaged in bullying behaviours towards younger learners (Duma 2013: 60). Despite this Burton and Leoschut (2013) emphasized that schools had the potential to either positively or negatively reinforce behaviours. However, the prevalence of school violence poses a threat to the notion of schools being a positive reinforcement of early childhood development, as highlighted by Duma (2013).

Burton and Leoschut (2013: 1) reiterate that victimization in South African schools had created an environment of fear and insecurity that had detrimental effects on learning, academic performance, and learner development. The South African Council of Education (2011: 4) highlights that the severity of school violence in South Africa was evident in both primary and secondary schools, regardless of gender, age, race, or school category. Ngqela and Lewis (2012: 87) further observe that schools located in townships were particularly susceptible to violence, which posed a threat to the safe development and well-being of learners. The presence of violence and fear in high-density schools adversely impacted attendance and learners' ability to concentrate. This is especially concerning since many of these schools cater for learners from low-income housing where education is viewed as a means to escape poverty.

Ncontsa and Shumba (2013: 11) argue that violence is more prevalent in schools situated in high-density areas compared to low-density schools. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 13) support this finding that violence is more common in schools situated in high-density areas rather than low-density and rural areas. The inadequacy of facilities that support the holistic development of school children may also have a negative impact on the overall school climate. In response, Zoch (2017: 26) recommends the implementation of targeted interventions in schools located in high-density areas to improve school outcomes. Given the prevalence of violence in South African schools, there is a need for a strategic approach to reduce violence in schools, particularly in the Umlazi District within the eThekweni area, which is the focus of this study. Prior studies on school violence in

South Africa (the SACE report in 2011, Burton in 2008, and Burton and Leoschut in 2012) have recommended the use of traditional law enforcement strategies to combat violence in schools.

The effectiveness of traditional law enforcement methods for addressing the issue of school violence has been limited, as noted by Netshitangani (2014: 1395). Ngqela and Lewis (2012: 89) observed that township schools, due to their lack of resources, infrastructure, and unfavourable locations, were particularly vulnerable to violence. Given the contracting South African economy since 2017 and the expected tighter budget in the future, it is crucial that the country finds a cost-effective and sustainable solution to ensure the safety of its citizens (Gould *et al.* 2018: 2). This is a more pressing issue in the schools where the expectation is the preparation of the young to become useful and responsible future citizens. Mgijima (2014: 205) recommends a collaborative approach involving school communities as a viable strategy to combat school-based violence. Therefore, Gould *et al.* (2018: 13) suggest that local institutions should adopt a bottom-up approach by harnessing the collective wisdom of the community. In this context, the establishment of localized peace clubs, conceptualized and designed by learners, could play a pivotal role in addressing school-based violence.

Hence, an alternative strategy to address violence in schools is to cultivate tolerance and teamwork abilities in learners (Ncontsa and Shumba 2013: 11). To this end, the implementation of school peace clubs could be viewed as a systematic approach towards effecting change. These clubs would act as a mechanism to supervise and promote the use of nonviolent techniques for conflict resolution among learners in Umlazi District. The underlying premise is that if learners can be educated and trained to become advocates for peace within and beyond the school environment, it could lead to the advancement of peaceful and nonviolent principles in resolving disputes among learners, as Juma (2015) emphasises.

Mgijima (2014: 205) postulates that, to address violence in schools, effective strategies that actively engage school communities are necessary. One prospective strategy is the formation of peace clubs. Examining the potential role of peace clubs in resolving conflicts in schools located in the Umlazi District could be a viable strategy for developing an

intervention that challenges the pervasive culture of violence in Umlazi schools. The primary objective of this research is to investigate whether school-based peace clubs can serve as an initiative to bring about systematic change in addressing violence in four selected schools. As such, a targeted number of four schools will be educated and trained in peacebuilding and nonviolence principles. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the peace club approach in resolving conflicts within and around the school premises. The experiences and feedback from participants will inform the development of a strategy that can be widely adopted within the school's community on a wider scale.

The conceptual framework of this study draws upon the guiding principles proposed by Juma (2015) which encompass the key themes of relationships, justice, human rights, stress, and trauma healing, as central to the philosophy of peace clubs. Additionally, this approach is informed by four of the seven strategies outlined by the World Health Organization (2016) for ending violence against children. These include: (i) challenging norms and values that promote the use of violence as a means to resolve conflicts; (ii) creating safe environments by targeting violent hot-spots and establishing safe spaces; (iii) providing effective response and support services, with peace clubs being identified as a potential source of such support; and (iv) enhancing education and life skills, including the promotion of peace education in schools, to improve children's social and life skills. It is noteworthy that there is limited existing literature on the topic of peace clubs, particularly in the context of South Africa. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the current body of knowledge by providing new insights and information on action research in South African schools, and the implementation and impact of peace clubs.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

As the South African Council of Education (2011: 4) describes it, the role of schools in the holistic development of children is not limited to imparting knowledge but also extends to cultivating self-awareness, responsible behaviour, and healthy social interaction with peers. However, the rising incidents of violence in schools have brought into question the efficacy of schools in promoting positive learner development in South African communities. The severity of this issue is further highlighted by the extensive coverage it

has received in the local media (Netshitangani 2014: 1394; Irene 2023). Nevertheless, school-based violence in South Africa is not a new phenomenon; its existence can be traced back to the inception of formal educational institutions. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 1) observe that the history of school violence in South Africa predates the literature and initiatives on school safety. The concerning levels of school violence in South Africa have become a significant cause for alarm, with some incidents resulting in loss of life. Mgijima (2014: 198) contends that violence in schools has been an entrenched and persistent issue over the years.

Ncontsa and Shumba (2013: 3) note that school violence is frequently perpetrated by older male learners, while younger learners, specifically those in Grades 8 and 9, are more susceptible to victimization. Taking the aforementioned into consideration, ninth-grade learners were chosen as the focal group, as they possessed a first-hand understanding of the impact of victimization. Burton and Leoschut (2013) argue that schools have the potential to either reinforce positive behaviours or contribute to negative behaviours. However, the issue of school violence has raised questions about the ability of schools to serve as positive reinforcements. Burton and Leoschut (2013) assert that victimization in schools creates an environment of fear and insecurity, negatively affecting learning, academic performance, and overall learner development. The South African Council of Education (2011) highlight that school violence is a pressing concern in primary and secondary schools, regardless of gender, age, race, or school type. Ngqela and Lewis (2012: 3) have further emphasised that violence in township schools poses a threat to the safe development and well-being of pupils as the presence of violence and fear can disrupt attendance and severely impair learners' ability to concentrate on their studies.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

This study aimed to explore whether peace clubs could be used to bring systematic change in attitudes towards school violence through designing a peace model and evaluating its effectiveness in mitigating the problem at four schools located in Umlazi District.



### **1.3.1 Objectives**

1. To investigate the nature, extent, and consequences of violence in four schools located in Umlazi District, eThekweni Municipality
2. To identify current responses to violence in Umlazi District and assess their effectiveness
3. To establish peace clubs in four schools and operate them over eight months as a vehicle for building nonviolent ways of handling conflicts, and
4. To undertake an evaluation of the outcomes of the peace clubs at the four schools.

### **1.3.2 Research Questions**

1. What is the nature, extent, and consequences of violence at four schools located in Umlazi District, eThekweni Municipality?
2. What are the current responses to violence in Umlazi District and their effectiveness?
3. Can peace clubs be established and operated at four schools for eight months as a vehicle for building nonviolent ways of handling conflicts?
4. What are the evaluation outcomes of the peace clubs in the four schools?

## **1.4 Significance of the Study**

School-based violence is a concerning phenomenon prevalent in many South African schools. This research employed a mixed methods approach to investigate the viability of utilising peace clubs and peace education as interventions to challenge the pervasive culture of school violence in Umlazi District eThekweni Municipality, Kwa-Zulu Natal Province, South Africa. By actively involving the directly affected learners and staff, the study aimed to generate knowledge on the potential effectiveness of peace clubs in addressing school violence. The participation of stakeholders in determining strategies for violence prevention promotes a sense of ownership and engagement. The research adopted an action research design which was meant to explore how troubled schools could create a peaceful environment by drawing on experiential knowledge, indigenous

wisdom, and best practices for peacebuilding in educational settings as directed by the community itself.

The research explained the ways in which learners and staff could engage in collaborative peace-building activities within their schools. The study could demonstrate how participatory interventions can provide a platform for the affected individuals to voice their concerns and contribute to peace-building efforts. Active involvement in the intervention process by participants would give a sense of empowerment in addressing the challenges faced, engage in critical reflection on divisive issues, and potentially bridge any gaps. The research findings have the potential to inform policy formulation and implementation in the Department of Education, and to influence participants' attitudes, mindsets, and behaviours in relation to conflict and peace (Irene 2023). The interactive nature of the participation process is expected to contribute to positive changes in the attitudes and behaviours of the participants in the context of conflict and peace.

## **1.5 Contents of the Research Report**

**Chapter One** focuses on the introduction to the study. This section discusses the problem statement, the aims and objectives of the study and significance.

**Chapter Two** discusses literature focusing on school violence. It considers the nature, extent, and consequences of school violence, forms of school violence, factors contributing to the problem, theories of aggression, consequences of school violence, local and international policy and legislation, and intervention strategies.

**Chapter Three** presents the theoretical framework. Theories that include conflict transformation, social learning theory, systems theory, and systems think theory are explained together with their link to the research problem.

**Chapter Four** covers the research worldview, the methodology and action research. Sampling, selection criteria, ethical considerations, reliability, and validity are discussed.

**Chapter Five** discusses the research findings extracted from the survey, interviews and focus group discussion information.

**Chapter Six** focuses on the action research element of the study. The seven stages of action research are discussed. The evaluation of the peace projects is discussed.

**Chapter Seven** discusses the key research findings of the study.

**Chapter Eight** concludes the research, and hints at future research gaps that could be investigated. Recommendations resulting from this study are given.

## **1.6 Chapter Summary**

The overall aim of the study was to investigate the nature, causes and extent of school violence in the Umlazi district. The present chapter initiates its discourse with an exploration of the introductory aspects of the research, succeeded by the explication of the problem statement. Subsequently, the study's aim, objectives, and research questions are discussed. The chapter culminates with a succinct overview of the overarching structure that defines the composition of the entire thesis. The following chapter discusses the literature that focuses on the nature, extent, and consequences of school violence in and around South Africa.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents a comprehensive literature review serving as a guiding framework for the current study. The review concentrates on the complex phenomenon of school violence, offering a thorough examination of its nature, underlying causes, and far-reaching consequences. The exploration encompasses an examination of aggression theories, an analysis of various contextual factors that contribute to the intricate dynamics surrounding school violence. The prevalence of school violence as a serious social problem is underscored, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted topics the study investigated.

#### **2.2 The Nature of School-Based Violence**

School-based violence is a multifarious occurrence that manifests in diverse forms, extensively documented in scholarly literature. Masinga (2016: 117) notes that violence is a multi-dimensional phenomenon encompassing a range of expressions varying in frequency influenced by individual characteristics such as age and gender (Benbenishty and Astor 2008: 72). The South African Human Rights Commission (2008: 5) highlights the nature of violence as being reliant on the social context in which it occurs, whether it involves learner-on-learner, teacher-on-learner, or learner-on-teacher, or external aggression directed towards both learners and educators.

Khani (2016: 6) identifies five distinct categories of violence that occur within schools, namely, physical assault perpetrated by learners upon one another, sexual assault committed by male learners upon female learners, assault (both physical and sexual) inflicted upon learners and teachers by individuals not affiliated with the school, assault committed by teachers upon learners, and assault upon teachers by learners. The South African Human Rights Commission (2008) distinguishes school-based violence and

similarly identifies four categories of violence between learners, violence from learners towards teachers, violence from teachers towards learners, and violence from external individuals towards both learners and teachers.

The occurrence of violence within the South African school environment is not a recent phenomenon, but instead, is an inescapable feature of the daily lives of school children. It is highly probable that violence existed prior to significant historical events such as the Sharpeville Massacre, and the 1976 Soweto Uprisings. The former involved apartheid police shooting school children, while the latter was a violent confrontation with the state headed by school children. Mabasa and Muluvhu (2019: 14393) note that school violence is evident within the political history of South Africa, compounded by the current circumstances of extreme poverty and inequality.

The definition of violence is problematic due to the lack of uniformity stemming from diverse influences on the perception of what constitutes violence, which varies across different communities. The World Health Organization (2002: 4) highlights that defining violence is not a scientific effort but rather an issue of judgement. Najjuma (2011: 17) contends that the existence of multiple definitions creates controversy and inconsistency shaped by contextual familiarity. The term "school-based violence" itself is continuously evolving (Henry 2014). Constantly changing factors that influence violence in the school environment render the definition of the phenomena problematic.

The World Health Organization (2002) defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threats or actual, against oneself, another person, or a group or community, resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation. Gaultung (1969: 179) identifies four typologies of violence: classical violence, involving intentionally inflicted harm such as war and torture; misery, with the deprivation of basic material needs; repression, involving the loss of various forms of freedom, mainly freedom of choice; and alienation, which is the deprivation of non-material needs for relations with society, others, oneself, often resulting in the loss of identity. These four typologies are significant in defining school-based violence in the present study.

Recent years have seen attempts to define school-based violence with contextual and temporal influential factors. Before the advent technological advancements such as social media and the use of digital networks, say Akiba *et al.* (2002: 836) any physical or psychological attack, or threat of attack, by learners or teachers on other learners within a school environment was perceived by the victim as violence. Despite this limitation, there is an acknowledgement that violence can manifest in physical and psychological forms. On the other hand, Van Der Merwe (2010: 108) points out that violent behaviour is any form of abuse, destructive conduct, or criminal activity occurring within a school environment. Taken together, learner-on-learner victimisation is unaccounted for in the two definitions.

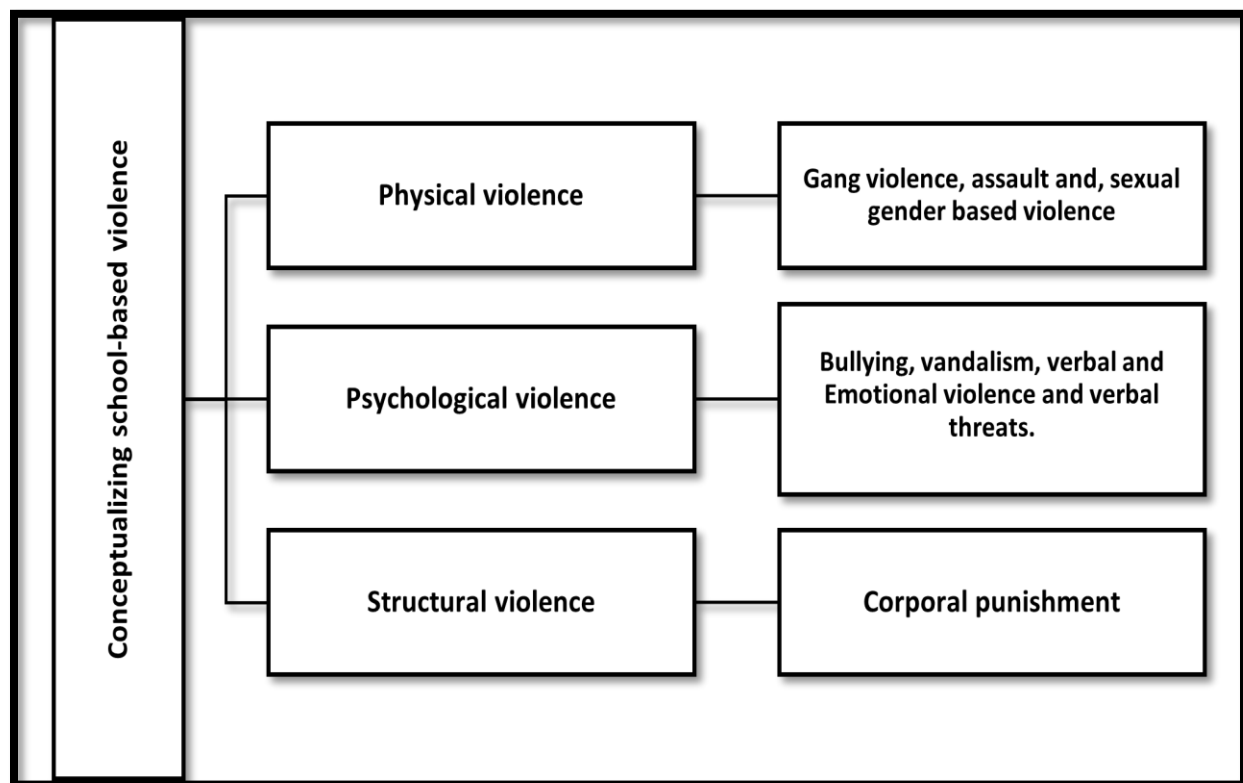
Miller and Kraus (2008: 15) posit that school violence is a broad construct that encompasses various behaviours such as victimisation of teachers and children through physical and psychological exploitation, cyber-victimisation and intimidation, fighting, bullying, classroom disruption, physical and psychological harm to both teachers and learners, cult-related behaviour, and the use of weapons. Burton and Leoschut (2013) add that any violent behaviour in the confines of a school environment including corporal punishment, cyber-bullying, and online aggression link to the definition. However, online aggression and cyber-bullying are not necessarily confined to school premises, but can occur in any location, including one's home.

An extensive assortment of violent behaviours in schools range from psychological to physical assaults, such as rape, hazing, and initiation; less severe forms involve intimidation, sexual harassment, gangsterism, drug trading, theft, and vandalism (De Wet 2014 ). Gopal and Collings (2017: 3) point out that violence related to school attendance encompasses occurrences that take place while learners are commuting to and from school or within the school premises, and pose barriers to school attendance. Kira *et al.* (2014) conclude that violence related to school attendance can be understood in two dimensions: first, the nature of the resources that are threatened or lost when violence happens, and secondly, the systemic level at which perpetration occurs.

There is need to distinguish different types of violence, as it can be perceived mistakenly as a single or general issue in society (Masinga 2016: 118). Forms of school violence are diverse, ranging from minor to severe acts of aggression, corporal punishment, bullying, gang-related activities, sexual abuse, physical assault, verbal abuse, theft, robbery, and threats (Center. Link News Brief 2002). In this study, types of violence, namely verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, property, gang, and systematic violence, are discussed. These forms are often inter-related, and significantly impact numerous schools in South Africa and elsewhere.

### 2.3 Forms of School Violence

Figure 1 depicts the various types of violence that learners and teachers may encounter as part of their daily experiences. Three primary categories of violence are identified: physical, psychological, and institutional, as illustrated in a flow chart below (Manatsa 2023).



**Figure 2-1** Conceptualizing School-Based Violence (Self-Generated).

### **2.3.1 Physical Violence**

Badri (2014: 6) and Pinheiro (2006: 52) describe physical violence as the deliberate use of physical force directed towards another learner, leading to detrimental consequences for the learner's well-being, survival, developmental progress, or dignity. Pinheiro (2006: 52) posits that this form of action includes striking, kicking, shaking, beating, biting, strangling, or burning; further manifestations involve inflicting blows to the head or body, or subjection to degrading punishments by educators such as ear or hair pulling, pinching, or enforcing prolonged periods of squatting. In contrast, emotional and verbal violence primarily rely on language as a means of harm, whereas physical violence predominantly employs objects and physical force with the intent to cause bodily injury.

In their study of South African learners Burton and Leoschut (2013: 13) established evidence of assault around school premises as prevalent. Furthermore, urban schools experienced notably higher incidences of aggression compared to metropolitan and rural areas (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 13). Patterns observed in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, in the Umlazi and Inanda environs, saw a heightened prevalence of violent activities, reflected by high crime rates. The districts have acquired a reputation as crime hotspots, consistently ranking at the forefront of criminal activity (Police Recorded Crime Statistics 2023: 15; Sign 2023).

### **2.3.2 Gang Violence**

Gangsterism is the formation of groups along racial and economic lines to perpetrate violence and crime while physically defending against other groups (Crawage 2005; Masinga 2016: 122; Maitra 2020). Gangs have identifiable symbols and names; their presence in schools, for example the Bloods and Creeps, in the United States of America (Starbuck, Howell and Lindquist 2001; Carson and Esbensen 2017). Ncontsa and Shumba (2013: 6) confirm the prevalence of gangsterism in schools in the Eastern Cape Province. Standings (2005: 8); Gevers and Flisher (2013: 180); Osadebe (2013: 87) posit that gangs comprise individuals with unique antisocial tendencies engaging in violence, crime, and disruptions within a school context to terrorise members of the community. These individuals held contrasting cultural beliefs from mainstream society and share



unique common values, beliefs, and rituals. Maphanga (2004: 2) suggests the existence of formal structures that regard outsiders as hostile or easy targets for victimisation. Gang affiliation, for various reasons, ranges from rebellion against authority, finding a sense of belonging, retaliation, earning honour and prestige among their peers, drug dealing or use, and committing crimes (Maphanga 2004: 18; Standings 2005: 8).

Often violent conflicts are provoked by minor incidents such as disputes over girls, stolen goods, money, or insults (Standings 2005: 15). Maphanga (2004: 18) explains that eruptions might be a means of gaining respect and power. Within the school context, gang violence is directed towards rival group members as they compete over various yet often similar issues. Research on the perceptions of educators in the Eastern Cape Province regarding the extent and causes of violence revealed that the presence of gangs in schools and townships contributes to an increase in victimisation of non-gang members (De Wet 2007).

This results in a terrorising traumatising "fear factor" for educators, learners, and parents, leading to threats, intimidation, and harassment, ultimately resulting in both learners' and teachers' absenteeism (Masinga 2016: 16). De Wet (2016: 3) also discusses the detrimental effect of gangsterism on learners, teachers, parents, authorities, and the community. Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014: 49) add that gangsterism induces fear among both learners and teachers, not only within the school premises but also during their commute to and from school. The fear of personal safety at school was connected to negative consequences such as decreased commitment to school, reduced attendance, and strained relationships with other learners.

Gangsterism in schools generates conflicts with catastrophic consequences that include the loss of lives among learners and teachers (Oluwatobi and Babatunde 2010: 26; Schenck, Magidi and Erasmus 2016: 76; Sibisi, Mkhize and Singh 2019: 5). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2007: 13) highlights that when learners are associated with gangs or reside in communities prevalent with gangs and drugs, it directly contributes to episodes of fighting, violence involving weapons, and drug-related issues within the school environment.

### 2.3.3 Sexual Gender-Based Violence

Bloom (2008:14) citing the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (2016: 4) describes sexual gender-based violence (SGBV) as a term used to capture violence that occurs because of the normative roles expected of each gender, and the unequal power relationship between the genders within the context of a specific society. The primary targets of gender-based violence are women and adolescents. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 20) contend that, although both males and females are victims, certain types of violent behaviours are more strongly associated with victimization of women. Such forms of behaviour are gender-based violence. Pinheiro (2006: 20); Benbenishty and Astor (2008: 72) describe sexual violence as verbal or physical sexual harassment, inappropriate touching, including sexual assault or rape, inflicted on children by someone with power and control over them.

Sibisi (2016) posits that the use of derogatory language such as "slut," "bitch," and "whore," among other terms exhibiting misogyny, can be perceived as an ongoing reminder for young women that their immediate surroundings are characterised by potentially dangerous intricacies. The solicitation of sexual activities with under-age female learners or female colleagues is an increasingly emerging trend among male teachers (Ngidi 2018). This behaviour unequivocally displays a self-centred disregard for the rights and dignity of women and young girls. Moreover, engaging in sexual relationships with learners does not only breach the trust of the community, but it also constitutes an illegal act and a breach of professional conduct (Ngidi 2018).

Educators often contravene the fundamental principle of *in loco parentis*, an integral component of South African school law and policy. The principle of *in loco parentis* places a significant burden on teachers to undertake the duties and responsibilities of parents in their absence (Naong 2007: 292). Disregarding the principle implies failure by educators to fulfil the expected role in providing care and guidance to learners as surrogate parental figures within the school setting. Also, Coetzee (2016) points out that incidents of learners recording sexual acts performed by their peers, sharing videos of fellow learners engaging in sexual activity, receiving or possessing messages with explicit content,

engaging in sexting, and accessing pornographic websites during school hours are increasingly perceived as commonplace behaviour among learners.

The South African School Violence Study by Burton and Leoschut (2013: 20) revealed significant gender disparities in experiences of violence among learners:, where females reported a higher likelihood of experiencing sexual assault or rape compared to their male counterparts. Further revelations recounted instances of unwanted touching, incidents of pushing or shoving into toilets and verbal abuse or teasing of girls. The study concluded that a substantial majority of the perpetrators were predominantly males. The findings are consistent with Mncube and Harber (2012) cited by Mgijima (2014: 199) who highlights the prevalence of sexual harassment of female learners by male counterparts in numerous South African schools. Mgijima (2014: 305) emphasised that sexual harassment of female learners remains a pervasive problem across many schools in South Africa.

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010: 231) posit that the escalation of child sexual abuse in South African communities contributes directly to the incidence of HIV infection among learners. Consequently, children who experience abuse and violence exhibit immediate indicators of distress, including elevated levels of anxiety, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, behavioural issues at school, diminished academic performance, and disrupted peer relationships (Bon 2012: 92). Long term, enduring consequences then manifest, such as compromised adult health, impaired personal relationships, and an increased propensity for engaging in violent criminal activities (Bon 2012: 92). Victims of sexual abuse were more inclined to resort to alcohol and drug abuse to conceal the emotional scars inflicted by the act (Nhambura 2020: 39). It is highly probable for such individuals, particularly girls, to drop out of school. Sexual violence and harassment experienced by young girls may also lead to teenage pregnancy.

#### **2.3.4 Verbal and Emotional Violence**

Masinga (2016: 119) notes that verbal violence is a prevalent type of behaviour characterised by derogatory name-calling, racial slurs, cursing, screaming, passing remarks, and the use of vulgar language. The existence of verbal violence in schools in the form of aggression seen by attacks of victim through words and teasing to cause

emotional harm is found in some literature (Benbenishty and Astor 2008; Osadebe 2013; Singh and Steyn 2013). Emotional violence, on the other hand, is an all-encompassing term that incorporates psychological and verbal abuse, and bullying, which can take various forms that include threats of physical violence, name-calling, sarcasm, spreading rumours, persistent teasing, exclusion from the group, tormenting, ridicule, and humiliating comments (Mncube and Harber 2013). Additional forms of emotional violence can be found in other studies: for instance, Benbenishty and Astor (2008) cite insults, neglect, and isolation; Antonowicz (2010) includes the refusal to check learner's homework, and repression of the child's emotion, while Devers *et al.* (2012) mention intimidation and emotional manipulation as forms of emotional violence. It is evident that emotional violence can manifest in various forms that include the use of words and humiliating actions that cause harm to the victim's emotional well-being.

#### **2.3.4.1 Bullying**

De Wet (2016: 62) describes bullying as a deliberate, recurrent perpetration of hurtful actions, verbal utterances, or other behaviours, such as derogatory name-calling, intimidation, or social exclusion, executed by an individual or a collective against one or more individuals. Bullying in educational institutions is propelled by an inherent power asymmetry (Du Plessis and Conley 2007: 43). Nhambura (2020: 35) contends that the individuals possessing superior power exploit the power imbalance to dominate the weak. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2008: 11) argues that perpetrators deliberately seek to inflict harm and distress upon victims, with the explicit intention of dehumanizing and subjugating victims.

De Wet (2007: 62) expanded the various manifestations of bullying experienced by learners, encompassing emotional bullying (for instance, terrorisation, extortion, character defamation, humiliation, blackmail, discriminatory ranking or rating based on race, disability, or ethnicity, manipulation of friendships, ostracism, and peer pressure), verbal bullying (for example, hurtful name-calling, persistent teasing, spreading gossip, and making racist remarks), and physical bullying (for instance, punching, poking, strangling, hair pulling, beating, biting, excessive kicking, and direct acts of vandalism).

The correlation between different forms of bullying and school violence is evident through instances of school shootings, chronic bullying, physical aggression, and suicides (Raven and Jurkiewicz 2014). Du Plessis and Conley (2007: 44); Sibisi (2021: 34) report that bullying represented the most prevalent form of school-based violence in South Africa. Educators confirmed daily and weekly bullying and being aware of the presence of known bullies (Du Plessis and Conley 2007: 44). Most schools have documented incidents of this phenomenon.

The phenomenon of teachers being subjected to bullying by learners has emerged as a significant and concerning issue within primary and secondary educational institutions. The prevalence of the maltreatment of teachers has been noted in the Free State and the Eastern Cape regions (De Wet and Jacobs, 2006, cited in Davids 2017). A high percentage of teachers in the study reported experiencing some form of harassment throughout their teaching careers. Sibisi (2021: 38) contends that, despite the expectation on teachers to assume a leadership role and be in control within the school environment, they often faced humiliation and embarrassment.

As result, teachers developed a fear of victimisation and a sense of helplessness preventing them from taking decisive action against individuals responsible for disruptive behaviour (De Wet and Oosthuizen 2010). Sibisi (2021: 38) postulates that the adverse effects of intimidation were prolonged absences from school and extended sick leave due to stress-related issues. This had a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching which also affected the levels of dedication and enthusiasm for the teaching profession. Absenteeism and fearful attitudes of teachers negatively influence the learners' academic performance. This could explain why some urban schools struggle to produce quality and competitive learners.

#### **2.3.4.2 Cyber-Bullying**

This phenomenon has experienced a surge in prevalence due to technological advancements in the digital realm. It entails the deliberate exploitation of electronic media, such as mobile devices and the internet, to inflict harm, to harass individuals, and to

tarnish reputations and interpersonal connections (Price and Dalglish 2010: 51; Duma 2013: 38). It can be argued that bullies have transcended the confines of cyberspace, perpetuating intimidation around the clock using various social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2008: 11); Cilliers and Chinyamurindi (2020: 30) report that individuals disseminate hurtful images and employ cyberspace to execute on-line and physical threats by means of hurtful e-mails or texts, thereby exploiting the digital landscape.

Hurtful images and videos in youth sub-cultures are popularly referred to as memes and, in some instances, users create humiliating stickers. Dowd, Singer and Fretwell-Wilson (2006: 337) corroborate that the advantage of cyber-bullying is that perpetrators torment victims while maintaining a relative degree of anonymity. It can be argued that this is deliberate exploitation of the internet to perpetrate cyber-violence aimed at humiliating and threatening others. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 70) affirm that cyber-violence also manifests as sexting, occurring on various on-line platforms such as instant messaging, websites, and on-line multi-player video games.

A South Africa National School Violence Study of 2012 recorded that one fifth of participants experienced cyber-bullying, while a much higher number encountered on-line violence in the form of sharing unwanted pictures and videos. The experience of on-line violence through instant messaging platforms such as Mixit, BBM, WhatsApp, MSN, or Yahoo was average (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 69). The growing number of learners owning cell phones and tablets, and an increase in computer usage in schools, the likelihood of cyber-bullying incidents is also expected to rise. It is important to note that learners may also direct such forms of bullying towards their teachers in the event of access to teachers' contact numbers or e-mail addresses.

One can argue that the consequences of instances of learner bullying have profoundly detrimental effects on both the individuals being victimized and those witnessing such acts. Moreover, in the absence of immediate intervention, empirical evidence suggests that victims are prone to experiencing a decline in overall well-being, manifesting in

feelings of compromised physical health, heightened anxiety, and diminished enjoyment of everyday activities. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 70) argue that the likelihood of enduring long-term mental health complications including anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation is considerably heightened for victims who become inclined to exhibit altered behavioural patterns, adopting passive attitudes and engaging in self-isolation. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 70) also record a high percentage of learners experiencing some form of on-line violence or cyber-bullying, and often were victims of violent crime.

Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) conclude that bullying for exposed individuals may induce a range of psychological and emotional consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, sadness, and feelings of loneliness. Ngakane (2010) highlights several physical manifestations associated with bullying that are linked to individual well-being. The subsequent social ramifications involve feelings of isolation and social exclusion. Furthermore, the impact on education is marked by absenteeism, withdrawal from social activities within the school environment, and impaired concentration.

#### **2.3.4.3 Vandalism**

Masinga (2016: 121) defines vandalism as a form of property violence where learners engage in aggressive acts resulting in the destruction of school facilities, such as toilets, bathroom walls, seats, doors, windows, library contents, laboratories, and even water tanks, as well as defacement through writing on seats and walls (Thawabieh and Ahmad Al-rofo 2010: 410). Robers *et al.* (2013: 189) further expound that property violence includes intentional acts of damage to school possessions through bombing, arson, graffiti, and other similar actions. However, the primary focus of property violence according to Robers *et al.* (2013) is the destruction of targeted infrastructure and other material resources belonging to the school and teachers. The definition excludes the destruction of material possessions of other learners which should also be looked into. De Wet (2004: 206) reports that school vandalism had cost the Department of Education 41 million rands in 2001. Almost two decades later, Mkwana (2022) states that vandalism cost the Department of Education 200 million rands in 2021, thus becoming a

serious problem in South African communities by burdening education budgets. One can note that in the intervening years between the two studies (i.e., 18 years), the costs of vandalism damage have increased by 159 million rands. This potentially results in the collapse of teaching, directly impacting on the quality of learning and the right of learners to learn in inviting and safe environments.

### **2.3.5 Institutionalised Violence**

Institutional or structural violence emerges as a manifestation of violence whereby institutional policies and practices exert authority to enforce regulations and disciplinary measures that subject learners to harassment to achieve compliance (Robinson, Davies and Saltmarsh 2012: 186). Mncube and Harber (2013: 105) corroborate the notion that systemic violence often arises from teachers engaging in verbal, psychological, and physical abuse, and resorting to corporal punishment to discipline learners. Furthermore, Pedro (2012: 78) argues that violent schools can be characterised as hostile environments, where some teachers display unsupportive and uncaring attitudes, frequently criticising and using derogatory language towards learners. Robinson, Davies and Saltmarsh (2012: 186); Mncube and Harber (2013: 105) assert that such educators demonstrate unprofessional behaviour, and neglect consideration of the unique needs of individual learners.

Mncube and Harber (2013: 105) maintain that institutional violence is perpetrated by schools and the broader educational systems through their failure to take decisive action against perpetrators of school violence or to proactively prevent violent occurrences (Devers *et al.* 2012: 12). Devers *et al.* (2012: 9) also argue that schools have a responsibility to serve as exemplars and to educate learners by imparting values and norms that promote non-violence. At the same time, Devers *et al.* (2012: 9) further suggest that, instead of fostering peaceful environments, violent schools exhibit a tense classroom atmosphere characterised by an authoritarian style of leadership. Learners' rights are frequently violated in environments where racial, cultural, religious, and sexual discrimination is practiced (Pedro 2012: 78). Masinga (2016: 123) explained that institutional violence is perpetuated by systemic and institutional forces, manifesting in



undemocratic policies, rules, and regulations that disregard the needs and rights of learners.

## **2.4 Factors Contributing Towards School Violence**

Violence is a complex social issue with multiple contributory factors that give rise to and sustain its presence in society. The Umlazi District community presents a complex society characterised by a historical backdrop of political turmoil, family disputes, socio-economic deprivation, and incidents of taxi-related and drive-by shootings (Mkhize, Mthembu and Napier 2023). The diverse manifestations of violence have eventually infiltrated educational institutions, necessitating a comprehensive examination of the Umlazi community and its interconnected variables. Accordingly, this chapter endeavoured to explore the impact of the school environment, community dynamics, familial circumstances, socio-cultural and economic conditions, as well as peer influences on the occurrence and perpetuation of violence in and around schools.

### **2.4.1 School Environment**

The school environment plays a crucial role in either facilitating or castigating incidents of school violence. Numerous factors contribute to the occurrence of school violence, among them individual and societal influences. However, it cannot be overlooked that the school environment has a critical role in determining safety. Bezuidenhout and Joubert (2003) contend that poor facilities, a shortage of educators, an inequitable educator-to-learner ratio, a lack of discipline, and a disorganised school environment were enablers of school violence. Eisenbraun (2007: 464) simplified the underlying causes of violence in schools to encompass location, size, ethnic distribution, social policies, and physical condition. This study identifies seven specific factors that often contribute to school violence: (1) The absence of supervision and discipline; (2) A poor school climate; (3) Inadequate policies addressing violence; (4) Insufficient conflict resolution and social skills programmes; (5) The availability of weapons; (6) Gang activity; and (7) A lack of mental health facilities.

The lack of supervision within and outside the classroom emerged as a contributing factor to the occurrence of school violence in two studies (Bezuidenhout and Joubert 2003;

Eisenbraun 2007). Educational institutions characterized by ongoing, yet inadequate monitoring mechanisms foster an atmosphere devoid of learner accountability (Eisenbraun 2007). Consequently, learners are inclined to behave in a manner unrestrained by rules or regulations, both during instructional sessions and in non-academic settings. Burton and Leoschut (2013) observe that learners perceived classrooms as the most unsafe environment, where victimisation frequently occurred. Additionally, Dewan (2021: 43) argues that the absence of teacher supervision, manifested through absenteeism and a dearth of behavioural monitoring and control systems, creates a climate filled with anxiety and fear among learners, ultimately interrupting the quality of education.

Educators bear a significant responsibility regarding school violence as their lack of motivation to initiate change and to cultivate a conducive classroom atmosphere or vice-versa can make the difference. Nhambura (2020: 65) posits that, when confronted with behavioural challenges exhibited by learners, educators frequently attributed these to individual characteristics of learners and their immediate familial environment. However, it can be argued that educators who fail to establish order in classrooms demonstrate a lack of effective management skills that present learners with opportunity to engage in unwanted behaviours.

The education sector in South Africa is currently facing significant challenges leading to a state of disorder. Insufficient implementation of laws and policies that address school violence has had a detrimental impact on the morale of educators. Experiences of different forms of abuse from learners can be found in various reports (South African Human Rights Commission 2008). Janse Van Rensburg (2010: 24); Edwards-Kerr (2013: 60) state that teachers' lack of training on how to address school violence, low morale, and low job satisfaction are cited as other contributory factors to poor school environments enabling violence. Hlatshwayo (2018: 1) notes that in 2011 the South African Democratic Teacher's Union (SADTU) reported that 67 000 teachers resigned citing learner violence and challenges with school management. The continued exposure to hostile situations exacerbates the levels of violence as educators seek to maintain

control over their classrooms by resorting to punitive measures to enforce discipline, which can vary from teacher to teacher. The study by Burton and Leoschut (2013) highlights learners who experienced physical punishment from educators and principals; Kwa-Zulu-Natal Province had the highest prevalence of corporal punishment.

The use of corporal punishment to enforce discipline inadvertently reinforces the belief that violence is an effective means of problem-solving (Dewan 2021: 45). Rather than assuming a proactive role in teaching learners pro-social behaviour, corporal punishment exacerbates the very behaviour it intends to address. Shiva-Kuma *et al.* (2017) postulate that power dynamics within educational settings impede the development of mutual respect, engagement, and the overall effectiveness of learning. This highlights that schools lack conflict resolution and social skills initiatives. Ghorab and Al-Khaldi (2014), in examining the influence of violence on children's attitudes towards educators and learning concluded that teachers from violent backgrounds and communities were more likely to perpetuate violence against their learners. Padayachee and Gcelu (2022) propose that educators adopt disciplinary strategies that involve communication, reinforcement, rule establishment, implementation of consequences, and restorative methods, instead of relying on punitive disciplinary techniques to maintain classroom discipline.

The proliferation of weaponry and the prevalence of active gang involvement have contributed to an upsurge in school violence in many South African schools (Van Wyk and Theron 2005; Jefthas and Artz 2007: 46; Mncube and Steinmann 2014). Mncube and Harber (2013) opine that drugs, alcohol, weapons, and gangs serve as significant causal factors of school violence. In support, Burton and Leoschut (2013: xii) point to drugs and alcohol, weapons, the presence of criminal associations, both among peers and influential adults, as constituents of a robust predictor of antisocial behaviour. Revelations from the study were that approximately one in ten learners reported effortless access to drugs, a similar proportion had access to firearms, and one in five possessed knives or other weapons within the school environment (Burton and Leoschut 2013).

Le Roux and Mokhele (2011: 323) in mitigation stressed the significance of educational settings characterised by the absence of constructive, creative, and intellectually stimulating activities aimed at engaging learners' interests. Such an absence has the potential to contribute to a state of boredom, unhappiness, and apathy among learners. This could possibly lead to seeking solace in unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol and drug abuse, participation in gang-related activities, and engaging in other forms of antisocial behaviour (Le Roux and Mokhele 2011: 323). According to Janse Van Rensburg (2010: 4), schools afflicted with inadequate physical conditions, such as dilapidated infrastructure, broken windows, cramped hallways, and unhygienic facilities, exacerbate frustration and directly fuel incidents of school violence. To reinforce these findings, Eisenbraun (2007: 464) mentioned that learners attending disorderly educational institutions characterised by unkempt surroundings, pervasive graffiti, and poor hygiene levels are particularly susceptible to engaging in violent acts.

Put together, the school environment represents a multifaceted and condensed representation of the surrounding community in which learners are situated (Cavanagh 2009: 74). The occurrence of violence within schools is influenced by numerous interconnected and dynamic factors within the educational system. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 53) reiterate that schools reflect the cultural, political, economic, and ethnic fabric of the broader society. Events and dynamics within the school environment are directly or indirectly linked to the broader societal context (Flores 2005: 20; De Wet 2009: 59). From a bio-ecological systems theory lens, factors such as the family, individual characteristics, peer relationships and community contribute to school environments. The community equally exerts a significant influence; the following section will now examine this.

#### **2.4.2 Community Environment**

The occurrence of violence within educational institutions is frequently influenced by an array of risk factors that include accessibility of alcohol, drugs, and weapons, alongside elevated rates of criminal activity (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 47). Flores (2005: 20) asserts that persistent exposure to violence within local neighbourhoods contributes to

the manifestation of aggressive and violent behaviours within schools. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013: 29) established that the physical, social, and economic characteristics of neighbourhoods and communities significantly impact the likelihood of violence in educational settings. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2007: 13) substantiates this proposition, asserting that acts of violence witnessed outside the school environment, including gang violence, political conflicts, police brutality, and domestic violence, are often mirrored within the school environment. This is the result of the learners' lived experiences. Community-based violence can be defined as the recurrent and chronic exposure to firearms, knives, drugs, and arbitrary acts of violence (Foster *et al.* 2004: 60). Instances of forms of community-based violence are found in the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2015 report.

The Umlazi District confronts a complex interplay of socio-economic-political challenges, seen in high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, limited access to healthcare, and elevated crime rates. Subsequently, these problems have far-reaching implications for the overall well-being of citizens, hinder social progress, and contribute to economic inequality. Umlazi is predominantly characterised by low-income households, amplifying the likelihood of poverty and various social ills such as gender-based violence and high crime rates. Clark (2012: 90) highlights that structural violence, often less visible and manifesting in the form of poverty, unemployment, and accompanying inequalities and power imbalances, further exacerbates this state of affairs. Burton (2008: 49) contends that these conditions foster an environment conducive to school violence, as institutions are powerless over factors such as inequality, cultural beliefs, and attitudes concerning gender roles.

Leach *et al.* (2003: 132) discovered that schools in three Southern African countries served as breeding grounds for harmful gender practices such as initiation ceremonies which legitimise violence that persists into adulthood. These beliefs are reinforced by the prevalence of gender-based violence within the community (Mshweshwe 2020: 4). A perception exists that crime and violence are ingrained in daily life among South African communities; Umlazi is known as the most crime-ridden area in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province (Lamb 2021). Such perceptions significantly influence conflict resolution strategies within

these areas. Violence in South Africa has been normalised and is viewed as an aspect of societal function.

Poverty represents a significant underlying factor contributing to crime and violence within society (McCrea *et al.* 2019: 298; Anser *et al.* 2020: 18). In educational contexts, financially disadvantaged learners might resort to theft by open and forceful confiscation of their peers' possessions due to the inability to afford the items. Furthermore, with the prevailing high rates of unemployment and job cuts, violence continues to exert a detrimental impact on both communities and the school environment. Commonplace assaults, stabbings, and shootings are often witnessed by learners residing in townships (De Wet 2007: 253).

The argument substantiates the presence of weapons within schools and the possibility of learners being under the influence of drugs or alcohol when engaging in acts of violence. Ngqela and Lewis (2012: 87) emphasise the significance of investigating the phenomenon of violence within township schools as it poses a threat to the secure development and mental well-being of learners. It is worth noting that the violence observed within schools serves as a microcosm of the broader societal patterns. The violence originating within educational institutions often spills over into the community, even manifesting during learners' commute to and from school, rendering numerous routes within and adjacent to townships as high-risk areas (Gopal and Collings 2017).

Economic and social hardships experienced by children often compel them to engage in the sale of cigarettes and drugs procured from adults within their respective communities within the school environment as a means of survival. The prevalence of drugs within schools can be attributed to the pre-existing issue of drug availability in society at large (Hunter 2020: 5). Access to drugs within communities, coupled with a significant presence of adults involved in criminal activities and the drug trade, further exacerbates the involvement of learners in acts of violence (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana 2010). Dlungwane (2017) attributes the rise in informal alcohol outlets and street-based drug vendors to learners and adolescents, perceiving and even admiring such behaviours as

acceptable and worth emulating as role models. The formation of groups or gangs, and the carrying of weapons and drugs by learners reflects life in the community. The social challenges prevalent within communities in the end permeate the school environment in which they are situated to varying degrees (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 54).

Political violence emerges as a noteworthy factor contributing to the proliferation of violence within educational institutions. Sibisi (2016) indicates that the political struggles that paved the way for South Africa's freedom instilled a belief among individuals that violence represents the most effective means of conflict resolution. Communities, particularly those with high population densities, often address issues related to service delivery by resorting to burning tyres, obstructing roads, and various other acts of vandalism to protest. One such incident was in July 2021 unrests with KZN as its epicentre. A culture of violence has been established, sustained by the enduring effects of past violence, which has gradually become normalised within society as exemplified by the July 2021 unrest. Thus, the extent to which South African children are exposed to violence raises concerns (Ward *et al.* 2007). The escalating levels of violence and crime within communities have had a direct impact on violence within schools. Sibisi (2016) further asserts that children hailing from black and coloured communities are more susceptible to adverse circumstances and bear a heightened vulnerability to this phenomenon.

Meyer (2005: 11) argues that the prevalence of high levels of violence within numerous South African schools can be attributed to a complex amalgamation of historical legacies, recent socio-economic challenges, and political pressures, all of which impact individuals, families, schools, and communities. Bruce (2007: 64); Clark (2012: 83) add that the lingering effects of the apartheid system and past political violence serve as explanatory factors for the present-day violence observed within society. Furthermore, Bender and Emslie (2010: 192) conclude that South Africans have become deeply entrenched in a learned and inter-generationally transmitted culture of violence with a dangerous allure for today's youth. The common use of the term "comrades" to refer to one another, a phrase historically associated with political struggles for freedom, illustrates the point. In

addition, Dunbar-Krige, Pillay and Henning (2010: 7); Mabasa and Muluvhu (2019) state that schools situated in troubled areas inevitably become intertwined with the troubled community's ecosystem and, given the overwhelming impact of destabilising social forces, these institutions succumb to their effects.

### **2.4.3 Family Environment**

The family unit plays a crucial role in the upbringing of children and significantly influences their behavioural development (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 60; Maternwosk and Fry 2018). Within the family context, children acquire beliefs, values, and attitudes that serve as their moral compass Dewan (2021: 47). Families possess the potential to reinforce both positive and negative behaviours in children. A child's behaviour reflects their familial background. Studies have revealed a relation between children from dysfunctional and unstable families, characterised by low cohesion, high levels of parental conflict and disharmony, and the likelihood of exhibiting violent tendencies (Eisenbraun 2007: 464; Ward 2007: 14). Dewan (2021: 47) suggests that children from such violent family environments often experience a deficiency in holistic development and are at an elevated risk of engaging in delinquent behaviour within schools and communities.

Khoury-Kassabri, Astor and Benbenishty (2009: 175); Van De Merwe, Dawes and Ward (2012: 70); Singh and Steyn (2013: 3) presented literature on families who lack structure, inconsistently implement rules, and employ harsh and irregular disciplinary practices and so raise children with a propensity for violence. In support, Le Roux and Mokhele (2011: 323); Pedro (2012: 76); Burton and Leoschut (2013); Dupper (2013: 16) maintain that children from families characterised by physical punishment, lack of affection and care, sibling rivalry, absent fathers, and uninvolved parents are more likely to perpetrate violence in school settings. Dewan (2021: 48) posited that parents, guardians, and older siblings play a significant role as models for younger individuals.

Influential figures serve as role models from whom young people learn about socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Pahad and Graham (2012); Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2020) argue that the presence of negative role models in close proximity increases the likelihood of young individuals engaging in delinquent behaviours. Foster



and Brooks-Gunn (2013) assert that violence from parents towards children can be utilised to explain the heightened vulnerability to victimisation in the school environment.

Parental involvement plays a pivotal role in determining learner behaviour. Nhambura (2020: 78) points to the absence of parental involvement and lack of support towards educational institutions as contributing significantly to negative learner behaviour. The term "lack of parental involvement" primarily refers to the absence of fathers. A substantial number of families in South Africa are led by single parents. Pedro (2012: 76); Dupper (2013: 16) noted that children from families where the father is absent or uninvolved often exhibit delinquent behaviour. Perry (2009: 29); Van De Merwe, Dawes and Ward (2012) state that families of troubled children typically exhibit minimal interest, involvement, and supervision in their children's education. Nhambura (2020: 78) postulates that some parents are unwilling to take responsibility for their children's misconduct, consequently promoting unruly behaviour among learners. Ndamani (2008: 177) contends that parents tend to delegate the responsibility of instilling moral values in their children to schools.

Masinga (2016: 125) asserts that children raised in apathetic and unsupportive families are left to navigate their own paths with minimal or no guidance, thereby fostering delinquent behaviour. Burton and Leoschut (2013), in a national survey, revealed that one in three learners resided in single-parent households, while one in every seven was being raised by their grandmothers. Thus, a relation exists between the upbringing of delinquent children and predominantly single-parent households as opposed to those living with both parents. These households can be characterised as broken homes.

Eisenbraun (2007: 464) says that the disruption of familial structures due to social adversities, such as illness, divorce, death, or incarceration, detrimentally affects children. In contrast, Le Roux and Mokhele (2011); Van De Merwe, Dawes and Ward (2012); Mathews, Benvenuti and (2014) contend that the presence of both parents does not mitigate violence; instead, various factors can be cited as contributing to an increased likelihood of aggressive behaviour among children. Burton (2008) identifies additional familial risk factors. The social norms, values, dominant beliefs, and behaviours experienced by young individuals in homes and communities exert an impact on the

prevalence of interpersonal violence within school settings, whether as victims or perpetrators. This confirms the underlying intersections described by Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory. However, one cannot ignore the role of a male figure in a family, which is to provide discipline and guidance to children.

#### **2.4.4 Peer Pressure**

Van De Merwe, Dawes and Ward (2012: 730); Burton and Leoschut (2013: 66) argue that peers hold a significant influence as socialising agents who critically shape learner antisocial attitudes and violent behaviours. In addition, Casella (2012: 45) posits that learners in close proximity to antisocial peers are more likely to be involved in acts of violence, either as perpetrators or victims. Pro-violence values and attitudes, and exposure to aggressive and violent peers directly contributes to the manifestation of antisocial behaviour among learners (Van De Merwe, Dawes and Ward 2012: 730; Burton and Leoschut 2013: 66; Osadebe 2013: 87). The learners from the four schools were more likely to align themselves with groups or gangs with external influences.

Collings and Magojo (2003: 125) note that learners who participated in group violence exhibited a desensitisation to extreme forms of violence compared to individuals acting alone. Dewan (2021: 50) highlighted that girls negatively influenced by peers engaged in non-violent relationship-oriented behaviours, such as exclusion and spreading rumours, whereas boys displayed physical aggression. Hamlall (2012); Farrel, Thompson and Mehari (2017) emphasise that boys, particularly, sought approval in terms of masculinity, boys were more vulnerable to violence as perpetrators or victims, primarily around the age of 15. Mothibi, Mathopo and Mofokeng (2017); Steyn and Singh (2018) explain that peer groups play a role in peer victimisation and engagement in violence as individuals strive to impress others, seek power, and garner attention.

However, Avci and Gucray (2013: 206) say peer groups can also serve as a positive influence by reinforcing positive behaviour such as academic excellence and establishing goals that promote good conduct. Gouws, Kruger and Burger (2000: 1) observe that peer relationships offer opportunities for multi-faceted learning that include exploration of new roles and asserting independence from parents. This fosters the development of the

individual and creates a positive group identity. The influence of the peer group, the desire for inclusion, approval, and acceptance coerces learners to conform to the values and beliefs of the crowd (Louw and Louw 2007). Conformity is not inherently negative; its impact depends on whether the learner is conforming to behaviours that are deemed good or bad.

#### **2.4.5 Media**

The media has undergone significant transformation over time, primarily influenced by the exponential growth of digital platforms. In contemporary society, a diverse array of information communication technologies and programmes are now employed to disseminate information, messages, and content to a vast audience in real time. The range includes print, broadcast, digital, and social media platforms. The influence of media on children and young people is a subject of debate, contingent upon the specific type of media influence to which they are exposed. Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, TikTok and Twitter have drawn the attention of legislators in Europe and the United States of America due to rising cases of abuse and bullying among the young on these platforms. Studies confirm the negative impact of these social platforms on children (Kwan *et al.* 2020; Cataldo *et al.* 2021). It is undeniable that media exerts a substantial influence Hudson, Windham and Hooper (2005: 137); Livingstone (2007: 6) note that children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to media influence due to the incessant exposure to content delivered through these channels.

De Wet (2007: 56) reveals that South African children exposed to violent films in the absence of parental control, faced an increased risk of developing aggressive behaviour. In support, Pedro (2012: 77) adds that children extensively exposed to violent imagery became desensitised and prone to engaging in violent behaviour due to the normalisation of aggression and harm. The studies provide evidence on the influence exerted by media on children's behaviour. The Council on Communications and Media (2009: 1497) emphasise the adverse effects of violent media on the physical and mental well-being of children and adolescents. The effects include desensitisation to violence, nightmares, depression, and sleep disorders. It can be argued that the media has become increasingly toxic, as the content being disseminated often portrays and reinforces negative aspects

of societal events and themes. Learner's transfer and play out undesirable behaviours in school environments often with grave consequences.

O'Hara *et al.* (2012: 1) explain that the inclusion of sexual content, and the acceptance of abusive language in Hollywood action movies has the potential to exert a significant influence on adolescents. This likely leads to engaging in reckless sexual behaviours despite restrictions. The lack of parental monitoring gives access to young individuals of all ages.

Moreover, rap music frequently perpetuates gender stereotypes, particularly through the marginalisation and trivialisation of women (Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). It might be suggested that numerous rap songs can be categorised as "status degradation ceremonies" aimed at women, often employing derogatory terms such as "whores" (Weitzer and Kubrin 2009). Moody-Ramirez and Scott (2016) also emphasise that the music lyrics commonly depict women as "bitches" and "whores," while boasting about male dominance in relationships and sexual prowess. This further and frequently glorifies violence, misogyny, and materialism. At the worst, this music style glorifies killing and physical aggression as a form of entertainment. Given that young individuals tend to emulate the media they consume, these undoubtedly contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based violence and other forms of behaviour now considered normal. It can be contended that various forms of media propagate unrealistic, stereotypical, and constrictive perceptions of reality among young school children. In short, the evidence underscores the influential role of media in contemporary society.

## **2.5 Theories of Aggression**

Literature shows aggression theorists have developed multiple perspectives to assist us to understand and explain school violence and other aggressive behaviours. The efforts are beyond just describing the causes of human actions, but also explain the root causes which are not necessarily the result of one factor alone. These theories shed light on our understanding of school violence in the macro-system. The ensuing discussion will give

a detailed examination of only five theories and their implications to the development of intervention strategies.

### **2.5.1 Social Aggression Learning Theory**

The integration of social learning theory Bandura (1983) with other theories on aggression is regularly employed to illuminate the origins of aggressive behaviour in individuals. Bandura (1983) acknowledges that individuals possess neuro-physiological mechanisms enabling the exhibition of aggressive behaviours. These are activated upon appropriate stimulation and are subject to cognitive regulation. The theory emerged as a comprehensive explanation for aggressive conduct where, previously, other theories were seen as inadequate. The social learning theory proposes that, although aggression might have a biological foundation, aggressive behaviours are acquired through observation and imitation, and then are vicariously reinforced when individuals are rewarded for their actions (Bandura 1983). Supporting the social learning theory, Cosme (2021) highlights Bandura's notable Bobo the clown experiment, in which children who witnessed physical aggression towards an inflatable clown subsequently imitated the adults when left alone. It is plausible to suggest the levels of violence that have characterized Kwa-Zulu Natal since the Eighties, earning the name "The Killing Fields," has become a trans-generational culture.

There are three distinct models of observational learning: (1) Live, being a tangible individual actively demonstrating aggressive behaviours – for example, parents, guardian, or member of the community; (2) Verbal instruction, which involves the explicit explanation and detailed instructions and guidance on the use of weapons such as guns or knives, and violent actions; and (3) The symbolic model comprises fictional characters encountered through diverse media outlets (Ahn, Hu and Vega 2020: 2). Participants in this study had roots in communities characterised by frequent exposure to instances of violence. The behaviours from the three different models are idolised and copied by the young. Cosme (2021) highlights the presence of evidence suggesting the influence of

social media in promoting violent conduct among youth, thereby underscoring the necessity for further investigation in this domain.

The tenets of the social learning theory state that acquisition of knowledge alone is inadequate for effecting behavioural change. The process of behaviour change necessitates not only the initial learning but also the subsequent retention and motivation of the individual. Bandura (1983) asserts that, when considering aggressive behaviour, motivation encompasses both the instigators and regulators of aggression which have reasonably received attention. For an individual to engage in aggressive acts, certain instigating factors must be present that trigger previously learned aggressive behaviours. Bandura (1983) identifies several such instigators, which encompass influences derived from modelling, physical assaults, verbal threats and insults, incentive inducements, and adverse treatment. Additionally, the social learning theory maintains that the existence of regulatory factors either motivate or deter an individual from engaging in aggressive behaviour. These regulatory factors consist of cognitive elements encompassing social and status rewards, external reinforcement, punishment, alleviation of adverse treatment, vicarious reinforcement, self-reward, self-punishment, and other influential factors (Bandura 1983).

The manifestation of aggressive behaviour in learners can be attributed to the influence of social and status rewards within their peer group (Pan *et al.* 2020: 2286; Laursen and Veenstra 2021: 899). As such, the social learning theory provides valuable insights into the fundamental factors that contribute to aggression among learners, especially within the specific social contexts in which they are situated. Particularly in environments marked by elevated levels of crime and violence, aggression becomes a learned behaviour that is not only modelled but also reinforced through vicarious means. The aggressive conduct displayed by young individuals in South African educational settings is a mirror image of prevalent patterns of aggression observed within their broader social environment.

### **2.5.2 General Strain Theory**

General Strain Theory (GST) developed by Robert Agnew (2001) states that the experience of strain or stressors increases the likelihood of individuals experiencing negative emotions, such as anger and frustration. This creates a motivation for corrective action – in some cases, engaging in unlawful or delinquent behaviour. The processes by which strain leads individuals towards criminality or delinquency, particularly in the absence or removal of positive stimuli, the failure to achieve positive goals, and the introduction of negative stimuli can all be explained by GST (Agnew 2017). Agnew (2017) identifies several factors that influence strain-related criminal behaviour. These include an individual lack of adequate coping skills, a lack of resources to legitimately manage strain, the low levels of conventional social support and control, attributing strain to external factors, and exhibiting a criminal disposition.

Strains perceived as unjust may motivate individuals to engage in unlawful behaviour as a coping mechanism for their experiences (Agnew 2017). In the body of literature examining school violence in South Africa, inferences have been made regarding learners' propensity to engage in violent confrontation because of strenuous circumstances at home and at school (Eisenbraun 2007; Mshweshwe 2020; Dewan 2021). Broken homes, violent communities, gangs and groups have been identified as sources of strain leading to different forms of school violence (Ward 2007: 14). Instances of learners exhibiting aggressive behaviour towards teachers or vice versa have found their way into social media platforms. Research reports have also captured evidence of the phenomenon (Nxumalo 2023). Umlazi District is generally a crime ridden, low-income environment, that indirectly strains children and ends in some getting entangled in criminal activities including violence at schools.

General Strain Theory underscores the significance of strains with a high likelihood of contributing to criminal behaviour and hindering an individual's coping mechanisms. Factors to consider include the degree or intensity of strain when evaluating its magnitude. The duration, frequency and persistence of the strain influences its impact (Agnew 2017). The timing of a strain is also significant as more recent anxieties generally have a greater impact compared to older ones where the effects may gradually diminish

over time. Severe childhood experiences can manifest in criminal behaviour during adulthood.

An individual's response to strain can be influenced by its impact on individual core goals, needs, values, and identity. Agnew (2017) emphasize the variance of significance of a strain depending on it affects the fundamental aspects of an individual's life. The assessment of the magnitude of a strain, the reaction of the audience, and the influence of sub-cultural beliefs are interconnected. As an example, a slap, perceived as a severe form of disrespect and a significant insult in public is common learner behaviour. Such an incident witnessed by an audience, is likely to be exploited to ridicule the individual later, which could magnify the individual's flight or fight response.

Low levels of social control can contribute to criminal behaviour (Agnew 2017). This perspective helps clarify why learners experiencing neglect at home may be more susceptible to displaying aggressive behaviour. This aligns with the concept that strains associated with low social control can be influential factors in the emergence of delinquent behaviours, including aggression and bullying.

Drawing from the social learning theory, Agnew (2017) contends that strains generate pressure or incentives that can lead individuals to engage in criminal behaviour as a coping mechanism. Individuals are more inclined to engage in criminal activity if their observations reveal that such behaviour is rewarded within their community. In environments where gangsters command respect, learners may adopt gangster behaviour to gain respect. The exhibition of aggression and bullying in learners might be explained by these experiences (Choi and Dulisse 2021 ). The argument aligns with the indication that strains and negative experiences can create pressure or incentives to engage in similar behaviour as a means of coping or seeking validation.

Characteristics perceived as unjust such as poor socio-political-economic conditions formed the basis for the application of the general strain theory to the present study, aimed at assessing the strains experienced by learners in Umlazi District. There is an association between perceived unjust strain and low social control that creates pressure or incentives, likely to lead learners towards crime and delinquency (Agnew 2017). Given the wide range of potential strains, researchers must carefully evaluate whether a



particular strain possesses any one of these characteristics or a combination to accurately categorize and incorporate them in their studies.

### **2.5.3 Frustration-Aggression Theory**

The frustration theory, formulated by Dollard *et al.* (1939) is a psychological theory that draws upon Freud's psychoanalytic concept, which posits that actions are driven by instincts, particularly sexual instincts. The disruption or frustration of these instincts are reflected through the occurrence of aggressive behaviour. Warburton and Anderson (2015) add that, although frustration often results in aggression, this relationship is not always consistent. On the other hand, Miller *et al.* (1941) contend that frustration gives rise to the instigation of various responses, one of which may manifest as an inclination towards aggression.

An argument may be made that individuals experiencing frustration are prone to manifest violent reactions towards any factor impeding progress. Failure to attain desired objectives and the resultant frustration engenders feelings of animosity and hostility in affected individuals (Rahmati and Momtaz 2013: 303). Even though there is a link between frustration and aggression, there was no focus on the concept of frustration displacement which involves redirecting personal frustrations and aggressive tendencies toward different targets, often those who are vulnerable and innocent (Rahmati and Momtaz 2013). They further note that, despite the examination of the connection between frustration and aggression; displacement involved redirecting individual frustrations and aggressive tendencies towards alternative targets, typically vulnerable and innocent was not given attention. Rahmati and Momtaz (2013) posit that frustration is akin to Freud's notion of sublimation, wherein unwanted impulses are transferred onto less harmful outlets. In the context of schools, displaced aggressive tendencies often manifest towards teachers, other learners, and other school staff (Sibanda 2022; Nxumalo 2023). Whereas some of the underlying problems that trigger frustration and subsequent aggression may lie beyond the direct control of the school, it is important to acknowledge that innocent teachers and learners bear the brunt of these frustrations.

#### **2.5.4 Cognitive-Neo-Association Towards Aggression**

The cognitive-neo association theory, initially proposed by Leonard Berkowitz (1993), emerged as an alternative perspective to the limitations of the frustration-aggression theory (Drndarević 2021). Drndarević (2021) highlights that this theory acknowledges that anger can be elicited by aversive events, facial and bodily expressions associated with anger, and situational stimuli linked to both anger and aggression.

Contrary to the frustration-aggression theory, Berkowitz (2012) asserts that frustration serves as a trigger for anger which, in turn, creates a state of readiness for aggressive behaviour. Berkowitz (2012) emphasises that the cognitive-neo association model proposes that aversive experiences can engender either a "fight" or "flight" response, contingent upon immediate circumstances, prior learning, and genetic predispositions. Given the focus of the present study on aggression in learners, particular attention is given to understanding the fight response.

In certain instances, it is possible that aggression could arise from actions and circumstances linked to anger. Berkowitz (2012) stresses that the presence of weapons can potentially contribute to aggression. For example, learners carrying weapons on school premises who witness a fight or other forms of aggressive behaviour could see that as a trigger for aggressive conduct (De Wet 2007: 674). External and internal stimuli associated with highly unpleasant events or other anger-provoking aggressive incidents can incite aggression (Berkowitz 2012). Instances such as parent abuse, criminal activities, violence, and various manifestations of aggression have the potential to elicit anger and foster a predisposition to engage in confrontational behaviour, ultimately leading to aggression.

#### **2.5.5 Social Identity Theory**

The social identity theory integrates the concepts of social identity and self-categorisation theory in the study of group processes and inter-group relations (Hornsey 2008). Initially proposed by Henri Tajfel and John C (2004). The theory illuminates the dynamics of inter-group conflict, arguing that minimal conditions can elicit discriminatory behaviour towards

out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 2004). Individuals tend to exhibit favouritism towards group members when presented with minimal conditions that trigger violent behaviour. Social identity theory comprises three key concepts: social categorisation, a tendency of individuals defining themselves and others in terms of specific categories, creating an "us" versus "them" distinction in influential interpersonal interactions; and social comparison and social identification (Hornsey 2008; Turner *et al.* 2012; Densley and Peterson 2018).

Densley and Peterson (2018) provide evidence suggesting instances of "vicarious retribution," where an in-group member seeks revenge for an assault or provocation that personally did not affect them but harmed a fellow in-group member. In this case, a perceived threat to social identity was salient. Youth in densely populated neighbourhoods identify with groups or gangs due to the fear of being vulnerable when alone. The observations illustrate that aggressive behaviour can be instigated by group dynamics and driven by collective beliefs.

An illustrative example of this phenomenon can be observed in young males who, desiring not to be perceived as vulnerable, resort to aggressive conduct to garner the admiration and esteem of their peers. The social identity theory plays a crucial role in comprehending inter-group conflicts, and its principles can be employed to combat instances of bullying within educational institutions (Turner *et al.* 2012). Turner *et al.* (2012) have highlighted various studies that employ the social identity theory to address the issue of bullying in schools. For instance, by prohibiting customary practices such as hazing, it is possible to potentially mitigate aggression and diminish instances of violence between different grade levels, which may harbour distinct perceptions of one another.

In summary, the presented theories serve to illuminate the fundamental underpinnings of school violence. They provide an alternative perspective that extends beyond mere description, delving into an analytical exploration of the latent origins which can be adapted across diverse contexts, as elucidated within the framework of systems theory. The social aggression learning, and social identity theory underscore the significant role of social interactions, power dynamics, and social learning in the propagation of

aggressive conduct. These theoretical constructs jointly acknowledge the powerful influence of the developmental environment on children's behavioural manifestations, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) notes. It is conceivable that behaviours are acquired, thereby emphasising the pivotal function of modelling in shaping child behaviour. Nevertheless, some instances of aggression can be construed as reactions to stress-inducing stimuli that evoke feelings of anger.

The General Strain and Frustration-Aggression theories attribute aggression to the frustration stemming from various circumstances, such as economic deprivation, maltreatment within educational and communal contexts, and instances of bullying. However, these two theories do not fully expound upon the mechanism through which learners internalize the appropriateness of resorting to aggressive behaviour as a means of releasing anger when confronted with frustration. The Cognitive Neo-Association towards Aggression theory postulates that both internal and external cues act as triggers for aggressive responses, with these cues being intertwined with learned and reinforced aggressive cognitions and actions over time. Central to this theory is the recognition that behaviour is acquired through a process of learning. In summation, it can be said that aggressive behaviour is acquired, as no individual is innately predisposed to aggression; rather, it is the culmination of instructive encounters that shape one's conflict-resolution strategies. In analysing Umlazi district, one notes that it is a violent community.

## **2.6 Consequences of School Violence**

Learners who encounter violence within a school setting are prone to experiencing a broad range of physical, emotional, health, educational, and behavioural consequences (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 91). In support, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013: 1) suggests that the extent and severity of the violence directly influences the degree of suffering and the impact endured. The repercussions of school violence may endure into adulthood, fostering a cycle of violence and aggression across generations. The African Child Policy Forum (2006: 1) concludes that the violence exacts an incalculable toll on both current and future generations, vividly illustrating how it undermines human development. The subsequent sections provide a discussion on the

health, psychological, educational, social, and economic effects associated with school-based violence.

### **2.6.1 Health Consequences**

School violence can have significant health implications, particularly when it involves corporal punishment and severe physical injuries inflicted upon learners. Becker and (2008: 52) in a study in the United States on corporal punishment, revealed that learners subjected to such disciplinary measures often experienced severe muscle injuries, extensive bruising, and scarring. Similarly, South African Human Rights Commission (2008: 14); Ferrara, Franceschini and Villani (2019) report that school violence can lead to physical harm, including scars, mild to serious wounds, fractures, bruises, and, in extreme cases, even suicide or homicide. Violence has profound effects on the health and behaviour of adolescents, resulting in both short-term and long-term physical health problems. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013: 1) argues that injuries suffered by adolescents may not be immediately visible, but can manifest as negative behavioural outcomes, such as alcohol and drug abuse, or suicide. Some injuries persist into adulthood, leading to permanent disabilities or, in extreme cases, death.

Additionally physical health hazards caused by school violence, may include the contraction, and spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, as well as early and unwanted pregnancies (Antonowicz 2010: 29; Beninger 2013: 301; Brock *et al.* 2014: 6). The health consequences of school violence can have detrimental effects on both maternal and child health, potentially leading to unsafe abortions or infanticide.

### **2.6.2 Psychological Consequences**

Psychological consequences represent a frequently cited set of outcomes associated with school-based violence. Dupper (2013: 39); Badri (2014: 8) concur that children and adolescents who endured emotional trauma manifested symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, diminished self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness and disempowerment subsequent to experiencing acts of violence. Gevers and Flisher (2012: 184) validate that those victims of school violence experienced suicidal ideation due to

traumatic encounters. Regarding gender issues, Devers *et al.* (2012: 11) note that female victims had a higher propensity to develop eating disorders compared to their male counterparts. The study by Pereznieto *et al.* (2010: 11) of bullying in Brazil reveals a higher percentage reporting loss of interest in and enthusiasm for education, with a significant number expressing fear of attending school, while a low percentage experienced a decline in trust towards teachers, loss of friendships, and hindered academic progress. In a Nigerian investigation, Antonowicz (2010: 29) discerned that female victims lived in a constant state of fear concerning sexual harassment perpetrated by male peers and teachers, leading to a lack of trust in their classmates.

Sexual violence significantly impacts and undermines an individual's psychological well-being (South African Human Rights Commission 2008: 14). Findings from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013: 1) demonstrate the profound and detrimental effects of violence on mental health and overall well-being. Depression and anxiety disorders were among added negative psychological consequences linked to school violence from the study. De Wet, Jacobs and Palm-Forster (2008: 97) corroborated a positive correlation between adolescents' exposure to verbal, physical, or sexual violence and the subsequent occurrence of emotional and psychological trauma.

Verbal violence and corporal punishment also yielded significant effects. Evans *et al.* (2012: 1105) observe that verbal violence contributed to delinquency in both males and females, while corporal punishment had a limited impact. Their study further revealed that corporal punishment fostered low self-control, hostility, and contributed to antisocial behaviour, particularly among males (Evans *et al.* 2012: 1105). However, the findings indicate that verbal violence had a negative effect on both genders. This can be attributed to young individuals perceiving harsh parenting practices as unjustified, as they believe they are capable of reasoning with their parents if given the opportunity, rather than being subjected to shouting or screaming (Evans *et al.* 2012: 1105).

Ferrara, Franceschini and Villani (2019: 22) add that children experiencing physical punishment were likely less able to internalise moral values, less inclined to resist temptation, to engage in altruistic behaviour, to empathise with others, or to exercise

moral judgment of any kind. Children experiencing abuse were prone to developing disruptive and aggressive tendencies, including physical aggression towards siblings, parents, schoolmates, and romantic partners. Furthermore, these patterns of violence were carried into adulthood, becoming parents who were persuaded to use punishment as a means of discipline, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence (Ferrara, Franceschini and Villani 2019: 22).

Sexual violence constitutes a distinct form of violent behaviour that carries significant psychological implications and consequences for a child's own sexual behaviour. Beninger (2013: 301) states that child victims of sexual violence endure profound emotional setbacks. Moreover, they face a heightened risk of engaging in early sexual experimentation or having multiple partners (Kenya Violence against Children Study 2011: 83). Some may resort to commercial sex in exchange for academic benefits, accommodation, or food (Antonowicz 2010: 29). Safran (2007: 45) affirms that school violence exerts enduring psychological effects. Left with lasting psychological scars following traumatic violent experiences, children are likely to encounter difficulties in their educational pursuits.

### **2.6.3 Educational Consequences**

The issue of violence within educational institutions poses a significant challenge to South Africa's commitment as a signatory to various regional and international agreements. The challenge contradicts the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise the promotion of safe and peaceful societies, and the establishment of robust institutions to ensure improved access to education within secure and protected learning environments. In addition to incidents of violence within schools, there is a concerning correlation with gender-based violence, which reflects the broader societal context explained by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. Beninger (2013: 287) posits that gender discrimination acts as a significant obstacle in the pursuit of gender equality. In agreement, Robinson, Davies and Saltmarsh (2012: 56); Masinga (2016: 147) state that gender-based violence in schools hinders a nation's commitment to fostering non-violence and achieving gender equality. Also, it often hampers learner enrolment, retention, and academic performance in developing countries.

The long-term consequences of gender-based violence result in inadequate education for girls, thereby limiting social development. Research indicates a correlation between women's lower educational attainment and increased risks to child health (Pereznieto *et al.* 2010: 14). The presence of violence within school breeds an atmosphere of fear within the learning environment. Mncube and Madikizela-Madiya (2014: 47) argue that school-based violence leaves a lingering sense of fear, subsequently disrupting various educational processes, including the teaching, and learning culture. Zulu *et al.* (2004: 174); Devers *et al.* (2012: 11) argue that malice acts as a deterrent for learners, leading to decreased attendance, while parents are reluctant to send their children to such schools.

Consequently, parents often opt to transfer their children to other schools to protect them from the nuisance of school-based violence (Pinheiro 2006: 130). A Save the Children Denmark (2008: 55) study in Ethiopia revealed that parents confirmed the occurrence significantly influenced their decision regarding their children's school attendance. Additionally, a higher number of girls compared to boys were absent from school intermittently due to school-based violence. Pereznieto *et al.* (2010: 10) confirm absenteeism from school due to bullying and harassment at some point during the school term. The impact was not only on the parents but also deprived learners of the opportunity to access education within a conducive and safe learning environment, free from intimidation and violence.

School-based violence affects victims who continue attending school in various ways. Devers *et al.* (2012: 11) comment that victims often display a lack of interest and poor concentration, ultimately impacting their academic achievement. Masinga (2016: 147) agree, stating that victims no longer prioritise education due to diminished concentration levels and lowered self-esteem. Walker and Smith Jr (2009: 137); Badri (2014: 8) suggest that victims tend to be hyper-vigilant and experience extreme lethargy, leading to a steady decline in academic performance, increased absenteeism, and ultimately dropping out of school, thereby truncating their academic aspirations.



#### **2.6.4 Economic Consequences**

The impact of school-based violence manifests in both short-term and long-term consequences. In the short term, school-based violence can incur unanticipated medical health costs for the families of the victims. Although the extent of these costs depends on the severity of the violence, they contribute to the overall economic burden associated with school-based violence. Beninger (2013: 287) acknowledges that certain instances of school-based violence have immediate health-related implications. Pereznieto *et al.* (2010: 13) explain that the economic impact on healthcare and treatment primarily hinges upon the nature and severity of the violence. Save the Children Denmark (2008: 62); Devers *et al.* (2012: 11) assert that health-cost cases encompassed incidents such as rape, stabbings, severe corporal punishment, and sexual abuse resulting in pregnancy. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013: 1) states that some instances of school-based violence can lead to permanent disabilities and, even, death. The lack of systematic recording made it difficult to ascertain the overall financial costs (Pinheiro 2006: 68; Pereznieto *et al.* 2010: 4). School-based violence significantly affects both learners and their families since education is widely recognised as a crucial means of breaking the cycle of poverty within families. Depriving children of their right to education due to school-based violence undermines their present and future ability to contribute as productive members of society (Pereznieto *et al.* 2010: 12). Consequently, many families aspire to see their children pursue higher education and any disruption to access quality education hinders their prospects.

Edwards, Mumford and Serra-Roldan (2007: 31) confirm that dropping out of school has enduring consequences on a learner's lifelong outcomes. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2007: 3) concurs, stating that dropout learners forfeit the opportunity to achieve financial independence and improve their standard of living. Consequently, Ellery *et al.* (2010: 19) conclude that the phenomenon had far-reaching implications for children, their families, communities, countries, and global economic development carrying severe economic repercussions for families and future generations.

### **2.6.5 Social Consequences**

Violence in schools has enormous societal repercussions that can have an influence on people, communities, and society. According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2007: 3), school-based violence carries a detrimental impact on the ability of learners to form trusting relationships and develop pro-social behaviours. The South African Council of Education (2011: 4) notes that victimised learners often faced hindrances when engaging in normal childhood activities and academic pursuits. Failure by victimised learners to cultivate pro-social skills, positive social capital and to internalise moral values undermines the formation of a caring and healthy community (Masinga 2016: 150). Pinheiro (2006: 129) further argues that learners affected by violence are unlikely to exhibit noble character traits or to demonstrate empathy towards their peers. Pinheiro (2006: 129); Gevers and Flisher (2012: 183) conclude that victimised learners are more prone to engage in aggressive and disruptive comportment during their youth, potentially leading to involvement in criminal activities as adults.

Gevers and Flisher (2012: 184) assert that experiences of violence lead to the development of a pessimistic outlook on the future, and to detrimental decision-making that jeopardises their prospects. The Republic of South Africa National Development Plan (2011) states that, when individuals feel unsafe, it becomes challenging to foster their personal development, establish goals, and contribute to socio-economic activities. Antonowicz (2010: 7) and the South African Council of Education (2011: 4) contend that what threatens future society, peace, emotional well-being, stability, equality, and social cohesion is an unstable learning environment. Masinga (2016: 150) argues that the social consequences of school-based violence extend beyond its direct impact on individual learners, reaching as far as impeding the development of social capital and social cohesion.

### **2.6.6 Teacher Consequences**

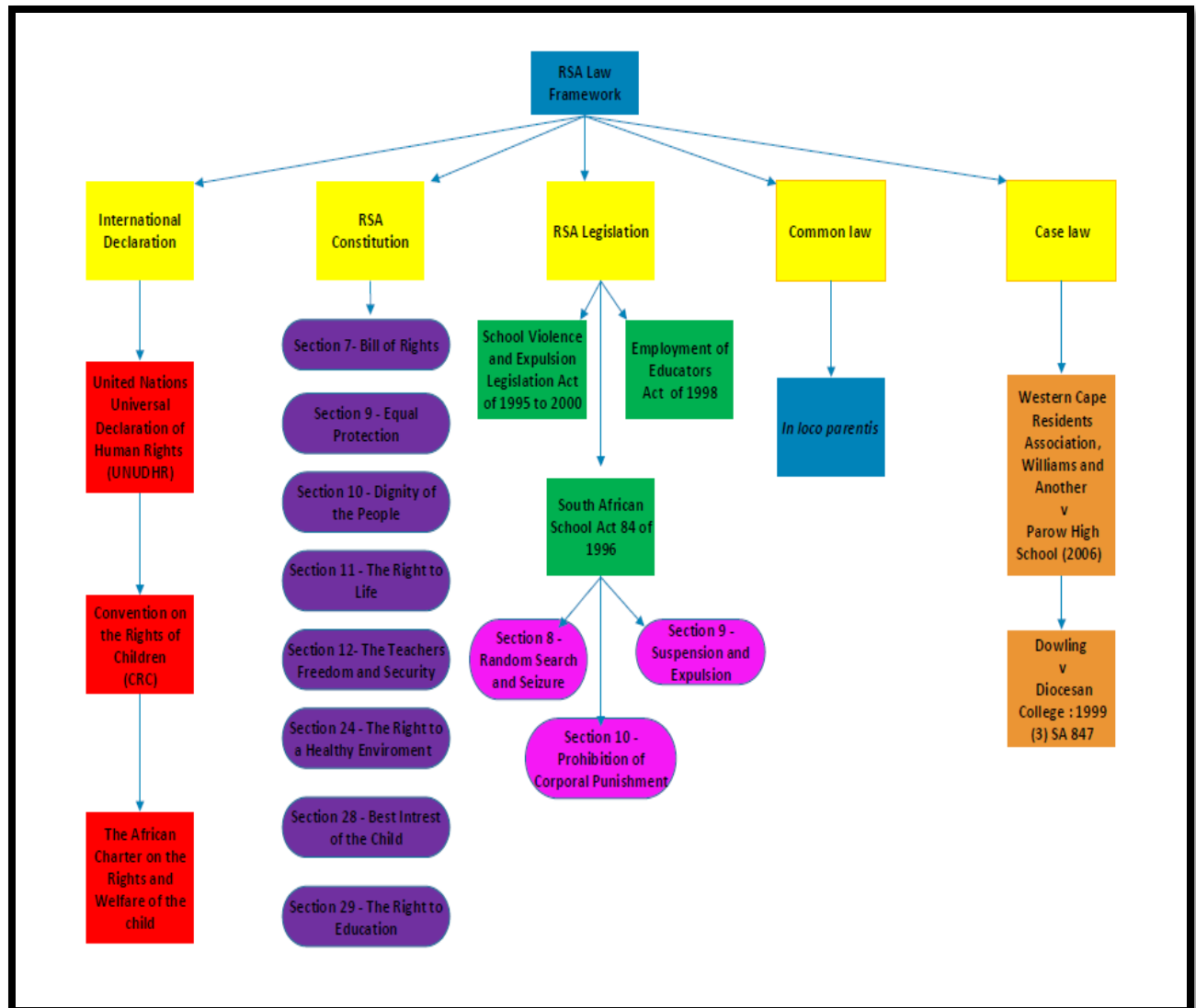
The impact of school-based violence extends beyond the emotional, academic, economic, social, and behavioural development of learners to incorporate the attitudes and teaching performance of educators (De Wet 2007: 11; Wilson 2008: 293). The South

African Human Rights Commission (2008: 14) posits that educators who have fallen victim to aggressive learners often experience post-traumatic stress disorders, adversely affecting their teaching abilities. Sibisi (2021: 88) highlights that professionals in the teaching field face the highest levels of mental fatigue, burnout, and psychological distress compared to other professions in South Africa. A link exists between psychological stress and the grade level being taught: teachers instructing higher grades were more susceptible compared to those teaching lower grades. Furthermore, female teachers tend to be more sensitive to misbehaving learners than their male counterparts, resulting in earlier and more intense signs of distress (Sibisi 2021: 88).

## **2.7 Local Policy and Legislation on School Violence**

The South African legal structure is set within a comprehensive framework encompassing regional, international, and local policy laws and legislation that address the education sector. These legal provisions are carefully formulated and enforced to prevent and effectively address the diverse range of social problems prevalent within the sector. Five main aspects – International Declarations, the South African Constitution, legislation, common law, and case law – make up the South African legal system. Each is intended to oversee and control a different area of society. Structures are made up of different substructures working together to provide thorough coverage and efficient application of the law.

In the coming section, a detailed examination is conducted to explore the substructures and their respective roles in addressing prominent social issues, particularly those pertaining to education and violence within South African schools. Below is an organogram showing the legal components and the substructures.



**Figure 2-2** Law Framework (Hlatshwayo 2018).

## 2.7.1 International Declarations

### 2.7.1.1 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948) contains a comprehensive array of principles pertaining to human rights. Article 1 discusses liberty, equality, and dignity that inherently belong to all individuals possessing rationality and conscience, emphasising the imperative for harmonious interaction among them. Article

3 firmly establishes the entitlement of every person to the fundamental rights of life, personal liberty, and security. Furthermore, Article 5 unequivocally prohibits the infliction of torture, as well as cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment upon any individual.

Addressing the right to education, Article 26 (1) stipulates that every individual possesses the right to accessible education, particularly during the foundational and primary stages, without any financial burden. It asserts the universal availability of technical and vocational education, while higher education should be accessible based on merit. Furthermore, Article 26 (2) explains that education should be directed towards the holistic development of human personality and the cultivation of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Education must also foster understanding and tolerance among diverse nations, ethnicities, and religious groups, actively supporting the United Nations' endeavours to uphold peace. Finally, Article 26 (3) of the UDHR affirms the right of parents to select the form of education they desire for their children, acknowledging their autonomy in making decisions regarding their children's educational path.

#### **2.7.1.2 Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC)**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) delineates a comprehensive range of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights bestowed upon children. According to the Convention's definition, a child is an individual under the age of 18. While the CRC does not explicitly focus on education, it acknowledges the intrinsic significance of education as a fundamental entitlement for children. Article 3 accentuates the paramount importance of safeguarding the best interests of children, emphasising the need for meticulous deliberation in decisions that may have implications for children. It further underscores the responsibility of adults to act in the best interests of children and to conscientiously evaluate the potential consequences of their decisions on future generations.

Moreover, Article 19 of the CRC addresses the imperative of shielding children from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect inflicted by parents or caregivers. This provision recognises that disciplinary measures should be administered in a manner that upholds

a child's dignity while fostering their development. Hence, effective disciplinary techniques, aimed at facilitating a child's understanding of societal behavioural norms, ought to refrain from violence and align with the child's best interests. Additionally, Article 28 refers to the right to education, asserting that every child is entitled to primary education. Furthermore, to optimise the educational experience, schools must be administered in a non-violent and orderly manner.

### **2.7.1.3 The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child**

African Union member states adopted the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (1990) as a regional human rights document in 1990. The objective is to defend and advance children's rights in a variety of circumstances, including schooling; the charter especially targets the rights and welfare of African children. The ACRWC, which creates a framework to safeguard the rights and welfare of South African children in the educational system, is a document to which South Africa is a signatory. The ACRWC generally offers South African schools a regional framework that informs and directs them in their obligation to preserve children's rights and welfare by ensuring that they get quality education in a secure and welcoming environment.

Article 3 of the ACRWC prohibits the discrimination of children based on race, ethnicity, sex, religion, disability, and socio-economic status. In this regard, South African schools are mandated to ensure that no learner faces discrimination based on the above-mentioned factors, and to provide equal opportunities for all children to access education. Article 4 advocates for the best interests of the child. South African schools are required to make decisions and act in ways that prioritise the well-being and development of children in all matters related to education. In addition, Article 7 of the ACRWC encourages participation and growth of child-friendly schools. This section acknowledges the right of a child to express their views freely in all matters affecting them. Thus, South African schools should involve children in decision making processes and promote child-friendly learning environments. In addition, Article 11 of the charter recognizes the right of every child to education and puts emphasis on primary education being compulsory,

available, and free to all. In this regard, South African schools are obligated to provide access to education for all children within their jurisdiction.

## **2.8 The Constitution of South Africa**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) serves as the ultimate law of the country, encompassing various sections that safeguard human rights. Section 9 (1) ensures equality before the law, offering equal protection and benefits to all individuals. Consequently, discrimination, including within educational institutions, is strictly prohibited. Section 9 (3) specifically addresses gender equality, guaranteeing girls equal opportunities, fair treatment, and protection from discrimination and exploitation.

Therefore, any violence occurring in schools undermines a learner's right to education, yet some learners might opt for absenteeism or even consider dropping out. The government bears the responsibility to act against perpetrators of violence and to safeguard victims against abuse and exploitation. Section 10 emphasises the right to human dignity, condemning social ills such as sexual abuse, sexual harassment, intimidation, and victimisation of learners. Sections 12 (1) (c) (d) and (e) uphold the right to freedom and security, which includes protection against arbitrary detention, violence in any form, torture, and cruel or degrading punishment. This provision underscores the importance of schools ensuring the rights of all learners by addressing violence and human rights violations. Furthermore, Section 12 (2) highlights the right to bodily and psychological integrity, thus emphasising that sexual harassment, sexual abuse, intimidation, and victimisation of learners not only infringes upon children's physical and mental well-being but also violates their freedom and security as guaranteed by the Constitution.

### **2.8.1 Bill of Rights**

A key element of the 1996 South African Constitution is the Bill of Rights. It establishes the fundamental liberties and rights of every citizen of the nation and serves as the cornerstone for the advancement of social justice, equality, and democracy. The clauses of the Bill of Rights expressly address many elements of education in South Africa, even though it applies to all spheres of society, including schools. The Bill declares that

everyone in South Africa has the fundamental right to an education. The right to basic education is protected by Section 29, and includes adult basic education and further education, both of which should be gradually made available and accessible. There is a strong emphasis on the idea of equality, and unjustified discrimination in any context, including educational institutions, is banned.

Schools must offer equal opportunity and treatment to all learners, regardless of their colour, gender, religion, ability, or any other form of prejudice. The Bill also encourages inclusivity and is against discrimination in the classroom. It forbids unjustifiable discrimination based on a variety of factors, including race, gender, religion, and handicap. Schools are expected to make sure that no learner is excluded or marginalised based on these characteristics, and that everyone has equal access to education. The Bill safeguards the dignity and right to privacy of all people, including learners and teachers. Schools are required to establish a setting that respects and preserves the privacy and dignity of every person on their property.

### **2.8.2 Section 9: Equal Protection**

Section 9 of the Constitution guarantees the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. In general, the provision prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth. Thus, every learner has the right to be free from violence and discrimination while attending school.

### **2.8.3 Section 12: The Teachers, Freedom, And Security**

Section 12 of the South African Constitution guarantees everyone's right to freedom and security, for teachers and learners. Whereas Section 12 focuses on personal security and freedoms, it also has an impact on education because it proposes that educational institutions support and uphold these rights. All people, including instructors, are free to exercise their numerous rights and freedoms under Section 12. This includes the freedoms of speech, association, and belief—all of which are essential for teachers to freely express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. Teachers have the freedom to participate in open debates, present many points of view, and to give learners a well-



rounded education. In addition, Section 12 guarantees the security of persons, safeguarding them against any form of physical harm, violence, or abuse. This provision is particularly significant in the context of education, as it protects both teachers and learners from any form of violence or mistreatment, and it fosters a safe and secure learning environment where everyone feels protected and can thrive.

#### **2.8.4 Section 28: Best Interests of The Child**

Education is significantly affected by Section 28 of the South African Constitution, which focuses on the best interests of the child. It emphasises giving top priority to children's needs for development, well-being, and education. Every child has the right to a fundamental education, according to Section 28. Regardless of a child's socio-economic status, race, or any other element, the state is required to ensure that they have access to a high-quality education. It imposes a duty on the government to provide the means, setting, and assistance necessary to guarantee that children get the education they require. According to Section 28, inclusive education is encouraged, which calls for providing those children with special needs or impairments with equal access to education. It emphasises the removal of obstacles and the offer of suitable assistance and accommodation for every child to take part completely in the educational process. Section 28 also outlaws discrimination against children in the delivery of education. It ensures that children are not treated unfairly or denied educational opportunities because of their colour, gender, language, religion, or any other trait. The provision encourages the development of inclusive, diverse learning settings that honour the individuality and rights of every child. Section 28 acknowledges that education encompasses not only academic learning but also a child's overall development. It emphasises how crucial it is to support their physical, mental, emotional, and social health. This stresses the necessity for a thorough and balanced educational system that considers the various needs and abilities of learners.

#### **2.8.5 Section 29: The Right to Education**

The right to education is protected in Section 29 of the South African Constitution. Everyone has the right to receive an elementary education, including adults. Additionally,

the state must gradually increase access to and availability of higher education. In public schools where it is reasonably practicable, people have the right to obtain an education in the official language(s) of their choice. When ensuring that learners have access to education in the preferred language, the state must consider elements including equity, viability, and the need to reform outdated discriminatory policies. Individuals have the right to create and fund their own independent educational establishments. Institutions should not engage in racial discrimination, should register with the state, and should uphold standards on a par with those of public educational institutions. The clause that permits independent educational institutions does not preclude the state from giving these institutions funding.

However, although the Constitution protects learners and teachers from violence, it is not possible for a piece of paper to protect anyone and, indeed, the actual violence in schools proves that it does not. It can be argued that learners and teachers are protected but that in the event that their constitutional rights are infringed they have legal recourse to compensation through retributive justice (as opposed to transformational justice). The above-mentioned sections of the Constitution will not stop violence although they may mitigate it but at least there is legal statute acknowledging the right to freedom from violence. Thus, although the Constitution provides the legal right, education about it and against violence is needed for its effects to be felt. Peace as much a mind-set as is violence; hence, worldviews and mind-sets must be changed.

## **2.9 The Legislation**

The South Africa National Education Policy Act 27 (1996) holds considerable importance as a prominent legislative framework governing the provision and administration of education within the context of South Africa. The Act's primary objective is to facilitate the delivery high quality education while concurrently advancing the principles of equal opportunity and safeguarding the fundamental rights of learners within the nation. The South African Schools Act of 1996, also known as SASA 84 of '96, is a legislative instrument that enforces the imperative of educational accessibility. It substantiates the assurance of basic education as a fundamental entitlement for every South African

citizen, irrespective of considerations such as race, gender, or socio-economic status. Central to the Act is the principle of non-discrimination, which serves as a cornerstone in promoting equitable opportunities within the educational domain. Under the provisions of SASA, public schools are obliged to admit learners and cater for their educational needs without engaging in any form of unjust discrimination.

Furthermore, the South African Schools Act of 1996 includes provisions that demarcate the parameters of discipline and behaviour within educational institutions. The Act grants schools the authority to formulate rules and regulations pertaining to disciplinary measures, and a code of conduct for learners. However, it places significant emphasis on the imperative of fairness and reasonableness in implementing disciplinary actions, thereby upholding the rights of learners. Section 8 (J) of the Act stipulates that, in accordance with applicable provincial legislation, the governing body of a public school must engage in consultations with learners, parents, and educators to establish a code of conduct. Subsequently, Section 25 (2) mandates that the code of conduct should be designed to cultivate a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to enhancing and sustaining the quality of the learning process.

The legislation underlines the significance of upholding secure and favourable educational environments, delineating strategies to effectively address challenges including bullying, violence, and substance abuse within educational institutions. Hence, the well-being of both learners and educators can be fostered. Such a conducive environment is facilitated through measures such as suspension, expulsion, and the prohibition of corporal punishment. Regarding the expulsion of learners, Section 9 (I) of the Act stipulates that, subject to any relevant provincial regulations, the governing body of a public school possesses the authority to suspend a learner from attending the school. This suspension can be employed either as a corrective measure for a duration not exceeding one week or as a temporary measure pending a decision regarding the learner's expulsion, which rests with the Head of Department. Furthermore, Section 10 of the Act specifically prohibits the administration of corporal punishment to learners within the school setting. It unequivocally states that no individual may engage in such disciplinary practices. Violation of this provision outlined in subsection (1) constitutes an

offence, and upon conviction, the offender is subject to a penalty commensurate with that imposed for assault.

## **2.10 Common Law**

Common law, as a legal system, is characterized by its reliance on customary practices, traditions, and judicial precedents, rather than on explicit written statutes or codes. Within this framework, the principle of *in loco parentis*, which translates to "in the place of a parent," imposes a duty upon educators to ensure the physical and psychological safety of all learners under their supervision (Masinga 2016: 78). Oosthuizen (2008: 125) explains that *in loco parentis* signifies assuming the parental role in the absence of the child's biological or adoptive parents. Masinga (2016: 79) further clarifies that educators are expected to anticipate potential hazards to which learners may be exposed and are obligated to proactively safeguard their well-being. Generally, the doctrine of *in loco parentis* is commonly invoked in circumstances where an individual or organisation assumes responsibility for the care, supervision, and welfare of a child, despite not being their biological or adoptive parent.

Instances where this doctrine applies include educators, coaches, day-care providers, camp counsellors, and other individuals entrusted with the temporary custody of or control over children. Hlatshwayo (2018: 34) points out that educators bear the responsibility of providing diligent supervision concerning the psychological and physical well-being of learners, who are inherently impressionable and immature individuals. Consequently, as an integral component of their duty to ensure the welfare of learners, educators are obligated to oversee their physical safety (Hlatshwayo 2018: 34). Therefore, this necessitates the provision of protection to learners who fall victim to violence perpetrated by other individuals within the educational setting.

## **2.11 Case Law**

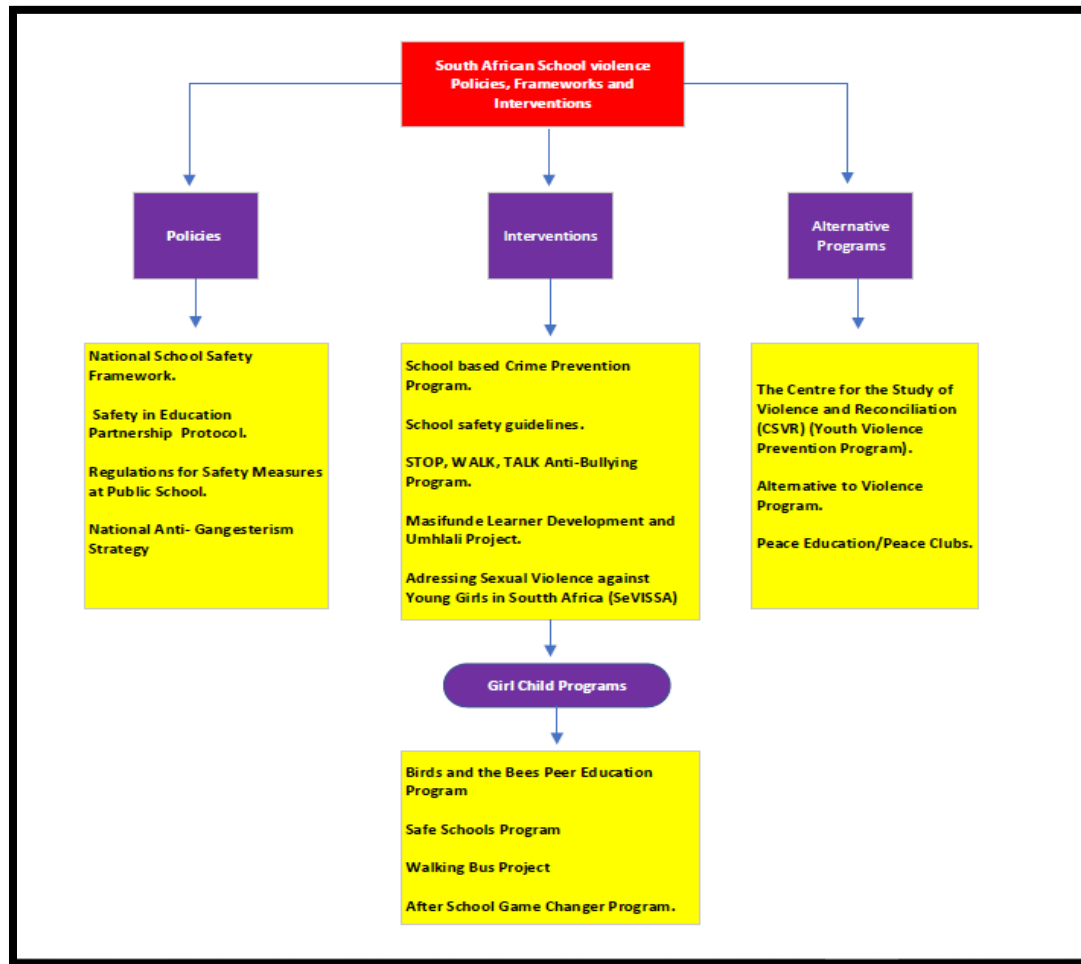
Case law encompasses the corpus of legal principles, interpretations, and doctrines that are derived from judicial decisions rendered in court cases. These decisions are instrumental in shaping the legal landscape and provide a foundation for subsequent legal

determinations. As Hlatshwayo (2018: 34) cogently elucidates, case law assumes the character of law itself, serving as a repository of rule-based principles employed within the judicial sphere. In the specific context of education, constructed principles derived from case law assume a crucial role in governing educational matters by guiding the actions and decisions of relevant stakeholders.

For instance, in the case of *Western Cape Residents Association, Williams and Another v Parow High School (2006)*, a Grade 12 learner enrolled at Parow High School had been causing problems since her enrolment. One pertained to her confrontational demeanour towards figures of authority. Owing to her cumulative history of misconduct, the school decided against extending an invitation for her to attend the matric farewell event. The petitioner opted to challenge this prohibition, contending that the school's refusal to invite her amounted to a violation of her constitutional rights pertaining to human dignity, equality, and freedom of speech. Judge Mitchell posited that two of the foremost principles that educational institutions must instil in learners are discipline and deference towards authority. Judge Mitchell ruled that one strategy that can be used to convey such instructive concepts is the awarding of a privilege as a reward for honourable behaviour and in reverse denying praise and reward in the event of indiscipline. The court went on to say that bestowing a privilege without first earning it could theoretically infringe on the rights to equality and dignity of worthy learners. The court argued that praising good behaviour is a practice that permeates many parts of life and that learning about it early in development can invariably benefit the learner in their subsequent lives. Regarding the introduction of such a disciplinary structure in educational institutions, the court found no constitutional.

Furthermore, in the context of bullying, the legal case of *Dowling v Diocesan College: 1999 (3) SA 847* holds significant relevance. The law case covers the successful legal action filed by the guardians of a male juvenile subjected to abuse by two appointed prefects. The parents won their case against the school board. The court's conclusions in this instance emphasise the importance of education institutions in protecting the worth of their learners. The court determined that violent acts were committed by fully accredited prefects while acting within the parameters of their assigned responsibilities. As a result,

schools are responsible for the behaviour and consequences of their appointed prefects' activities.



**Figure 2-3** South African Policies on School Violence (Self-Generated).

## 2.12 National policies

This section examines the overarching national policies formulated to challenge the prevalence of school violence. Noteworthy policies, including but not limited to, the National School Safety Framework, the Safeguarding in Education Partnership Protocol, the Regulatory Framework for Safety Measures at Public Schools, and the National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy, will be discussed. These policies collectively represent a

concerted effort by relevant authorities to address the intricate challenges posed by school violence through a systematic and multifaceted approach.

### **2.12.1 National School Safety Framework**

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) collaborated with the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) and other key government stakeholders to develop the National School Safety Framework (NSSF). This framework adopts a comprehensive approach to prevent violence and promote safety in schools, drawing on the recommendations of the works of (Shaw 2005; European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 2013 ; Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) 2016). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) (2016) states that the National School Safety Framework was implemented in 2015 after receiving approval from the Council of Education Ministers. Its primary objective is to create a secure and supportive learning environment free from violence and threats for learners, educators, school governing bodies, administration, and principals (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) 2016: 10).

The National School Safety Framework (NSSF), along with the Regulations for Safety Measures in Public Schools, mandates the implementation of various initiatives in schools, including a School Safety Policy, School Safety Plan, Policy on Non-Violent Discipline, and a code of conduct for learners. These mandated initiatives are overseen by the Safe School Committee within schools, and require schools to conduct annual surveys on safety issues (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) 2016). Additionally, the Framework provides survey templates for these annual surveys, which involve gathering feedback from school stakeholders such as learners, principals, and educators. According to the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) (2016), the survey findings are to be submitted to the District Safe School Coordinator, and in the case of serious offences, they should be reported to the local police station. Furthermore, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) (2016) emphasises that if there is suspected abuse, the school principal is obligated to report the incident to the school social worker and the local police station.

The implementation of the NSSF has revealed shortcomings in terms of follow-up, monitoring, and evaluation of its execution in schools nationwide. Bongweni and Tyilo

(2019) in a study in the Western Cape, and the investigation by Dewan (2021) in Kwa-Zulu Natal found that schools were incorrectly implementing the procedures outlined by the NSSF. Additionally, learners and parents were not adequately involved in the development of school codes of conduct and school safety policies. As a result, there was low compliance from learners and parents, and a lack of parental involvement when issues arose in schools, as (Dewan 2021: 78) notes. Bongweni and Tyilo (2019) conclude that, unilaterally implemented training workshops by the Department of Education without consideration of the specific needs of each school, posed challenges in effectively implementing the NSSF. These findings suggest a need for improved oversight and guidance to ensure proper adherence to the framework's guidelines and for greater inclusion of learners and parents in the decision-making processes related to school safety policies and procedures.

### **2.12.2 Safety in Education Partnership Protocol**

In 2011, the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Department of Basic Education collaborated to formulate the Safety in Education Partnership Protocol. This protocol designates the government entities as integral components in providing security within educational institutions during school hours. The protocol stipulates that operational safety committees be set up within schools to be tasked with facilitating effective communication with the SAPS. Implementing school-based crime prevention programmes aimed at curtailing and deterring unlawful and delinquent behaviours among learners, thus ultimately enhancing overall safety within educational settings, is stressed. Furthermore, schools are under obligation to develop mechanisms for reporting safety incidents, to reinforce measures on access control, and to enforce strict regulations prohibiting dangerous weapons and illicit substances on school premises.

#### **2.12.2.1 Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools**

In accordance with the Regulations for Safety Measures at Public Schools, Regulation 1128 of 2006, all schools in South Africa need to maintain an environment that is devoid of drugs, alcohol, and dangerous weapons. These regulations explicitly prohibit the entry of individuals intoxicated or involved in drug-related activities onto school premises. Furthermore, if any person within the school grounds is suspected of carrying drugs,



alcohol, or a weapon, authorised individuals such as a police officer or school principal are granted the authority to conduct a search on the suspected individual. Also, in addressing the issue of alcohol and drug use among learners in schools, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Alcohol and Drug Use Among Learners, and the National Drug Master Plan, serve as additional strategies. These initiatives are specifically designed to tackle and respond to the presence and misuse of alcohol and illicit substances within educational institutions.

#### **2.12.2.2 National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy**

In June 2016, the National Anti-Gangsterism Strategy was officially approved by the South African Cabinet. The primary objective of this strategy is to proactively prevent and respond to gang-related violence while addressing the adverse consequences resulting from such violence. This is achieved through the implementation of various initiatives, encompassing both school-based and community-based interventions. Notably, the strategy underscores the significance of effectively executing existing frameworks such as the National School Safety Framework, the National Strategy for the Prevention and Management of Alcohol and Drug Use Among Learners in Schools, and the Safety in Education Partnership Protocol. However, Dewan (2021: 79) observed that a limitation of this strategy is its absence of novel policy recommendations or practical suggestions to effectively combat school violence.

#### **2.12.3 Intervention Strategies**

Table 2.1 outlines the intervention strategies that have been executed in South Africa. The table delineates the objectives of these interventions, their respective geographical locales, the present state of their execution, as well as potential points of contact and hyperlinks to facilitate access to their corresponding official websites.

### 2.12.3.1 Intervention Strategies Summary

**Table 2-1** South African Intervention Strategies Summary.

| <b>Intervention Strategy</b>            | <b>Aim</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Location</b> | <b>Status and contact details</b>                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| School-based Crime Prevention Programme | <p>Strengthening the efficacy of safe school committees in addressing crime and violence in educational institutions.</p> <p>Establishing effective collaborative partnerships between schools and proximate police stations.</p> <p>Mobilising communities to assume responsibility for educational institutions in their localities.</p> <p>Enhancing learners' awareness regarding the ramifications of violence.</p> <p>Promoting the establishment of crime and safety reporting systems within educational institutions.</p> <p>Implementation of school-based crime prevention programmes in conjunction with relevant provincial, district, and local authorities.</p> <p>Deployment of specialised operations in key educational institutions, encompassing visible policing and patrol activities.</p> <p>Enforcing the closure of illicit shebeens and liquor stores within a 500-metre radius of educational institutions.</p> | National        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched in 2009</li> <li>• South Africa Police Service (SAPS)</li> <li>• Department of Basic Education (DEB),</li> </ul> |
| School Safety Guidelines                | <p>The aim is to promote collaboration and participation of police officers in promoting safe and orderly school environments.</p> <p>Mandates schools to establish safe school committee made up of internal stakeholders such as learners,</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | National        | <p>Launched in 2000</p> <p>Department of Basic Education (DEB).</p> <p>SANCA 0861 472 622</p> <p>NICRO 021 462 001</p> <p>SAPS CRIME STOP</p>                      |

|                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                   | educators, school governing body (SGB) and school security personnel. The external members include SAPS, local ward councillors' metro police, community police forums, social workers, and non-governmental organisations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |          | 08600 10111<br>EMERGENCY NUMBER 10111<br><a href="https://www.saps.gov.za/child_safety/downloads/school_safety_pamphlet.pdf">https://www.saps.gov.za/child_safety/downloads/school_safety_pamphlet.pdf</a> .                                                      |
| Stop walk Anti Bullying Programme                 | The programme aims to prevent bullying in South African schools. A manual on Prevention and Management of Bullying in Schools is available for educators to manage cases of bullying. There is the E-Safety Guidelines for cyber-bullying. Collaboration with Mindset in creating an anti-bullying animated television series for primary and high schools to curb violence. A series was broadcast on DSTV Channel 319 and 309 to support the STOP, WALK, TALK Anti-bullying campaign.                                                                                        | National | Launched in 2018<br>Department of Basic Education (DBE).<br><a href="https://www.education.gov.za/ArchivedDocuments/ArchivedArticles/Anti-bullyingCampaign.aspx">https://www.education.gov.za/ArchivedDocuments/ArchivedArticles/Anti-bullyingCampaign.aspx</a> . |
| Masifunde Learner Development and Umhlali Project | The aim of the Masifunde Learner Development programme is to provide academic support to previously disadvantaged learners, improving future opportunities while reducing exposure to crime and violence.<br><br>The Umhlali project sought to enhance data-based youth resilience against crime and avoid offending behaviour through intervention strategies such as family prevention, school safety, early childhood development, child protection and skills development. Furthermore, programmes after school provide opportunistic information to the unemployed youth. |          | Masifunde Learner Development (2012).<br>Umhlali Project (2015-2018).                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Addressing                                        | This project aims to reduce violence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Gauteng, | Launched in 2017                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

|                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sexual Violence against young girls in South Africa (SeVissa) | against children, particularly girls in schools, thereby improving their access to and performance in school, as well as impacting educational outcomes for other children. This is to be achieved by implementing the National Safety Framework in schools, sharing outcomes and lessons learnt with the larger community, and publishing the results.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and the Western Cape | <a href="https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/school-violence-in-south-Africa">https://www.saferspaces.org.za/understand/entry/school-violence-in-south-Africa</a>                                                                                                                                                |
| Birds and the Bees Peer-Education Programme                   | This programme seeks to challenge negative attitudes and social norms that promote sexual violence and prevent survivors from speaking. This creates a culture of consent where learners feel safe. Learners are also trained to become peer educators on issues of sexual violence, rape myths, consent and behaviours that exacerbate sexual violence. Finally, it involves the same peer educators in developing safety plans as well as awareness campaigns in schools. They will also serve as points of contact for victims of sexual offences in and around school. | Athlone and Khayelitsha Western Cape        | Launched in 2006<br><a href="https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/safe-schools-programme">https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/safe-schools-programme</a>                                                                                                                                            |
| Safe Schools Programme                                        | This project was created to ensure that schools are safe and consequently are enabling supportive learning environments. This is achieved through installing security systems, the development of programmes focusing on addressing learner behaviour and systems and programmes addressing and responding to weapons, substance abuse and gang violence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Western Cape                                | Launched in 2006<br>Department of Basic Education (Western Cape).<br>Oscar Keith Apollis, Safe Schools Manager, Western Cape Department of Education:<br>Tel: +27 (0)21 467 2970<br>Email: <a href="mailto:Oscar.Apollis@westerncape.gov.za">Oscar.Apollis@westerncape.gov.za</a><br>Nazeem Sheik Ismail, DCES, Western Cape |

|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                        | Department of Education:<br>Tel: +27 (0)21 467 9367<br>Email: Nazeem.Sheik-Ismael@westerncape.gov.za                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Walking Bus Project                 | This project involves parents and volunteers from the community who walk children in groups to and from school to improve learner safety. If available, volunteers also check the safety of school perimeters.                                                                  | Cape Town-Western Cape | Launched in 2016<br>South African Police Service (SAPS), Metro Law Enforcement, Metro and Provincial Traffic Department,<br>Department of Education – Safer Schools, Department of Social Development, Religious Leaders, Community Police Forums (CPFs), Neighbourhood Watches (NHWs), Schools, Parents, NGOs, and Communities.<br><a href="https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/walking-bus-initiative">https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/walking-bus-initiative</a> |
| After-school Game Changer Programme | This is an after-school programme that promotes regular and consistent participation of learners. These programmes aim to improve learner outcomes, reduce school dropout rates, and mitigate risk-taking behaviour. The programmes include sports and recreational activities. | Western Cape           | Launched in 2016<br>City of Cape Town, Department of Cultural Affairs and Sports (DCAS), Department of Community Safety (DOCS), Department of the Premier (DotP), Department of Social Development and Western Cape Education                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|  |  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  |  | Department.<br><a href="https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/after-school-game-changer-programme">https://www.saferspaces.org.za/be-inspired/entry/after-school-game-changer-programme</a> |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

## **2.13 Alternative Programmes**

### **2.13.1 The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) (Youth Violence Prevention Programme)**

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) endeavours to foster peace, ensure safety, and promote human rights within educational institutions through the implementation of intervention programmes that encompass various facets such as education, victim support, environmental design, and collaborative alliances with schools. Additionally, the Centre offers skills development training and supplies educational resources upon request. The main objective is to introduce young individuals to non-violent alternatives, and to empower them by granting agency in participatory activities and engagement in programmes centred on social responsibility. For instance, in the Ekangala community, the CSV initiative spearheaded the development and facilitation of interventions targeting youth violence.

### **2.13.2 Alternative to Violence Programme (AVP)**

The Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) is a globally acknowledged voluntary initiative that organises workshops to empower individuals to adopt non-violent lifestyles based on principles of mutual respect and care. AVP is inclusive, welcoming individuals of all ages, backgrounds, and gender identities. Although AVP initially received support from the Quakers (Religious Society of Friends), the programme itself is not religiously aligned and functions effectively within various social and religious contexts. Nor are its workshops affiliated with any religious' faith. Since its establishment in 2008, AVP has provided support to facilitators and AVP programmes in conducting workshops. The organisation adheres to non-discriminatory policies, ensuring that appointments and activities are free

from bias based on gender, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age, or criminal history. Furthermore, groups and programmes operate independently, although officially recognised members receive additional assistance from AVP International. Currently, AVP has a presence in over 50 countries worldwide, including Costa Rica, New Zealand, Russia, Israel, and South Africa.

AVP has been implemented as an experimental and emotionally engaging component in school programmes. Its primary objective is to impart valuable skills that foster emotional awareness, ultimately aiming to prevent interpersonal violence. The programme has demonstrated its effectiveness in diminishing instances of violence within the classroom environment, while simultaneously enhancing interpersonal relationships among learners and promoting academic proficiency. Workshops are designed to leverage everyday experiences and provide individuals with alternative strategies for managing conflicts, thereby assisting them in steering clear of violent or abusive behaviours.

### **2.13.3 Peace Education/Peace Clubs**

There is need to transform education from an authoritarian learning pedagogy to one that incorporates justice, inclusiveness, and respect (Harber 2018). To understand and tackle school violence there is need to use peace-building to transform the educational system, thereby addressing causes of school violence. Dewan (2021: 89) identifies the core competencies of peace clubs as: empathy, solidarity, participatory, democratic engagement, and individual and collective agency. John (2018) found that elements of peace education were being implemented in the South African education system via the Life Orientation curriculum; however, there were some challenges such as limited time, effort together, and enough training to deliver the content effectively. The peace clubs launched in South Africa in 2012 were successful because they were learner-centred and led (John 2018). In this study learners met once every week for eight months to discuss issues affecting them and to develop action plans to challenge the social issues plaguing their school. Thus, the use of discussions, mentoring and other creative methodologies were incorporated into the action plans.

## **2.14 Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided a comprehensive analysis of the intricate nature of school violence. The discourse encompassed an exploration of historical and contemporary occasions of school violence, both within a localised and global context. The prevailing manifestations of violence, as substantiated by scholarly works, was critically examined. Moreover, a thorough inquiry into the multifaceted determinants of school violence was undertaken, alongside an appraisal of aggression theories that offer divergent perspectives on the underlying catalysts of such phenomena. The ramifications stemming from school violence were duly deliberated upon. Additionally, a thorough investigation into pertinent international and local legislative measures was conducted, in conjunction with an evaluative overview of historical and current strategies of intervention. The final part of this literature review was a comprehensive depiction of alternative programme approaches. The next Chapter will discuss the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

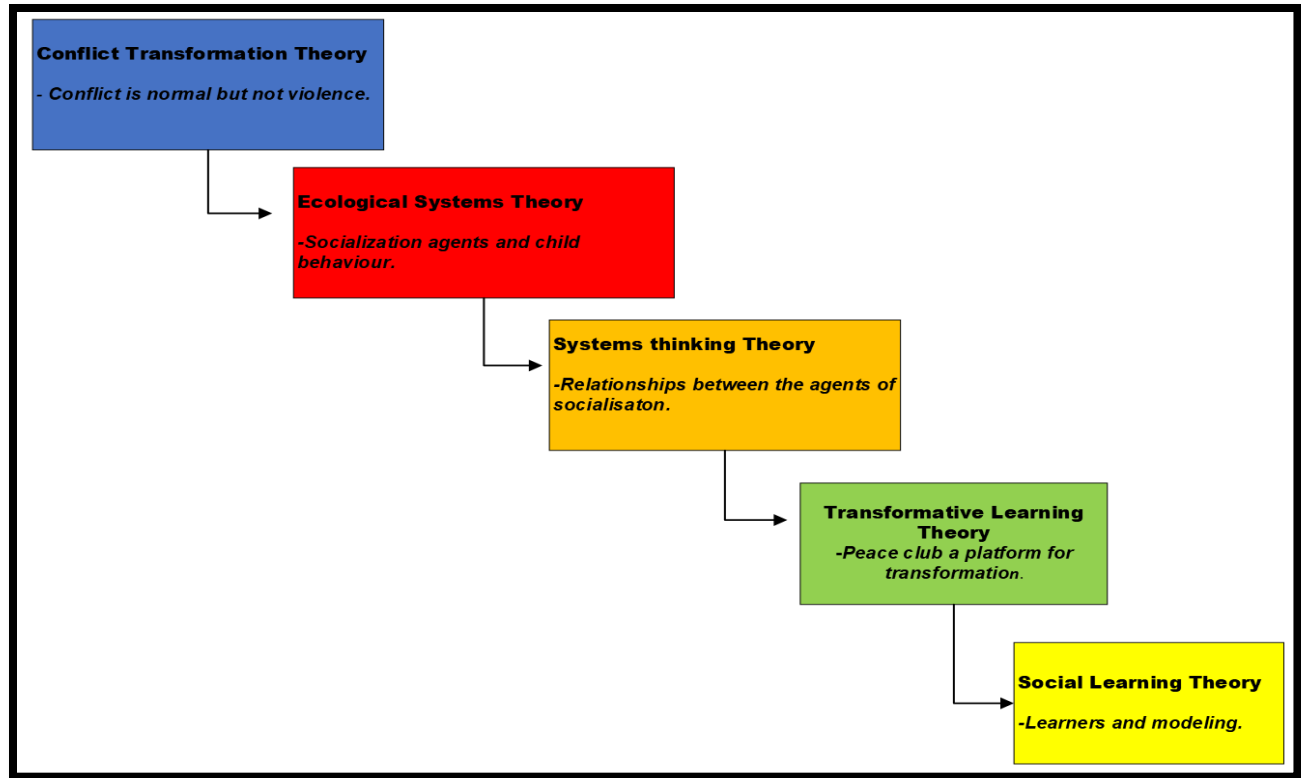


## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

A research study's theoretical framework is crucial since it establishes parameters for the methodology. It acts as the cornerstone upon which all research knowledge will be built (Grant and Osanloo 2014: 12) . Grant and Osanloo (2014: 12) explain that it provides the foundation for the rationale of the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions. In this study, the theoretical framework was conceived as an intellectual, research-based foundation for understanding, applying, analysing, and designing innovative approaches to investigate school violence. It was also seen as a mechanism for promoting peace in the education and social science contexts. A theory predicts relationships from an intellectual angle on which research data will be based to find meaning in future studies. Thus, conflict transformation, social learning, ecological and the systems theories were crucial to understanding school violence and to promoting peace clubs as an intervention strategy in Umlazi District.



**Figure 3-1** The Five-Way Step Process (Self-Generated).

In Figure 3.1, the illustration underscores the five fundamental theories that constitute the theoretical foundation guiding the study and the choices made by the researcher. The central theory, conflict transformation, served as a pivotal framework, enabling the researcher to convey to participants that conflict is a natural occurrence, distinct from violence. This theory also proved valuable in facilitating conflict mapping. The ecological systems theory contributed significantly by aiding in the identification of prevailing structures and the impact of the school ecosystem. Simultaneously, the systems theory played a crucial role in comprehending the interrelations between these existing structures within the school ecosystem. Additionally, the transformative learning theory directed the study's focus towards understanding individuals' worldviews and the potential for transformation. Lastly, the social learning theory concentrated on the modelling of learners. Detailed discussions on each of these theories can be found in the preceding sections of this study.

### **3.2 Conflict Transformation Theory**

The Conflict Transformation theory seeks to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating a constructive change process that reduces violence, increases justice, directs interaction and social structures, and addresses real-life problems in human relationships (Lederach 2003: 23). Lederach (2003: 23) explains that the main objective of conflict transformation is to create adaptive responses to human conflict through change processes which increase justice and reduce violence. The establishment of peace clubs at four schools in Umlazi District was viewed as a potential adaptive response to the alarming rates of school-based violence crippling the South African education system.

According to Lederach (2003), the conflict transformation process probes steps to take to discontinue something undesirable, to eliminate the destructive element, and to create the desired response. In this study, school-based violence was the undesirable trait that needs to be eliminated, while peace is the desired attribute to be cultivated. Lederach (2003) further insists that, in this kind of situation, solutions to both the short-term crisis and the long-term issue should be fully explored. The creation and implementation of a non-violent response programme to lessen violence in the four different schools with the aid of peace clubs was a promising mediation initiative, both in the short and long terms, thereby bringing systematic change to violence in Umlazi District schools.

Lederach (2003) highlights that conflict transformation necessitates the deliberate engagement in envisioning, integrating, giving due reverence to, and advancing the human and cultural proficiencies inherent in a specific environment. This undertaking requires a novel perspective that refrains from predominantly construing the context and its inhabitants as the underlying predicament, with external entities holding the solutions (Lederach 2003). Instead, it mandates a comprehension of the ultimate transformational objective as one that affirms and amplifies the intrinsic human assets and societal resources. Considering this perspective, schoolchildren can be a resource for fostering peaceful neighbourhood residents and, above all, can serve as peacekeepers in their own classes or school premises.

Therefore, one of the goals of the study was to educate learners on the importance of non-violent behaviour, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Another was to create and assess the procedures applied by peace clubs to resolve disputes on and around school grounds considering the participants' experiences. This was an appropriate strategy for transforming conflict since it went beyond interpersonal and intragroup interactions to address the structural injustices and root causes of conflict in schools. This was consistent with the first goal, which aimed to investigate the types, levels, root causes, and effects of violence in schools.

Lederach (2003: 14) posits that conflict transformation involves viewing and responding to the ebb and flow of social conflict to bring about positive change processes that reduce violence. Social structures and responses to interpersonal interactions in real life ought to be developed. Lederach (2003: 15) further argues that responses to violence should involve action and comprehension based on personal experience. The training the participants and peace club members would receive could be used as a source of information to develop localised strategies to combat school-based violence and to promote peace. As a result, mechanisms might be established to assess the efficacy of peace clubs in resolving disputes in and around schools.

Miall (2004: 5) points out that a range of people may play a crucial part in gradually changing conflict situations through a series of smaller or larger modifications. The establishment of peace clubs was a step towards identifying and reducing trends in school violence. Knowledge of the potential role that learners could play in combating school-based violence was crucial to building peaceful communities. Children's behaviour is frequently reinforced by agents of socialisation (Grusec 1992: 782). In educational settings, peace groups have the potential to function as socialisation enablers. This might be a setting where learners pick up certain positive behaviours and unlearn the negative components. Therefore, it is important to research the child's environment. Investigating the influence of the effects of systems on child development can be informative. Understanding the influence of peer pressure, the family, society, school, and religion on behaviour in and around the school was essential. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was a relevant lens through which the research sought to understand the factors that influence school violence, and the role of peace clubs as an appropriate mitigation strategy.

### **3.3 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory**

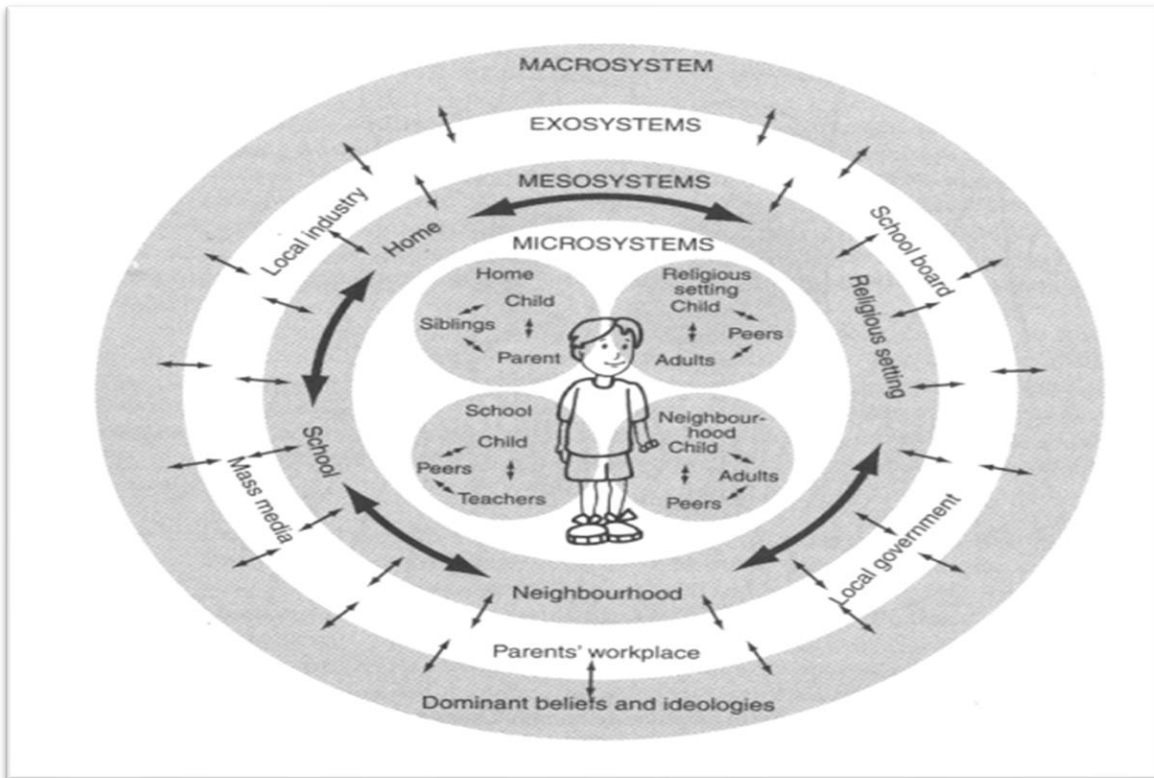
The ecological systems theory put forward by Bronfenbrenner explains how different environmental influences affect the psychological growth of people. Bronfenbrenner (1979: 27) asserts that human development is a process in which individual growth is a more in-depth, distinct, and accurate understanding of the ecological environment. A variety of environmental influences that include the child's immediate family, school contexts and the general cultural values, laws, and practices, have an impact on the development of a child's behaviour (Härkönen 2007). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that children are a developing organism that interacts with their environments; their actions are an expression of their interactions and personal individualities (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The study assumed the learner's actions reflected the ecological factors that characterise the Umlazi District.

Nhambura (2020: 28) emphasises that studying multiple personal systems rather than just observing behaviour is the best way to comprehend human growth. It was appropriate to examine the multiple personal systems surrounding the learners in the four schools in Umlazi to comprehend their conduct. The several personal systems, comprised homes, families, friends, the church, and the community (Nhambura 2020: 28). It can be argued that understanding the development of learner behaviour and school violence depends on the link between the child and their immediate environment, in this case Umlazi District. Here, we see, first, that a child is an active participant who influences his or her environment. Second, there are the environmental forces, conditions, and constraints to which the child must adapt. And third, the environment consists of different sized entities nested one inside the other, and their reciprocal relationships within the micro-, meso-, exo-, and macro- systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979). These three assumptions are crucial to understanding socialisation.

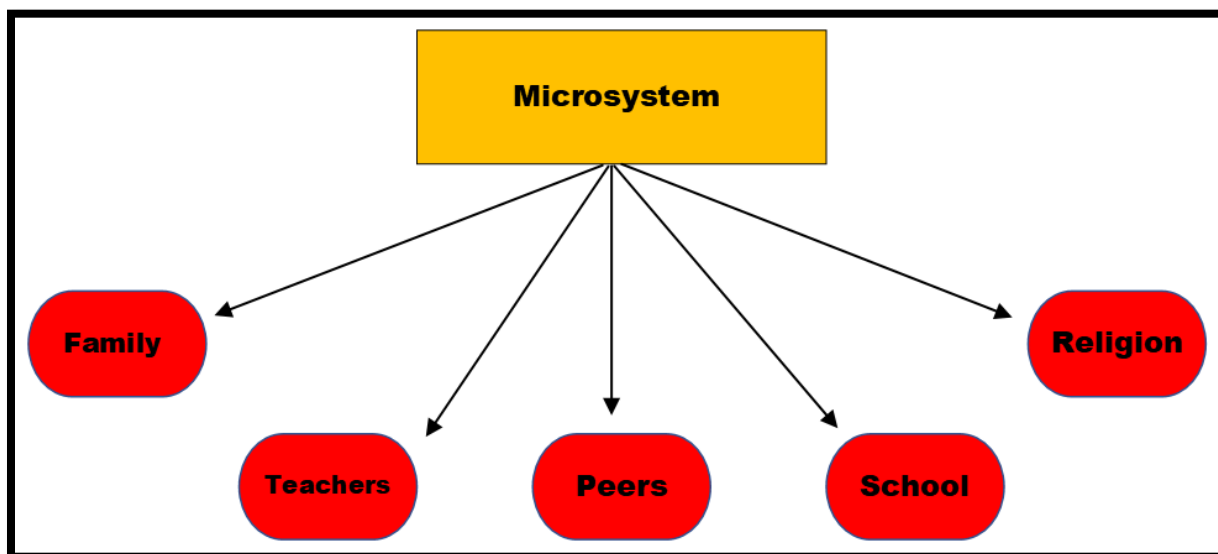
To comprehend child personality development with reference to violent and non-violent behaviour in Umlazi schools, considerations of the natural environment, the key players, and their influence should be at the forefront. The definition of interaction is supported by an understanding of how children behave in response to their interactions within their surroundings (Härkönen 2007: 4). Understanding the nature, scope, and effects of violence in the four schools in the Umlazi District of eThekweni Municipality depended on these factors. Based on this first goal, survey and interview techniques were relevant to

ascertain teachers', security guards', parents' and learners' feelings about school violence and peace in their communities.

Sibisi (2021: 1026) adds that the ecological systems theory is useful for understanding school violence as it emphasises underlying causes as a combination of personal and environmental problems. Lee (2011) investigated the underlying causes of violent learner behaviour using the ecological system theory, which helped explain a lot of the variability within bullying behaviours. The theoretical framework was a useful lens for the current study on school violence used to pinpoint the variables influencing the phenomenon in Umlazi schools. Lee (2011: 1666); Ettekal and Mahoney (2017: 7) note that, the ecological theory classifies the environment into four elements the micro, meso, exo, and macro systems. The approach emphasises the importance of family, friends, and community ties in shaping how learners feel, act, and develop (Sibisi 2021: 1028). Härkönen (2007: 15) gave a thorough illustration of the layers that affect children's behaviour in Figure 3.2.



**Figure 3-2** Five Interlocking Contextual Systems that Influence Child Behaviour (Bronfenbrenner 1979).



**Figure 3-3** School Microsystem (Self-Generated).

### **3.3.1 Micro-System**

The micro-system – the closest ecological level in contact with a child's immediate environment – consists of the dwellings and the time spent there (Analisah and Indartono 2018: 239). Despite connections on the outer levels influencing inner structures, Härkönen (2007: 7) argues that micro-system interactions are the strongest of all systems with the greatest impact on children. A micro-system, comprises the activities, roles, and interpersonal interactions that a developing child encounters in a particular physical and material environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979: 22). Four distinct, significant factors – family, teachers, peers, and the school culture – function in brain learning, according to (Lee 2011: 1666).

Despite Lee (2011) identifying four influential factors, given religion's significant impact on Africans' upbringing and child behaviour, it was necessary to consider this. Mbiti (1975) argues that spirituality plays a significant role in the daily lives of Africans. For instance, in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, 78,5% of the population claimed to practice Christianity, 12,3% traditional African religions like ancestry, tribe, or animism, 3,3% followed no particular religion and 2% professed to be Muslim (Statistics South Africa 2015: 27) . With this empirical data, religion is an important social agent that needs to be considered when assessing the role of the micro-system in the personality development of children in school. It was important to understand the ethos of these factors, and the perception of violence, non-violent behaviour, and child behaviour in Umlazi, an area regarded as a volatile environment.

#### **3.3.1.1 Family**

Lee (2011: 1666) posits that parental behaviours and knowledge of societal concerns such as domestic violence had an impact on children's development. Children's behaviour is influenced by parental permissiveness towards violence, authoritarian parenting styles, and parental violence (Espelage, Bosworth and Simon 2000; Shields and Cicchetti 2001; Christie-Mizell 2003; Curtner-Smith *et al.* 2006). A further argument by Lee (2011); Popov and Ilesanmi (2015); Singh (2016); Nkosi and Adebayo (2021); Zhao (2021) is that children with more authoritarian parents, who observed domestic violence, and parents



with a passive attitude towards violence were more likely to use violence against other children. Chinyama (2021) adds that children with strong social and emotional links to their parents and deeper, more positive interactions with their peers were less likely than children with weak relationships to act aggressively or engage in delinquent behaviour.

This argument suggests that families have a significant impact on the development of children and how they perceive the world (Chinyama 2021). This study's focus on the Umlazi learners' family structures was crucial. South Africa has high rates of domestic and school violence, divorce, and unstable relationships. The core reasons for school violence may be revealed by examining the role of families' influence on children's development under these challenging circumstances, and how they affect the school environment. One of the goals of the study was to examine the role families play in either causing conflict or acting non-violently.

#### **3.3.1.2 Teachers**

Teachers have a crucial role in the personality development of learners as they spend more time with the children than anybody else except their families. The lack of moral authority among teachers has been linked to an increase in bullying in classrooms. For instance, insufficient bullying interventions by teachers in South Korea were found to contribute to the frequency of bullying (Park 2003; Yang 2005). Mbambo (2016); Nyawo (2016); Singh (2016); Mahabeer (2020) conclude that South African teachers lack effective bullying intervention techniques as well as community and parental support, which has led to an epidemic of school violence. One focus of the study was on comprehending the role teachers have in addressing school violence.

#### **3.3.1.3 Peers**

One of the elements influencing a child's personality development is peer relationships. Lee (2011: 1668) asserts that, public self-coercion, power dynamics, and false friendship networks encourage aggressive conduct in children. The phrase "power dynamic" refers to some children's propensity to view aggressive behaviour as a way to retain dominance over weaker colleagues or groups in order to rise to greater social status (Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco 2001). They further note that the degree to which differences between

children and their peer groups are tolerated is referred to as the level of difference acceptance. In this regard, difference acceptance includes how much diversity or dissimilarity is allowed or accepted within a group of children and their peers. It is about the extent to which variations in personalities, behaviours and characteristics among children is okay within the social setting of their peer group. This variable has been found to be a key predictor of violent conduct (Coloroso 2003; Young and Sweeting 2004).

Furthermore, there is a connection between children's self-images and how their peers view them. Cairns and Cairns (1991: 256) contend that this relationship is a key predictor of victimisation. There is "pseudo friendship" which refers to a relationship in this study that shields learners from being bullied but also requiring them to bully others in return in order to keep up their deviant peer groups (Lee 2011: 1668). Hence, investigating how friends affect a child's personality behaviour in Umlazi schools was crucial. Having violent buddies is a recurring attribute of aggressive learners; peers have a big impact on many young people's behaviour (Maphumulo 2018: 33).

Although peer pressure can result in risky behaviour, not all youth violence is peer-led and not all peer influences are detrimental. Young children and teenagers are more inclined to imitate their bad behaviour-exhibiting peers. Botha, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2012) remark that learners linked to peers who engage in violent behaviour acquire the same behaviours. To comprehend the role friends and peers have in learner conduct, it was necessary to thoroughly explore peer influence.

#### **3.3.1.4 School**

One of the social contexts with the biggest impact on learner behaviour is the school atmosphere (Gottfredson and Gottfredson 1985; Gottfredson 2001). The term "school environment" describes how school settings are perceived and experienced by the learners (Lee 2011). Lower quantile schools are frequently under-resourced and under-equipped (Murray 2016). Schools in Umlazi are in the lower quantile zone. This has an impact on service delivery in terms of learning support systems, which in turn has a bearing on child personality development. Ettekal and Mahoney (2017: 3) posit that

learners behave better in classes with positive impact programmes such as athletics, volunteer work, faith-based organisations, and academic clubs.

#### **3.3.1.5 Religion**

Religious conversations between parents and children are linked to favourable personality developmental traits. Religious disagreements between couples either had no positive impacts or were linked to children's unfavourable internalizing and externalizing behaviours Roer-Strier and Sands (2001); Gunnestad and Thwala (2011), while their mental health is positively impacted by religion (Murray 2016). This study also needed to take into account the role of religion in shaping children's character development and in assisting to resolve conflicts or discourage violence.

#### **3.3.2 Mesosystem**

Krishnan (2010) describes the meso-system as the second immediate stratum to the micro-system. It focuses on the connections between two or more systems; for instance, several micro-systems that may include the home, peer surroundings, and school. For an in-depth understanding of the relationship, the learners' homes and schools were examined. The learner's life is greatly influenced by both their family and school. Every breakdown in interaction between the learner's environment – that is, both the home and the school – had an effect (Masuku, Sibiya and Hlengwa 2021). It is imperative to explore the relationship the school has with the learner's parents or guardians as a mirror of the meso-system.

#### **3.3.3 Exo-System**

Sincero (2012) explains the exo-system as the circumstances giving rise to a connection between where a person does not play an active part and one in which they do. The exo-system includes various individuals and places that may not have any direct interaction with the child, but which affect their behaviour. Examples include the neighbourhood, the parents' workplace, and distant relatives. Although the child is not actively involved in this system, Tudge *et al.* (2009) assert that its operations frequently have an impact on the development of the child. Owing to their demanding occupations and other important

commitments, parents' absence from their children's lives might occasionally result in teenage pregnancy (Masuku, Sibiyi and Hlengwa 2021). Other delinquent behaviours found in schools can be attributed to absent parents.

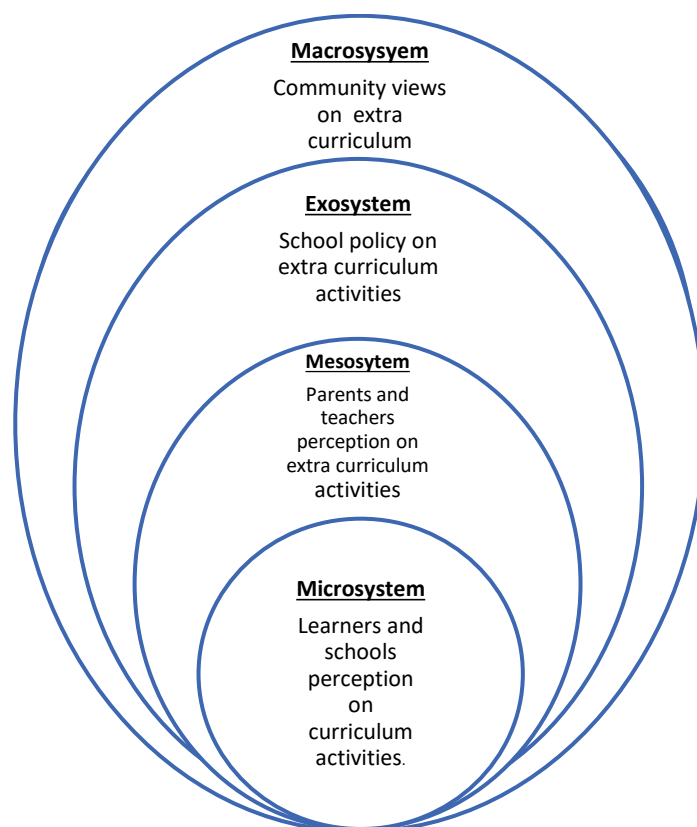
### **3.3.4 Macro-System**

A broader culture known as a macro-system influences racial and socio-economic aspects of child behaviour. Analisah and Indartono (2018: 240) in their view culture includes communal values and rituals in the broadest setting in which pupils and educators live. Examples of macro-system elements impacting children's behaviour include cultural features, political upheaval, and economic disruption. More so, the broadest setting in which learners and teachers live is culture, which embraces local beliefs and traditions. Du Plessis (2008) says violence has long been a part of South African culture. Since the apartheid era up to date, it has disproportionately affected the black and coloured population groups. Moreover, children's socio-economic status influences their behaviour and the ability to learn; indeed, some learners from low-income neighbourhoods are very tenacious (Analisah and Indartono 2018: 240). This tenacity serves to underscore the importance of peaceful school environments where learners can focus on their studies.

### **3.3.5 Chronosystem**

The chrono-system affects children's psycho-social development. It also involves changes or consistency in the environment in which the individual lives, in addition to changes or consistency in the person's qualities throughout time (Analisah and Indartono 2018: 240). Despite extensively outlining the various elements affecting how children behave, this theory does not cover the conceivable connections between various social systems and how they might affect child behaviour and work to bring about desired or unintended changes in the school environment. It is important in this study to comprehend the interactions between social organisations operating in schools, such as the family, community, administration, and security.

### 3.3.6 Peace Clubs an Extra Curriculum Activity, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological.



**Figure 3-4** Systems Theory an Extra Curriculum Perspective (Self-Generated).

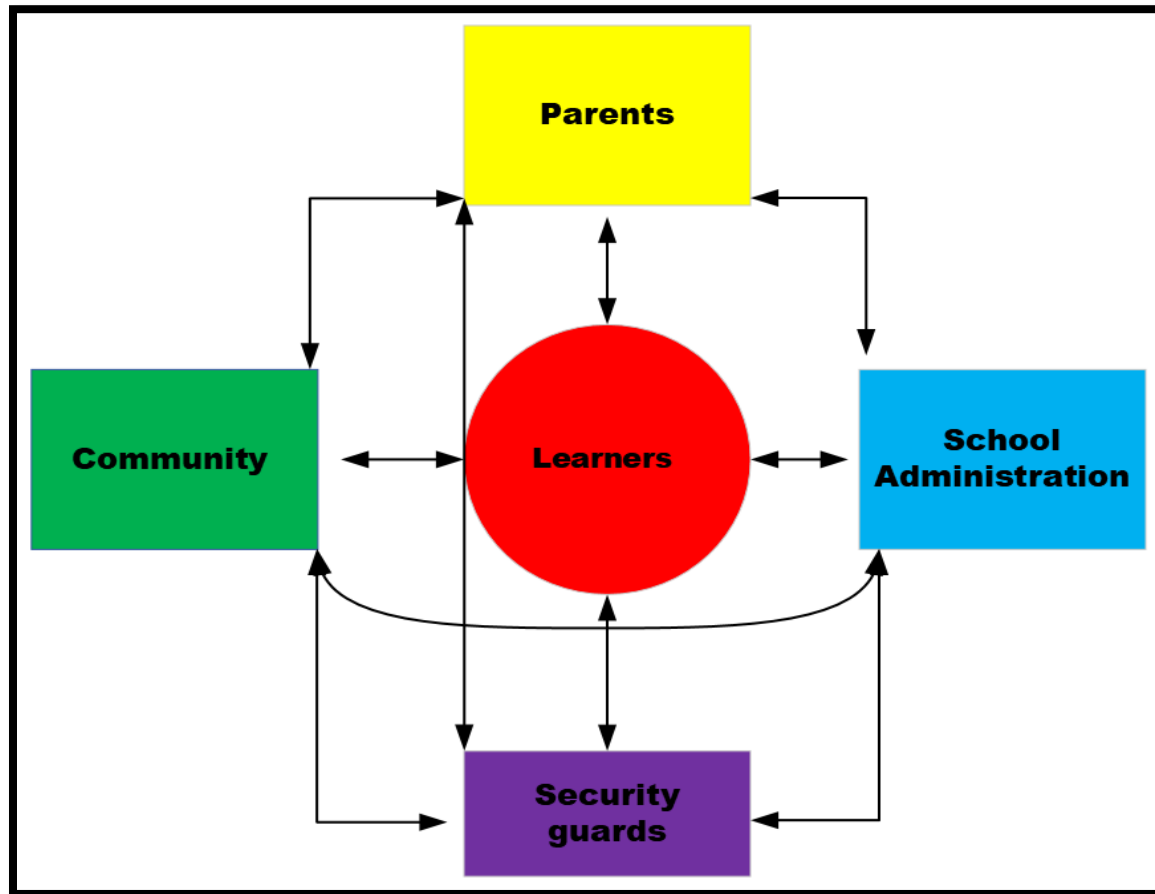
An examination of the influence of internal and external forces on extra-curricular activities in schools was equally critical. In the ecological systems theory Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains how different types of environmental systems influence human development. Therefore, an assessment of the influence of the school environment on extra-curricular activities could highlight their importance for school violence intervention strategies. In this section, child development was replaced by peace clubs. To understand school violence, the influence of the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems on the development and initiation of peace clubs as an extra-curricular activity in schools located in high-density areas needed scrutiny. These systems play an important role in shaping our knowledge of the development of peace clubs as an element of extra-curricular activities. In the micro-system, it is important to explore the attitudes of learners and school management towards this form of extra-curricular activity. This would anticipate the reaction of both learners and school management to the introduction of peace clubs.

The meso-system includes teachers' and parents' perspectives on extra-curricular activities. Teachers who spend substantial amounts of time with learners must be involved for any initiative of this nature to succeed in schools. They have knowledge of learners' behaviour and the environmental politics. Teachers play a crucial role in developing and carrying out extra-curricular activities. Parents' influence is equally important as they tend to direct child activities within the school premises. They can either emphasise or discourage extra-curricular activities leading to learner disengagement.

The exo-system includes the school. The researcher must understand school policies and extra-curricular activities. For instance, schools react differently to extra-curricular activities based on policy and attitude. The way affluent schools support extra-curricular activities is different from lower quantile establishments. This can also be linked to the availability of resources, which affects the attitudes and policies on extra-curricular activities. As a result, extra-curricular activities in poorly funded areas could be viewed as an unnecessary, unworthy use of limited academic time and infrastructure and other resources (Haliimah 2010: 20; Ogbonnaya and Awuah 2019: 107).

The macro-system is represented by the community. It plays a contributory role in the development of any extra-curricular activities. Clubs such as Scripture Union enjoy a great image in communities because of their spiritual impact. Religious beliefs uplift communities, in turn influencing learners positively. If the community does not paint a positive image of extra-curricular activities, the initiatives fail. Hence, the exploration of the knowledge of peace clubs in communities and their acceptance was critical.

### 3.4 Systems Thinking Theory



**Figure 3-5** School's Ecosystem (Self-Generated).

Since Aristotle argued that knowledge is gained through understanding the whole and not that of the individual parts (Aristotle's Holism), researchers have struggled with the systems and parts in terms of their contents and relative dynamics. Over the past century, this historic endeavour evolved into what is now known as "systems theory," (Von Bertalanffy 1951). Capra (1997) describes the systems theory as an integrative model concerning every system in nature, society, and many scientific fields, providing a framework for conducting holistic investigations on a phenomenon. In social work the theory enabled the study to take a comprehensive look at circumstances, existing structures, and their influence to better understand experiences, problems and struggles of Umlazi District learners. The area of interest was the school eco-system and the influence of existing supporting structures such as communities, parents, teachers, and security personnel.

Lai and Lin (2017) contend that the systems theory emphasises organisational relationships and interdependence among system components and organisation-environment relationships. The systems thinking theory offers insightful information on comprehending links in a social and ecological setting by approaching any situation with a holistic understanding (Slabbert 2018). Thus, structure, patterns, and relationships emerge from interactions among components, making each system a contributor (Lai and Lin 2017). Hence, Amagoh (2008: 2) explains that, with systems theory, the behaviour of the entire system is determined by the interaction of the components. There is need to recognise the overall patterns of an unfolding situation to understand change. With schools facing rampant violent behaviour, it was important to explore the school ecosystem, its existing structures, and how they have functioned to maintain a healthy school environment.

The fundamental tenet of general systems theory is the interaction of systems with one another and their environments. The systems for this study included the micro-, macro-, meso- and eco-systems mentioned in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory. In support, Mchunu (2015: 83) states that the systems thinking approach acts as a guide and key strategic link between the macro and micro levels of dealing with problematic issues. The systems elements discussed in this section comprised of the Department of Education, the community, the school administration, security guards and learners. As Mhlongo and Zondo (2022: 8283) argue, the premise of the systems theory is in understanding relations between interactional systems, their surroundings, and how different structures working together to achieve larger goals, in this context, in Umlazi District.

The desired goal in this study was the nurturing of a peaceful, safe, and productive school environment for learners, teachers, and parents in Umlazi District. In this research, it was important to appreciate past and current efforts of the interacting systems in challenging school violence and creating safer environments. Issues such as the level of involvement by the Department of Education, of parents in school activities, and community contributions to school development received attention. Mhlongo and Zondo (2022: 8283) further note that the theory was necessary for trans-disciplinary science seeking to



address complex problems, formulating policies at organisational, national, and international levels. The development of policies that focus on the use of extra-curricular activities such as peace clubs as an alternative to school violence is important in youth development. A major tenet of systems theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, regardless of the field to which it applies.

Systems theory avoids focusing solely on outcomes; instead it recognises that other points of view must be considered before making any decisions (Mchunu 2015: 83). The challenge in systems thinking is to make desirable outcomes more likely (Morgan 2005). This is imperative as the study aimed to explore whether peace clubs could be applied to move away from violence in the four schools, through the design of a peace club model, and evaluating its effectiveness in solving conflicts in Umlazi District.

In addition, Hammond (2019) advises that, when departments operate in silos, it becomes difficult to implement organisational strategy which is critical to systems theory. As a result, organisational members prioritise departmental goals over broader institutional goals. Hence, systems thinking encourages people to share knowledge beyond their functional boundaries (Brits 2011). It was important to gain insight about the five agents involved in the school ecosystem and their relationships with regards to preventing school violence and promoting peace. All the independent systems rely on each other to function. Therefore, learner behaviour is a result of different systems components co-operating to achieve one common goal. As a result, good behaviour modelling is important in and outside the school.

### **3.5 Transformative Learning Theory**

The Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) worldview is based on a set of paradigm assumptions arising from an individual's upbringing, life experiences, culture, or education (Christie *et al.* 2015: 11). Christie *et al.* (2015: 11) note that, when individuals are asked to clarify their worldview, most tend to respond with statements such as 'The world is this way because ...,' and, as found in this study, participants remarked, 'Our community has violence because ...' Mezirow (1978) advises that an individual's explanation is, in turn, rooted in a series of ingrained and well-rehearsed causal

assumptions. Notably, Mezirow (1978) comments that changing worldviews is challenging, given that they become unconscious frames of reference and established habits of thinking over time. Thus, transforming a worldview necessitates a compelling human catalyst and persuasive argument before modelling it (Mezirow 1978).

In this context, learner-led peace clubs were potentially seen as a potent catalyst for fostering peace in schools and modelling of appropriate behaviour among learners. For the researcher, transformative learning is linked to conflict transformation theory, which is a central tenet of this study. Transformative learning is a process of effecting change in a frame of reference for participants, and was important for its potential to develop autonomous thinking (Mezirow 1978: 5; Dirkx 1998: 4). Conflict has the potential to act as a catalyst for transformative learning: when learners and their surrounding communities experience school violence, they are confronted with diverging opinions, values, and worldviews. In the wake of school violence, Umlazi learners were encouraged to engage in transformative learning to better understand the root causes of conflict and to explore ways to address the problem in a constructive manner. Thus, social interactions are crucial which the principles of the social learning theory are. It can be argued that, for transformative learning to occur, meaningful discussions are needed, which peace clubs can facilitate.

More so, it was observed that through transformative learning, participants would identify and challenge their own biases and assumptions, gain a deeper understanding of school violence, and develop strategies for conflict resolutions that would manifest through peace campaigns. This may lead to effective and sustainable conflict transformation as participants become better equipped to navigate and address conflict with empathy and creativity. In addition, modelling and the reinforcement of positive transformative behaviour could also be a catalyst for peace.

Transformative learning and conflict transformation theory were central tenets of the study. Conflict emerges as a pivotal catalyst for transformative learning, especially in the context of school violence where learners are exposed to contrasting opinions, values, and worldviews through discussions. The Umlazi learners were confronted with

challenging opinions on peace and conflict. This compelled them to actively engage in transformative learning moments to comprehend the underlying causes of conflict and to seek constructive approaches to address the issue. It can be argued that meaningful discussions and dialogue were essential for the facilitation of transformative learning, whereby peace clubs would play a crucial role in fostering these meaningful discussions.

Moreover, the transformative learning process empowers participants to identify and critically examine their own biases and assumptions. By doing so, participants would gain a profound insight into the underlying complexities of school violence, enabling them to formulate effective strategies for conflict resolution. This is evidenced by their active involvement in peace campaigns. As a result of this transformative learning experience, learners will be better equipped to navigate and address conflicts with heightened empathy and creativity. This will foster a climate of effective and sustainable conflict transformation within their respective schools. Furthermore, the modelling and reinforcement of positive transformative behaviour serves as additional catalysts in this transformative learning journey. The transformative outcomes for those involved in peace clubs, and the school at large through peace campaigns, will be enhanced.

As Christie *et al.* (2015: 11) advise, researchers incorporated the mind-stimulating issues listed below during the course of the peace club meetings:

**Disorienting dilemma:** Here, learners encounter a situation and information that challenges existing beliefs leading to a state of confusion

**Self-examination:** This stimulates individuals to introspect to assess their beliefs, values, and behaviours

**Sense of alienation:** Participants potentially experience a sense of detachment or alienation from their previous worldview after realising gaps in their perceptions

**Relating discontent to others:** This involves the sharing of discontent, new-found awareness, to seek validation and understanding from their peers and researchers

**Explaining options of new behaviour:** Here, alternative perspectives and behaviours that could replace and modify previous ways of thinking and acting are explored

**Building confidence in new ways:** This encourages the development of confidence in the viability and relevance of adopting new attitudes and behaviours

**Planning a course of action:** Learners are urged to formulate a clear plan of action to implement their new-found perspectives and behaviours for themselves and, potentially, other learners

**Knowledge to implement plans:** Learners gain insight to execute their plan effectively, and to continuously acquire necessary knowledge, skills, and resources. This could be individually or collectively

**Experimenting with new roles:** Role plays prompt individual and collective engagement in experiments with and practice of newly acquired behaviours and roles; effectiveness and relevance are evaluated.

**Re-integration:** Here, participants individually or collectively incorporate changes into their daily lives, and experience re-integration of their transformed worldview into their overall identity and sense of self.

In essence, the researcher held the view that learners possessed valuable insights capable of addressing the issue of school violence. However, to tap into this potential, it was imperative to revisit and reassess their perspectives on the world. It was also necessary to unshackle themselves from the influence of past experiences that might hinder their current behaviour. The most effective approach to achieve this transformative shift was through engaging in transformational learning processes. By encouraging the sharing of personal experiences and fostering open exchanges of ideas and opinions, learners could collectively embark on a journey of meaningful self-discovery and growth. Such a respectful and considerate environment would enable participants to challenge their preconceptions and to develop a more comprehensive understanding of themselves and the world around them. This would pave the way for positive behavioural changes, and the constructive resolution of school violence.

### **3.6 Social Learning Theory**

Bandura (1971: 3) proposed that, under social learning theory, behaviours are learned either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of models. Ward (2007: 9) highlights that people often acquire information from various social experiences that include models of behaviour, authority figures, discipline from parents and, discussions. Nhambura (2020: 24) adds the environment as key in shaping an individual's behaviour. In this regard, it was essential to understand how the micro, macro, meso and exo systems in Umlazi District influenced learner behaviour at selected schools. It was necessary to assess whether the systems positively or negatively influenced learner behaviour in and outside schools, and the role they played.

Moreover, it was crucial to investigate whether the Department of Education, teachers, school management, security personnel and parents worked together in modelling learners' attitudes towards their colleagues. This was in line with the first objective which sought to investigate the nature, extent, and consequences of violence in four schools located in Umlazi District, eThekweni Municipality. Grusec (1992: 781) explains that Bandura's theory concerns itself with how humans operate cognitively on their social experiences, and how the impact of the cognitive operations come to influence learner behaviour. Bandura (1971: 3) contends that, children are not born deviant but, instead, learn through experience and observations. The experiences of everyday life of learners in Umlazi influence their views on conflict management and peace promotion within the school environment.

Grusec (1992: 782) posits that individuals tend to abstract and integrate information encountered through a variety of social experiences such as verbal discussions, discipline encounters and exposure to models. The social learning theory assumes that modelling influences learning principally through informative functions that observers acquire, mainly through symbolic representations of modelled activities, rather than specific stimulus-response associations (Bandura 1971: 6). Herbert (2000: 105) suggests that models are figures observed on a daily basis or are symbolic figures seen on television or film and read about. Nhambura (2020: 24) explains that society holds these figures in high esteem. They are seen as role models. Models in the micro- and meso-systems can be found in family, religious groups, school, and neighbourhood. Family members include

both the extended and nuclear family. A learner-led peace campaign could assist in modelling learner behaviour.

Department of Social Development Republic of South Africa (2021) maintains that strong societies are built on strong families. In the family environment, an individual's physical, emotional, and psychological development occurs. With the current discipline crisis in schools, it is important to understand family modelling. Thus, questions that call for attention include: Is the family instilling proper values into children and actively supporting educational development? Are parents, guardians and extended family playing their parental roles? Which family has children with good or bad behaviour? Hence, family modelling and child behaviour were examined through the lens of social learning theory. As of March 2022, crime statistics indicated that Umlazi had become South Africa's murder capital (Felix 2022). The location comprises residential areas, informal settlements, and hostels where known killers, drug lords and violent people reside. It is imperative to investigate their impact on the school environments and communities in which learners reside.

This study sought to establish a positive peace club model in schools, from which learners take could take positive lessons. A model activity is a peace club which has the aim of bringing systematic change to violence in schools, with pupils as key players. Grusec (1992: 783) clarified that Bandura's social learning theory consists of four components used for modelling behaviour which, in turn, influence decision-making of individuals. The first process is the intentional process (Bandura 1971: 6). During the initial stage of modelling, a person cannot learn much by observation if there is no attention to or recognition of the essential features of the model's behaviour (Grusec 1992: 783). Through observation and paying attention to situations, live or symbolic behaviours are modelled (Grusec 1992: 78).

The level of attention is determined by a variety of variables such as power, attractiveness, and conditions in which behaviour is viewed (Grusec 1992: 783). Bandura (1971: 6) concurs, stating that exposing an individual to the model does not ensure that they will attend closely, but they will necessarily select from the models' numerous relevant characteristics. The germane feature is that of being curators of peace in their

respective schools. Through observation, learners can note any consequences of behaviour from others. This is called vicarious learning (Bandura, Ross and Ross 1963). Kowalski and Western (2011) as cited by Nhambura (2020) did a study reinforcing learning through vicarious conditioning called Rocky. They found that behaviour associated with positive rewards attracted more admiration unlike negative rewards. Positive rewards in the peace clubs included one on counselling, and group sessions that promoted family values.

The second stage is that of retention (Bandura 1971: 6). Grusec (1992: 782) explains that, at this stage, observed behaviour is represented in memory through marginal or a verbal representational system. Here, a verbal representational system could be a peace club. Bandura (1971: 7) notes that retention is achieved when activities have been modelled. It often happens when the activities have stopped. This occurred through peace education and the leading of the peace campaigns. The third step was that of motoric reproduction processes (Bandura 1971: 7). Grusec (1992: 782) argues that this stage involves the conversion of symbolic representations into appropriate actions similar to the originally modelled behaviour.

Moreover, Bandura (1971: 8) advises that, if the individual reflects consistent attitude or actions, these can easily be integrated to produce new patterns of behaviour. To master the newly learned behaviour, they must rely on verbal reports from onlookers (Bandura 1971: 8). Furthermore, in everyday learning, people usually master new patterns of behaviour by modelling and refining through self-corrective adjustments based on informative feedback of performance. The focus group discussions, one-on-one counselling, and weekly meetings provided the opportunity for such feedback. The reinforcement and motivational process is the last stage of the theory (Bandura 1971: 8). A person can acquire or retain capabilities to model behaviour, but the learning may rarely be activated when negatively sanctioned. Mncube and Harber (2013: 106) recommend that, when tackling violence in schools, the involvement of parents, learners and staff in policy and decision-making processes is appropriate for creating a genuine community. For Grusec (1992: 782) there must be sufficient incentive to motivate the actual performance of modelling actions.

In this regard, giving voice and responsibility to the learners to be custodians of peace served as an incentive. The objective that the peace club members designed as a non-violent response programme aimed at promoting peace and undertake an evaluation of the programme was a step in the empowerment process. Bandura (1971: 8) explains that, when positive incentives are provided, observational learning, which previously remained unexpressed, is promptly translated into action. Grusec (1992: 782) hints that people move from pro-social behaviour that is maintained by expectation of externally administered consequences to behaviour maintained through self-regulation.

This is possible because judgmental self-reactions come into play whenever an action is performed. The point is that the source of self-regulation is the modelling and direct tuition (Grusec 1992: 782). Grusec (1992: 782) further notes that adults respond differently to children's behaviour, and this is one kind of information that children consider when formulating personal standards about which behaviours are worthy of self-blame or praise.

Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963: 9) assess the impact of modelling on children's behaviour, concluding that exposure to violent content results in more aggression from exposed individuals compared to the unexposed. Nhambura (2020: 24) points to three influential processes on behaviour, namely observation, modelling, and imitation. It is assumed that learners who were exposed to peace initiations could experience positive influence from observation, modelling, and imitation in Umlazi District. The net effect would be learner ability to curb violent behaviours in and around schools among peers.

In conclusion, the mapping of school violence and peace clubs was theoretically explained to show how they link. The conflict transformation theory authored by Lederach (2003) was applied as the first steppingstone by recognising that conflict is normal, but violence is not. Furthermore, there was recognition that human relations and needs should be at the centre of the study. This would be fostered through inclusive participation. Above all, the emphasis of structural analysis, the understanding of the root causes, and the underlying structural factors such as socio-economic-political factors, made way for the ecological systems theory which was important in distinguishing and explaining internal and external systems that affect learners and the school environment. The ecological systems theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided a road map on



who and what to think about when trying to understand the micro and macro influences of child behaviour. The central issue was to unmask the agents of socialisation and their influence towards child behaviour. The third supporting systems thinking theory Von Bertalanffy (1951) suggested ways to comprehend the relationships between the different socialisation agents. Considering this, it was acknowledged that the school functions as an ecosystem with a variety of actors. All other socialisation agents were impacted if there was failure with one.

More so, there would be a positive relationship given that the systems are functional. Exploring and understanding relations between the socialisation agents in the Umlazi District was a crucial matter. Transformative learning theory would aid in exploring the participant's worldview. It would help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their collective perception of school violence, and what they could do to be exemplary to other learners. Finally, the social learning theory Bandura (1971) aimed to explain how learners could possibly act as role models for their peers, and the actions they could take to foster harmony in and around school. The conceptual model developed into a four-step procedure. It was noted that these theories served as a foundation for each of the study objectives, allowing for their thorough exploration.

### **3.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented theories anchoring this study. These theoretical underpinnings were key in exploring how peace clubs could be used to bring systematic change in attitudes towards school violence through designing a peace model. The conflict transformation theory provided guidance on the principles of conflict transformation that could be used to promote peace in schools. The systems theory was useful in depicting social systems existing within the school eco-system and their function. This further guided the researcher in evaluating the functionality of the school eco-system. More so, the transformative learning theory was useful in exploring ways in which participants could transform their ways and perspectives. This theory gave researchers the road map for changing worldviews among the peace club members and to explore how this could be applied in a school setting. This led to the social learning theory which focused on

modelling of participants. The following chapter discusses the strategies using the five theories to effect change.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

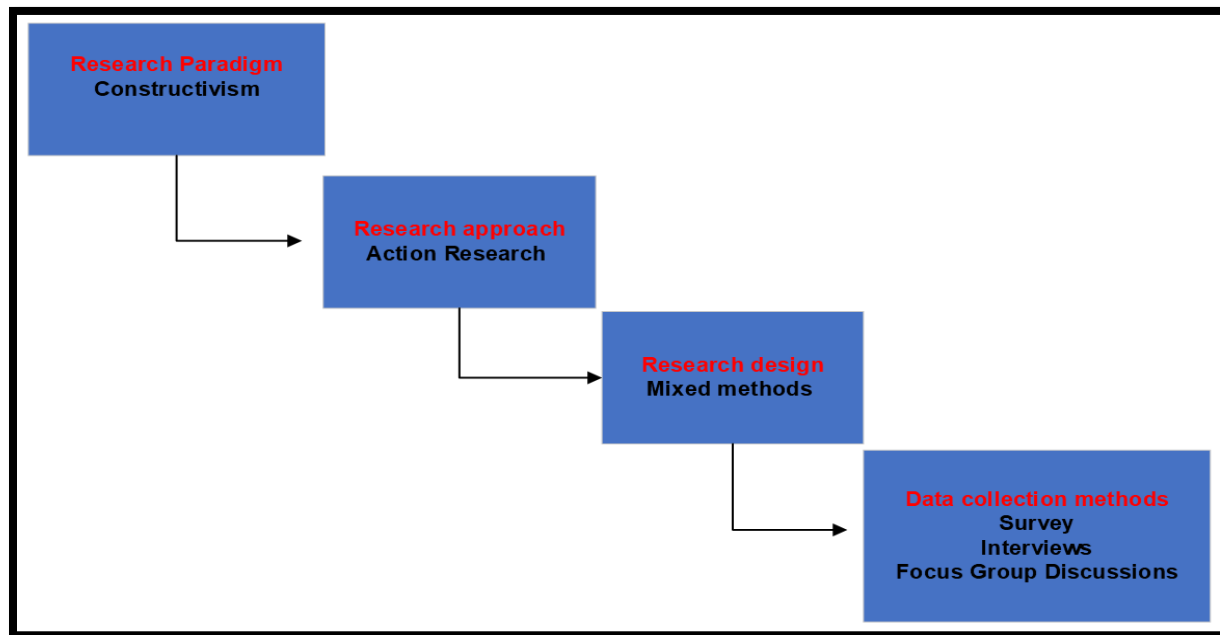
### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter explored literature that related to school violence and peace clubs as well as the theoretical framework. This chapter discusses the research design that derived the study. Aspects such as the research paradigm, the research approach, the research design, and data collection are covered. More so, the aspect of action research which constitutes exploration, planning, implementation, and evaluation is presented. Finally, the mixed methods approach, which was used to meet the desired objectives of the study, is explained.

#### **4.2 Research Design**

This refers to the strategies and tactics used in research, ranging from fundamental presumptions to specifics on data collecting and processing (Creswell 2014: 3). Research design, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 33), contains a set of generalised principles that integrate a theoretical framework to investigative procedures first, then to techniques for gathering empirical data. In this study, the researcher was guided by Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004: 36) who advise that a research design selected by the researcher should indicate a cohesive group of procedures that complement one another, have a good fit to provide data, and conclusions that address the research question and achieve the set objectives. Thus, in this study, the research design directed approaches for data analysis and interpretation, study methodologies for data collection, and considers factors such as experience and training of the researcher and the target audience of the study (Creswell 2014). The underlying worldview and philosophical presumptions, also known as research paradigms, determined the elements of the research design. As such, the study's conceptual underlying principles were constructivism, action research with a mixed methods approach. Figure 4.1 below illustrates the research methodology layout:



**Figure 4-1** Umlazi Research Methodology Structure (Self-Generated).

### 4.3 Research Paradigm

This refers to a study's underlying philosophical assumptions or worldview to which a researcher subscribes. Guba (1990: 17) and Kamal (2019: 1388) define a research paradigm as a set of assumptions that direct behaviour – in this case, the research process. More so, this worldview is the perspective, or way of thinking, or school of thought, or collection of beliefs that guides how the study results are understood or interpreted by the researcher (Kivunja and Kuyini 2017: 26). Thus, Lather (1986) emphasises that the paradigm inevitably reflects the researcher's views on the kind of world they desire to live in. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 26) reiterate that, as a paradigm "defines the researcher's worldview," what is meant is that a paradigm constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that govern how a researcher views the world, how s/he understands and behaves within that reality. In this sense, the researcher believed that the people who are closest to the societal issue at hand are best suited to bring about change due to their lived experience and that there is need for psychological and

educational transformation to sustain peace. The affected and victims of school violence harboured the much-needed answers. Therefore, the Umlazi school community had access to rich, informative knowledge and problem-solving skills relating to school violence. As a result, the goal of the researcher was to help the four schools' efforts to combat school violence through the use of peace clubs. As a result, this study is based on a constructivist and transformative worldview.

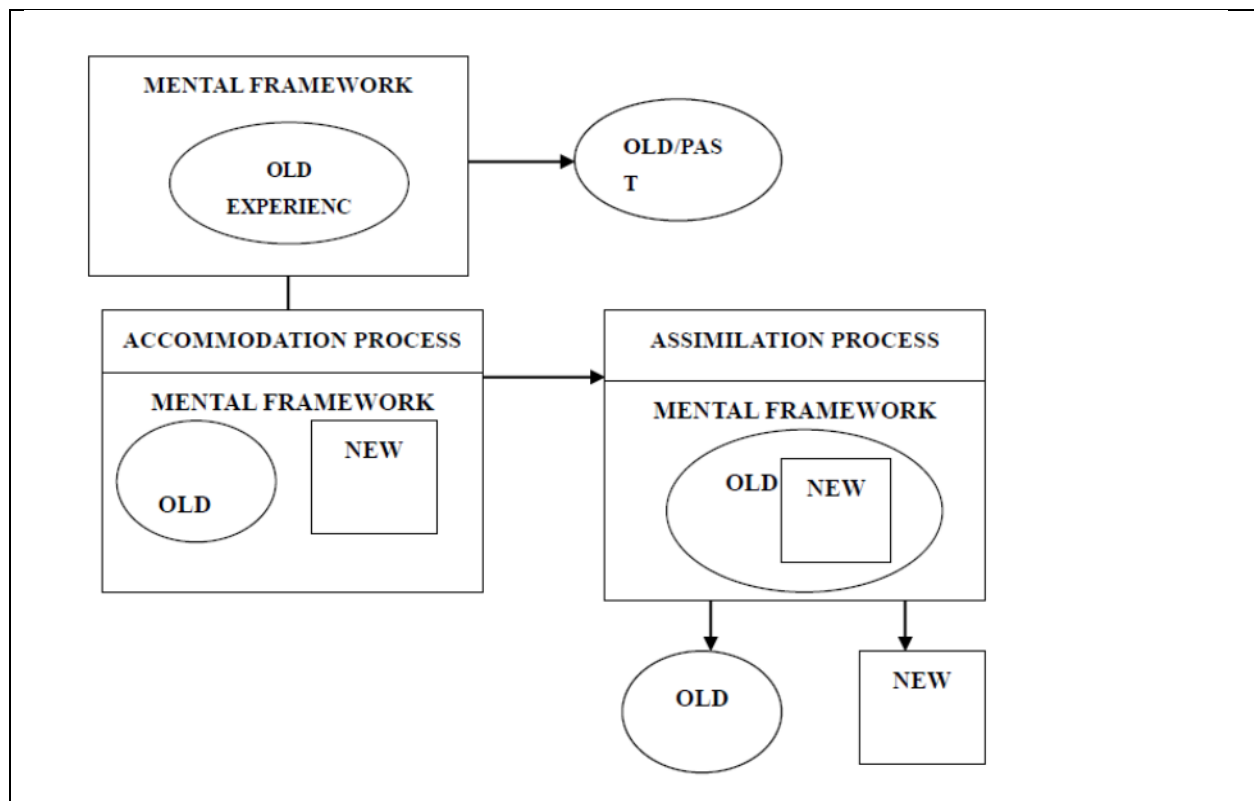
#### **4.3.1 Constructivist Worldview**

Constructivism is a worldview that explains the nature of knowledge and how people learn based on prior experience and background information (Ultanir 2012: 196). Ultanir (2012: 196) explains that, in constructivism, people build their own new knowledge or understandings by fusing what they already know with the concepts, experiences, and activities that they encounter. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017: 33), this approach attempts to “get into the heads of the participants being studied,” so as to comprehend and interpret what they are thinking about a certain context. Thus, it was ascertained that, in the constructivist worldview the role of learners, teachers, school administration, parents, security guards’ interpretations and personal experiences formed the conception of school violence and the potential role of peace clubs. Rather than the researcher trying to impose peace theories and education, this constructivist approach puts more emphasis on understanding the lived experiences and interpretations of the participants. However, to effect lasting change, the researcher recognised the need for transformational learning for participants.

Nonetheless, Honebein (1996) advised that people build their own knowledge and understanding of the world through experiences and reflecting on those experiences. Thus, it is predicated on the analogy that most of what people learn comes from experience (Cashman *et al.* 2008). Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah (2016: 1) advise that the constructivism philosophical paradigm can be used to conduct research in a teaching and learning environment at any level of education. Davis, Maher and Noddings (1990) provide guidance to the researcher on how to incorporate constructivism into the educational context as the research centred on learners' experiences with school violence and peace.

*It is assumed that learners have to construct their own knowledge- individually and collectively. Each learner has a tool kit of concepts and skills with which he or she must construct knowledge to solve problems presented by the environment. The role of the community – other learners and teacher – is to provide the setting, pose the challenges, and offer the support... (Davis, Maher and Noddings 1990: 3).*

Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah (2016: 3) suggest there are two ways to build knowledge: accommodation and assimilation in the constructivist worldview. The initial step in the formation of knowledge through the accommodation process entails adapting one's mental model to the outside world and considering new experiences (Kim 2005). As a result, the learner makes room for the new experiences to sit alongside the old ones in the mental faculties (Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah 2016: 3). In the second and last process in the development of knowledge, known as assimilation, the individual incorporates the new experience into an existing framework of previous experiences without modifying that framework (Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah 2016: 3). As a result, in the person's mental framework, both the old and the new experiences are made to co-exist and are put into practice.



**Figure 4-2** Knowledge Construction in Constructivism (Adom, Yeboah and Ankrah 2016).

In conclusion, constructivism was used to explore school violence through fostering understanding and empathy. A constructivist approach acknowledges that every person has their own distinct experiences and viewpoints, and they can work to foster an atmosphere where learners feel comfortable sharing their ideas and emotions. This was accomplished through exercises that encouraged learners to actively listen to one another and to seek to comprehend each other's view. In general, a constructivist worldview was helpful in exploring school violence and accommodating peace clubs because it emphasised the significance of comprehending different experiences and viewpoints, and fostered empathy and understanding as a strategy of preventing further incidences of school violence. However, to avoid relapse into the vicious cycle of school violence and to continuously foster peace, there was need to advance transformational referencing to past experiences among the peace club members which is discussed next. Nonetheless, regarding this study, peace clubs were a central tenant of promoting empathy and

understanding through various projects that varied from academic awareness to campaigns against drug abuse as devised by the learners.

#### **4.4 Action Research**

According to Herr and Anderson (2015), social psychologist Kurt Lewin is credited with creating action research in the 1940s and 1950s. Lewin argued that the main guiding concept of research should be to promote social change through dialogue, involvement, and collaboration (Dewan 2021: 98). Lewin, according to Greenwood and Levin (1998: 19), changed the role of the researcher from being a passive bystander to an active participant in solving issues. He created a framework for generating knowledge based on solving real-world problems. Lewin envisioned action research as work that does not separate the investigation from the action required to solve the problem, as McFarland and Stansell (1993: 14) state. Noffke (2009: 65) observes that action research does not conform to traditional research models but seeks to expand the boundaries of traditional research designs and merge them with practice. Accordingly, Oyinloye (2018: 92) argues that the main distinction between participatory action research and other types of research is the inclusion of an action agenda. This enables the research to transcend the constraints of conventional research by developing interventions to evaluate the reliability of the research findings.

Action research is critical research that addresses issues in real life involving communication, co-operation, and mutual learning, with the goal of generating measurable effects, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 379). As a result, Green (2007) defines action research as social research carried out by two entities – the community and the researcher – who collaborate to address challenges affecting stakeholders. Craig (2009: 4) suggests that the collaborative nature of action research empowers participants and the researcher by enabling them to modify and improve circumstances. In addition to encouraging widespread engagement, Green (2007: 3) emphasises that action research also focuses on supporting actions that help the stakeholders' social transformation. According to Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004: 47) action research is carried out with the assistance of those for whom the intervention



was created with the intention of emancipating them. Oyinloye (2018: 92) recommends action research as an alternative to standard research approaches that focus on doing "for" rather than doing "with".

As a result, the researcher acknowledges and credits the local stakeholders as a repository of experience and expertise in action research (Green 2007: 2). According to Herr and Anderson (2015), action research is socially engaged, its goal is to improve and transform the researcher, participants, and setting. As a response, Herr and Anderson (2015: 3) described action research as an investigation carried out by or with insiders of an organisation or group, but never on them. They add that it is a reflective process that is purposefully and methodically carried out and provides data to back up claims. Moreover, the ontological assumptions of action research include its moral commitment, which is value-laden, and that the action researchers view themselves in the context of their participants (McNiff and Whitehead 2011: 27).

As a result, the researcher for this study already had a set of beliefs that he brought to the investigation (Dewan 2021: 98). The researcher's moral principles were sympathy and empathy while working with learners in this area. Noffke (2009: 1) says that, because action research is rooted in participant values, its research design should include participant values and character. Action research is fundamentally carried out by a team made up of a professional action researcher, members of an organisation, and community people looking to improve a condition, according to Greenwood and Levin (1998: 4). They also point out that this approach supports action that will result in a more equitable condition for the stakeholders, and that encourages widespread participation in the process.

However, stakeholders might not have a strong background in research reporting, which calls into question the validity of the data gathered. Thus, researchers must be cautious regarding validity. Walker (2001) suggests that, in order to preserve validity, the researcher should triangulate and use various sources of data to develop knowledge while considering various contexts. Walker (2001: 250) asserts that action research should be more concerned with the context in which meanings are formed than with

validity and dependability. More specifically, Greenwood and Levin (1998: 75) contend that credibility and validity should be evaluated in terms of whether the actions done provide individuals with more control over their circumstances to solve the problem.

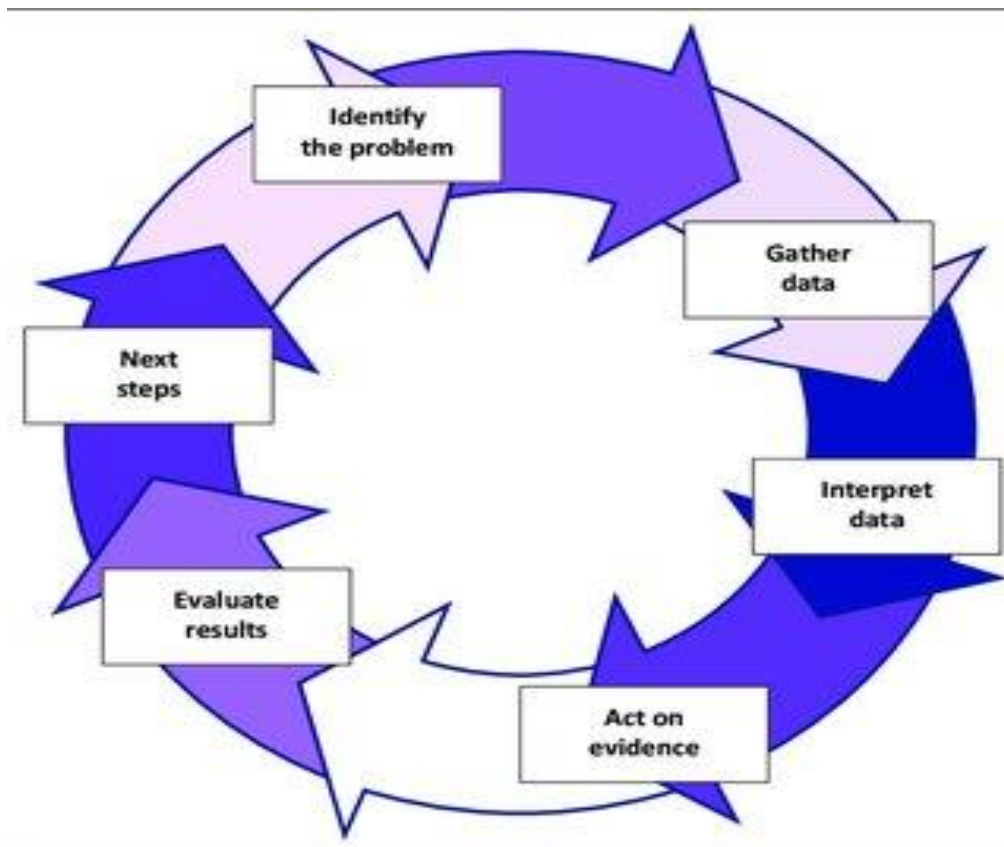
The fundamental tenets of action research as outlined by Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) cited in Creswell and Plano Clark (2011: 10) guided the research, and they were as follows:

- Assisting learners to break free from the constraints placed on them by the media, whether in print or online, regarding power dynamics
- To spark discussions that result in change that frees learners from the constraints placed on them by maladaptive societal systems and structures, and which have an adverse effect on their ability to develop and exercise their own personal authority
- To make a change agenda proposal that has been developed by stakeholders.

Thus, action research in this study was seen to be about discovering ways to develop researcher and stakeholder research skills and knowledge rather than studying individuals and determining what is wrong. Above all, problem-solving was the most important aspect of action research (Oyinloye 2018: 94).

#### **4.4.1 Action Research Stages**

Action research, according to Sax and Fisher (2001: 72), has many stages, one of which is the identification of a problem that interests the researcher. The researcher implemented the six action research stages that Green (2007) identified. These include defining or identifying the problem, producing pertinent knowledge about the problems in a group setting, learning about and using social research techniques (designing and implementing interventions), and finally, evaluating and interpreting the findings. Thus, the diagram below shows the stages the researcher followed:



**Figure 4-3** Action Research Cycle (Ferrance 2000).

Ferrance (2000); Wilson and Virginia (2016: 64) detail the steps the researcher took, such as:

#### **4.4.1.1 Problem identification**

This was one of the most significant sections of the research as it investigated the fundamental causes of the research problem and what technique may be employed to address it. Social trends regarding school violence were investigated and examined at this stage. In order to support the study and identify any gaps, current literature on school violence and peace clubs was gathered through desktop research. Adebayo (2017: 118) advises that problems cannot be solved except when correctly identified and that, without proper identification, the research will lack direction. Thus, Oyinloye (2018: 96) concludes that, without adequate planning and preparation at this stage of the research, there is a risk of false starts, which would frustrate the research process.

#### **4.4.1.2 Gathering and interpreting data**

In the second stage, the researcher gathers information to determine the scope of the study. This could be accomplished using quantitative or qualitative techniques. This may consist of, but is not restricted to, interviews, diaries, photographs, meeting logbooks, videos, case studies, surveys, records, tests, report cards, attendance, focus group talks, and questionnaires (Ferrance 2000: 11). Oyinloye (2018: 96) asserts that, when employing three separate sources for triangulation, the choice of data should be based on acceptability, availability, and convenience of access. Thus, Ferrance (2000) argues that the data should be organised in order to draw the appropriate conclusions.

In this regard, the researcher interpreted the quantitative information gathered in the earlier phase using SPSS version 2.4. In the statistical data, the researcher searched for connections and correlations. More so, the researcher applied methods such as thematic data analysis to the qualitative data. In the qualitative data, the researcher looked for repeating themes. According to Ferrance (2000: 12); Adebayo (2017: 105), rigorous and exhaustive interpretation and analysis of data help one get a solid understanding of the topics under investigation.

#### **4.4.1.3 Act on evidence**

Here, the researcher formulates an intervention strategy. This is done by the researcher and relevant stakeholders. Greenwood and Levin (1998: 4) advise that action research promotes broad participation in the process and encourages action in satisfying the situation of the stakeholders.

#### **4.4.1.4 Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for determining the impact of any study. This study evaluated the results of the two schools' peace campaigns. According to Oyinloye (2018: 97), evaluation helps the researcher by prompting reflection on the action research process and then to re-strategies. Consequently, inquiries such as: Was the intervention successful or unsuccessful? How does any modification (of attitude or behaviour) affect the course chosen to take, or the actions taken? What should happen next, then?

(Townsend 2013: 109; Adebayo 2017: 106). Following the peace campaigns, participants were questioned about what went well, what could have been improved, how the learners reacted, and whether anything had changed.

#### **4.4.1.5 Next step decision**

Regarding this, the parties involved considered the need for a similar peace campaign, and what could be done to promote peace clubs. Future project identification and formulation is done based on experience.

### **4.5 The Roles of the Researcher and Participants in Action Research**

As Reason and Hardbury (2001: 1) describe it, participatory action research is a democratic, participatory method that focuses on developing useful knowledge in the service of noble human ideals. In procedure, researchers have an important role as insiders in the research design (Dewan 2021: 100). Herr and Anderson (2015) hint that a researcher's position is very important. This researcher's position in this situation was that of a foreigner and a university learner. A significant barrier was the language. Language barriers meant acceptance and tolerance took a little longer.

The researcher learnt some *isiZulu* and local manners to overcome this barrier. As time went on, the people became responsive. With the aid of a native research assistant, this enhanced the success of the research. In particular, because of the nature of action research, mutual respect between the parties involved was necessary. Thus, there was need of a local expert. Moreover, the researcher treated the participants as experts because of their backgrounds. In conclusion, Dewan (2021: 100) remarks that social concerns such relationships with the setting and participants determine the process and product of the activities conducted. This comment guided the researchers.

Furthermore, action research participants are empowered because they actively participate in the development and implementation of study conclusions (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell 2005: 205). In this regard, participants oversee planning and carrying out their outcomes based on their past or present experiences. The varied experiences provided a wealth of insights into how to address societal issues such as school violence in this study. As Dewan (2021: 102) notes, letting individuals participate offers a fresh

viewpoint and innovative solutions that encourage independence and accountability. Collectiveness was also a role that individuals may have assumed. According to Dewan (2021: 102), with regards to collectiveness, participants in this situation help each other to control emotions and behaviour. It was noted that participants frequently reminded one another to use good manners and to respect the group's rules during the focus group talks. The researcher made use of the co-learning mode of involvement, which is defined as the process by which locals and visitors exchange information to generate fresh insights and collaborate to produce action plans with external facilitation (Cornwall 1996 cited in Herr and Anderson 2015:51).

#### **4.6 Mixed Methodology**

There are two fundamental types of research which are qualitative and quantitative, with mixed techniques of research referring to a blend of the two. The mixed methods approach combines features of both quantitative and qualitative designs, despite the quantitative and qualitative designs representing two extreme ends of a single continuum (Newman and Benz 1998; Creswell 2014: 3). Creswell and Plano Clark (2011: 12); Creswell (2014: 3) explain that mixed methods provide strengths that offset the weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative studies. As Oyinloye (2018: 87) puts it, the mixed methods approach provides a better understanding of phenomena by using multiple methods of data collection and analysis to examine research problems.

According to Green (2007) the main goal of a mixed methods approach in social enquiry is to provide a better understanding of the phenomena being studied, which cannot be accomplished by a single method alone. Hence, mixing these two methods was crucial in drawing conclusions that could be corroborated. For Oyinloye (2018: 86), quantitative methodology in a mixed-methods approach plays a role of testing hypotheses and investigating correlations between variables that can be statistically assessed. In a bid to create connections regarding the kind, scope, and effects of violence in the four schools situated in the Umlazi District, this approach was crucial. Moreover, there was need to have baseline data that described violence and safety including variables such as the gender ratio, age in relation to violence, and safety. This baseline data informed the

researcher about the status of school violence in Umlazi District. As a result, quantitative methodology served this purpose.

On the other hand, a qualitative technique aids in understanding a social issue through the viewpoints and experiences of those impacted (Oyinloye 2018: 86). To fully understand a scenario, Moyo (2016: 120) emphasises that the qualitative approach is a useful tool. Hennik, Hutter and Bailey (2011) explain that a qualitative approach allows a researcher to identify issues from the perspective of participants to appreciate the meanings and interpretations they give to their situation being explored. Consequently, in the study, focus group interviews helped to make sense of data that could not be quantitatively explained. For instance, why were certain schools more violent than others? Moreover, how is gender related to aggressive behaviour among learners? Also, there was need for the researcher to understand the covert dynamics connected to peace club operations in the four schools.

In this regard, the qualitative method helped to fully comprehend the phenomenon being studied (Bashir, Afzal and Azeem 2008: 43). Braun and Clark (2013: 10) concur, stating that qualitative research approaches capture complex and contradicting matters that characterise the real world while giving room for the researcher and participants to make sense of patterns and meanings. Despite the different advantages, the researcher used a combination of methods, both the quantitative and qualitative, equally because they both provided a deeper understanding of school violence and peace clubs in schools (Ritchie *et al.* 2014). Thus, each strategy contributed to the researcher's perceptions of school violence and peace clubs, supporting the other from their point of view. The blending of mixed methods approach is shown in Table 4.1:

**Table 4-1** Quantitative and Qualitative Methodology Comparison.

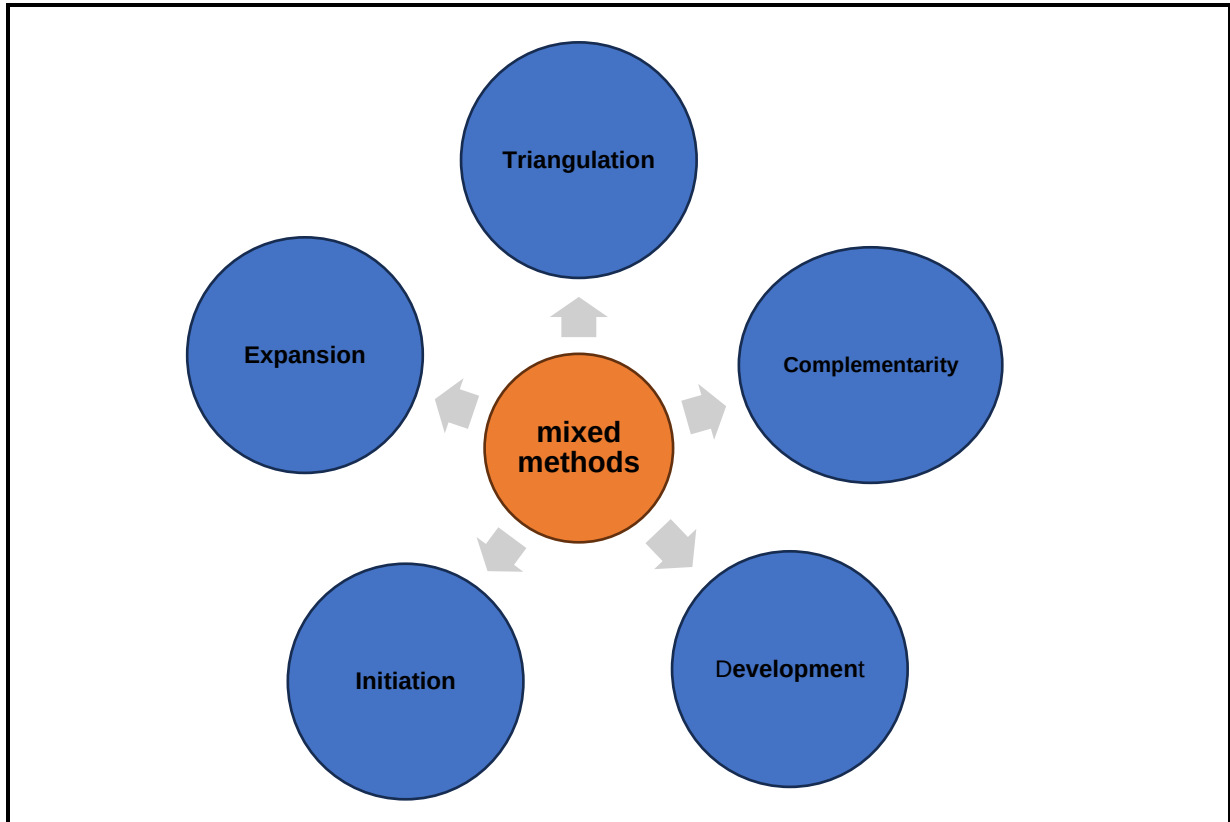
|                         | <b>Quantitative</b>                                                                        | <b>Qualitative</b>                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Objective               | To quantify data further extrapolate results to the broader population – objective one.    | To gain a detailed picture of the reasons, beliefs, and motivations. Objectives one to four.                                                                                        |
| Purpose                 | Quantify opinions and experiences – objective one.                                         | To have an in-depth understanding of the situation in terms of personal opinions and experiences – objectives one and four.                                                         |
| Data                    | Numerical data (statistics)                                                                | Textual data (themes)                                                                                                                                                               |
| Study population        | Large sample size to get an overview of the situation.                                     | Participants were purposefully selected. In this study, focus group discussions lasted for six months meeting once a week. Peace clubs were successfully launched in three schools. |
| Data collection methods | A survey was used to collect data.                                                         | In-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations and field notes were used to collect data.                                                                               |
| Analysis                | Statistical analysis                                                                       | Thematic analysis                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Outcome                 | To identify correlations, prevalence, and patterns of violence in schools – objective one. | To explore opinions and attitudes towards school violence, to develop peace club initiatives, and to assess its impact on learner behaviour .                                       |

**Source:** Hennik, Hutter and Bailey (2011: 6).



There were five reasons for selecting mixed methods research in this study as guided by Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989). These are illustrated in Figure 4.4 below:

#### 4.6.1 Selecting a Mixed Methods Approach



**Figure 4-4** Mixed Methods Approach Factors (Self-Generated).

##### 4.6.1.1 Triangulation

This study sought corroboration, convergence, and correspondence of results from the different methods. In this regard, correspondence and corroboration were critical in testing some relationships, connection, and theories that the researcher had in mind regarding the causes of school violence and peace campaigns in schools located in high density areas. For instance, relationships between violence and the environment, and gender and violence. Thus, triangulation in this study was important.

#### **4.6.1.2 Complementarity**

The combination of research approaches would provide a complete and more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study. According to Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989), this aspect provides enhancement, elaboration, illustration and clarification of results from one method with the results from the other method. In this study, there were certain questions which arose from quantitative data analysis which needed face to face interviews, focus group discussions to provide further information. For example, how did the educators explain why their school was either peaceful or more prone to violence compared to other schools? Moreover, why were males more victimised compared to females, yet they were the least in reported cases? What were the hidden effects of being a male or female learner in Umlazi district?

#### **4.6.1.3 Development**

This entails using the results from one method to help inform the other method, where development is broadly construed to include sampling and implementation as measurement decisions. For this study, development was important as survey results helped the researcher structure interview guides and consider the environment dynamics when launching peace clubs in schools. This informed the researcher as to what to ask and what not to ask. This increased efficiency in measurement decisions and school engagements.

#### **4.6.1.4 Initiation**

This seeks to discover paradoxes and the creation of a new framework perspective that related to school violence. In this study, the rate of male victimisation was misconstrued due to the popular belief that females are the number one victims of violence in South Africa. This has put male behaviour under more scrutiny, with less consideration given to the behavioural challenges that males also face in communities. Moreover, in this study, there was need to consider peace clubs as an alternative in challenging school violence. Hence, this initiation was in line with the third and fourth study objectives.

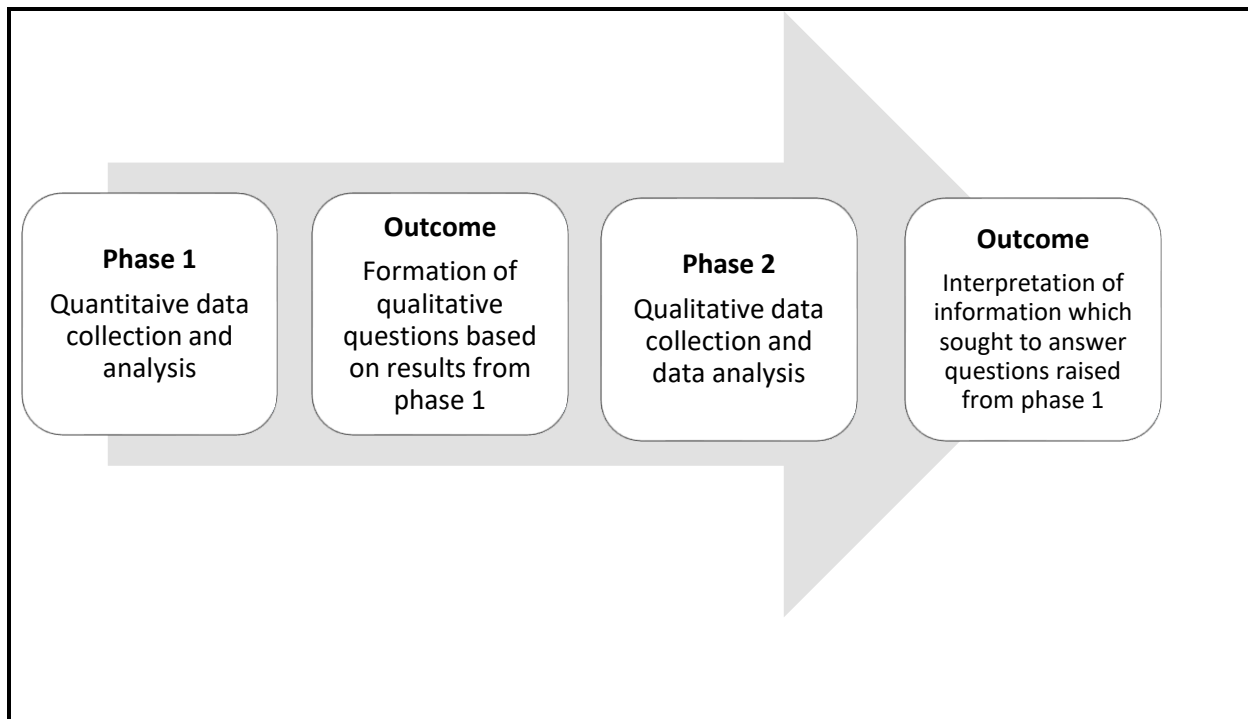
#### **4.6.1.5 Expansion**

This aspect attempts to extend the span and range of inquiry by using different methods from inquiry components. The main cornerstone of the study was to get an overview of the general perception of school violence among learners. To get a comprehensive picture, the span and range had to increase. Thus, most learners were targeted as potential participants of the study to achieve the range of inquiry. For these reasons, the mixed methods approach was viewed as necessary in exploring if peace clubs were a viable vehicle for challenging school violence in Umlazi District.

However, Ponce and Pagán-Maldonado (2015: 116) share that there are two options in a mixed methods study to be considered before integrating it into a study. There is the convergent parallel design, and there is the sequential design (Hafsa 2019: 45; Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri 2021: 30). This study applied the research sequential design to meet the set objectives.

#### **4.6.2 Explanatory Sequential Design**

Explanatory sequential mixed methods involves collecting data in an iterative process whereby data collected in one phase contributes to the data collected in the next phase (Driscoll *et al.* 2007: 21). In this regard, Hafsa (2019: 46) explains that the researcher first conducts the quantitative investigation of the study, then analyses the results and elaborates on the findings using qualitative data. The information collected using the qualitative method seeks to answer the questions arising from the collected quantitative data. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011: 82) highlight that the overall purpose of this strategy is to use qualitative strands to explain preliminary quantitative results. Ponce and Pagán-Maldonado (2015: 18) argue that explanatory sequential design has an advantage of being structured in a way that describes the research problem in depth. Hence, this approach was useful as the researcher sought to explore deeply the trends of school violence in Umlazi and how this problem could be overcome instead of just quantifying the results. The two explanatory sequential phases are shown in figure 4.5.



**Figure 4-5** Explanatory Sequential Design (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

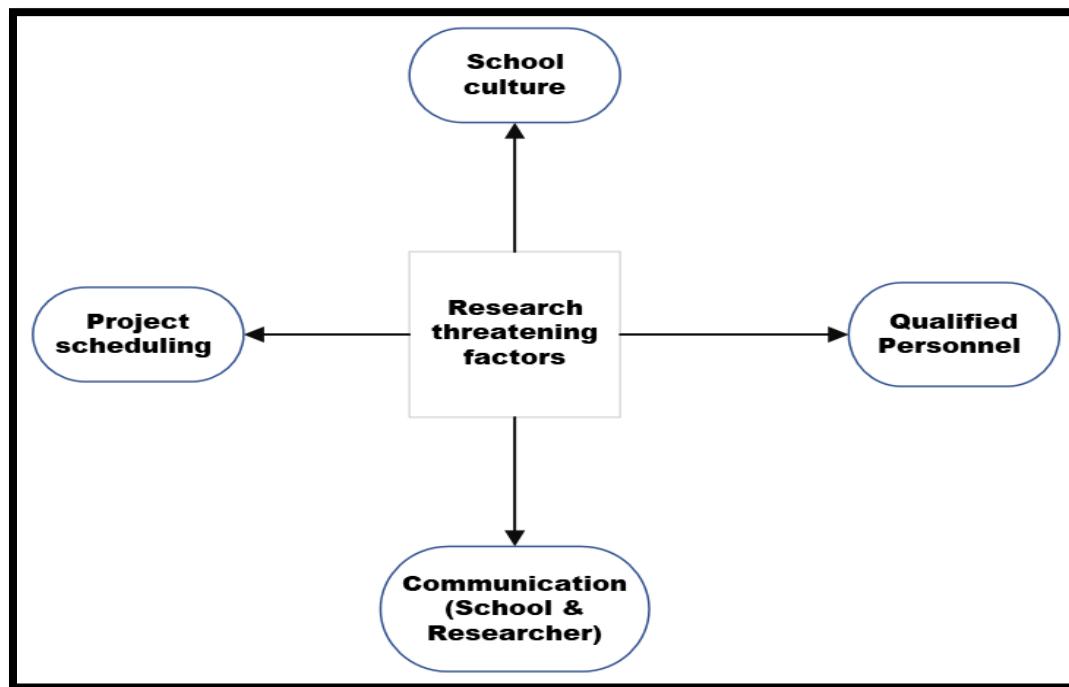
Phase one used a survey in the four schools to get an understanding of the nature, extent, and consequences of violence. This information highlighted variables and establishing patterns, measurement of variables, and comparing frequencies of violence in schools. The 603 participants were purposefully chosen and conveniently sampled from the four schools. The results from the survey gave an understanding of the general situation of the schools leading to the formation of the second phase (Driscoll *et al.* 2007: 21).

In the second phase, the researcher had to further seek answers that could not be explained statistically. This included the causes of violence, the current responses to violence, and investigating their effectiveness in the schools. Phase two would also seek to establish peace clubs to promote non-violent ways of handling conflicts, and to evaluate the outcomes of the peace clubs in the four schools. Dawadi, Shrestha and Giri (2021: 30) clarify that, in this second phase, the qualitative design contributes to a more detailed explanation of certain quantitative results that could not be explained statistically. This was achieved through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and field notes. As Moyo (2016: 120) maintains, qualitative research methodologies are

very useful in doing an in-depth inquiry into a certain situation to comprehend it. However, it was observed that, despite interviews giving a deeper understanding of violence, the focus group discussions proved to be a rich source of information of the socio-economic-political dynamics that were affecting learners in Umlazi District.

#### 4.7 Data Collection Methods

This study used the questionnaire as a secondary source of data, while interviews, focus group discussions, and observations were primary sources. These qualitative approaches of data collection spanned a period of six months. The focus group members turned out to be rich in information. With the support of the researchers, this action research developed, implemented, and evaluated peace campaigns to specifically promote non-violent behaviour in schools. However, in developing and implementing the peace campaigns, project threats were detected, and they are shown in figure 4.6, while figure 4.7 gives an overview of the data collection steps and process below:



**Figure 4-6** Data Collection Threatening Factors (Self-Generated).

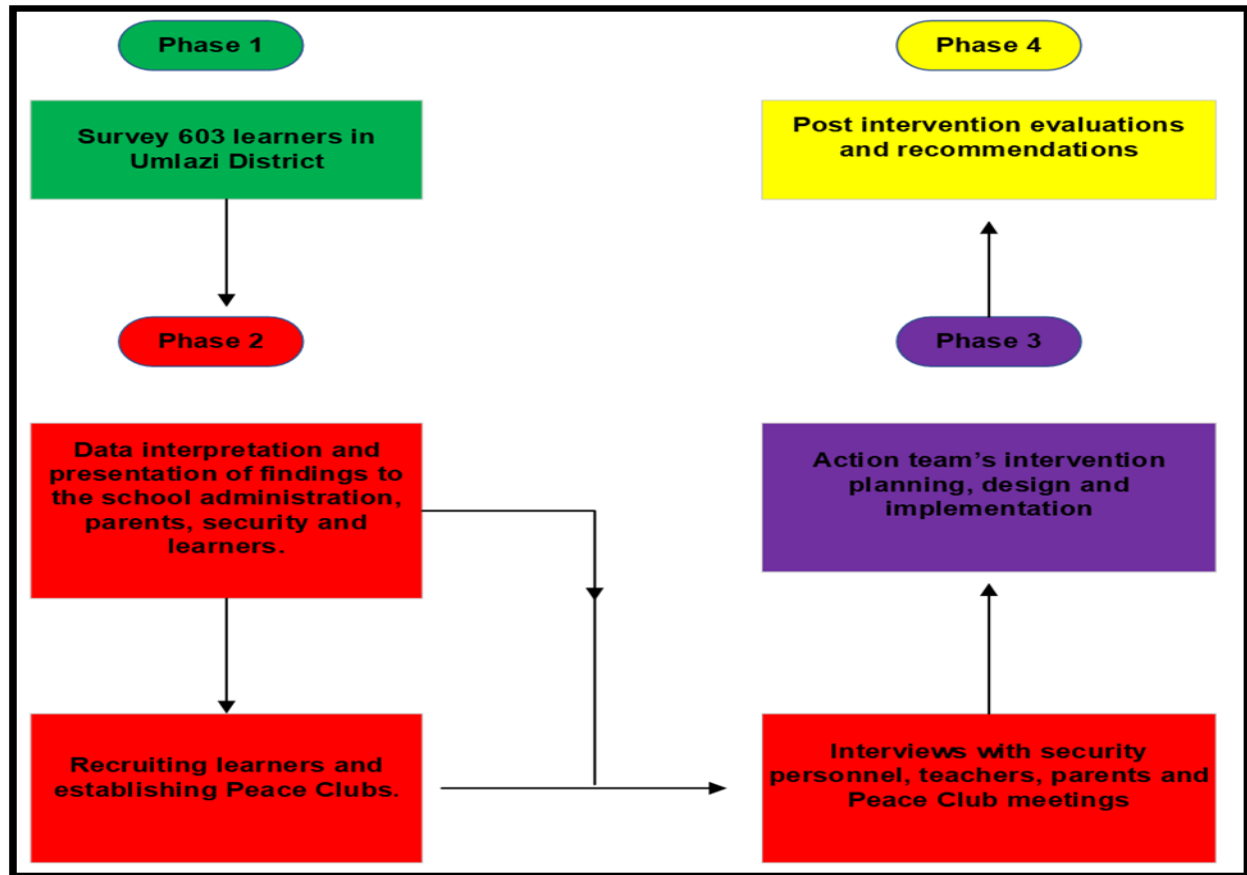
In Figure 4.6, the presented analysis underlines critical challenges that could undermine the effectiveness of the data collection process, as identified by the researcher. Of paramount significance was the influence of school culture. The extent to which a school

actively supports extracurricular activities emerged as a pivotal factor. The success of the research hinged on the school's commitment to such activities, as it greatly impacted the availability of participants for the study. Furthermore, the trajectory of extracurricular activities was contingent upon the disposition of the school administration, highlighting the institutional role in shaping research outcomes.

A second salient factor pertained to project scheduling. The researcher needed to meticulously consider the timing of extracurricular activities in alignment with the schedules of the learners involved. The Kwa-Zulu-Natal Department of Education, in granting research permissions, stipulated that the research should not disrupt the regular learning schedule. Consequently, in schools lacking designated study periods, logistical challenges emerged, which could hinder the researcher's access to the learner population.

The acquisition of qualified personnel was another imperative condition for successful research. For instance, when working with learners, the presence of a registered and qualified social worker became indispensable, especially in the event of traumatic cases. The school underscored the necessity of having a social worker present during interactions with learners, rendering it a critical prerequisite. The absence of adequately skilled assistants posed a significant barrier to gaining access to the learners.

Lastly, effective communication skills assumed paramount importance. The ability to engage with schools necessitated the observance of basic social skills and etiquette. Disruptions or breakdowns in communication with school administrations had the potential to jeopardize the research's success. These four discerned factors, when not proactively addressed and accounted for both prior to and during the research process, were recognized by the researcher as significant threats to the successful execution of the study.



**Figure 4-7** Data Collection Process (Self-Generated).

Figure 4.7 depicts the systematic research methodology adopted by the researcher, organized into distinct phases. Phase 1 of the research entailed conducting a survey within the Umlazi District, focusing on four schools. Phase 2 was dedicated to the interpretation of the data collected during Phase 1. Statistical data was generated using SPSS version 2.4. Subsequently, interview and focus group discussion guides were developed based on the insights derived from this statistical analysis. During this phase, voluntary recruitment of participants was conducted, and they willingly engaged in the study. Interviews were conducted on a single occasion, whereas focus group discussions spanned a duration of 5 to 6 months. Phase 3 marked the commencement of the action research component of the study, while Phase 4 was centred on post-intervention evaluations and the formulation of recommendations based on feedback from the learners.

#### **4.7.1 Sampling methods**

Sampling involves a process of choosing a sample from a population for a certain type of research goal (Bhardwaj 2019: 158). The researcher combined random sampling and snowballing when approaching schools. The first school was contacted and asked if they would be interested in taking part in the study. After that, they were asked if they could refer the researcher to any potential schools, they were aware of. In this regard, the school administration would share details of the next contact person from the potential school. Out of an estimated total of 800 Grade 9 learners in the four schools, 603 learners participated in the study. Purposive sampling was used in the first phase of the investigation. This method allowed the researcher to sample learners who met the study's requirements, which required that they be in Grade 9.

More so, the educators were purposefully chosen as advised by the assigned educator who acted as guide in the school premise. The reason being that the designated educators had knowledge of colleagues who had experience with school violence. Furthermore, no educator outside the selected schools was chosen to participate. Another requirement was participation availability and willingness. In accordance with the school administration's recommendation, Grade 9 learners were contacted outside class learning hours. For all four schools, it frequently happened during study hour. A combination of random and purposeful sampling was used for the qualitative data, which was the focus of the study's second phase. Based on availability, learners who were only in Grade 9 were considered eligible for the study.

#### **4.7.2 Questionnaire**

The study's initial phase was entirely quantitative. To see if the questionnaire was concise and straightforward, pilot research was first carried out. As Davies (2007: 47) explains, piloting means to try out on subjects similar to those targeted for the main study. The purpose was to examine if the questionnaire had clear instructions with easily understood questions, no jargon, and in a well-organised format (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell 2005).

The researcher visited four Umlazi schools to try to carry out a pilot study. Authorisation had to be granted by the principal to access each school. The researcher introduced



himself and the purpose of the study. The principals were interested in participating pending proper authorisation from the University and the Department of Education as the research involved minors. The researcher was advised that a provisional ethics letter from DUT was not sufficient to legally access the school. The researcher faced a challenging situation in which they needed to obtain a full ethics approval letter to access schools. While on the other hand for DUT to issue an ethics letter, the questionnaire had to be piloted first. Thus, the process involved a dual requirement. This dual requirement posed a dilemma for the researcher, creating a complex situation in which both access and consent needed to align for the research to proceed in an ethically sound manner.

Thus, the researcher had to think of other ways of getting around this problem. As a result, eThekwini Matric Learning Centre located at 21 Field Street, Zunaysha House was approached for assistance. This school has learners who are mostly repeating their matriculation and are above the age of 18 which is the legal age of consent. As a result, they were piloted to check the conciseness of the questionnaire. The school was approached because the researcher has a professional relationship with the school authorities. A letter from the Department of Education and a letter of information was enough to be granted access to this school. For the piloting the researcher had to reduce the number to five learners who were strictly above 18 years, and one teacher to avoid burdening the school administration. The researcher followed the research ethics:

- I introduced myself and the purpose of the study
- I presented the participants' rights
- The participants signed the consent form if interested, and
- They filled in the questionnaire and gave feedback.

Participants were asked if the questionnaire was clear and concise; it was confirmed that it was easy to understand, and not very long to answer. As a result, there were no alterations made, and it was adopted for the study. DUT ethics body was informed that the data collection tool needed no alterations, and an ethics letter was produced. This letter was produced to the four schools who gave the researcher the permission to contact its learners. Thus, the four schools were not piloted but participated in the main study.

The questionnaire was evaluated on the targeted sample of Grade 9 learners in general because the researcher wanted to first get a broad picture of the trends in school violence in Umlazi. The survey was used as a steppingstone in this regard. The survey was completed by 603 learners out of a possible 800 (75.4%). The 291 males and 312 females that took part in the study had an average age of 15 years.

Owing to the COVID-19 restrictions the Department of Education imposed on the schools, the process lasted six weeks. The rotation system and educator duty roster slowed down the process. The assigned educators spoke to the learners in isiZulu and encouraged them to participate as some learners succumbed to peer pressure. It was observed that some learners ridiculed those learners who were willing to talk about their experiences with school violence. This caused some hesitancy; thus, the research assistant, a qualified social worker, and the educators engaged and assured the learners that they were doing the right thing. With this assurance, more learners were willing to participate in the study.

#### **4.7.3 Interviews**

The researcher used in-depth interviews to further examine survey results in detail. Parents, teachers, and security personnel were all questioned. Once more, time management was a challenge. The researcher had to limit the number of questions because of time constraints imposed by the educators. This problem was mostly caused by a lack of authority. The school administration was found to have had minimal involvement in the research process despite granting access, which is why some interviews were never conducted. Two of the four schools helped with the teachers and security guards for interviews. The selected teachers and security personnel co-operated freely. However, the researcher was aware of study ethics. Thus, the school administration was cautioned not to sanction interviews. However, one school refused the researcher access to the learners even though they were permitted to take the survey. As a result, no qualitative information from that school was gathered. This denied access did not compromise the quality of the data as the researcher managed to involve the three other schools there by translating to a 75% response rate.

#### **4.7.4 Focus group discussion**

Before commencing focus group discussions, the researcher presented the survey results to the learners in their respective schools. This meant that the researcher travelled to each of the three schools presenting results to the grade 9 learners on days set by the school. In those set days the researcher would approach class by class with the assistance of the research assistant and designated educator of that school. After the presentation, the research assistant would engage and encourage learners to join in the peace club for deeper conversations. Hence, there were going to a peace club in each of the three schools. Owing to the ever-present threat of peer pressure, learners were encouraged to write their names on a piece of paper if interested. This was done to protect learners from peer pressure and being ridiculed, soon after, the venue and time to meet was announced in each of the schools. However, due to the school rotation system, which was a COVID-19 safety measure in place at that time, the process lasted three weeks.

As a result of this delay from the rotating system, some learners would forget and eventually lose interest due to the duration taken before commencing the peace club. Thus, the numbers dwindled from the promising forties to a small number ranging from 8,9 and 10 in the schools respectively. However, despite this predicament, some learners joined along as the weeks progressed and others left. Females were most of the participants in general, while only a handful of males attended across all schools. These focus group discussions lasted over five months with a meeting held every week in each school. These discussions were useful in understanding school violence in depth and understanding the learner's worldview. The prolonged sessions were a result of the nature of the study. It was noted that, although the researchers would come with a planned topic for discussion, the conversations often went the opposite of what was expected. Most discussions were centred around trauma healing as this was their reality. Instead of pushing for a structured discussion the researchers allowed the learners to express themselves and from there certain themes were taken note of. Such themes would be probed if the researchers saw a need.

Many of the learners who attended the sessions had some deep underlying social problems originating from home that crept into their school environment. Such issues

were not necessarily a problem as the research assistant is a qualified social worker. Hence, she dealt with issues of trauma healing, and notified the school authorities if the case was complex. Many learners needed a place to vent and some form of support, and that is what the peace club provided. Braun and Clark (2013: 11) advise that, as researchers are part of a group, their participation potentially result in a different awareness among participants thus serving as a tool to foster social change. This was critical for the study which sought to bring change in violent behaviour among learners.

In the post-intervention reviews, questions were used for evaluation following the intervention plan. In this regard, the members of the peace club discussed their thoughts and findings regarding their plan of action. This was accomplished through focus group sessions where participants would reflect on the whole planning and implementation process.

#### **4.7.5 Data Analysis**

The data from the surveys were analysed using the SPSS 2.4, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The correlations, cross tabulations, and frequency trends of the software proved helpful in comprehending school violence in the Umlazi District. Thematic analysis was used to examine qualitative data. Thematic analysis was useful in finding, analysing, and reporting patterns in the data (Flick 2014: 421). Thus, interviews and focus group discussions thoroughly extracted words, meanings, and interpretations from characterised data, and further analysed hidden facets of the research issue (Sarantakos 2005: 299; Flick 2014: 421). Based on discovered common themes in the focus group discussions and interviews, inductive and deductive methodologies were used to classify the data into groups (Stringer 2014: 141). This meant that the research assistant, who was a native speaker, would be consulted throughout the meticulous transcription of the audio tape.

## **4.8 Validity and Credibility of Data**

### **4.8.1 Quantitative Research**

In quantitative studies, external validity refers to the extent that one can draw inferences from, and generalise a sample for the whole population (Oyinloye 2018: 101). Thus, one can argue that external validity is a result of accurate sampling. The researcher addressed this by aiming to survey at least 65% of the Grade 9 learners in each school. Hence, the researcher managed to survey 603 from the estimated total of 800 learners from four schools. Content validity refers to the research questions which accurately measure the knowledge being sought in relation to the study objectives. The researcher achieved this by making sure that the survey questions were aligned with the set objectives. More so, to ensure reliability and strengthen research instruments, a pilot test was conducted on five Grade 12 learners and one educator. With the pilot study participants satisfied with the questions and structure, the questionnaire was disseminated to the target population. The pilot study was done to avoid possible mistakes that would inadvertently affect data collection process, which would distort and comprise the data quality.

### **4.8.2 Qualitative Research**

In qualitative research, validity refers to the credibility of interpretations, plausibility, and the internal consistency of study objectives, data and findings (Oyinloye 2018: 101). To achieve credibility of the qualitative methodology, the researcher rigorously followed five principles which were credibility, dependability and conformability, transferability, reflexivity, and reliability (Othman, Steen and Fleet 2021: 78). Table 4.2 discusses the steps the researcher took in line with the five principles:

**Table 4-2** Establishing Validity.

| <b>Rigour principles</b>                | <b>Strategies</b>    | <b>Current study measures</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Credibility</b>                      | Prolonged engagement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study lasted for nine months. Focus group discussions (FDGs) were held every week for five to six months.</li> <li>• The researcher planned the interviews, FGDs, and interviews.</li> <li>• The Research Assistant (RA) was a native, qualified registered social worker and a PhD candidate at DUT.</li> <li>• Data transcription was done by the RA and data analysis was done by the lead researcher with the help of the RA.</li> <li>• Built trust with the participants and absorption into data</li> </ul> |
|                                         | Triangulation        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigator triangulation (two researchers did the data coding, interpretation and collective decision making).</li> <li>• For data triangulation, multiple data collection methods were used to corroborate data. Field notes, FGDs, interviews and observations were used.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                         | Membership checking  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Content analysis with participants.</li> <li>• No asking or sharing of personal information/experiences unless it is one-on-one counselling session.</li> <li>• Member checking before and during interview; clarification and with examples provided to confirm meaning.</li> <li>• Revise and discuss interpretations with final agreement with participants and RA.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Dependability and Conformability</b> | Audit trail          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every step taken by the researcher since starting and concluding of the study was documented. See Appendix 4.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                         |                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                         |                                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pilot test of all data collection tools.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Transferability</b>                  | In-depth description                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient sample size.</li> <li>• A clear detailing of data collection and data analysis procedures.</li> <li>• A description of the participant's characteristics, views, and experiences.</li> <li>• Discussion of findings and interpretations.</li> <li>• Provide recommendation for future study.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Reflexivity</b>                      | Critical self-reflection<br>Critical appraisal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher strived to maintain balance between self and research relationships.</li> <li>• Re-listened to audio recordings to reflect on and evaluate the quality of the data collected.</li> <li>• The RA cross-checked for any leading questions or bias</li> </ul>                                          |
| <b>Reliability for content analysis</b> | Stability                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Findings were checked for coding categories to confirm accuracy.</li> <li>• Any similar findings from different codes were merged.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                                         | Reproductivity                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The RA was tasked to reproduce an independent data analysis, and observed if the results could be corroborated with that of the lead researcher.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                         | Accuracy                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher checked for accuracy while the RA cross-checked.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

## 4.9 Ethical Considerations

This study placed a high priority on participant safety. Ethics, in accordance with Flick (2014) and May (2011), is concerned with what is right and just in the interests of the project, the sponsors or workers, the participants, and the function of research in society. Before starting the study, the researcher acquired from DUT an ethical clearance that included liability coverage. Moreover, the data collection process and presentation were

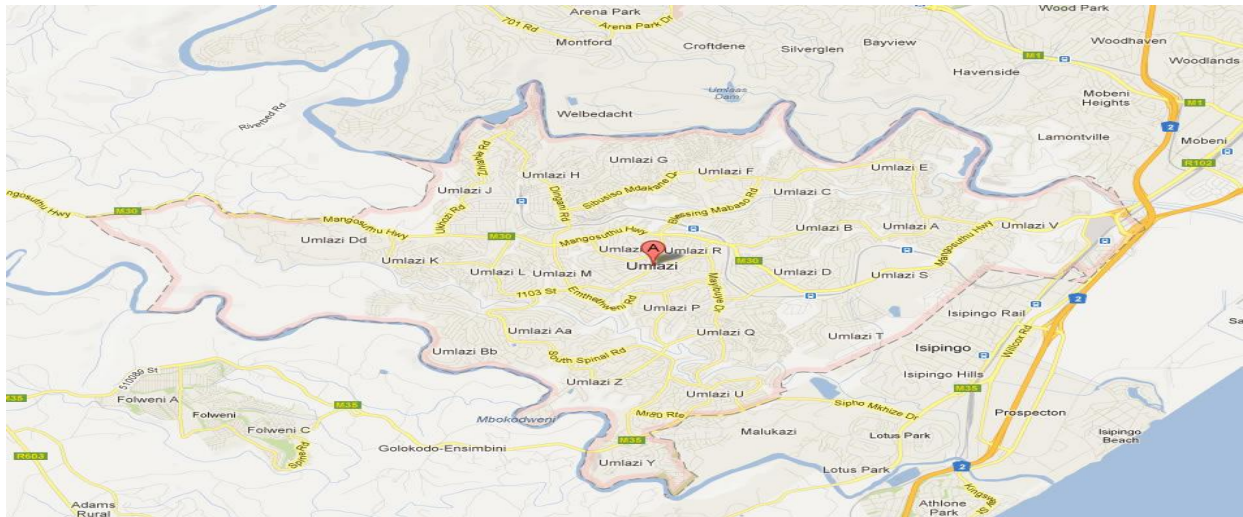
handled with caution and professionalism. First, the basis of the study was informed consent. Participants were informed of the terms of their consent as Best (2012: 22) recommends, and the researcher respected their right to determine whether they wished to participate or not. Secondly, anonymity was crucial in protecting the identities of the schools and the participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of both parties. Thus, only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor were aware of the real identities of the participants and schools. Nonetheless, the peace campaign squad was well-known to other learners. To ensure that they would not be in danger, the researcher closely observed their role and mentored them.

#### **4.10 Study Location**

This research was done in the Umlazi District, which is 26 kilometres southwest of Durban, and is broken down into 26 sections, numbered A through Z. Administratively, it belongs to the South Municipal Planning Region of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. It is South Africa's fourth-largest township in terms of population, behind Soweto, Tembisa, and Katlehong, with an estimated 104,914 homes housing 404,811 people, with on average of four individuals per household (Statistics South Africa 2018). The target population, aged 15 to 19, makes up about 5% of the total population. Around 43% of the households are female headed, while 22% of the population has no source of income, with a 40.5% dependency ratio.

This township is considered one of the most unsafe townships in Kwa-Zulu-Natal (KZN) province, as it is riddled by crime ranging from murder, sexual assault, assaults with intent of grievous body harm, attempted murder, to common assault, and robbery. For instance, murder cases in South Africa, 6 083 people were murdered between January 2022 and March 2022, a 22% increase compared to the same period in 2021. According to Hoosen (2022) from April to June 2022, statistics showed that KZN was the worst region in the nation for murder cases, with a 15.6% increase from 2021 to 2022. This indicates the volatility of the Umlazi community. Most murders happened in public places including streets, open fields, parking lots, beaches, the victim's home, or another home of a person the victim knew.





**Figure 4-8** Umlazi District (Google maps 2023).

#### **4.11 Researchers' Reflection on The Research Process in Umlazi District**

The endeavour appeared insurmountable due to spatial politics from the study's planning stages to its execution. Communication barriers prevented the researcher from learning more. The researcher speaks a language other than IsiZulu, while Umlazi is 90% IsiZulu. So, there were concerns about the problem of acceptance and tolerance from both the school administration and learners. Communication barriers were a persistent threat to the implementation of the research. Participants chose to use the vernacular language in place of an international language. This led the researcher to hire a research assistant who could manage the research procedure. Since the research assistant was a registered social worker, a Ph.D. student at DUT, and a resident in Umlazi, she naturally fitted into the researcher's profile. It was noted that, in some cases, local people must be the driving force for research to succeed. In this way, the research assistant took over as the primary spokesperson for the study, while the researcher acted as a 'fly on the wall' and tried to stay in touch with the participants.

Also, it was shown that participants trusted people who are similar to them. This serves as another proof that locals must be included constantly in engagement activities.

Nonetheless, the organisational culture of some schools contributed to their not being as effective as others. In some of the schools, the administration collaborated closely with the researcher because they recognised the importance of the study. However, it was disappointing that other schools put in minimal effort. In one of the schools approached, the principal would assist only if I could help their child get enrolled at DUT. The researcher was bemused by this implied request. The researcher was only a student so how could he get involved in the registrar's office. As a result, the research never materialised in this school.

In another case, the researcher seemed to be a burden to the assigned educator. Consequently, the researcher had to pull out and focus on the welcoming schools. What was surprising from this school was that the learners who joined the peace clubs were the most active of all the schools. They demonstrated their readiness and desire to foster harmony in their school. When the researcher explained why they were unable to proceed, their faces betrayed their sadness and annoyance.

In general, it was found that women were more eager to engage than men. What was alarming being that the female learners emphasised the male learners' alarming drug use and violent tendencies, as well as their own inability to co-operate. The focus group meetings were scheduled for Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. These took place from 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. during study time, over five months. (See appendix 4 for the research schedule in the three schools.)

Participants were seen looking for counselling and someone to listen to their difficulties. Several themes relating to adolescents were discussed to keep the conversations engaging. This demonstrated that action research requires on-the-fly planning rather than concrete planning in advance. Nonetheless, the study was much more at risk from DUT bureaucracy than from Umlazi's geopolitics. This was so because the researcher went beyond the allotted period and the research grant was cancelled. Yet, the researcher had no influence over the situation since, because of COVID-19, schools were inaccessible from 2019 to 2021. The schools resumed their regular timetable after the research grant expired in January 2022.

In April 2022, Umlazi was badly affected by severe floods, which were well-documented. These floods devastated Kwa-Zulu Natal's infrastructure. The research had to be put on hold for a month while water and sanitation were restored. The research office only extended the grant to August 2022. To obtain money for research, the researcher turned to part-time employment. However, every goal was achieved, and the outcomes are shown in that chapter of data interpretation and analysis.

#### **4.12 Conceptualisation of Key Terms**

For the following chapters focusing on data analysis and discussion, the terminology employed was defined to ensure exactness and comprehension. Phrases and concepts that pertain to the specific area of focus in the following chapters, such as high school, teachers/educators, learners, school violence, action research, and peace clubs, were explicated. Moreover, explaining these terms gave the research topic significance as it investigated the frequency and prevalence of school violence, and the role of peace clubs in four selected schools within the Umlazi District.

##### **4.12.1 High School**

Schools in South Africa are classified into three categories: pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools. As per the South Africans Schools Act 84 (1996), a school is defined as an institution that admits learners in one or more grades ranging from Grade Zero (R) to Grade 12. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, a high school was defined as an educational institution that enrolls learners in Grades 8 to 12.

##### **4.12.2 Teachers/Educators**

The South African Employment of Educators Act 76 (1998) defines educators as individuals who teach, educate, or provide educational services at public schools, department offices, or adult-based education centres. For the purposes of this study, an educator/teacher is employed to provide educational services to learners in a high school setting, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. The terms "educator" and "teacher" were used interchangeably.

#### **4.12.3 High School Learners**

In this study, the term "high school learner" was used to refer to a child who is attending a school and is obligated to receive educational instruction, as defined by the South Africans Schools Act 84 (1996). The focus of the study was on learners in Grade 9, who were enrolled in an institution registered with the Department of Education (DoE) in accordance with the South Africans Schools Act 84 (1996). Specifically, in the context of this study, a "high school learner" refers to an individual who is registered and attends a school located within Umlazi District in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The terms "high school learner" and "learner" were used interchangeably.

#### **4.12.4 School-Based Violence**

Several attempts have been made to define school-based violence, often influenced by the specific context of the research. Akiba *et al.* (2002: 836) proposes a definition of school-based violence as, "any physical or psychological assault, or threat of assault, of learners on other learners or teachers in schools which are perceived as violent by the victim." Similarly, Van Der Merwe (2010: 108) defines school-based violence as, "any type of violence that involves abuse, destructive behaviour, and criminal behaviour, manifesting within the school environment." However, these definitions appear to exclude incidents of victimisation among learners themselves.

Similarly, Bezuidenhout and Joubert (2003: 3) clarify that school-based violence includes, "school-related offences that encompass a variety of acts perpetrated on school grounds, such as sexual assault of pupils by fellow classmates and teachers, dealing in drugs and theft, bullying, and school shootings." Hagan and Foster (2000) explain school-based violence as any act that makes pupils afraid to come to school and stay at school. Burton and Leoschut (2013) define school-based violence as any acts that occur within the school environment, including corporal punishment, cyber-bullying, and online aggression.

The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) (2016: 5) defines school violence as, "any acts of violence that take place inside an educational institution, when traveling to and from school or a school-related event, or during such an event. These school-

based acts of violence can be both physical and non-physical and may or may not result in bodily or emotional harm to the victim. This violence typically takes the form of learner-on-learner, learner-on-educator, educator-on-educator, and educator-on-learner violence and severely disrupts the normal functioning of the schooling system." Furthermore, as stated by Zulu *et al.* (2004: 70) these behaviours may be perpetrated by learners, educators, administrators, or individuals not affiliated with the school, with the deliberate intent of causing harm or injury to another person or causing damage to school property.

This study conceptualised school violence to include child and/or teacher perpetration, physical and psychological exploitation, cyber victimisation, cyber-intimidation, fighting, bullying, classroom disruption, physical and psychological injury to teachers and learners, cult-related behaviour and ritual activities, sexual and other boundary violations, and the use of weapons in the school environment. For this study, the terms "school violence," "school-based violence," and "violence at school" were used interchangeably, as defined above.

#### **4.12.5 Action Research**

According to Herr and Anderson (2015), action research aims to foster the development or transformation of the researcher, participants, and the setting in a socially engaged manner. Denzin and Lincoln (2008: 379) further suggest that action research involves addressing real-life problems through collaboration, dialogue, mutual learning, and the production of tangible results. For this study, it was conceived as a systematic approach to investigating and solving practical problems in real-world settings through collaborative and iterative processes. It is an academic and practitioner-oriented research methodology that involves identifying, designing, implementing, and evaluating actions aimed at improving specific situations or contexts. It involved cycles of reflection, planning, action, and evaluation, with the goal of generating practical knowledge that could inform practice and lead to positive change in schools.

#### **4.12.6 Peace Clubs**

A peace club is a structured organisation which works to further the values of social justice, non-violence, and peace in a particular neighbourhood. To increase awareness,

develop capacity, and promote constructive acts that support the promotion of peace and nonviolence, a peace club engages in a variety of activities, including advocacy, education, and outreach. To develop understanding and tolerance among various groups and to address the core causes of conflict, these activities can include planning peace-oriented events, conferences, seminars, and campaigns, fostering dialogue, and promoting effective communication. Peace clubs emphasise proactive and participatory approaches to peace, involving participants from many origins and viewpoints, and developing an inclusive, respectful, and co-operative society.

#### **4.12.7 Programmes**

According to Saunders (2016: 4), a programme can be conceptualised as a set of external activities, curricula, or stand-alone entities that are implemented within an organisational context, such as schools. These programmes are typically designed and introduced in response to identified needs of a specific group (Masinga 2016: 6). Netting and O'Connor (2013: 758) posit that the activities within a programme are purposefully designed to serve a social function, such as addressing school violence by providing direct services to the target group. Further insights from Van Baalen and De Conning (2011: 171) and Young (2007: 13) suggest that these activities are closely co-ordinated to achieve the intended outcomes. In the context of schools, the desired outcomes of such programmes are to generate positive impacts on the participants, as Netting, Kettner and McMurtry (2004: 327); Royce, Thyer and Padgett (2010: 5) emphasise. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, programmes are defined as intentionally co-ordinated activities designed to address social issues, such as school violence, with the goal of producing positive outcomes among participants.

#### **4.13 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented research and data collection methodologies. Underlying philosophies were also discussed, as well as other research protocols such as research processes, sampling approaches, and the study area. Ethical issues and issues of

reliability and validity were also elaborated. The seven words central to data interpretation, analysis and discussion were conceptualized. The next chapter will present an analysis of the data collected quantitatively and qualitatively.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

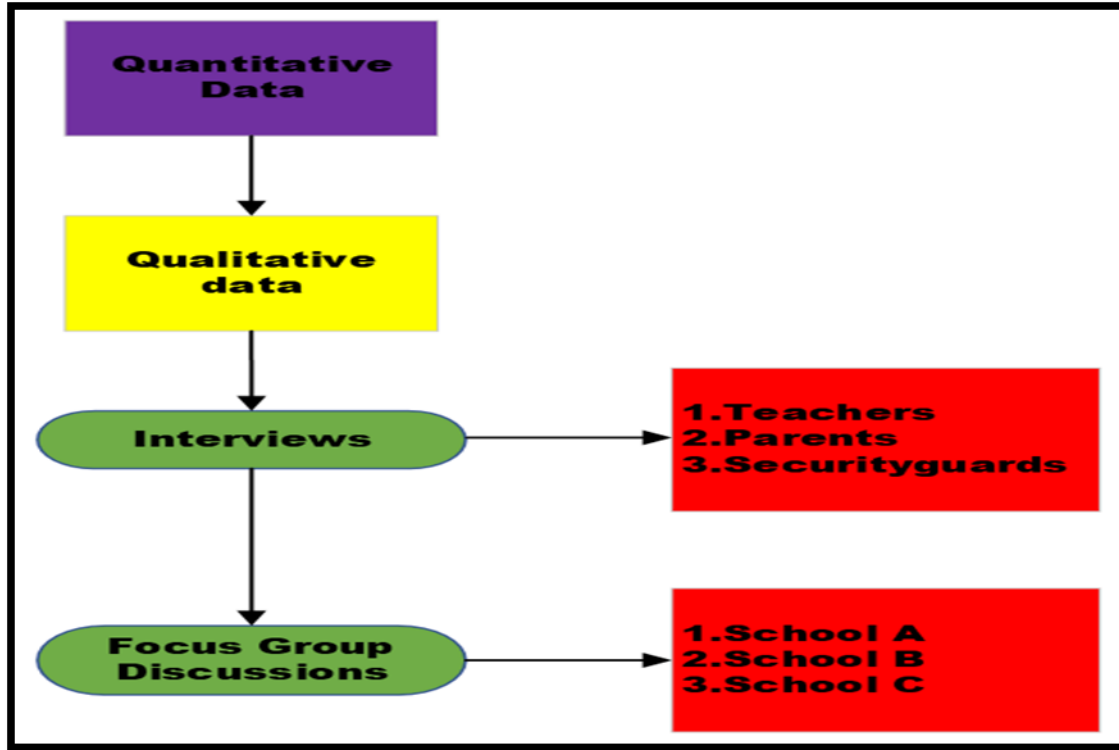
### **DATA PRESENTATION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter is dedicated to a comprehensive examination of the outcomes derived from surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions conducted at four secondary schools in Umlazi District. These methods of data collection contributed significantly to comprehending school violence in the district. The survey encompassed 603 learners across four schools and employed a self-administered questionnaire to solicit insights into the nature, extent, and consequences of school violence. This marked the first step of the explorative process of the study. The data was analysed using SPSS 2.4 software. This allowed for the identification of underlying patterns within the dataset, including frequency distributions and mean values for each query, alongside cross-tabulations disaggregated by gender.

Further into the exploration stage, interviews and focus group discussions were undertaken to provide a deeper understanding of aspects that could not be quantitatively examined. Employing a thematic analysis approach, the qualitative data was initially transcribed with the assistance of a native-speaking research assistant. The process of thematic analysis, jointly conducted by the researchers, entailed a thorough scrutiny of transcriptions, aimed at discerning emerging themes and categories. Both written and recorded data were dissected into smaller, coherent units, thereby facilitating a broad investigation of distinct patterns that surfaced during conversations and discussions across three schools at this point as one school withdrew. It is noteworthy that, to preserve ethical considerations and protect the anonymity of the involved schools, deliberate discretion was exercised by withholding the names of the schools. Instead, pseudonyms were adopted. Diagram 1 exemplifies the discussion layout of this chapter.





**Figure 5-1** Discussion Layout (Self-Generated)

## 5.2 Quantitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

### 5.2.1 Sample distribution in schools

**Table 5-1** Sample Distribution According to Schools.

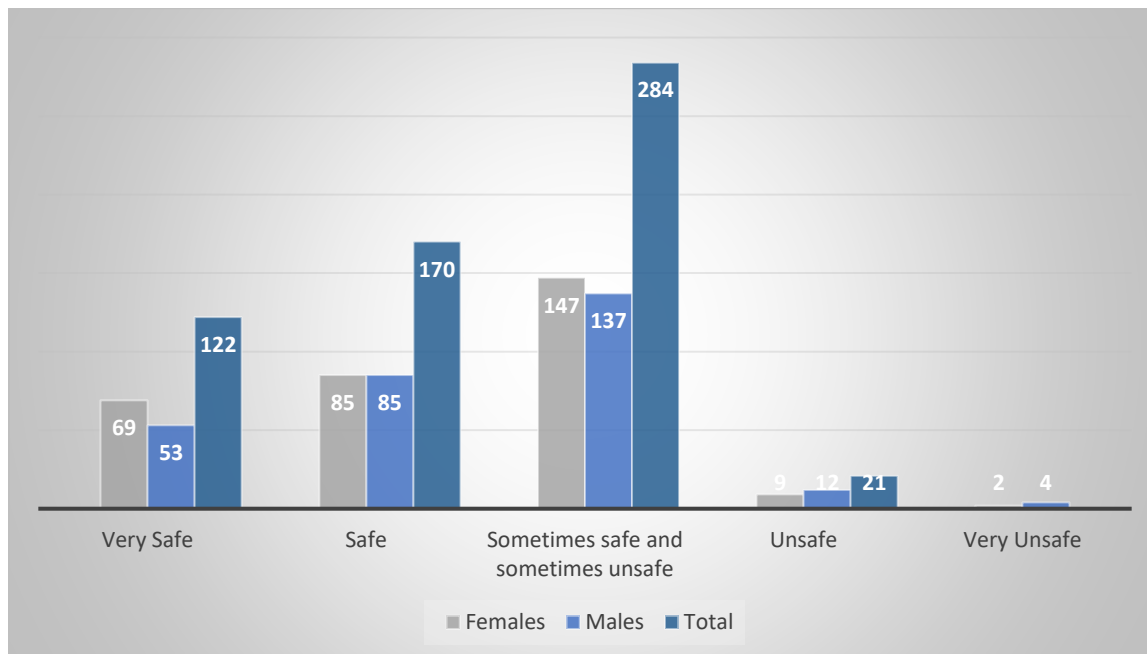
| Name of school | Frequency | Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|
| School A       | 69        | 11.44   |
| School B       | 184       | 30.51   |
| School C       | 265       | 43.95   |
| School D       | 85        | 14.10   |

A total of 603 learners, with an average age of 15 years, consisting of 312 females and 291 males, actively participated in the survey. The gender gap between participants can

be regarded as a positive reflection of DBE efforts to bridge gender discrepancies in the South African educational sector (Alex and Mammen 2014: 81) Notably, School A's relatively diminished participation rates were attributed to the bureaucratic difficulties encountered within the school environment. This was underscored by the noteworthy observation that the educator selectively directed access to specific learners despite knowing the importance of the study. This deviation from the prescribed methodology could conceivably stem from the researcher's youthful appearance and unknown research profile, despite having research experience. Bocar (2013); Abrenica and Cascolan (2022) in agreement state that youthful researchers face problems of acceptance in carrying out research.

Contrastingly, the study recorded substantial participation rates at School B – a trend that can be primarily ascribed to the proactive involvement of the school's principal. Evidently, the principal's unwavering support facilitated the comprehensive survey of the entire Grade 9 classes. Similarly, in the School C context, an elevated number of learners were surveyed, this being predominantly attributed to the proactive engagement of an educator who assumed the role of a Life Orientation instructor. This advantageous position provided an unrestricted access to the Grade 9 cohort, thereby substantiating the high participation rate from this specific school. Conversely, School D evidenced comparatively reduced participation rates linked to its infrastructural limitations. Notably, the school's physical capacity was small in comparison to its counterparts, rendering it inherently pre-disposed to accommodating fewer participants within the study.

### 5.2.2 Safety among learners



**Figure 5-2** Safety Index in Schools (Self-Generated).

Figure 5-2 depicts the general perceptions of the state of school safety. Some 20% (122) of the participants reported feeling very safe at school. In that 20%, more females than males, on average, felt safer. This showed that, compared to boys, girls were in a safer environment in and around schools. Additionally, 28% (170) of the learners said they felt safe in their classrooms. The safety assessment was equal for both sexes. However, 47% (284) of the learners occasionally felt both safe and unsafe on school grounds. Despite females being more dominating, there is not much of a safety difference between the genders. Although 1% of the learners said they felt very unsafe, 3% of the learners reported feeling unsafe. Table 2 indicated safety in relation to each school.

These findings are particularly noteworthy given the reputation of Umlazi District as one of the most unsafe townships in South Africa with high cases of violence (South African Police Service 2023). Interestingly, a substantial proportion of learners from the three schools exhibited an ambiguous sense of security. The observation that learners tended to categorize their feelings as either safe or unsafe suggested an inherently unstable school community, prone to unpredictable occurrences. Evidently, a minority segment of

learners reported feeling unsafe, leading to the argument that, in most instances, the school community can be deemed safe, although within the context of its inherent volatility.

**Table 5-2** Safety Among Learners.

| <b>Do you feel safe at school?<br/>(Percent)</b> |                  |              |                  |               |                    |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| <b>Name of school</b>                            | <b>Very safe</b> | <b>Safe</b>  | <b>Sometimes</b> | <b>Unsafe</b> | <b>Very unsafe</b> |
| <b>School A</b>                                  | 18.84            | 18.84        | 62.32            | 0.00          | 0.00               |
| <b>School B</b>                                  | 15.22            | 25.54        | 50.00            | 7.07          | 2.17               |
| <b>School C</b>                                  | 24.91            | 33.58        | 38.49            | 2.64          | 0.38               |
| <b>School D</b>                                  | 17.65            | 24.71        | 55.29            | 1.18          | 1.18               |
| <b>Overall</b>                                   | <b>20.23</b>     | <b>28.19</b> | <b>47.10</b>     | <b>3.48</b>   | <b>1.00</b>        |

Table 5-2 provides a more in-depth analysis: it became evident that Schools A, C and D indicated a higher prevalence of learner uncertainty. Despite learner uncertainty in apparent efficiency in administrative and infrastructural aspects, the schools faced a notable deficiency in terms of security personnel. Singularly, the schools relied on security guards numbering between one to five stationed at the entrance gate, primarily tasked with overseeing the comings and goings of learners. This limited security presence left a substantial void in maintaining order within the rest of the school premises. This confirmed that schools which are under resourced struggle to maintain discipline and order in the school (Ngqela and Lewis 2012; Spaul 2013; Du Plessis and Mestry 2019).

Observations revealed that the schools were resorting to improvisation. Educators were strategically positioned around the schools to attend to learners during sessions. However, the mere positioning of educators was not a comprehensive guarantee for the monitoring of the entire school grounds. Consequently, this situation created opportunities for disruptive behaviour among learners, as they could adapt and exploit potential loopholes

in the system. Conspicuously, School A had a history of violence. Prior to the study, a community member who assisted in maintaining order during breaks fell victim to a shooting incident, allegedly perpetrated by individuals linked to illicit drug activities in the area. Additionally, numerous instances of witnessed gang-related fights and activities occurred within the school, further underscoring the need for enhanced security measures.

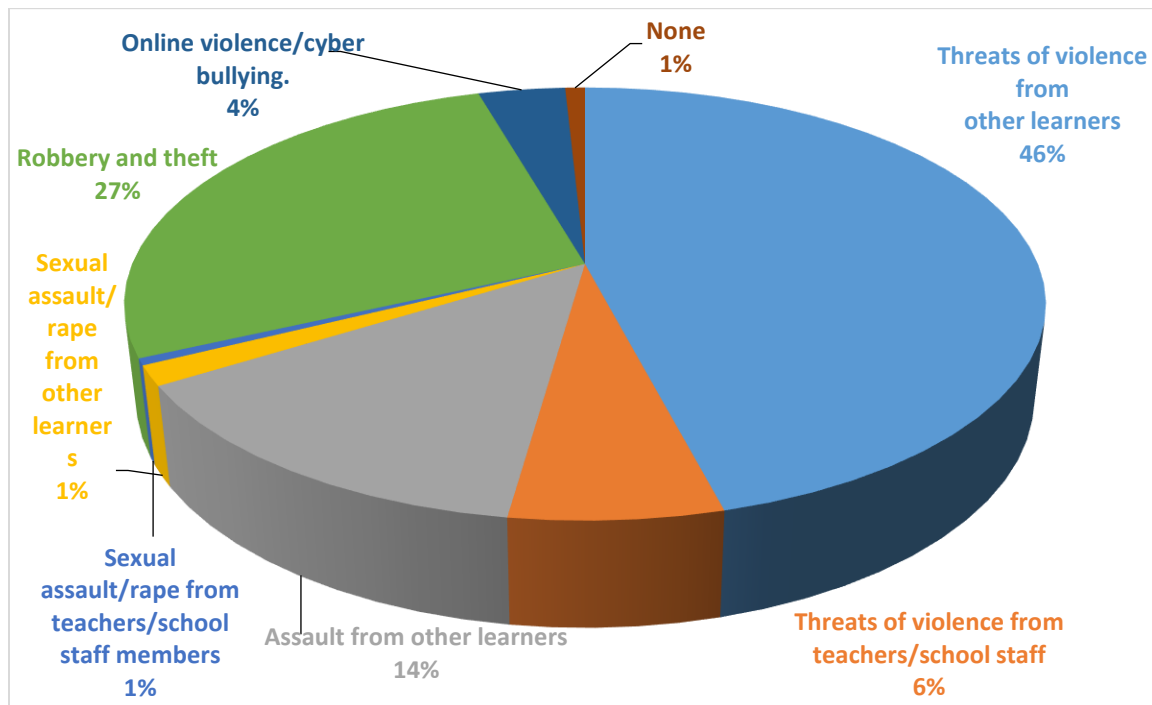
Indeed, the documented instances of violence within the school environment have a discernible impact on the psychosocial well-being of the learners. Public displays of violence have contributed to the cultivation of a pervasive sense of uncertainty among the learners. Interestingly, it was noted that participation was potentially influenced by a sense of patriotism or a desire to portray their school in the best possible light, even though their actual experiences suggest otherwise.

The tendency to present the school in a more positive light was evident during the data collection phase, as participants frequently asserted that their school was one of the best in Umlazi. This raised concerns about the potential concealment of the true realities faced by the learners within the school. The school's surroundings, which included informal settlements and hostels, were exposed to elevated crime rates which exacerbated security concerns. This attitude reflected hostility towards the researchers as they were treated as outsiders (Maphanga 2004).

Observations revealed that the schools lacked effective monitoring systems during school hours. Instead, they relied heavily on teachers for security measures, yet there was a staff shortage for the coverage of various areas within the school. This situation created opportunities for delinquent behaviour and unmonitored activities among the learners.

Above all, the reliance on force as a primary means of maintaining order within these schools has contributed significantly to the prevailing sense of uncertainty among the scholars. This observation highlights a deficiency in the understanding and implementation of non-violent conflict resolution practices among the teaching staff. The use of force not only fails to effectively address behavioural issues but also directly undermines the overall sense of security within the school environment and, to some extent, aggravates violence (Dewan 2021).

### 5.2.3 Types of Violence in Schools



**Figure 5-3** Violence in Schools (Self-Generated).

The types of violence in schools that learners have observed is shown in Figure 5-3. The presence of violent threats was acknowledged by 46% of the learners. Some 27% of those surveyed were aware of theft and robbery incidents occurring in schools. On assaults, 14% of the learners reported seeing an assault by another learner, while 6% reported verbal threats of violence from teachers and other members of the school staff. Online violence and cyberbullying were reported by 4% of respondents, while 2% of incidents involved both teachers and learners being sexually assaulted or raped, and 1% of the respondents said they had not witnessed any violent crime.

It was noted that educators were the least perpetrators of school-based violence. The majority of the violence was perpetrated by the learners against other learners. The main contributors to the volatile school environment were the learners. This suggested that, to understand school violence, learners' perceptions were key to any mitigation of the phenomenon since they were the main stakeholders and were a threat to each other (Gould *et al.* 2018). The dominant types of violence mirror the character of Umlazi District. This

also indicates the influence of community environments on learner behaviour (Flores 2005).

It emerged that learners were constantly threatening each other and subjecting each other to robbery and theft. This was common in South African communities and schools (Burton and Leoschut 2013: 15; South African Police Service 2023). However, with the rise of influence of social media platforms such as TikTok, stickers and memes, there are new trends in the perpetration and forms of violence. Social media are being weaponized as they lack regulations and tracking systems of the origins of the abusive content. This is now a novel threat in conflicts as it is anonymous. More so, teachers remained the lowest threat in the respective schools. It is likely that social media will eventually become the favoured weapon of victimising both teachers and learners; no one will be held accountable, thus avoiding consequences such as expulsion (Xu 2021; Rajbhandari and Rana 2023)

Furthermore, instances of sexual assault involving both learners and school staff were relatively infrequent within the study context. This observation contrasts with the broader national statistics, which consistently report a high prevalence of sexual assault cases throughout South Africa (Burton and Leoschut 2013; South African Police Service 2023). However, it is essential to acknowledge that the actual frequency of such incidents may be higher than officially recorded. This discrepancy may be attributed to the inherent challenges in reporting sensitive and traumatic experiences, as it often necessitates a substantial degree of trust and confidence from the victim to openly discuss their ordeal (Antonowicz 2010; Nhambura 2020).

Supporting this assertion, there were instances during the study's sessions where participants shared accounts of unwelcome comments and physical touches originating from older learners. These narratives underscored the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment that encourages victims to come forward and share their experiences. This ultimately contributes to a more accurate understanding of the prevalence of sexual assault within educational settings (Antonowicz 2010). Table 5-3 presents a comprehensive breakdown of the distribution of violence in the four schools.

**Table 5-3** Types of Violence in Schools.

| <b>The main forms of violence happening in school<br/>(Percent)</b> |                                                |                                                        |                                    |                                                 |                                                         |                          |                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <b>Name of school</b>                                               | <b>Threats of violence from other learners</b> | <b>Threats of violence from teachers/ school staff</b> | <b>Assault from other learners</b> | <b>Sexual assault/ rape from other learners</b> | <b>Sexual assault/ rape from teachers/ school staff</b> | <b>Robbery and theft</b> | <b>Online violence /cyber bullying</b> |
| <b>School A</b>                                                     | 46.38                                          | 4.35                                                   | 7.25                               | 1.45                                            | 0.00                                                    | 31.88                    | 7.25                                   |
| <b>School B</b>                                                     | 42.39                                          | 3.8                                                    | 19.57                              | 2.17                                            | 1.09                                                    | 25.00                    | 5.98                                   |
| <b>School C</b>                                                     | 49.81                                          | 6.79                                                   | 13.96                              | 1.13                                            | 0.00                                                    | 24.91                    | 1.89                                   |
| <b>School D</b>                                                     | 41.18                                          | 11.76                                                  | 7.06                               | 1.18                                            | 1.18                                                    | 36.47                    | 1.18                                   |
| <b>Overall</b>                                                      | <b>45.94</b>                                   | <b>6.30</b>                                            | <b>13.93</b>                       | <b>1.49</b>                                     | <b>0.50</b>                                             | <b>27.36</b>             | <b>3.65</b>                            |

From the above table, it is evident that threats of violence originating from other learners had no substantial variations among these schools. All the schools exhibited a similar level of vulnerability to threats of violence, indicating a comparable prevalence of the occurrence. Remarkably, threats of violence emerged as the predominant form of violence reported by learners within their respective school environments, showing no differences from findings by Burton and Leoschut (2013). Of particular interest was the prominence of School C in experiencing higher incidents of threats of violence. This heightened prevalence could potentially be attributed to several factors, including the inherently aggressive nature of the Umlazi community itself and the immediate surroundings of the school, which include nearby hostels and informal settlements. These contextual factors might have contributed to an elevated risk of threats of violence within the school setting.

One educator gave testimony in which they recounted instances where their colleagues had been subjected to threats from members of the local community which led to withdrawal and fear (Sibisi 2021). The threats occurred in plain view of the learners, and such



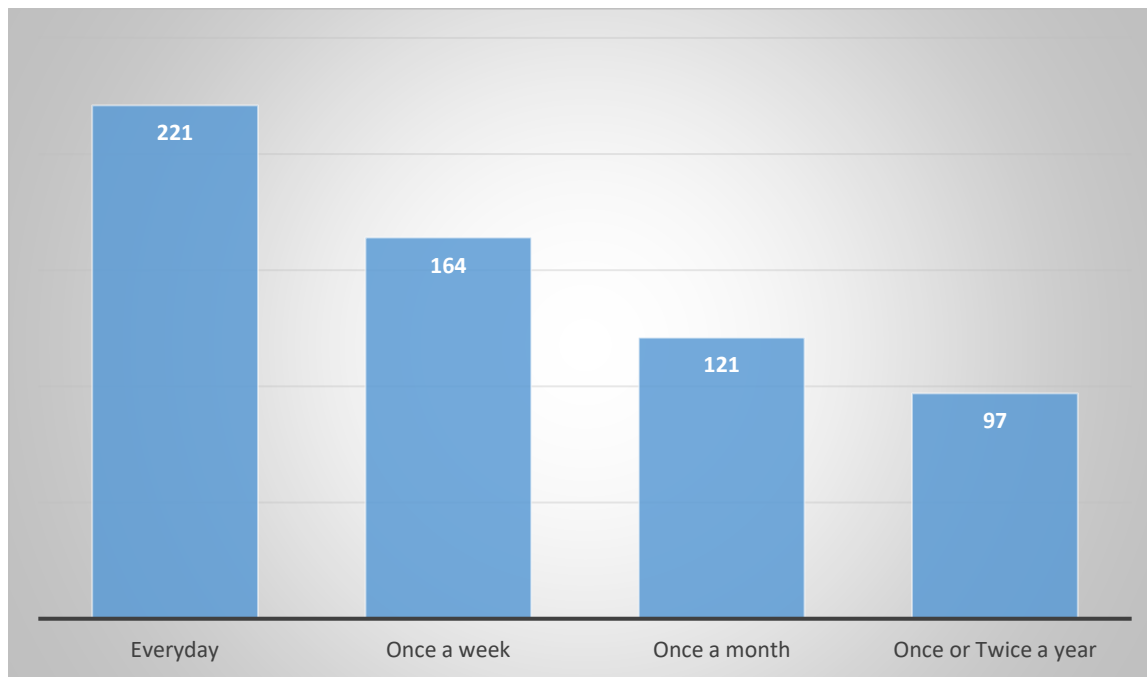
occurrences may contribute to the cultivation of delinquent behaviour among the learners. In certain cases, these threats escalated into physical assaults. School C once again demonstrated higher incidents of observed physical assault cases among learners. This suggests a potential correlation between threats and subsequent physical violence. Surprisingly, despite School B having a comparatively lower number of reported threats from learners, it paradoxically exhibited a higher number of witnessed physical assaults. This observation suggests a possibility that threats of violence most likely led to physical altercations. Consequently, it can be inferred that School B, despite its lower reported threats, still faced a considerable level of violence, confirming its classification as a school with a noteworthy presence of violence.

Both School A and School D experienced a significant number of robbery cases. These schools are situated in low-income areas characterised by poor sanitary conditions. Apparently, these two schools are in close proximity to each other; therefore, it was possible that the occurrences affecting one school had a direct impact on the other. The prevalence of poverty in the neighbouring community appeared to be a contributing factor to the increase in robbery cases among learners (Ngqela and Lewis 2012). An insightful revelation came from a security personnel member who disclosed having dealt with incidents of learners engaged in robberies against community members and who subsequently sought refuge within the school premises. Moreover, some learners approached the security personnel to inform them that they would be late due to court appearances. This unequivocally indicated that the school environment reflected the criminal activities prevalent in the surrounding communities. Consequently, any developments affecting School D were likely to have a corresponding effect on School A.

Furthermore, reports suggested the presence of active gangs operating in the area, a position corroborated by graffiti markings on certain walls within the vicinity. These observations underscore the intricate relationship between the schools and their immediate communities. The socioeconomic challenges and criminal activities interplay, inevitably impacting the safety and well-being of learners. More so, schools plagued by deficient physical conditions, such as deteriorating infrastructure, shattered windows, congested passageways, and unsanitary facilities, serve to intensify dissatisfaction and contribute

significantly to the occurrence of incidents of violence within the school environment (Janse Van Rensburg 2010).

#### 5.2.4 Frequency of violence in schools



**Figure 5-4** Frequency of Violence (Self-Generated).

Every participant confirmed having witnessed violence in 2021 at their respective schools. Some 37% of the learners admitted to seeing violence of some kind being committed every day. Of those surveyed, 20% said they encountered violence at least once a month, while 16% said they witnessed it once or twice a year, and 27% said they saw violence at least once a week.

Based on the available data, it is apparent that a significant portion of learners were exposed to violent incidents during their time in school. This observation implies that instances of violence were relatively commonplace within the school environment, occurring with regularity on a weekly basis. The prevalence of certain types of violent incidents reported by a majority of learners on a weekly basis underscored the sense of instability within educational institutions. Despite this, most participants expressed feeling safe, as indicated in section 1.3 of the study, which raised the question of whether or not the

schools genuinely provided a safe educational environment. A study in South African townships established that schools in townships experience high levels of violence daily (Kutywayo *et al.* 2022). Furthermore, a consistent pattern of instances involving threats and robberies within the school environment points to a high frequency of minor crimes and threats. Burton and Leoschut (2013: 15) comment that assault levels among learners was increasing. Although these occurrences did not pose an immediate physical danger, their potential psychological and socio-emotional impact should not be underestimated. Table 5-4 provides additional insight into the comparative prevalence of violence within different schools.

**Table 5-4** Frequency of Violence in Schools.

| How often does the violence happen in your school?<br>(Percent) |           |             |              |                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Name of School                                                  | Every day | Once a week | Once a month | Once or twice a year |
| School A                                                        | 18.84     | 31.88       | 31.88        | 17.39                |
| School B                                                        | 34.78     | 31.52       | 19.02        | 14.67                |
| School C                                                        | 43.02     | 24.53       | 18.11        | 14.34                |
| School D                                                        | 35.29     | 22.35       | 18.82        | 23.53                |
| Overall                                                         | 36.65     | 27.20       | 20.07        | 16.09                |

It was evident that, in each of the four schools studied, approximately half of the learners reported witnessing incidents of violence weekly, occurring on five out of the school-week days. This observation serves as a poignant representation of the prevailing societal conditions within South African communities, where individuals are routinely exposed to violence in their daily lives. For instance, in the first quarter of 2023, an average of 70 people were murdered every day around South Africa with Umlazi leading the rates in Kwa-Zulu-Natal (Mitchley 2023). Notably, School A and School D, both situated in the same geographical area, reported similar frequencies of violence. This similarity underscores the shared societal challenges affecting the schools, thereby confirming their common struggle with prevalent social issues. It may be argued that school difficulties could be a result of existing problems in the geographical location which differed from one area to another.

Schools B and C ranked highest in terms of threats of violence and physical assault and reported the highest incidents of learners witnessing acts of violence within the school environment. This implies that, among the four schools studied, these two were identified as having a comparatively higher level of violence. Remarkably, nearly two-thirds of the learners at these schools confirmed having witnessed violent incidents on a weekly basis.

The situation at School C could be attributed to its location, which exposed learners to higher levels of community-related violence. In contrast, School B, despite having better infrastructure and administrative resources compared to the other schools, faced challenges related to discipline. An investigation revealed that the school's large size, coupled with limited monitoring systems and insufficient personnel for maintaining discipline, contributed to these issues.

During the data collection process, it was observed that some classes at School B were not adequately supervised by educators. This lack of supervision provided learners with opportunities to engage in delinquent behaviour without facing consequences. It was also noted that, although study time was officially designated, in practice, learners and educators alike would often socialise outside classroom time, rather than dedicating themselves to academic pursuits. This lack of effective monitoring during study periods and dismissal times created opportunities for delinquent behaviours to occur unchecked.

School A, despite the relatively lower number of witnessed violent incidents, stood out due to the increased and proactive involvement of both parents and educators in school affairs. Notably, during the study, it was revealed that some parents had established committees aimed at assisting educators to patrol areas where learners were known to engage in drug and alcohol consumption during break times. The collaborative effort between parents and educators contributed to a more secure school environment (Wolhuter and Van der Walt 2020).

In contrast, the other three schools did not benefit from such parental support but encountered criticism and disruption instead. For instance, parents at School B disrupted classes and even initiated a school shutdown, demanding the removal of a specific teacher. Notably, this school exhibited the highest levels of violence among the four schools.

Discussions with the school administration revealed that parents often played a role in creating instability by interfering with school policies designed to maintain discipline. The closure of the school by parents during a regular school day exemplifies the strained relationship between parents and school administrators, which had a detrimental impact on the school's functioning and safety.

Furthermore, School C faced a similar challenge, where learners were known to exhibit violent behaviour if disrupted during break times when they engaged in drug use, particularly smoking weed. One educator expressed concerns about the risks associated with patrolling in the school, as it could potentially make them targets outside the school. Consequently, there was a prevailing sentiment that the school environment could not be effectively controlled or monitored. Additionally, some parents at School C did not actively contribute to efforts to maintain discipline within the school. It was noted that, when disciplinary hearings were scheduled, parents either failed to attend or, when they did, often sided with their child, making it challenging to enforce disciplinary measures. This appeared to be a sign of poor moral and disciplinary measures from the parents, thereby allowing their child to misbehave (Wolhuter and Van der Walt 2020).

Taken together, it is evident that, in the sampled schools, there is a lack of cohesion and co-operation within the school ecosystem, making it difficult to establish and sustain discipline. This situation indicates broader societal issues within Umlazi and, by extension, South Africa. Institutional breakdowns in maintaining law and order, coupled with growing mistrust within communities, have contributed to the challenges in school environments. The following table discusses the effects of violence on fellow learners and peers.

### 5.2.5 Effects of violence on Learners

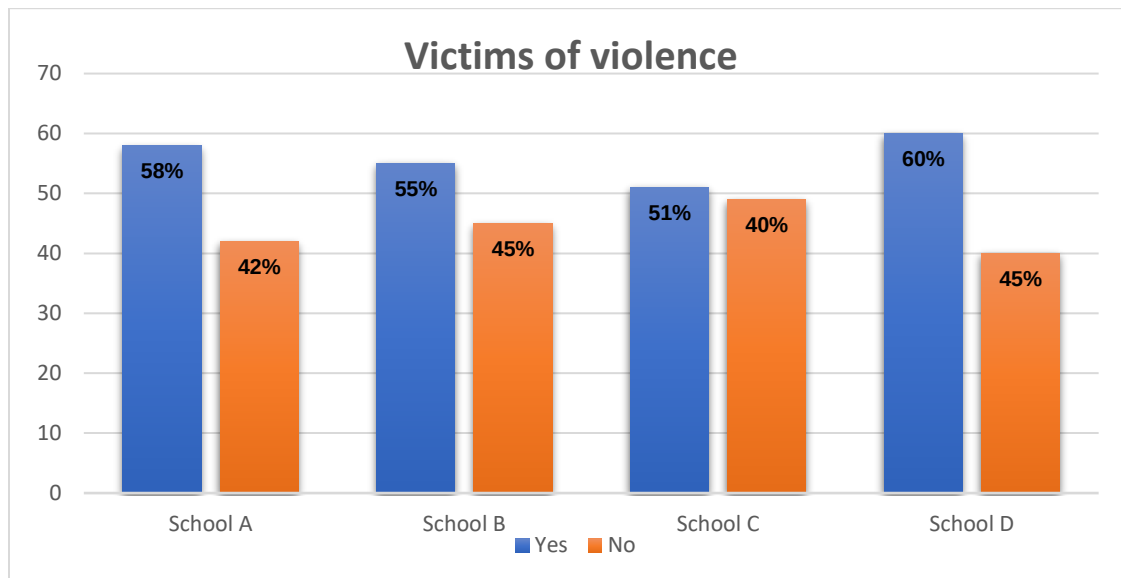
**Table 5-5** Effects of Violence on Learners.

| Effects of violence on learners                                |           |         |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
|                                                                | Frequency | Percent |
| They feel anxious and afraid                                   | 259       | 42.95   |
| They disassociate or withdraw from contact with other learners | 53        | 8.79    |
| They have difficulty in concentrating on schoolwork            | 165       | 27.36   |
| They stay away from school                                     | 80        | 13.27   |
| They drop out of school                                        | 41        | 6.80    |
| Not aware of any effects                                       | 5         | 0.83    |

Table 5-5 covers the effects of violence on learners as observed by their peers and teachers. About 43% (259) of the learners claimed that the violence in schools caused fear and anxiety. Slightly over 27% (165) of the respondents indicated that they had trouble with concentration during class. Furthermore, 13% (80) of learners recognised that their peers opted to stay away from class. Just less than 9% (53) of learners experienced acts of disengagement and withdrawal from school, while 7% (41) said they knew someone who wanted to withdraw from school. Only 1% (5) of witnesses said that violence did not affect learners.

Most of the learners exhibited signs of fear and anxiety, as reported by their peers. This observation suggests that a substantial proportion of learners may have been experiencing some form of trauma. It is possible to propose that the challenges in maintaining focus on school activities could be attributed to the presence of fear and anxiety; these are known effects experienced by individuals who have been victimised (Safran 2007; Perezniето *et al.* 2010; Hendricks and Tanga 2019). Moreover, withdrawal as a recognisable behavioural issue commonly observed among victims of violence was evident in the data. These findings indicated that learners were able to recognise the behavioural impact of violence displayed by their peers, though they did not fully comprehend that these behaviours stem from underlying trauma. Figure 5-6 presents the personal testimonies of learners in terms of them being victimised.

## 5.2.6 Victimisation



**Figure 5-5** Victimisation Index (Self-Generated).

Figure 5-5 presents the incidence of violence experienced by the 329 (55%) learners who had acknowledged being victims of school violence in general. It indicates the distribution of victims across the four schools. Of the 329, 178 (54%) of the victims were male learners while 151 (46%) were females. Thus, males were found to be victims more frequently than females. However, 274 (45%) learners commented that they had not been victimised at any point in their school in 2021. Of the 274, 178 (65%) were females while 112 (41%) were males. This was a clear indication that females were less likely to be victims of violence in Umlazi District.

**Table 5-6** Gender Distribution.

| Have you been a victim of such violence this year<br>(Percent) |       |       |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Name of school                                                 | Yes   | No    |
| School A                                                       | 57.97 | 42.03 |
| School B                                                       | 51.32 | 48.68 |
| School C                                                       | 60.00 | 40.00 |
| School D                                                       | 55.43 | 44.57 |

The findings from School A revealed that a substantial portion of the participants, specifically 58%, disclosed instances of experiencing violence. Within this group, a noteworthy gender discrepancy was observed: 58% of these participants were male, while the remaining 42% were female. Similarly, the School B survey reported a slightly lower prevalence of victimisation, with 55% of respondents acknowledging such experiences. Importantly, at School B, the distribution of male and female victims was equal. Again, at School C, the proportion of participants who reported being victims was slightly lower at 51%. The gender distribution in this sample was 53% male and 47% female. Lastly, the School D study found that 60% of its respondents had encountered violence at some point during the year. A significant trend emerged as 60% of these victims were male, while 40% were female. This pattern suggests a consistent targeting of males as compared to females in the incidents of violence reported across the different locations.

The conclusion was drawn that males were more susceptible to experiencing violence compared to females – a finding in contrast to national crime statistics, which typically depict women as more frequently victimised, unlike males (Burton and Leoschut 2013). However, the South African Police Service (2023) acknowledged that males dominated the victim list. Despite this, it can be contended that male violence tends to be concealed and receives less attention in discussions (Depraetere *et al.* 2020). This phenomenon may be connected to local cultural beliefs that discourage men from expressing vulnerability or emotions, perpetuating the notion that "men do not cry." Consequently, the acknowledgment of violence against males appeared to be less pronounced despite its prevalence in schools.

During the fieldwork, a noticeable phenomenon was observed where male participants exhibited hesitancy in responding to questions regarding their experiences as victims of violence. Instead, they engaged in interpersonal dynamics characterised by humour and teasing. Male participants often queried their peers in a playful manner, occasionally singling out a friend and mockingly acknowledging their victim status. In response, the person questioned often replied with sarcasm, implying that violence was perceived as a form of dominance, those who had been victimised were viewed as lacking in strength.



Consequently, these individuals were subjected to laughter and playful taunts by their fellow male colleagues. This behaviour may serve as an explanatory factor for the sudden surge in the number of male learners who reported being victims of violence within their school environments. The ensuing table provides a comprehensive overview of the various types of violence encountered by these victims.

#### 5.2.6.1 Gender Victimisation

**Table 5-7** Gender and Violence.

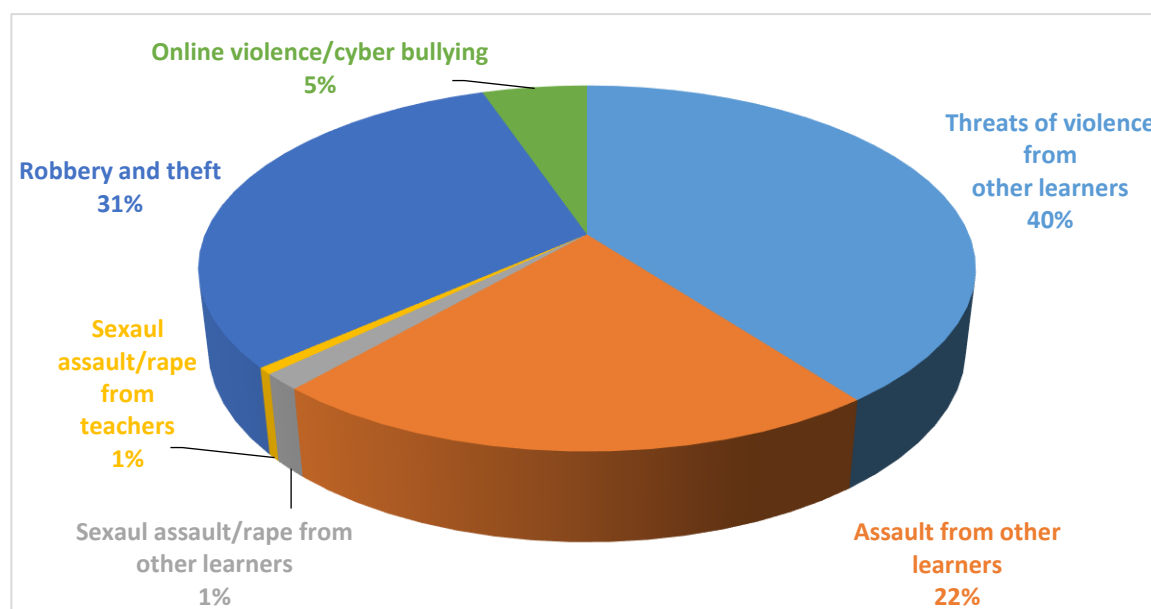
|        | Victims of Violence |     |         |
|--------|---------------------|-----|---------|
| Gender | Yes                 | No  | P-value |
| Female | 151                 | 161 | 0.002   |
| Male   | 178                 | 113 |         |
| Total  | 329                 | 274 |         |

The findings indicate a correlation between gender and the incidence of violence, with statistical significance observed at a p-value less than 0.05. Specifically, the results suggest that male learners, comprising 178 cases, exhibited a higher likelihood of experiencing acts of violence compared to their female counterparts. Kutwayo *et al.* (2022) similarly concluded that males were more exposed to violence compared to females. On a different note Ncontsa and Shumba (2013); Markkanen, Välimaa and Kannas (2021) add that older male learners were often the perpetrators of school violence, while younger learners, especially those in Grades 8 and 9, were more susceptible to experiencing violence in educational settings. These outcomes contrast with the prevailing data, which predominantly reports that females are more commonly victimised by violent acts (Burton and Leoschut 2013; Statistics South Africa 2018).

This perceived incongruity may be attributed to the possibility that relatively less attention is directed toward addressing issues related to male victimisation. The consistent emphasis in various media platforms on addressing challenges faced by women has potentially contributed to a diminished focus on the experiences of male victims. This trend is evident in policies, advertising campaigns, and portrayals within the criminal justice system, which at times may exhibit a bias favouring women.

It is important to acknowledge that these results, although suggesting a gender-based disparity in victimisation rates, should be interpreted with care. Various factors and nuances may underlie the observed associations. Further research and analysis are warranted to gain a thorough understanding of the complex dynamics involved in gender-based violence and its portrayal in media and policy landscapes. The following section delves into the types of violence victims experienced.

### 5.2.7 Types of Violence Encountered by Learners



**Figure 5-6** Violence Encountered by Learners (Self-Generated).

The types of violence experienced by the 345 learners (57%) who confirmed being victims at school is highlighted in Figure 5-6. It was discovered that 138 (40%) of these learners were victims of threats of violence from other learners, with 55% of the males and 45% females confirmed as victims. Males were being violently threatened more than females in the four schools. Robbery and theft, experienced by 107 (31%) of the learners, was the second-highest type of violence. It was found that, for both males and females, the victimisation ratio was comparable. Some 76 (22%) of the participants reported being assaulted by other learners at some point in their school. From the assault statistics, male learners made up 53% of victims, while females made up 47%. Furthermore, 17 respondents (5%) described experiencing cyberbullying and online violence. Together, teachers, school employees, and other learners had committed 2% of all sexual assaults. Burton

and Leoschut (2013) singled out threats of violence and robbery as the most common forms of violence happening at school – a trend confirmed in this study. Table 5-8 will illustrate the types of violence and their frequencies in the four schools as reported by the victims.

**Table 5-8** Types of Violence Encountered.

| Name of School (Percent) |                                         |                           |                                        |                                  |                   |                                |       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| Name of school           | Threats of violence from other learners | Assault by other learners | Sexual assault/ rape by other learners | Sexual assault/ rape by teachers | Robbery and theft | Online violence/cyber bullying | None  |
| School A                 | 10.95                                   | 13.3                      | 0.0                                    | 0.0                              | 11.11             | 11.11                          | 11.63 |
| School B                 | 27.01                                   | 26.7                      | 20.0                                   | 50.0                             | 41.67             | 5.56.                          | 30.62 |
| School C                 | 46.72                                   | 50.67                     | 60.0                                   | 50.0                             | 30.56             | 61.11                          | 44.57 |
| School D                 | 15.3                                    | 9.33                      | 20.0                                   | 0.0                              | 16.67             | 22.22                          | 13.18 |

Table 5-8 draws the resemblance between the types of violence encountered within the schools and the prevailing description of the Umlazi District. The community's reputation for being associated with threats of violence, criminal organisations such as as "*inkabis*," and incidents of robberies suggested that the unlawful activities prevalent in the surrounding areas were gradually infiltrating the school environment. This finding implied that children tend to imitate and adopt the behaviours and actions to which they are exposed, thereby reflecting the influences of their external surroundings. The South African Police Service (2023) flagged Umlazi in the top 30 of most robbery, threats, murder and assault-infested communities in South Africa.

Once again, School C demonstrated the highest incidence of various forms of violence in the context of a comprehensive investigation, encompassing five out of the six types of

violence studied. This recurring pattern accentuated a phenomenon of the significant influence of geographical location on the prevailing negative dynamics within school environments. Both School B and C consistently exhibited elevated levels of violence, attributable in large part to their compromised ecosystem. This disruption extended to the deteriorated relationships between parents and the school administration, ultimately resulting in a climate conducive to disruptive behaviours. It is evident that a lack of effective coordination within the school environment could foster a fertile ground for delinquent behaviour to thrive. Interestingly, the incidence of reported sexual violence appears comparatively lower, which may be ascribed to the heightened attention and focus on safeguarding the welfare of women.

It is important to acknowledge that South Africa contends with alarmingly high rates of homicides and sexual assaults against women within communities, emphasising the urgency of addressing such pressing issues (South African Police Service 2023). The increased awareness and emphasis on the protection of the girl child may have contributed to a reduction in reported cases of sexual assault, both by educators and fellow learners. Nevertheless, during the course of focus group discussions, a noteworthy observation emerged: a significant number of young girls appeared to be actively engaged in romantic relationships. This was evident from their discussions about the concept of "*indoda must*," signifying certain expectations they held for their male partners. The fact that the young girls, who have not yet reached the age of legal consent, are already making demands within their romantic relationships indicates a substantial degree of emotional investment in the partnerships.

The behaviours resembling those of adults, may also suggest the possibility of their engagement in consensual sexual activities. However, it is important to note that these adolescents may not fully comprehend the intricate dynamics and potential consequences associated with willingly or unwittingly consenting to activities within their relationships. Their actions highlight the importance of providing comprehensive education on the implications of such engagements and the significance of informed consent in interpersonal relationships. An indicative measure of sexual activity within the studied context is the

current prevalence of teenage pregnancies. Barron *et al.* (2022) found that in South Africa the 1998 childbearing rate of 15–19-year-olds was similar to that of 2016. This indicates that a constant presence of sexual activity amongst learners.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that dynamics such as sexual-partner violence might remain unreported due to the emotional bonds existing between the partners, effectively concealing instances of sexual misconduct. Both School B and C learners from both genders have acknowledged the presence of gender-based violence within their respective communities. Male learners reported instances where females knowingly humiliated and verbally assaulted them, while male learners themselves confessed to engaging in violent behaviour towards their female counterparts. These cases of gender-based violence within schools appear to be reflective of broader societal tendencies. Similar incidents occurred within the surrounding communities. Consequently, victimisation rates within the school environment mirrored those observed within the wider community. In comparison to global norms, South Africa has experienced a higher incidence of assault, threats of violence, and robberies (South African Police Service 2023). It is evident that children are influenced by and emulate the behaviours they witness in their immediate social surroundings, thus perpetuating these patterns of violence within the school setting.

School A stood out with notably lower instances of violence, a trend attributed to the robust relationship between the local community and the school administration. There are established studies that concluded that schools with organised relationships with the larger community enjoyed lower cases of bullying (Wang, Berry and Swearer 2013; Wang and Degol 2016). This positive outcome can also be correlated with the active engagement of educators in the lives of their learners. In contexts with fewer learners, such as School A, it was observed that the capacity to effectively monitor and manage learner behaviour was enhanced. Conversely, Schools B and C, which boast larger learner populations, tended to experience a higher frequency of violence cases and victims within their school premises. Matsepe, Maluleke and Cross (2019) noted that teachers with large numbers experienced high cases of delinquent behaviour. The subsequent section delves into an exploration of the frequency of victimisation, as reported by the victims themselves.

### 5.2.7.1 Gender and Violence

**Table 5-9** Gender and Violence.

| Type of violence                        | Gender     |            | P-value |
|-----------------------------------------|------------|------------|---------|
|                                         | Female     | Male       |         |
| Threats of violence from other learners | 61         | 76         | 0.035   |
| Assault from other learners             | 35         | 40         |         |
| Sexual assault/rape from other learners | 1          | 4          |         |
| Sexual assault/rape from teachers       | 0          | 2          |         |
| Robbery and theft                       | 53         | 55         |         |
| Online violence/cyber bullying          | 10         | 8          |         |
| None                                    | 152        | 106        |         |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>312</b> | <b>291</b> |         |

The study findings reveal a correlation between gender and instances of violence, with a statistical significance level of  $p < 0.05$ . Notably, in six out of the analysed violent behaviours, males exhibited a higher prevalence. Specifically, males were found to dominate in incidents related to threats of violence and physical assault. This observed gender-based disparity in violent behaviour can be attributed, in part, to the environmental context that often fosters violence towards males.

The proclivity for violent behaviour among males, particularly in their early adolescence, may be associated with the stages of manhood development. This period may manifest heightened aggression or assertiveness as individuals navigate their evolving identities and societal expectations. Furthermore, within male peer groups, older males may exert influence over younger ones, potentially contributing to a greater exposure to bullying and threats, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence.

Conversely, females were found to predominate in instances of online cyberbullying. This resonates with Farhangpour, Mutshaeni and Maluleke (2019). They found a significant higher number of females were victims of cyberbullying in Limpopo rural schools (Farhangpour, Mutshaeni and Maluleke 2019). This phenomenon can be explained by their higher level of engagement in social media platforms, which rendered females more susceptible to these forms of aggression. The prevalence of females on social media

compared to their males’ colleagues makes them susceptible to cyberbullying (Hossain and Prodhan 2020). Thus, in seeking entertainment, they expose themselves to cyberbullying. Cyberbullying often manifests through activities such as stalking and the receipt of persistent, unwarranted messages from certain individuals.

In short, the results stress the importance of recognising gender-specific dynamics at play in various forms of violence. Although males may exhibit higher rates of physical violence and threats, females may be more vulnerable to cyberbullying due to their increased presence in online social spaces. Understanding these gender-related trends is essential for the development of effective interventions and strategies aimed at addressing and mitigating violence within schools. Section 1.9 (Chapter One) discusses further the frequency of violence among the victims.

5.2.8 Frequency of Violence Among Learners

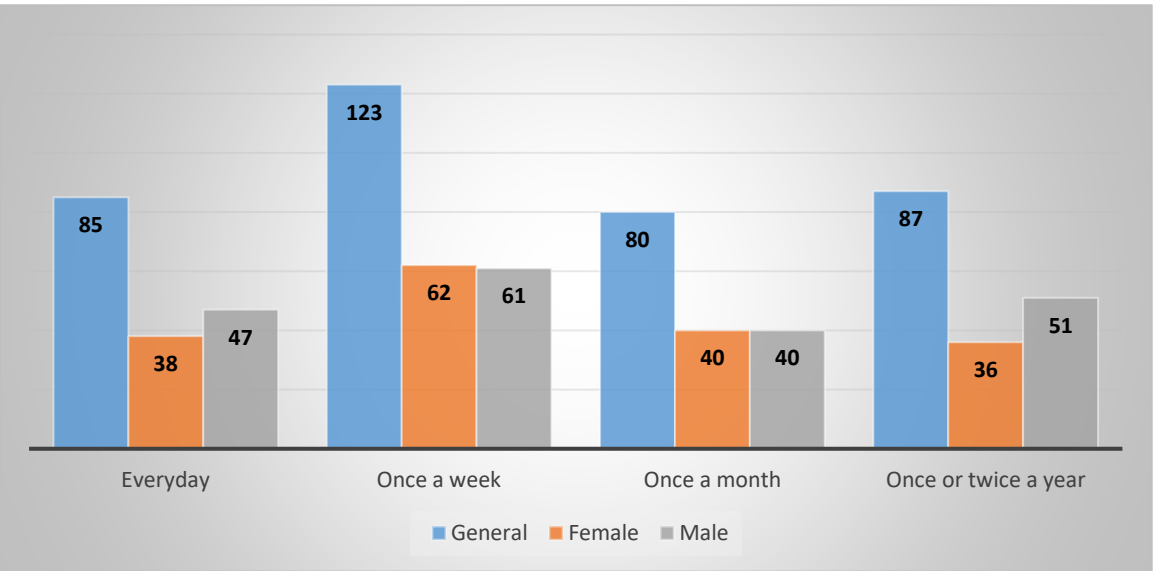


Figure 5-7 Frequency of Violence (Self-Generated).

The bar graph presents data on victimisation frequency in the four schools. Overall, on a daily basis, 22% of the learners experienced assault, with males predominately being the victims. Some 33% of respondents acknowledged being violated at least once a week. In contrast to the other four measured intervals, this one had the highest frequency. Of those surveyed, 21% said they had experienced victimisation at least once a month, while

23% reported the occurrence at once or twice a year. Evidently males were victims more frequently than females.

Based on the data analysis, a significant proportion of the participants emerged as victims of victimisation on a weekly basis. Specifically, the information revealed that those who had already experienced victimisation had been subjected to violations approximately once every week, highlighting a disconcerting level of exposure to violence in schools. Notably, the analysis indicated that males were more frequently victimised on a daily basis compared to females. In other intervals, such as frequencies in a month, there was not much difference between the two genders at all schools. However, yearly incidents for males were the most frequent. This indicates that males were the main victims of school violence in schools.

**Table 5-10** Frequency of Violence.

| Frequency of Violence |          |             |              |                      |       |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------|--------------|----------------------|-------|
| Name of school        | Everyday | Once a week | Once a month | Once or twice a year | None  |
| School A              | 10.59    | 11.38       | 11.25        | 9.20                 | 12.72 |
| School B              | 25.88    | 35.77       | 33.75        | 31.03                | 28.07 |
| School C              | 50.59    | 40.65       | 43.75        | 40.23                | 44.74 |
| School D              | 12.94    | 12.20       | 11.25        | 19.54                | 14.47 |

Analysing each school, it was evident that Schools B and C stood out conspicuously as institutions with the highest incidence of violence. More than half of their learners experienced violence at least once a week. This observation aligned closely with the previously highlighted sentiment among learners, where a significant majority expressed feelings of unease at these schools. The violence encountered by learners at these schools could be explained by either their witnessing of violent incidents, or direct exposure to violence within and around the two institutions. Schools situated in under-resourced, densely populated areas are more prone to such exposure to violence (Nggela and Lewis 2012; Duma 2013).

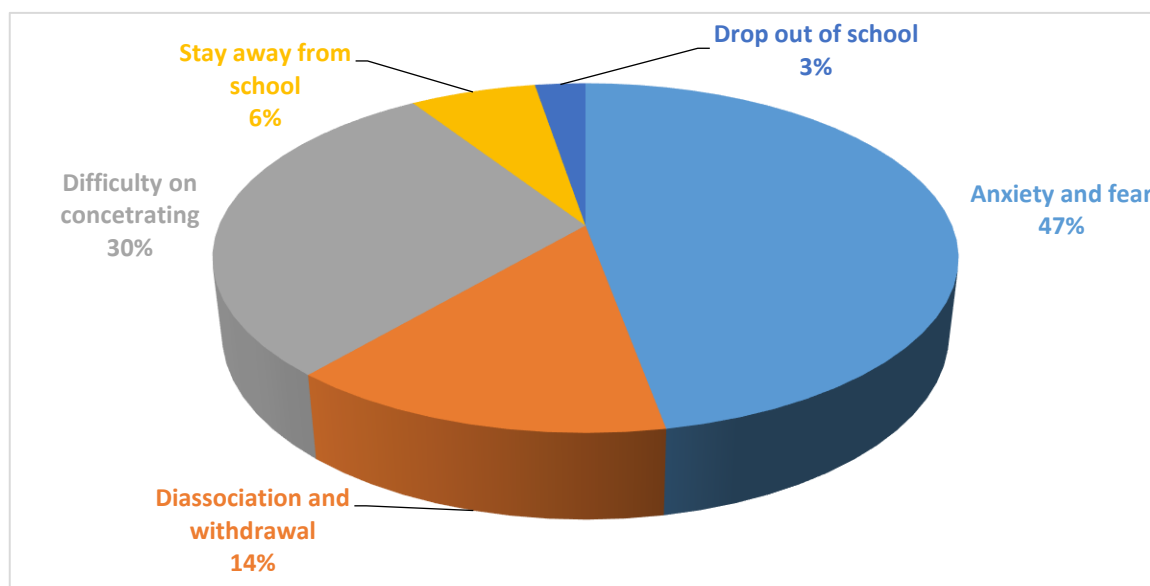
The reasons behind the notably lower incidence of school violence at School A remain unverified. During a brief interaction with the school administration, it was observed that



male teachers were consistently engaged in monitoring the learners. Additionally, School A had a smaller learner population compared to the other three schools. This might suggest that the presence of vigilant male teachers and the smaller learner body were contributing factors to the lower occurrence of school violence at the school. Also, in the case of School A, it appears that the active involvement of parents could be credited for the relatively minimal cases of school violence. Parents' active engagement in their children's education and school activities can create a positive and supportive environment that may deter instances of violence within the school.

During the course of the survey, there was an incident where a parent raised questions about the significance of the study for School A. This indicates that some parents possessed a keen awareness of the events transpiring within the school environment. It is worth noting that educators also emphasised the importance of notifying parents before engaging with the learners in various activities. These observations collectively suggest that the lack of parental involvement can potentially exacerbate delinquent behaviours among learners. When parents are more informed and engaged in their children's school experiences, it can contribute to a more supportive and accountable educational environment, potentially reducing instances of undesirable conduct. The next section will discuss the effects of constant exposure to violence.

### 5.2.9 Effects of Violence on Learner Victims



**Figure 5-8** Effects of Violence (Self-Generated).

Figure 5-8 presents data on how violence personally affected victims. It was found that 47% of the participants said they experienced fear and anxiety. Compared to males, female learners had greater levels of fear and anxiety. The percentage of learners having trouble focusing on academic work was 30%. In this regard, males found it more challenging to focus than females. In all, 14% reported feeling distant and withdrawn. Almost 3% of the learners wanted to drop out from school, while 6% wanted to skip school.

In short, it can be inferred that the majority of learners suffered from fear and anxiety. This was consistent with the general observations from other learners who confirmed that their peers suffered apprehension. Females were more than males in terms of symptoms. Fear and anxiety remained the most observed and experienced sense amongst female learners, a conclusion also reached by Burton and Leoschut (2013) who found females lived in anxiety more than males. In general learners suffered from difficulty in concentration. This being most likely a direct effect of anxiety and fear. Considering that females recorded higher numbers of victims of school violence, fear and anxiety could be a direct result of them being exposed (Burton and Leoschut 2013). Moreover, males were unlikely to express their emotions for fear of being viewed as sign of weakness.

**Table 5-11** Effects of Violence.

| Effects of violence on victims |                  |                                                           |                                                 |                         |                    |                          |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Name of School                 | Fear and anxiety | Disassociate or withdraw from contact with other learners | Have difficulty in concentrating on school-work | I stay away from school | Drop out of school | Not aware of any effects |
| School A                       | 13.89            | 9.26                                                      | 8.85                                            | 16                      | 0                  | 11.31                    |
| School B                       | 28.33            | 35.19                                                     | 37.17                                           | 24                      | 40                 | 28.05                    |
| School C                       | 44.44            | 44.44                                                     | 39.82                                           | 48                      | 20                 | 46.15                    |
| School D                       | 13.33            | 11.11                                                     | 14.16                                           | 12                      | 40                 | 14.48                    |

Table 5-11 in this study centres on examining the impact of violence on learners in the context of their respective schools. It is noteworthy that Schools B and C exhibited the

highest prevalence of emotional manifestations that included fear, anxiety, difficulties in maintaining concentration during school hours, and tendencies towards disassociation among their learners. These indicators align with established empirical knowledge regarding the effects of violence on individuals who have experienced trauma (Burton 2008; Burton and Leoschut 2013).

Consequently, one could reasonably contend that learners enrolled at these particular schools on the whole, grappled with the consequences of trauma. Significantly, the study also revealed a lack of discernible school policies designed to address trauma-related issues. Furthermore, the availability and efficacy of social workers within these schools seemed to be inconsistent, as reported by the participants. Although one of the four schools surveyed did employ a known social worker, it was noted that the individual carried dual responsibilities, concurrently serving as both a social worker and an instructor.

This situation raised a pertinent question on when these dual-role social workers had the opportunity to provide essential counselling and support to traumatised victims. This question gained additional significance with the realisation that some learners initially perceived the "peace club" as an organisation primarily focused on providing psychosocial support. Furthermore, the discussions held across all the surveyed schools predominantly revolved around the need for social support, prompting the involvement of a qualified social worker in the research process. In particular, Schools B and C emerged as having the highest number of learners experiencing trauma. In particular, School C lacked a dedicated social worker entirely, while at School B, the social worker's dual role as a counsellor and a teacher raised concerns about their capacity to effectively address the emotional well-being of the learners.

The absence of adequate psychosocial support within these schools was a possible contributing factor to the prolonged process of trauma healing, thereby perpetuating the enduring impact of strain on the learners. Resultantly, the effects of trauma, such as heightened levels of violence, diminished concentration, and withdrawal tendencies, persisted. It should be recognised that these schools were already grappling with resource and support constraints in their efforts to address issues related to school violence. This, in turn,

could elucidate the elevated prevalence of fear, anxiety, withdrawal behaviours, and difficulties in maintaining focus among the learner population.

### 5.2.9.1 Gender Comparison

**Table 5-12** Gender and Violence.

| Effects of violence                                       | Gender     |            | P-value |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|---------|
|                                                           | Female     | Male       |         |
| Feel anxious and fear                                     | 96         | 84         | 0.022   |
| Disassociate or withdraw from contact with other learners | 26         | 28         |         |
| Have difficulty in concentrating on schoolwork            | 49         | 64         |         |
| I stay away from school                                   | 7          | 18         |         |
| Drop out of school                                        | 5          | 5          |         |
| Not aware of any effects                                  | 129        | 92         |         |
| <b>Total</b>                                              | <b>312</b> | <b>291</b> |         |

There existed an association between gender and violence, as indicated by a significance value of  $p < 0.022$ . The empirical observations revealed that females tended to experience greater levels of fear and anxiety in comparison to males. This phenomenon can be ascribed to the idea that females exhibit heightened sensitivity when exposed to traumatic situations. In contrast, males tend to internalize their distress, possibly stemming from a perception of being used or an acceptance of certain irregularities in their lives. Furthermore, societal expectations may contribute to the diminished vulnerability of male victims, as expressions of fear and anxiety in males are often met with ridicule.

Male victims of violence also frequently exhibited symptoms of withdrawal, a common response among individuals who had experienced substantial victimisation. This pronounced tendency towards withdrawal may have adverse consequences on the academic performance of male learners, with potential implications for their educational outcomes. In summary, it was evident from the data that males bore a disproportionate burden of suffering in comparison to females in the context of violence-related experiences.

### **5.2.10 Section Summary**

In conclusion, the quantitative data was essential in achieving the first objective of the study which was to investigate the nature, extent, and consequences of violence in four schools located in Umlazi District, eThekweni Municipality. This provided baseline data which was used to further investigate the nature and extent of this phenomenon as this study utilised a sequential mixed methods approach. It was found that more than half of the learners were being victimised at least once a week. The common forms of violence occurring were assault, threats of violence and robberies. Sexual assault from teachers and learners had little significance together with cyberbullying. Consequences such as fear, anxiety, withdrawal and skipping school were recorded. Most of the victims were males. Furthermore, it also compared schools in terms of violence ranking and tried to explain the contributing factors as observed. This also formed the exploration phase of the research study. The qualitative section discusses the areas that could not be statistically explained. This being the strength of the mixed methods approach as they cover areas which one methodology omits.

### **5.3 Qualitative Data Interpretation**

This section presents the results of a study conducted in the Umlazi District, focusing on examining the incidence, severity, and ramifications of violence within three of four secondary schools. Data was collected through interviews with teachers, parents, and security guards using open-ended questions and observations. Thematic analysis was applied to the data, resulting in the identification of key themes and sub-themes, which provided a rich and descriptive portrayal of participants' experiences with school violence. The study included a total of 19 participants, comprising of four parents, seven teachers, and eight security guards, who were clustered into three sample groups based on their school of origin. Focus group data is discussed in the second part of the chapter. The qualitative findings contribute to the current understanding of school violence in the Umlazi District; it further provides insight into the lived experiences of those directly impacted by the phenomenon.

### 5.3.1 Analysis of Data

This section presents data obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers, security guards and parents.

### 5.3.2 Demographic Profiles

Table 5-13 provides the demographic profiles of the three sample groups:

**Table 5-13** Demographic Profiles.

| Pseudonym                                     | School code name | Number | Total participants |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------|--------|--------------------|
| <b>Sample 1</b><br><b>Teachers (T)</b>        | A (T-A#)         | 3      | 7                  |
|                                               | B (T-B#)         | 1      |                    |
|                                               | C (T-C#)         | 3      |                    |
|                                               | D (T-D#)         | 0      |                    |
| <b>Sample 2</b><br><b>Parents (P)</b>         | A (P-A#)         | 1      | 4                  |
|                                               | B (P-B#)         | 1      |                    |
|                                               | C (P-C#)         | 2      |                    |
|                                               | D (P-D#)         | 0      |                    |
| <b>Sample 3</b><br><b>Security guards (S)</b> | A (S-A#)         | 1      | 8                  |
|                                               | B (S-B#)         | 3      |                    |
|                                               | C (S-C#)         | 3      |                    |
|                                               | D (S-D#)         | 1      |                    |

### 5.3.3 Interviews

The following interview schedule contained questions that enabled all three groups to express their perspectives and personal encounters with violence in three of the four schools, and their thoughts on the future of peace clubs in schools. The questions included in the schedule were as follows:

### **Interview Guide for teachers, security guards and parents**

1. From your own experience, how do you describe the current situation in the school in terms of safety and violence?
2. What are the causes of violence around school?  
Probe: Do you know any person who was victimised, and what happened?
3. How does this violence affect you?
4. How does school-based violence affect learners?
5. Are there any programmes to deal with school violence at your school that you are aware of?  
Probe: If yes, what are they, and have they been effective?  
Probe: What challenges have been faced in administering these programmes?
6. Do you propose an alternative way of dealing with school violence in your class or school?  
Probe: If yes, why this approach?  
Probe: If no, why can you not propose an alternative method?
7. Have you ever heard of a peace club?  
Probe. If yes, what are your thoughts and its applicability in your school?  
Probe. If no, provide definition and ask their thoughts and if it could be useful in their school?

### **5.3.4 Process of Analysing Interviews**

Through the exploration of the information from participants, the process of analysing interview transcripts developed. This was informed by the experiences of conducting a pilot study as guided by the philosophy that data analysis gives voice to the interviewed (Harilal 2017: 81). Although there were concerns about how traditional coding methods of themes in transcripts could potentially alter acquired information, reporting was as accurate as possible. To ensure reliability, participants were given the opportunity to proofread transcripts alongside a native research assistant.

### **5.3.5 Data Analysis and Findings**

This section of the study centred on the analysis of findings derived from the collected data. The themes were based on the participants' responses to the in-depth interviews. Excerpts from the interviews were coded according to participant's demographic profiles.

So, for example, TPS-# means Teacher or Parent or Security guard - number of the participant. The themes and sub-themes were presented through verbatim extracts from participants.

### **5.3.6 Teachers' Interviews**

#### **5.3.6.1 Theme 1: Status of Schools**

Sub-themes: Safety concerns  
Discipline  
Helplessness

The data indicated varying levels of violence and aggression among learners, which directly affected the safety of both learners and teachers within the school premises. There also appeared to be a lack of disciplinary measures that could be taken against violent learners, which further perpetuated the problem. The need for better disciplinary measures, in support of teachers attempting to maintain order in the classrooms, and a broader societal effort to address the root causes of violence and aggression among learners was evident. The data suggests the existence of significant challenges in ensuring school safety and discipline in the high schools. The lack of disciplinary measures, fear of repercussions, and violent behaviour from learners made it difficult for teachers to maintain order and control in the classroom.

##### **5.3.6.1.1 Safety concerns**

The safety of learners and teachers within the school premises was a major concern at all three schools. There were reported cases of physical violence, bullying, and threats from learners towards both their peers and teachers. In some cases, the safety concerns were from external factors such as the surrounding communities, which contributed to the aggression of some learners. It was established that all three schools had countless reported cases of violence and aggression among learners, which contributed an unsafe environment for both learners and teachers. The violence often assumed different forms, such as physical violence, bullying, and threats from learners towards their peers and teachers. The behaviour was not limited to the school premises, but also extended to the



surrounding community, especially in the cases where learners resided in hostels which were reportedly aggressive environments. Data from the interviews confirmed the concerns as seen in the excerpts below:

T2 *"I saw one learner threatening a teacher after being reprimanded for disturbing lessons. The teacher could not react because he could have got into trouble and the learner was known to be violent too. After this incident I have never concerned myself with disciplining a learner as they are violent particularly male learners."*

T4 *"One teacher tried to discipline a child; the child went to get an inkabi and he came to threaten the educator in front of the learners. This happened during home time. Imagine being belittled in public and how he felt being threatened by a community member in front of learners. The next week or so it was a hot topic around school."*

T6 *"They can threaten you and get away with it. Sometimes you can see that they have taken drugs during break time and now they come into class causing all sorts of trouble. I was threatened, I stood my ground because I am a male teacher and I don't tolerate nonsense; imagine the female teachers? We are in a violent township and this we experience it too in classrooms."*

#### **5.3.6.1.2 Discipline**

The participants pointed out that there was a lack of disciplinary measures directed towards violent learners. This was due to fear of repercussions such as the Department of Education acting against the teacher, or the parent defending their child's behaviours. The data established that male learners were particularly more violent and often got away with threats and aggressive behaviour towards their teachers. Lack of discipline frustrated teachers and encouraged a culture of impunity among learners. The views were as follows:

T5 *"These kids are out of control. They can say, do whatever they want because they know you cannot do anything. "*

T7 *"There is nothing I can do but to let them be. They do whatever they want in class, and I cannot chase them out."*

#### **5.3.6.1.3 Helplessness**

In their responses, the teachers indicated they had become exhausted and disheartened by the lack of support and disciplinary measures, which had resulted in them surrendering

and not attempting to discipline learners. Also, the lack of control over learners was frustrating for teachers and resulted in feelings of helplessness. Teachers who had been threatened or intimidated by learners felt that there was no point in attempting to enforce discipline, which created a cycle of violence and aggression. Sentiments from these interviews are captured in the excerpts below:

T1 *"You, as a teacher, you cannot do anything because your hands are tied. If you try to chase them out, they refuse to leave class expecting a physical confrontation while from an administrative perspective I am denying the child his/her right to education as if I do not have rights as a teacher too. So, in the end, I let them be and let them do whatever they want."*

T4 *"They know they can do whatever they want, and if you report and contact their parents there will be no action; instead the educator will be persecuted. For the sake of your peace, you let it go."*

T5 *"If you beat them, the DoE will fire you, and if you tell the parent, they will accuse you of lying because they say their kid behaves very well. Some even demand that the school transfers you."*

T7 *"I have no other way of controlling these children – my hands are tied by the department and children's rights and the law too. Sometimes, although I threaten, it does not help."*

### **5.3.6.2 Theme 2: Causes of Violence**

Sub-themes:

- Lack of discipline and guidance at home
- Peer pressure and drug/alcohol use
- Broken school system
- Violence in the surrounding community
- Legal limitations
- Social media

The interviews revealed that violence in schools was a complex issue influenced by a wide range of factors that included individual learner behaviour, the local community, and systemic issues within the educational system. These themes provided a useful starting point for further research and interventions aimed at addressing violence in schools.

#### **5.3.6.2.1 Lack of Discipline and Guidance at Home**

Participants emphasised that the behaviour of learners in school was largely influenced by their upbringing. They suggested that learners who lacked discipline and guidance from parents were more likely to engage in disruptive and violent behaviours at school. Remarks from the interviews with the teachers were captured in the excerpts below:

*T2 “These kids are simply out of control. They do not have any guidance or discipline; this is causing all of this trouble. We have absent parents, a broken society, and a broken school system. This is resulting in violence. The society is feeding these kids drugs; parents are not taking care of their children. We are expected to fix this mess. We cannot cope with the pressure of work and let alone disciplining someone’s child who they have failed on their own to discipline.”*

*T4 “For some of these children, it is about how they are brought up. They lack discipline and guidance. With some learners you can tell that they have not been taught manners and how to behave. If they fail at home, how can we teachers succeed? These same learners, if you report them to their parents, they will protect them and accuse the teacher of fabricating stories.”*

*T5 “The problem is where they come from. They are not disciplined at home and who am I to discipline the child if the parent is failing? They do whatever they want at their homes, and they will do the same here in the school. You see the problem? I cannot teach and at the same time try to control someone’s child, I have a job to do.”*

#### **5.3.6.2.2 Peer Pressure and Drug/Alcohol Use**

Participants identified peer pressure and drug/alcohol use as factors contributing to violence in schools. They submitted that learners who used drugs or alcohol were more aggressive and difficult to control. Moreover, peer pressure was another factor encouraging learners to engage in disruptive behaviours. The excerpts below reflect the views of the informants:

*T1 “This issue of drug use has caused mayhem in our school. When learners take drugs, they become aggressive and hard to control.”*

*T3 “Peer pressure is causing some of these children to engage in these disruptive activities. I would say the increased use of drugs and alcohol consumption is causing all of this mess in our school.”*

T4 *“...In addition, some of these learners are taking drugs, they smoke during break time. Once they smoke and take drugs, you know that, as an educator after break time, you cannot conduct lessons at all. They will be laughing and just disturbing classes.”*

Below is a timeline establishing the pattern of drug use among learners during the time of research in one of the schools (T4):

**Table 5-14** Drug Usage Timeline

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> term | Increased number of learners taking drugs as the term began.<br>Blue pill drug.                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> term | It was reported to have been worse than 1 <sup>st</sup> term. Learners are more into drugs now<br>A new drug called <i>Zanax</i> being taken by learners. They mix it with water. 4 rand per pill and 10 rands for 3<br>An increase in number of learners taking drugs and smoking. |

#### 5.3.6.2.3 Broken school system

A participant from School A shared that the school system was broken, thus contributing to violence in schools. The participants maintained that the education system was not providing adequate support and resources for teachers to effectively discipline learners and manage disruptive behaviours. Relating to this issue, the comments below reflect the informants' opinions:

T2 *“We have absent parents, a broken society, and a broken school system. This is resulting in violence.”*

T7 *“We have parents who do not respect us, so their children do not respect us. The rules in place limit our power. Then there is little support from the Education Department. These children do not respect the school system; therefore, they do what they want.”*

#### 5.3.6.2.4 Violence in the Surrounding Community

Participants argued that the violent environment in the surrounding communities influenced learner's behaviour at school. They claimed that learners who witnessed violence daily were more likely to engage in similar behaviours. This was communicated through the views captured in the excerpts below:

T4 *“... The same community encourages some learners to vandalise school property. For example, some learners steal school property which will be used in their homes. Some of these people in informal settlements cannot afford to buy property; hence, the school is an easy target for properties like chairs. When some community members see the school like this, how do you think the learners will take their schoolwork? They will not be serious. We are also surrounded by violent community members. As you can see, we have hostels and informal settlements surrounding us. These learners witness violence on a daily basis. As a result, violent behaviour is part of their life.”*

T6 *“Look where we are teaching and the environment from which they come. Umlazi is dangerous my brother. You see, these children see violence every day – people fighting, killing, shooting, and stabbing each other. So, being violent becomes part of them. They will act like what they see in their communities. There are drugs there, girls selling their bodies. They will bring all that into the school. Think what it will be like? Chaos all over.”*

#### **5.3.6.2.5 Legal Limitations**

One participant believed that the laws put in place to protect learners' rights to education were contributing to violence in schools. The legal limitations made it difficult for teachers to expel disruptive learners or effectively eject disruptive learners from the classrooms. The opinions shared on this are reflected in the excerpts presented below:

T7 *“The educational system is broken; the laws protect the children; this creates room for all the problems you see in schools. You cannot easily expel a learner for misbehaving because of the laws put in place. At the top they make useless laws that make our job difficult, and their children do not attend these schools. I am left in a difficult position. Imagine, I cannot chase out a drunk learner who is disturbing class because I will be violating his/her rights to basic education, but is it fair? It is as if the laws are meant to oppress us teachers.”*

T2: *“it’s hard being a teacher these days, the law is against you. So, it’s hard for a teacher to instil discipline.”*

T3: *“We are not allowed to beat the children; however, we were not given working alternatives to punish the children, so their actions go unpunished.”*

#### **5.3.6.2.6 Social Media**

One participant acknowledged the rise and influence of social media on learner behaviour. Challenges particularly from popular social network platforms such as TikTok were taking centre stage. During data collection, the impact of TikTok challenges on

learner behaviour was observed. Confirmation of this development was drawn from sentiments expressed in the extracts that follow:

T4 *“There are now challenges on Tik Tok, such as Umlando challenge, throw an apple to a teacher.”*

T5: *“Children care more about social media than school. These phones disrupt classes, and they are at times recording during lessons.”*

### **5.3.6.3 Theme 3: Personal Effects of Violence**

Sub-themes: Fear and vulnerability  
Selective engagement  
Gender experiences

From the interviews, it was concluded that teachers experienced different feelings through exposure to violence and disruptive behaviour by learners from their respective schools. Fear and vulnerability, gender impact and selective engagement were the main themes that captured the teachers' experiences and perspectives as expressed in different responses. These themes highlighted the existence of challenges faced by teachers in their effort to deliver quality education.

#### **5.3.6.3.1 Fear and Vulnerability**

Teachers expressed fear and vulnerability when dealing with learners who exhibit violent and disruptive behaviour. At all three schools, concern for their own safety and well-being was raised. Reports of feelings of powerless and inability to control the learners and enforce discipline were made. This in turn affected teacher confidence and morale to effectively carry out their jobs. The fear of physical harm was mentioned by several teachers. This appeared as a significant barrier to their work. The reactions captured in the following excerpts sum up the teachers' feelings:

T1 *“It affects me because I do not feel in control. I cannot do or say anything to a learner this making me vulnerable to any form of danger.”*

T2 *“This violence and disturbances affect all of us. I am afraid of working with these learners.”*

T5 *"Ahh, I am afraid of these learners. What if one day one will stab me? Some of them are gang members and they are encouraged to be violent. So why should I risk myself?"*

T6 *"I am just afraid of correcting them because they are capable of doing anything."*

#### **5.3.6.3.2 Selective Engagement**

Selective engagement was another theme that emerged from the data. Educators shared that learners who exhibited positive behaviour and a desire to learn were often given attention. Some of the teachers expressed a willingness to work with learners who are motivated to learn and are not disruptive. Focus and efforts are put on learners who are receptive to their teaching and do not cause problems. This theme highlights the selective engagement strategy that some teachers adopt as a coping mechanism to deal with disruptive behaviour. Evidence from the interviews was witnessed in such comments that follow:

T7 *"I work with those who really want to learn, and I will not ask anything else. I let them be and I just go home, they are hopeless."*

T1: *"We move with those who want to move. This means we care only about the learners who want to learn. Some learners care about school and for those I put in the effort to teach them."*

#### **5.3.6.3.3 Gender Experiences**

Observations revealed that some teachers in the study felt more vulnerable and fearful due to their gender. Female teachers relied on male colleagues for support in dealing with disruptive learners. An in-depth analysis could explore the impact of gender experiences on the way teachers interact with learners and their colleagues. It was observed that often teachers reached a breaking point and did not want anything to do with the learners due to their erratic behaviour. A female pointed out that it is hopeless because the learners were into drugs and out of control. She had given up, and in such a state of mind, the effect on the quality of education delivered within the schools was a serious issue. Whether this reflected the general staff feelings and kind of learners at the school was also cause for concern. The excerpts that follow shed some light on the teachers' sentiments:

T4 *"If it gets out of hand sometimes, I call a male teacher to come and assist me in returning class order."*

T5 *"As a woman I let them be. They respect some male teachers, but they give women little respect."*

T2 *"Yes, I have observed some of my female colleagues having a tough time."*

#### **5.3.6.4 Theme 4: Effects of Violence on Learners**

Sub-themes: Negative impact on learners' academic performance

Fear and anxiety among learners

Desertion

From the educator's perspective, violence had significant and far-reaching consequences on learners and teachers in Umlazi District schools. It had negatively affected learners' academic performance, bred fear and anxiety, and culminated in a desire to abscond from school. The interviews gathered that teachers were also affected by the violence and had developed feelings of helplessness and frustration in the face of challenges. The urgent need to address and prevent violence in schools and create a safe, supportive learning environment for all learners was apparently important.

##### **5.3.6.4.1 Negative Impact on Learners' Academic Performance**

Across all three high schools, the effects of violence on learners were perceived as detrimental to academic performance. Educators indicated that learners were unable to concentrate on schoolwork, resulting in poor grades and potentially poor matric-performing schools. The disruption caused by violence was preventing learners from receiving quality education. It made it even harder for learners to hold realistic academic ambitions. The teachers' comments on the issue were aptly summed in the ensuing statements:

T2 *"...this affects their grades in classes as they cannot concentrate. This also affects the quality of education they receive, ultimately failing in school or not attaining high grades for their matric."*



T4 *“Some might want to concentrate, but the environment does not allow them to do so ... As a result, they have poor grades in the end not because they are stupid, but because they cannot concentrate fully because of the disruptions.”*

T5 *“It affects them when they want to concentrate, you can see some learners who are serious, but the environment is wrong. I will fear that they will fail...”*

T6 *“You see other learners copying that bad behaviour and it is sad because their grades will drop.”*

#### **5.3.6.4.2 Fear and Anxiety Among Learners**

Teachers from the three high schools intimated that learners were experiencing fear and anxiety because of the violence. They shared that learners did not feel safe, thus affecting their ability to focus on receiving class content. In some cases, educators indicated that learners were afraid of being victimised or bullied by their peers if they voiced their concern, thereby contributing to a sense of fear and anxiety. Fear and anxiety often have a long-lasting effect on the learners' well-being and mental health, potentially impacting academic performance. The reactions during interviews pointed out that:

T3 *“Learners do not feel safe in our school. Most of the time they are scared, especially those in the lower grades; they are afraid of bullying and victimisation.”*

T7 *“I have observed that it affects them. They want to learn, but they cannot voice that because they will be bullied. So they just keep quiet and expect you as the teacher to restore order. and me, I cannot do it.”*

T4 *“Yes, learners are affected. There is a general atmosphere of anxiety around the school. This affects learners and the staff too. We do not know when trouble might start. Some learners have to leave before school ends because they had a fight with one learner, and they are afraid that the other learner might invite gangsters.”*

#### **5.3.6.4.3 Desertion**

According to some educators, some learners expressed a desire to leave their current school to find a more conducive and better environment. Learners believed their current school did not provide them with the quality education and support they need to succeed. However, financial constraints were actively preventing some learners from transferring to a safer and different school, leaving them feeling trapped and helpless. This is reflected in the excerpts below:

T1 *"It affects learners as they want to leave school and be in a better environment."*

T4 *"...worse they do not have the financial resources to move into a new school that they think is better..."*

T5 *"...I encourage them to transfer to another school."*

#### **5.3.6.5 Theme 5: Current Security Shortfalls**

Sub-themes: Limited security measures  
Lack of proactive measures  
Police involvement  
Risky monitoring

The data from the interviews suggested that the high schools lacked comprehensive security programmes to address teachers' social-emotional needs and to provide proactive measures to prevent violent incidents. Limited resources appeared to hinder the schools' ability to implement effective security measures beyond monitoring and occasional police involvement. The preceding themes highlighted the need for high schools to implement proactive, comprehensive security programmes that address the social-emotional needs of learners, while considering the available resources.

##### **5.3.6.5.1 Limited Security Measures**

Observations showed that security measures at the schools were limited and inadequate to fully address the needs of the learners. This was witnessed in the opinions below:

T4 *"We only have a security measure whereby we stand in corners to monitor learner activity..."*

T6 *"During study time, we sit at strategic corners and try to control them."*

##### **5.3.6.5.2 Lack of Proactive Measures**

Educators noted that the schools did not implement proactive procedures to prevent incidents of violence and to promote a safe and peaceful learning environment. This was evident from their reactions to the questions on the issue:

T1 *"We do not have active programmes that promote peace among learners."*

T2 *"There are no such programmes in our school."*

#### **5.3.6.5.3 Police Involvement**

The teachers acknowledged that the police visit to address learners at all three high schools about the consequences of violence. However, the level of involvement was inconsistent, suggesting a lack of sustained support. This was reflected in the following feedback:

T3 *"Police come and talk to learners from time to time. But his statement does not corroborate with what was said by the other educators. The problem of these schools is that of being under-resourced; hence, they cannot invest in other extra curriculum activities. The main activity for these schools is sport."*

T5 *"We have the police coming to talk to the learners..."*

#### **5.3.6.5.4 Risky Monitoring**

Monitoring of learners was risky because of indiscipline and violent reactions towards school authority. The need for alternative methods of supervision could not be over emphasised:

T4 *"We do monitor learner activity, though sometimes it is risky because you would not know how a learner would react after they notice that you saw them smoking..."*

#### **5.3.6.6 Theme 6: Alternative Programmes Perception**

Sub-themes: Lack of resources and high workload  
Lack of trust and involvement from parents  
Scepticism towards alternative programmes

From the interviews, the importance of having alternative programmes to help manage learner behaviour was apparent. However, there was some scepticism about alternative mitigation programmes that made it difficult to implement changes that could improve the situation. The themes that emerged from the interviews suggested that teachers from the three schools faced significant challenges in their work, including high workload, lack of

resources, and a lack of trust and involvement from parents. The themes discussed below shed light on the issue:

#### **5.3.6.6.1 Lack of Resources and High Workload**

In their answers, educators expressed frustration and anger at the overwhelming amount of work and felt that adding more responsibilities would be unmanageable. Additionally, some teachers described the situation as stressful and a hostile working environment due to the schools' lack of resources. It is hard to tell the amount of workload teachers carried. It was a case of just doing what they were employed to do, educate, and go home in a ritualistic manner. The comments they made on the subject were insightful about their feelings:

T2 *"No, I do not have any idea, and I would not even attempt to because of my workload; we are understaffed."*

T4 *"I would not suggest any because the work is too much to bear. I have over 300 learners to attend to. I have to mark, submit the marks, meet deadlines and teach. How can I take on an extra activity?"*

T6 *"... I do not know. I have a lot of work to; I do not have time for that."*

#### **5.3.6.6.2 Lack of Trust and Involvement from Parents**

Educators maintained the position that parents were supposed to be more involved in their children's education, and to trust the teachers to carry out their duties. Some responses suggested that teachers felt that parents were not doing enough to support their children's education, which contributed to the difficulties they faced in the classroom in delivering and producing quality learners. The teachers' sentiments are presented in the excerpts below:

T1 *"I think parents should work with us to return order into the school."*

T7 *"I cannot think of any, but parents should be more involved with the school, and at least trust us with their children."*

T5 *"This not just a school problem, it's a community problem. We need the help of community members to be more involved and the police to be more involved."*

### 5.3.6.6.3 Scepticism Towards Alternative Programmes

On the issue alternative programmes aimed at making a significant difference in the classroom, doubt was detected. Perhaps, it was an indication of resistance to change due to the already high workload they faced. This position was reflected in their reactions to the inquiry from comments such as:

T3 *"No, I would not suggest any; the current programmes we have are good enough."*

T5 *"I do not have any idea because I do not think anything can change these kids."*

### 5.3.6.7 Theme 7: Peace Clubs

Sub-themes: Lack of awareness  
Potential benefits  
Implementation challenges  
External support

From the ensuing discussion, it was evident that, although participants were generally positive about the potential benefits of peace clubs, there existed possible challenges that needed addressing for the successful implementation of programmes. These included raising awareness and interest among learners and teachers and addressing the broader socio-economic challenges such as drug and alcohol abuse faced by the community. Additionally, the need for external support in the implementation of initiatives was emphasised. The importance of collaboration with external organisations and resources was critical.

#### 5.3.6.7.1 Lack of Awareness

Participants indicated that they had never heard of peace clubs before the interview. The lack of awareness and promotion of such initiatives within the school community was likely to face setbacks as seen in the reactions that follow:

T1 *"Honestly, I have never heard of such a club. From what you have told me it does look interesting..."*

T2 *"I do not know what is called a peace club."*

T3 *"I have never heard of such a club..."*

#### **5.3.6.7.2 Potential Benefits**

Despite the lack of knowledge about peace clubs, participants generally expressed positive views about the potential benefits of such programmes. They highlighted that the programme could benefit troubled learners, provide better guidance on conflict resolution, and offer a supportive space for learners. They made their opinions clear through statements such as:

T1 *"I think it might help some of those troubled learners in our school, be it boys or girls."*

T3 *"I think we really need such programmes because we have learners who have no discipline and some of them come from troubled families. They need support and better guidance on how to solve conflicts."*

T7 *"From what you have told me, I think it can help knock some sense into some of these children."*

#### **5.3.6.7.3 Implementation Challenges**

Potential challenges associated with the implementation of peace clubs, including lack of interest from learners, teachers and the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse among learners were identified. Responding to the question on this aspect, participants had this to say:

T2 *"...After hearing what it does, I say we really need such programmes in our schools, but the problem is, will the learners be interested? I also thought would the teachers be interested in mentoring such activities or they will be viewed as a waste of time?"*

T3 *"... we are used to sports in this area."*

T4 *"I have never heard of such a club, and I do not know if it will work here. The drug, smoking and alcohol abuse is too much. Some of them are just hopeless. Well, you can try, I have tried, and I am tired of all of this. I wish I could just move out of this place."*

T6 *"Well, I have never heard of it, but I cannot say it will help or not. You can try."*

#### **5.3.6.7.4 External support**

Some participants emphasised the importance of external support and involvement in the implementation of peace clubs. The invitation of an outsider to talk to learners was

potentially helpful in addressing some challenges associated with the implementation of such programmes. This was communicated during the interviews from answers such as:

T7 *“...they really need someone to talk to them who is an outsider.*

### **5.3.7 Parents’ Interviews**

#### **5.3.7.1 Theme 1: Status of Schools**

Sub-theme: Safety concerns  
Financial constraints  
Parental responsibility  
Comparisons with other schools

The study found that parents were quite concerned about the quality of the schools their children attended. Even though some interviewees reported some level of happiness with their child's school, others expressed grave concern for the safety and wellbeing of their children. Thus, themes such as safety worries, budgetary restrictions, parental responsibility, and school comparison were tackled.

##### **5.3.7.1.1 Safety Concerns**

Interviewees acknowledged some concern about their child's safety at school, particularly considering local drug use, violence, and crime. Several respondents believed that their child's present school was unsafe, while others were concerned about transferring their child to a school that would be riskier. This was captured in some of the answers given in response to questions on the issue:

P1 *“It is a scary situation, I fear for my child because I know the school itself is not good because learners are involved in alcohol abuse, and they smoke dagga too much. You hear about violence...”*

P3 *“This school scares me a lot because of what my child tells me what happens during school time. I always pray for my kids. As you can see, it is close to a hostel where you find all the killers, [and] drug lords, and next to it is an informal settlement where all [sorts] of crimes are committed.”*

P4 *"The level of school violence at that school worries me at times. Sometimes you hear the stories from my neighbours about what would have happened, and I ask myself whether that is really happening. And I really fear for the children."*

#### **5.3.7.1.2 Financial Constraints**

Participants raised concerns regarding the cost of moving a child to a better school. This revealed that financial issues constrained some parents' ability to give their children the quality education they wanted. Umlazi is a low-income district dominated by families living in poverty. The feelings of entrapment in difficult living conditions were evident these comments:

P1 *"...but there is nothing I can do because I cannot afford to transfer my child to a better school..."*

P3 *"Do you think I will be okay with my child being in such environment? I would want to transfer my child, but it will be expensive for me..."*

#### **5.3.7.1.3 Parental Responsibility**

The interviews revealed that parents had a responsibility to assist their children's education and to deal with problems in the school environment. Evidently, some parents were not entirely behind the school's leadership. Some parents, according to the participants, avoided their obligations, putting the onus on the school's leadership and staff. As a result, there was conflict between educators and learners due to inadequate mechanisms in place for children's guidance. These views were reflected in the following comments:

P2 *"I think the school does not have enough support from us as parents and the community. Some parents shift their responsibilities to the school yet, at the same time, they do not want their children rebuked for doing wrong."*

P3 *"Some parents or guardians do teach their children manners and good behaviour. You know, Ubuntu, just to respect people."*

#### **5.3.7.1.4 Comparisons with other Schools**

Based on what they had heard or their personal experiences, participants compared their child's school time with other schools. This implied that parents were aware of the



disparities in educational quality offered at different schools, and they wished to provide their child with a better education. One respondent added that their child could be refused admission if it was discovered that they were transferring from a problematic school. Due to probable behavioural problems at the school, the learner's entry would be prohibited by the administration. Therefore, the learner would be forced to attend the unpleasant school as shown in the reactions:

P3 *"Some schools, if they know the child is from this school, they will find a way of keeping your child away from their school because they do not want any trouble."*

P5 *"Well I think the school is better compared to the other schools and the stories I hear about them."*

### **5.3.7.2 Theme 2: Causes of Violence**

Sub-themes: Parental neglect and absence

Availability and influence of drugs and alcohol

Gang culture and intimidation

Socio-economic background and communities

A thorough analysis of the responses exposed that several factors contributed to school violence. Parental abandonment and absence, parental availability, the effects of alcohol and drugs, the presence of gangs and the culture of intimidation, the socio-economic background, and the home environment had profound influence on learners' characters. Below is a detailed discussion of each theme.

#### **5.3.7.2.1 Parental Neglect and Absence**

Regarding parents' influence on children's behaviour, parental absence or neglect affected violent learner behaviour in schools. Participants highlighted that parents were too preoccupied with earning money and neglected their children's wellbeing. This resulted in problematic behaviour. It may be concluded that learner violence was influenced by the lack of parents' supervision, interest, and involvement in their children's life. It was determined that effective parenting practices and obligations were essential for reducing school violence. In schools, learners' bad behaviour was driven by a dysfunctional family setup. The suppositions that appeared to confirm this notion were:

P1 *“This violence in school goes back to the child’s family and community. Their family has irresponsible parents and uncles, so obviously this child will misbehave. I would say absent parents are causing the violence.”*

P2 *“The parents who do not teach their children how to behave are part of this problem of violence. They spend their time away looking for money and forgetting their children who become troublesome.”*

P4 *“There are children who are being looked after by grandmothers who are too old to supervise. You see, it’s our culture for a parent to leave children with the children’s grandparents to raise the children.”*

#### **5.3.7.2.2 Availability and Influence of Drugs and Alcohol**

The consumption of drugs and alcohol appeared to encourage aggressive behaviour in schools. According to the respondents, alcohol and drugs were easily accessible and widely available to learners in communities. The parents also emphasised the influence of gangs, who lured learners into drug and alcohol usage through recruitment. Learners' access to and use of drugs, alcohol, and other substances, and outside influences such as gang activity, were a factor in violent behaviour in schools. This suggested the necessity of addressing problems associated with substance misuse and the influence of unfavourable peer groups. Poignant views on this issue were measured by these responses:

P3 *“For me, it’s the drugs and alcohol which are being sold all over, and you see that these learners have easy access to them. Drugs, especially, have over-run our communities; many young boys are just getting hooked up on drugs and they will do anything to get these drugs. Again, this causing all the violent behaviour.”*

P4 *“I think the root cause of all of this violence is the drugs that are flooding our communities. Obviously, when someone is intoxicated, they become violent and this is exactly what these kids are doing.”*

#### **5.3.7.2.3 Gang Culture and Intimidation**

Gangs in schools, and their impact on the adoption of aggressive behaviour, were another emergent theme. Participants reported that gangs were aggressively enlisting new

members through threats and coercion of educators and learners in and around school premises. This revealed that gang culture and learners' anxiety over gang-related violence were factors in their exhibition of aggressive and abusive behaviour. Therefore, it was necessary to address gang-related activities and provide a welcoming, safe learning environment where learners are not subjected to gang influence or coercion. The interviews brought to attention the educators' concerns on the developments through answers such as:

P2 *"... I blame those who sell drugs and alcohol to these learners; they cause this violence."*

P3 *"These gangs are recruiting them, and you know gangs are violent. This is causing violence in and outside the school premises."*

P4 *"Now we have gangs recruiting our kids, and when they have a problem at school, they call these gangs to come and intimidate other learners and teachers. Obviously, with such power, they become very abusive and aggressive because they know they have back-up. This is causing all the violence and madness we see in schools."*

#### **5.3.7.2.4 Socio-Economic Background and Communities**

The learner's socio-economic status and community had an impact on their behaviour in an educational environment. Some learners, according to the parents and guardians, came from unstable homes where problems such as substance misuse or violence were common, which had a long-term influence on their personality. Furthermore, because of the communities' inherent aggression, violence had become a way of life. It emerged that community and family socio-economic conditions had a bearing on aggressive learner behaviours. To end violence in schools, it is necessary to address socio-economic disparities and to offer assistance to learners from unstable family settings.

P1 *"Their children will adopt any behaviour because they do not have guidance. With the community, it is very violent, and these children are used to this violence, so they see violence as a way of life, yet that is wrong. I think they are traumatised by violence."*

P5 *"I think the cause of all this violence is the background. Ask these kids where they come from, and it will explain why they behave the way they do. Some kids come from good backgrounds, and they live what they have been taught. Now, some other kids come from unstable families, and they practice what they see. Imagine a house of drunkards,*

*drug abusers, violent family members or community. So, this could be the cause of all the violence you see in schools.”*

### **5.3.7.3 Theme 3: Personal Effects of Violence**

Sub-themes: Anxiety and fear

Lack of trust

Behavioural concerns

Desires to move away from violent areas

The responses on the issue of personal experiences of violence reflected a negative impact of violence the phenomenon in schools on parents' psychological well-being and their perceptions of school safety. The findings suggest that parents were deeply concerned about their children's safety and well-being in schools and were frustrated by the lack of action taken by the education system to address these issues. Anxiety and fear for their children's safety, behaviour concerns and school transfer were emerging themes discussed below.

#### **5.3.7.3.1 Anxiety and Fear**

Due to the high levels of violence and crime in the community and schools, parents expressed their concern and dread for their children's safety. They continuously hoped that their children would return home safely and were worried about possible harm that might occur to them while they were at school. Every day, lives were affected by the fear and anxiety that even persists after school hours. As a result of the violence and unrest at schools, parents voiced a sense of helplessness. They believed they have no power over the circumstances, and there is little they can do to safeguard their children. Their anxiety and concern for their child's safety was aggravated by the feelings of helplessness. Fear and anxiety, and a lack of trust in the education system were a constant threat to the well-being of parents.

P1 *“I can say I will be anxious sometimes because I will be wondering if they are okay. This is an environment where, as a parent, you should be confident that your child is 100 percent safe.”*

P2 *“...violence in schools affects me psychologically. You will always be on the edge wondering if your kids are okay.”*

P4 *"Of course it affects me. I fear for my child's safety at school. Have you been reading the news? Recently, they burnt a car. What has become of our children?"*

P5 *"It leaves me with a sense of anxiety because you are not sure what your child is going through at school."*

#### **5.3.7.3.2 Lack of Trust**

Some parents indicated a lack of faith in the education system's ability to safeguard and support their children's academic development. They believed that the system had not adequately addressed the problem of violence and bullying in schools. Questions emerged on the effectiveness of the system to eliminate bullying and other unbecoming behaviours. Some parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the neighbourhood and police, complaints were made about law enforcement, with gangs, robbery, and murder overtaking communities. They believed that the issue of violence in schools and the community was made worse by the absence of police officers and other effective security protocols at schools. Respondents' feelings on the issue were contained in some reactions such as:

P1 *"You know, you just lack confidence in the system which is meant to protect and help our children grow."*

P4 *"Our schools are not safe anymore."*

P3 *"...you know that your kids are in a violent environment. If I am scared to walk around freely in my section, what more with my kids who walk to school and come back every day? So, I will just be hoping that they are okay, and that they will come back home unharmed."*

P5 *"From time to time, I have to ask them if they are okay, because I cannot trust the school. Some teachers are abusive just like other learners. Recently, the school was shut because of the corporal punishment which was banned and why are they still practising it?"*

#### **5.3.7.3.3 Behavioural Concerns**

It was noted that some parents were concerned about how the widespread incidents of violence and drug addiction in schools could affect their children's behaviour and

wellbeing. Parents feared that their children might act aggressively or violently at home, and they were unsure about how to address the issue.

P2 “...at the same time, you worry about their behaviour because of the drugs and alcohol in school ... You see, with those bullied kids, they become aggressive and violent in the home, and you wonder what is wrong, yet the problem is that your child is being bullied at school.”

P3 “I am afraid that my child will pick up a drug habit which will lead them to crime.”

#### **5.3.7.3.4 Desires to Move Away from Violent Areas**

One parent expressed the desire to move away from dangerous neighbourhoods such as Umlazi. They believed that their children's safety was at risk due to the environment's excessive commotion. They yearned to move to safer locations where their children could grow up and receive better quality education without danger. The sentiments were explicitly made in these responses:

P1 “Honestly, I just wish I could move away from Umlazi – everything is just too hectic here. There are no police, it is thugs doing whatever they want, robbing killing and shooting...”

P5 “The neighbourhood is filled with violence and drugs. I would love to move to a better neighbourhood. Look, you can do everything as a parent to teach your child but influences from outside will corrupt them. That is my fear.”

#### **5.3.7.4 Theme 4: Effects of Violence on Learners**

Sub-themes: Changes in behaviour  
Trauma  
Poor academic performance

The respondents were worried about the effects of school violence on children's wellbeing and academic performance, and opportunities for the future. Accordingly, some parents had observed alterations in their children's behaviour and took steps to resolve the problems. The information also emphasised how crucial it was for parents to recognise the warning signs of violence, and to take pre-emptive action to save the children. The study produced the following themes:

#### **5.3.7.4.1 Changes in Behaviour**

Parents claimed that when their children experienced bullying or were exposed to violence in school, there was a notable behaviour change in them. Aggression, withdrawal, lack of interest in school, impatience, and sorrow were the changes. The parents acted because they perceived these changes as warning indicators that something was wrong. One-on-one interactions with their children were part of this action. Some explanations from the interviews were:

P1 *"I can see that their behaviour changes. If the child is being bullied especially, they become aggressive. It is like they take out their frustration on petty things."*

P2 *"The major sign that your child is being bullied is the change in behaviour. You find that a once happy child is now quiet and sad all the time, then you ask your child, 'Is everything okay?'"*

P3 *"I know of one child in our area – he was bullied a lot – and one day he lost it and took a stone and hit another learner who was abusing him. Luckily, he did not get hurt."*

P5 *"My child was bullied; he became withdrawn, sad, and he did not want to go to school, he was asking to be transferred."*

#### **5.3.7.4.2 Trauma**

A parent said that children who see violence experience trauma. They observed that their kids had trouble adjusting to their experiences and were quick to lash out and became irritated and aggressive. Trauma was a significant contributor to behavioural changes, and it affected academic performance. Information was provided from the excerpt below:

P3 *"Yes, violence affects our children, especially when they are victims of violence. They become traumatised, they start getting irritated easily, and they become very aggressive."*

#### **5.3.7.4.3 Poor Academic Performance**

Respondents expressed concern about how school violence potentially affected the academic achievement of children. They observed that, when children were exposed to violence, their grades started to suffer; some even dropped out of school. The parents

considered a child's academic accomplishment to be a key indicator of their future success and general wellbeing. This was echoed in the following remarks:

P1 *"In some cases, you can see the loss of interest in attending school; they become withdrawn."*

P2 *"Violence really affects these learners. They lose interest in school; their grades start dropping, and this really worries any parent."*

P4 *"...He had an arrogant behaviour and an 'I know it all attitude.' As a result, he started smoking and he failed school. He had so much potential; I thought he could have done better in life."*

### **5.3.7.5 Theme 5: Current Security Shortfalls**

#### **5.3.7.5.1 Lack of security awareness**

It was noted that the police were less strategically involved in maintaining order in schools, and they had a poor understanding of the security and safety procedures in place at the scene. It was determined that additional details were required to properly comprehend the issue and any possible areas for improvement. The details were not voluntarily provided by the participants. There was some curiosity about parental involvement in school matters as a result. The responses from parents were analysed in the section below. The analysis focused on non-verbal cues and implicit meanings provided by the participants:

P1 *"... I am not aware of any besides having a security guard by the gate."*

This statement suggested that the parent was not aware of any security measures or protocols in place at their local school, aside from the presence of a security guard by the gate. This indicated a lack of knowledge and involvement in security matters at their school.

P2 *"Yes, we have a community forum that started recently to engage with the school to help them fight drug abuse that happens during break time. And I know that the police come to schools."*



These statements indicated that there was a community forum in place that worked with the school to address drug abuse that occurred during break time. The speaker was aware that police officers came to their school, which suggested that parents knew something about school safety and security efforts.

P3 *"I know the police come and talk to the learners."*

This statement suggests that the police visited the location and engaged with learners in some way. It is unclear from the statement what the specific nature of these conversations were or what they were intended to achieve.

P4 *"The police come from time to time to talk to the learners."*

This response is similar to the previous one, but with the addition of "from time to time." This may suggest that the police visits were not regular or consistent, but rather occur sporadically.

P5 *"I know the police visit our children and talk to them about violence, drug and alcohol abuse."*

From this answer, the indication was that the police visited the location and specifically engaged with children about violence, drug use, and alcohol abuse. This suggested that the police were involved in efforts to promote safety and wellness among young people around schools.

#### **5.3.7.6 Theme 6: Perception of Alternative Programmes**

The discussion revealed that parents had no further recommendations. Some parents were not even aware of any other initiatives that might be used to protect the learning environment in schools. Others recommended stepping up security and law enforcement. It was noticed that parents made no new proposals for alternative initiatives as evidenced by answers that follow:

P1 *"I cannot think of anything other than the police being more involved and increasing the presence in schools."*

P4 *"I just want the police to be more present in schools."*

P5 *"We need the police to be more visible in the community and schools."*

### **5.3.7.7 Theme 7: Peace Clubs**

Sub-themes: Interest and Effectiveness

Utility and Support

Responsibility and Teaching

Violence and Outreach

Behaviour and Environment

It was generally noted that parents supported and expressed interest in extra-curricular activities. However, it may be claimed that the community, the available resources, and learner behaviour were some of the variables that affected the effectiveness of any mitigation activities. Extra-curricular activities may help learners learn valuable life skills, prevent violence, teach responsibility, how to treat others, and to keep them occupied in productive ways. There were concerns about the incidence of violence, whether these activities were appropriate for all learners, and whether there were enough resources to support the activities.

#### **5.3.7.7.1 Interest and Effectiveness**

Due to the perceived pessimism of the society, participants exhibited interest in the concept of peace clubs as part of extra-curricular activities but questioned their effectiveness. They added that children could develop in other areas of their lives thanks to extra-curricular activities. This was reflected by such responses as:

P1 *"I think it could be interesting, but I am not sure how effective it would be because our communities are just hopeless. With extra curriculum effective they are needed to help our kids develop in other aspects of their lives."*

P3 *"Such things might keep our children occupied; they might learn a few things about life which is positive"*

#### **5.3.7.7.2 Utility and Support**

The second assertion made a compelling discussion for extra-curricular activities and their value in reducing child violence. The parents mentioned that their own involvement in extra-curricular activities at school had been beneficial and had kept them on task.

P2 *"I think it could work and help our kids not to resort to violence. I support having extra-curricular activities because, when were in school, we had so many extra-curricular activities and they helped us stay occupied and to be focused on school."*

#### **5.3.7.7.3 Responsibility and Teaching**

One parent emphasised how extra-curricular activities had the potential to teach children responsibility and to treat others with respect and dignity. Despite the belief that such activities were beneficial, there was admission that they were unsure whether the school had the funds to support such activities, as is evident from the opinions below:

*P3 “Maybe it might help these kids to be responsible for their environment and they can teach each other how to treat each other. I think it is very useful and the extra-curricular activities are needed in schools. But I am not sure if the school have enough resources to carry out extra-curricular activities such as scouts.”*

*P1: “Extra-curricular activities can teach our children important social skills, but we need to make time as parents to support them. Maybe teachers and learners will care too about the programmes”*

#### **5.3.7.7.4 Violence and Outreach**

The high levels of violence in the neighbourhood were acknowledged by the fourth respondent with the argument that, although extra-curricular activities may not be appropriate for all learners, some still benefit from them. The informant thought it was crucial to reach out to learners because they would gain from such programmes. The remark below was indicative of the sentiments:

*P4 “Our kids do not know of such programmes because the violence it is just too much. You might not get everyone, but at least reach out to a few. Of course, we need extra-curricular activities – they were part of us when we were growing up.”*

#### **5.3.7.7.5 Behaviour and Environment**

Based on their behaviour and environment, the participants made a contrast between learners from other schools. A claim that learners from better schools were better behaved was made, the implication being that this influenced how well extra-curricular activities turn out:

*P5 “I think it might work, depending on the learners. You know, school kids from better schools behave better than our schools that have ill-disciplined children.”*

### **5.3.8 Security Guards**

#### **5.3.8.1 Theme 1: Status of Schools**

Sub-themes: Lack of discipline and control  
Community influence  
Fear and Resignation  
Strict school environment  
Gender-based violence

The interviews presented a picture of schools with serious safety and discipline issues, where learners are abusing drugs, acting violently, and committing crimes. The interview transcripts revealed several important topics regarding the difficulties with safety and discipline in schools. This covered staff members' diverse viewpoints, gender-based violence, and the effect of learner behaviour on education. A multifaceted strategy involving addressing the causes of negative behaviour, enhancing school safety measures, and offering help to learners dealing with personal or legal concerns was needed to address these challenges.

##### **5.3.8.1.1 Lack of Discipline and Control**

The security guards voiced their worries about the instability and lack of authority in their individual institutions. According to reports, some learners were committing crimes, using drugs, smoking, and acting violently. One interviewee indicated that maintaining classrooms order was a challenge because of drug usage and violent behaviour among learners. This gave rise to the idea that dealing with disciplinary issues might be an important area for development in the school. Participants described specific learner behaviours that caused friction in schools, including drug usage, smoking, violence, and criminal activity. The security workers were concerned about unbecoming behaviours because they threatened the safety and wellbeing of other learners and staff. The interviewees expressed frustration at their inability to control these behaviours, and some reported feeling unsafe in the school environment. The information derived from the interviews is presented in the excerpts below:

S1 *"The situation is bad. You see these kids, and they are out of control. They bring drugs and smoke them in the school. They do not respect anyone, and you ask yourself what has happened to this generation?"*

S3 *"It is hard, that's all I can say. There is no discipline and safety in the school currently. These learners do whatever they want, especially after school, I mean after study..."*

S5 *"It is bad what is happening in this school. The learners are out of control, they do and say whatever they want."*

S8 *"...but I have not seen serious crimes such as stabbing and killing. We are facing discipline as a problem among the learners..."*

#### **5.3.8.1.2 Community Influence**

Participants interviewed asserted that the neighbourhood had an impact on how learners behaved in class. They said learners imported violence and bad behaviour into the school grounds from the nearby neighbourhoods; they are also afflicted by the vehemence. The interviews revealed that learners imitated what they witnessed in their neighbourhoods. The general mood was captured in the words of two respondents:

S4 *"We are working in a difficult situation. The school struggles to keep peace and order in the school. The community they come from is violent, and this is now happening in the school. You see everything that is happening in communities is now happening in this school. I mean drug abuse, fighting, beating of girls, a lot is happening."*

S2 *"A lot is happening in this school, and it scares me. There are learners who are committing crimes and they come to learn. They are basically criminals living with us."*

#### **5.3.8.1.3 Fear and Resignation**

In response to the difficulties faced in providing security, respondents expressed fear. They disclosed that they had given up trying to stop some learners' bad behaviour and crimes because they felt incapacitated and had decided to surrender. Participants thought it was a safety measure to refrain from confronting the learners directly about their actions. Their sentiments were clear on the issue:

S1 *"...If you try to confront them, they might be violent. Now I just look aside and leave them alone."*

S2 *"A lot is happening in this school, and it scares me..."*

S3 *"...They will do all sorts of bad things and you do not have a say. I might stop them from leaving school, but they still do whatever they want. They are smoking drugs. You know, right now they have a drug that they take and mix it with water. I wonder where they are getting these drugs from."*

S5 *"...I do not have the power to stop it. So, we just let them be."*

#### **5.3.8.1.4 Strict School Environment:**

According to the security personnel, a disciplined school atmosphere played a role in ensuring that learners adhered to the rules and behaved in accordance with the rules and regulations. Nevertheless, these same individuals acknowledged that the behaviour of learners could still present issues beyond the confines of the school environment. This scenario posed its own challenges since school security was unable to intervene outside their jurisdiction despite the ramifications of the behaviours. The concerns could be gauged from these expressions:

S6 *"It is a tricky environment we are working in. These learners can be trouble sometimes, but we are better than other surrounding schools."*

S7 *"Well, the learners do behave, I guess here we are a bit strict and the learner's kind of follow the school rules. But their behaviour sometimes especially when going home it is not okay."*

#### **5.3.8.1.5 Impact on Education**

Participants acknowledged that the disruptive conduct of some learners impacted their academic progress: some skipped classes and others arrived late due to legal issues, all of which could compromise the quality of education at the school. This indicated that the disorderly behaviour of learners was not just a safety issue but also a hindrance to educational progress. The following comments show concern from the school authorities:

S2 *"They smoke and take drugs, and this makes them angrier and wanting to fight all the time. I do not feel safe at all with these children. I have come across learners telling me that they will be late to school tomorrow because they will be going to courts."*

S8 *"I have been called to class because a learner or learners are disrupting classes. That eats into learning time. Some do not even make it to class."*

#### **5.3.8.1.6 Gender-Based Violence**

There was evidence of gender-based violence occurring among the learners; a male learner was observed punching a female learner during the investigation. The alarming incident brought to attention the need for the school to address not only disciplinary concerns but also gender-based violence. Some learners may be vulnerable to physical harm. Moreover, this painted a disturbing picture of the school premises as a possible breeding ground for future gender-based violence offenders. The signs of alarm over such behaviour were aired by two participants saying:

*S4 "... I saw one boy punch a female; I was shocked because it was a really strong punch. I even shouted, 'Hey, you will kill her; forgive her,' and he just walked away as if nothing happened. Other learners were just looking, shouting, and laughing."*

*S1 "Girls, I admit, are involved in the violence and drugs, but they are also the victims of the violence. They are beaten by the boys."*

#### **5.3.8.2 Theme 2: Causes of Violence**

Sub-themes: Drugs and crime  
Absent parents  
Poor community environments  
Ineffective discipline and support system

From the point of view of the participants, the problems schools face in Umlazi District are rooted in various themes. The responses suggested a complex range of issues that contribute to the schools' difficulties. These include drug use, absentee parents, unfavourable community environments, and inadequate disciplinary and support systems. Tackling these problems necessitates a comprehensive approach that entails community participation, parental involvement, and the implementation of effective disciplinary and support mechanisms within and outside the schools.

##### **5.3.8.2.1 Drugs and Crime**

The prevalence of drugs and criminal activities in the neighbourhoods surrounding the schools were cited as significant factors contributing to the behavioural challenges the

schools encountered. The learners were frequently exposed to drug use, violent behaviour, and criminal activities, which they ended up emulating. The adverse effects of drugs were evident, as learners who consumed drugs or smoked marijuana were prone to violent tendencies and engaging in unlawful conduct. Furthermore, drug use and criminal behaviour in the community had a considerable influence on the learners' behaviour and actions. The reactions that summed up the wide perceptions of the subject were such as:

S1 *"I say it is the issue of drugs that are flooding our community. When these learners take drugs and smoke dagga, they become violent. I think also the community that the school is in. We have people killing each other, stabbing each other, robbing, taking drugs and shooting each other. Do you think after seeing every day, do you think they fear anything? They will live what they see."*

S2 *"The community is full of drugs, alcohol and malumes who are into crime. They cause these children to be criminals. In one case, the learners robbed someone in that street, and they ran into the school premises."*

#### **5.3.8.2.2 Absent Parents**

The lack of parental presence emerged as another recurring theme in the feedback. As other respondents indicated, parents were frequently absent, either physically due to extended work hours, thus leaving their children to fend for themselves, or emotionally by neglecting to discipline and monitor their children's conduct. Participants noted that the absence of parents had a major effect on the learners' behaviour as they were often left to spend time under adverse influences from their surroundings. The issue of absent parents compounded with negative community influences further exacerbated the lack of discipline in the children. This concern could be read from these reactions by the informants:

S3 *"In the hostels you find killers, drug lords and prostitutes when the parents are not around. These are the kind of people the learners spend time with. Seriously, what do you think they will learn other than crime, drug abuse and sex? The environment and absent parents are problems. Parents need to be more involved."*

S4 *"I think what causes these learners to misbehave is the absent parents. You know when a parent is absent, what will happen to the children. Fathers abandon their children; the mothers leave their children behind to look after themselves because of work. So,*



*who will discipline the children? And the community members will start teaching them bad things. It becomes part of their behaviour, and it affects the schools.”*

*S6 “The problem starts back at home. For some learners, you can see that they are not disciplined because of where they are coming from. You can tell that their parents are not strict, and they are letting their children do whatever they want. So, imagine trying to correct such a child? They will not change because their parents have already failed them.”*

#### **5.3.8.2.3 Poor Community Environment**

The community environment was a notable contributor to the challenges facing the schools. The areas surrounding the schools, which include hostels, informal and formal settlements, are frequently associated with drugs, prostitution, and criminal activities. The negative impact of these environmental factors on the learners was evident, as they began to adopt these behaviours. The presence of drug dealers, killers, and prostitutes in the hostels had a deleterious influence on the learners, who spent time with them in the absence of their parents. This resulted in exposure to criminal behaviour, drug abuse, and sexual activities, which eventually became ingrained in their conduct and affected their academic performance. Additionally, the community's exposure to violent crimes was apparent, as evidenced by learners fleeing into the school premises after committing street robberies. The normalisation of criminal activities made it difficult for learners to adopt more positive patterns of behaviour. The interviews drew attention to status quo from comments such as:

*S3 “The environment is the cause of our problems as a school. We have hostels, informal settlements and formal settlements surrounding us. In the hostels you find killers, drug lords and prostitutes... Seriously, what do you think they will learn other than crime, drug abuse and sex? The environment is a problem...”*

*S5 “Our problems are caused by the community members, the so-called gangs, inkabis, and drug lords are teaching learners wrong things. They teach them crime, smoking drugs, selling drugs to other learners. Why do that? What do you expect? These criminals need to be removed from the community and I know all of this nonsense will stop.”*

*S1” ...I also think it’s the community that the school is in. We have people killing each other, stabbing each other, robbing, taking drugs and shooting each other...”*

#### 5.3.8.2.4 Ineffective Discipline and Support System

The effectiveness of the discipline and support systems in the schools was another issue the participants highlighted. The respondents noted that learners' undisciplined behaviour and the difficulty in correcting it disrupted the school environment. Moreover, parents' lack of support for the schools and home disciplinary measures, compounded with the absence of parental discipline and guidance, contributed to the learners' problematic behaviour. The school's inability to rectify this behaviour due to a lack of authority or legal constraints exacerbated the issue. The participants further expounded on this issue, suggesting that parents might even encourage their children to misbehave through justification of behaviour when confronted. This undermined the teachers' efforts to correct the learners' behaviour so that learners became resistant to correction, thinking that parents would shield them from the consequences. This notion was reinforced by these submissions:

S6 *"...You can tell that their parents are not strict, and they are letting their children do whatever they want. So, imagine trying to correct such a child? They will not change because their parents have already failed them."*

S7 *"I blame the parents for most of the problems we face in this school. It is as if they encourage their children to misbehave because they will protect them. You can tell that when you try to correct them: they are stubborn, and they will not listen. Earlier this year, we had parents shutting down the school; they were protesting about a teacher. What message does this send to the learners? You can simply not correct them; if you try to, expect trouble."*

S8 *"I would say the problem we have is a result of many things. By many things I mean broken families, broken school systems and broken communities. Families are not giving proper teachings to their children. The school is not equipped with the right measures to discipline children, there are so many laws protecting children, and it is killing them. Broken communities are full of crime, drugs, alcohol; the television is teaching them wrong things. This is sad."*

### 5.3.8.3 Theme 3: Personal Effects of Violence

Sub-themes: Fear of violence and worry

Cautioned approach

Social dysfunction

Responsibility

Perception of violence

The interviews revealed a prevalent theme of fear and apprehension among the participants when dealing with the learners. The security guards acknowledged the inherent risks associated with their job, which often lacked clarity on how to proceed when cases occur. Additionally, the participants expressed a sense of trauma resulting from their interactions with violent learners at their respective schools. Nonetheless, despite these challenges, a strong sense of responsibility for the learners' safety was felt. Every effort was made to act in the best interests of the learners, given the difficult circumstances.

#### 5.3.8.3.1 Fear of Violence and Worry

In the context of the three schools in Umlazi District, the security guards reported a sense of fear and apprehension in managing the behaviour of learners. The guards were primarily concerned with their own safety and the safety of others when intervening in situations involving illicit substances or other illegal activities. This apprehension indicated the high levels of violence and crime prevalent in South African society which negatively affected the efficacy of security measures in schools situated particularly in high-density areas. Additionally, participants perceived learners as potentially dangerous and unpredictable, especially when they engaged in drug and alcohol use. The feelings of trepidation were detected in these extracts:

*S2 "I am afraid of reprimanding these learners. I just have to know where to stop, otherwise thugs might come for me, if they [learners] complain too much. I remember one of the community forum members was shot by the thugs. I think he was disturbing the drug selling at school and they came for him. Luckily, he survived. That was a clear message to everyone not to interfere with their business. This community forum is against alcohol and drug abuse in the school."*

S3 *"I just try to do the best I can because these learners can do anything, especially Grades 11 and 12. These ones can stab you, so I just look at them sometimes and ignore. Should I risk myself? I cannot say I fear them, but I say I mind my own business."*

S4 *"I find it risky to tell them to stop whatever they will be doing. I fear them, these learners know killers and they are friends. So, what if they send those killers for me? I just limit myself."*

#### **5.3.8.3.2 Cautioned Approach**

The security guards from the three schools adopted different strategies to manage the potential risks associated with their job. Although some opted to limit their involvement, others took a more proactive approach towards safeguarding the rest of the learners. This highlights the complexity of decision-making the security guards face as they attempt to balance their duties to protect learners against potential physical harm and school property from destruction. The interviews revealed some of the strategies that the security personnel applied to manage the undesirable behaviours as seen in the explanations:

S1 *"I do not have to interfere with their activities, otherwise I will put myself into unnecessary danger. I just have to be really careful. By activities I mean smoking, drinking, and taking drugs in the school."*

S5 *"I would rather work in a way that does not put me into a path that makes me clash with these learners."*

S8 *"... They are selling these drugs on behalf of gangsters. If I try to stop them, the gangsters will come for me, I have a family to feed. I just let them be. Everyone knows the learners involved in drugs, but what can we do? Our powers are limited."*

#### **5.3.8.3.3 Despair**

Security guards reported feelings of despair regarding the learner and the societal condition. They held the view that the learners constituted a "lost generation," and that certain aspects of their conduct could not be corrected. This feeling was linked to larger economic and social issues confronting South Africa, in particular inequality and unemployment. The position was raised through some comments such as:

S5 *"Look at our society, look how broken it is, and why should I bother myself? There are things you cannot change in life. These kids are a lost generation."*

*S7 “Do you think they will change? I do not think they will change. They think this is the life because they are surrounded by bad behaviour.”*

#### **5.3.8.3.4 Responsibility**

Despite the security guards' apprehensions and feelings of despair, a considerable number of them remained accountable and committed to the learners' security. They acknowledged the criticality of their occupation, and believed they must strive to ensure the learners' safety, even if it entailed some risk-taking. This demonstrated the security guards' strong devotion and professionalism which was evident in their own words:

*S7 “Well, truth be told, I am not really affected because I just do my work – that is, to check people who come in and go out ...”*

*S4 “I try to do my job to protect learners who want to learn. We do searches at the gate, but they manage to get their stuff at various illegal entry points. I break up fights here and there. Some of these fights you can tell it is children being children.”*

#### **5.3.8.3.5 Perception of Violence**

The security personnel at the schools held divergent viewpoints regarding the extent of violence on their premises. Although some considered the situation to be relatively benign, others believed that the learners had the potential to engage in severe acts of violence like stabbings. This highlighted the diversity of perspectives and experiences among security staff. There was no universally correct approach to tackling the issues around school violence. This was clear in the views they put across during the interviews:

*S6 “...I am not really affected. But you always have to bear in mind how you deal with these learners – some of them are crazy.”*

*S4 “Some of these fights, you can tell, it is children being children; there is no malice. But at other times, it goes wrong: school leavers get involved, knives come out and other dangerous weapons.”*

#### 5.3.8.4 Theme 4: Effects of Violence on Learners

Sub-themes: Normalisation of violence

Fear and intimidation

Aggressive behaviour

Upon examining interviews from the three separate schools, it was evident that different forms of violence had a notable influence on learners. The consequences on learners were classified into three primary categories: desensitisation to violence, apprehension and coercion, and belligerent conduct. It is crucial for schools and communities to collaborate and tackle effects of violence on learners in order to establish a secure and encouraging learning environment for all learners.

##### 5.3.8.4.1 Normalisation of Violence

An emerging pattern from the interviews was the normalisation of violence among learners. It was disclosed that violence was a prevalent occurrence in Umlazi; learners were regularly exposed to its manifestation. As a result, violence had become a routine aspect of children's lives. Security personnel also stated that some learners perceived violence as the most effective way of addressing differences. The normalisation of violence was concerning as it led to a vicious cycle where learners viewed violence as a viable resolution to their difficulties. This was underscored by the given explanations:

S1 *"I see bad effects because other learners become violent too. You see, Umlazi is a violent place, and these children see it every day. Imagine seeing a pool of blood in the street, or someone shot several times. What does that do to them? They are not scared of violence because they live with it."*

S5 *"... One day there was fight and you could see ... to some it seemed like it was nothing; it was as if they are used to it, and it is normal."*

S6 *"...So you see, with these learners, since they see and live with violence, they become violent also. I guess they are traumatised... I mean that what they see has damaged their way of seeing things."*

#### **5.3.8.4.2 Fear and Intimidation**

The interviews brought to light the second prominent theme, namely fear and intimidation. Learners were apprehensive of the violence they witnessed and encountered; this apprehension impacted their demeanour. As security personnel stated, certain learners were even too frightened to express their disapproval of their colleagues' actions, for fear of aggression. The fear and intimidation impeded learners from sharing their thoughts, which restricted their academic and personal growth. These sentiments were gleaned during the encounter with the guards:

S1 *"...Some learners just become scared in general if they see a [VW] Polo or Toyota Etios."*

S5 *"You can see fear written all over their faces, especially if there is an incident. Like one day, there was fight and you could see that they were scared..."*

S8 *"...It makes them scared; you can see that the learners are afraid to fully say what is on their mind because they fear being a victim of violence. You can tell that violence has made them afraid."*

#### **5.3.8.4.3 Aggressive Behaviour**

The participants talked about the escalating prevalence of aggressive conduct in school children. Learners' violence had contributed to an irrational and aggressive demeanour. According to the interviewees, some learners believed that violence and intimidation were the most effective means of resolving issues because that was all they experienced. Security personnel also noted that exposure to violence had a negative impact on children, occasionally leading to unexplainable anger. This aggressive behaviour could instigate conflicts and impede the positive development of the learning environment. Several submissions explain the phenomenon:

S2 *"Some of this violence has made some of these learners unreasonable: they think violence and threats are the best way of dealing with trouble because that is what they see."*

S6 *"Violence breeds more violence, drug taking encourages other learners to take drugs."*

S7 *“...Sometimes you even ask yourself, why are these children so aggressive, and then you remember that Umlazi and other surrounding communities are violent. This affects their behaviour.”*

S8 *“...You can tell that violence has made them ... in some cases use violence to solve conflict.”*

#### **5.3.8.5 Theme 5: Current Security Shortfalls**

Sub-themes: Police involvement  
Limited effectiveness  
Community involvement  
Parental involvement

As per the interviewees, although police presence was established in all schools, the efficacy of security programmes was constrained due to inadequate community and parental participation, along with insufficient supervision of learners. It may be necessary to address these concerns to enhance security programmes in schools.

##### **5.3.8.5.1 Police Involvement**

The interviewees from the four schools acknowledged the involvement of police in their security programmes. The police visited the learners to discuss issues related to drug and alcohol abuse, to discourage them from partaking in questionable behaviours, and to emphasise the importance of focusing on their studies. Police involvement in raising awareness on the dangers of crime was admitted:

S1 *“Only the police come from time to time to talk to the learners; I have not seen any community involvement.”*

S3 *“The police come here to talk to the learners about alcohol and drug abuse. This year I think they have come here only once.”*

S5 *“The police come and talk to the learners to try to discourage them about alcohol and drug abuse, and to focus on their schoolwork and to be something in life.”*

S6 *“I only know that the police come from time to time to talk to the learners.”*

S7 *“...I only know of the police who come here and there is nothing else.”*



#### **5.3.8.5.2 Limited Effectiveness**

One participant voiced their opinion that the existing security programmes were not adequately effective because of insufficient community involvement and learner supervision. Furthermore, a claim was made that monitoring learners necessitated a greater number of personnel than was currently available, resulting in an ineffective monitoring approach. The security sector voiced these views:

*S4 “Sometimes I patrol the school and monitor but I will be the only one. It is not really effective; monitoring of these learners requires numbers.”*

*S6 “With the level of violence we have, what we need is more numbers and more empowerment. It’s hard to monitor these learners especially when they do not respect you.”*

#### **5.3.8.5.3 Community Involvement**

From all the security personnel, only one mentioned community participation in their security programme. The community members came to that school during breaks to reduce drug and alcohol abuse by standing guard in areas where learners were known to engage in drug related activities. The other schools did not mention any community involvement. Some community comments are presented below:

*S2 “We have some community members who come through now to help the school in reducing alcohol and drug abuse during school breaks. They stand in corners where learners actively take their drugs and smoke.”*

*S1 “I wish parents would join hands with the school to fight alcohol and drug abuse because, I am telling you, no one is immune to this problem.”*

#### **5.3.8.5.4 Parental Involvement**

According to some interviewees, parents occasionally created issues within the school, making it challenging for the administration to enforce efficient security programmes. One interviewee stated that parents shielded their children and portrayed the school administration as villains. These reservations were captured in the statements that follow:

*S7 “The parents sometimes cause problems at the school. They protect their children and make us look like we are bad people. The community is not involved, it is as if there is a grudge between the parents and the school management.”*

S8 *"It is only the police who come and talk to the learners. The community is not involved at all. The parents are at the centre of some of the problems that happen at this school. Imagine, they came here and shut the school, what message does it send out?"*

#### **5.3.8.6 Theme 6: Alternative Programme Perceptions**

Sub-themes: Increased police presence  
Community and parental involvement  
Monitoring of learners  
Communication and collaboration

##### **5.3.8.6.1 Increased Police Presence**

Security guards stated that the police should increase their presence in schools, particularly during home time and school hours, to ensure order and security. The comments implied that the current levels of police presence were inadequate in dealing with the security concerns at the educational institutions. The feeling of being heard was evident in some submissions from the interviewees:

S1 *"I do not have any one programme I might think of, but the police should come more often..."*

S3 *"I want the police to come more often and park outside, especially during home time."*

S4 *"The police should visit us during school times to monitor what they will be doing."*

S5 *"With this level of violence, I would want the police to be more involved in maintaining order and security in and around the school."*

##### **5.3.8.6.2 Community and Parental Involvement**

The participants recommended that the school administration needed to collaborate with the community and parents to combat substance abuse. One interviewee proposed community and parental participation in school activities, similar to how they engaged in community forums that advocated for their interests. This implied that involvement of the community and parents in school initiatives was crucial for tackling security concerns. An indication of this is contained in the words:

S1 *"I wish parents would join hands with the school to fight alcohol and drug abuse because, I am telling you, no-one is immune to this problem."*

S6 *“The community should be involved more in schools just like how we have the community forums that stand for us, so they should do the same for school management.”*

#### **5.3.8.6.3 Monitoring of Learners**

The respondents recommended that law enforcement officers should visit schools occasionally to oversee the activities of the learners. A proposal for the community and parents to keep a close eye on children, particularly during breaks when there was a higher risk of substance abuse was made. This indicated that monitoring the behaviour of learners was a crucial component of any security initiative; the point was clearly echoed by these responses:

S2 *“I would suggest that the community and parents come together and monitor their children especially during break time when they take the drugs and alcohol.”*

S6 *“The police and community should be involved more in schools...”*

S7 *“Police patrols around and close to the school might reduce violence and bad behaviour. Police patrols might scare outside criminal elements.”*

#### **5.3.8.6.4 Communication and Collaboration**

The participants felt that the persistence of certain unbecoming learner behaviour in schools was attributed to a lack of communication and harmony among school management, teachers, security personnel, parents, and the community. Therefore, it was emphasised that effective communication and collaboration among various stakeholders was crucial for the successful implementation of any intervention security programmes. One informant had this to say:

S8 *“I would be happy if communities will join hands. The reason why is that we have some of these problems continuing. It is because school management, teachers, securities, communities, and parents are not speaking the same language.”*

### 5.3.8.7 Theme 7: Peace clubs

Sub-themes: Lack of awareness  
Scepticism

Responding to the issue on peace clubs' participants indicated lack of awareness of the existence of such an organisation. Participants stressed never having heard of peace groups, however after an explanation of the concept they understood. However, there was scepticism on the potential of clubs to bring about positive change in the learner's behaviour emerging as a motif in the data analysis. The scepticism was a recurring theme highlighted in the analysis.

#### 5.3.8.7.1 Lack of Awareness

Participants expressed the view that they were not aware of peace clubs. This lack of awareness is exemplified in the opinions below:

S1 *"My brother, I have never heard of peace clubs. What do peace clubs do?"*

S5 *"No, it's my first-time hearing about peace clubs."*

S7 *"No, it's a new thing to me; peace clubs, no."*

#### 5.3.8.7.2 Scepticism

Participants expressed scepticism on the role of peace clubs in reducing violence. Participants used words such as 'lost generation' in identifying the learners, and believe they are not capable of positive change. Some participants highlighted the current environment, and the lack of support from the government and the community. This was evident through comments such as:

S8 *"I do not know. Have you seen these learners – they are difficult to deal with. We have tried a number of things in the past, but [there has been] no change."*

S3 *"I hear you, but I do think such a thing will work. Maybe if parents and other community members are involved. It can be as simple as encouraging their children to join such an initiative."*

S1 *"These learners are corrupt.... Give it a try; let us see what happens."*

## **5.4 Focus Group Discussions**

### **5.4.1 Introduction**

In the present study, a survey was administered at the four schools, and the data collected were analysed using SPSS 2.4. Following the survey administration, one of the schools withdrew. There were attempts to communicate with the school administration to understand the reasons for their withdrawal, but no response was received. As a result, it was assumed that the school had withdrawn from the study. The remaining three schools expressed their interest to participate in the study, and the obtained survey results were presented to the learners. Those interested in further discussion of the results and forming a peace club were invited to carry out the formation. Focus groups were then formed at the three schools, with a fluctuating attendance throughout the data collection process. Nonetheless, the average number of learners participating in the study across the three schools was approximately eight in a group.

In this study, the focus groups were predominantly composed of female participants. At one of the schools, only females attended the group discussions. It was unclear why males were not interested in participating in peace club initiatives. However, all the learners who took part in the focus groups felt comfortable sharing their experiences in their respective groups. Due to limited numbers, the participants were not separated according to gender; there was no option for all-male groups. The researcher initiated the focus group discussions; however, a language barrier was encountered, which prompted the research assistant to take over the proceedings. Once the discussions were held in the isiZulu language, the learners became more comfortable and open in their responses. Similarities across the three schools in the responses were observed.

### 5.4.2 Analysis of Data

This section presents data obtained from the focus group discussions.

### 5.4.3 Demographic Profiles

Excerpts from the discussions were coded according to the demographic profiles of the participants, for example, L-A means Learner - School participant. Table 1 provides the demographic profiles of the three sample groups.

**Table 5-15** School Demographics.

| Pseudonym | School code name | Number | Total participants |
|-----------|------------------|--------|--------------------|
| Learners  | A (L-A)          | 8      | 26                 |
|           | B (L-B)          | 8      |                    |
|           | C (L-C)          | 10     |                    |

#### 5.4.3.1 Focus Group Discussion Schedule

The following focus group discussion schedule contained questions that enabled all three groups to express their perspectives and personal encounters with school violence. The questions included in the schedule were as follows:

#### 5.4.4 Discussion guide

1. According to your own experience here at this school, how do you describe the current situation in the school in terms of safety and violence?
2. What are the causes of violence in your school?
3. How does it affect you and other learners?
4. What can we do to challenge school violence?
5. What project can we do to raise peace awareness?

#### **5.4.5 Process of Analysing Focus Group Discussion**

Through the researcher's exploration of the information provided by participants, the process of analysing verbal experiences and body language were crucial. Although there were concerns about how traditional coding methods of themes in transcripts could potentially alter the acquired information, reporting was made as reliable as possible by participants with the opportunity to proofread the transcripts alongside a native research assistant.

##### **5.4.5.1 Data Analysis and Findings**

This section of the study centred on the analysis of findings derived from the collected data. The themes presented were based on the responses of learners who took part in the focus group discussions. The themes and sub-themes were presented in verbatim extracts from participants.

#### **5.4.6 School A**

##### **5.4.6.1 Current Situation**

The current situation at School A, as discussed by the peace club members, painted a grim picture of the situation. From the discussions, it appeared the school was plagued by violence related to drug abuse and the presence of gangs. The discussions highlighted many issues contributing to school violence; these are fully discussed below:

###### **5.4.6.1.1 Drug-related Violence**

Participants mentioned that drug abuse was rampant among learners, which often led to violent behaviour. Learners reported that the involved learners fought over spare change to purchase more drugs; some became aggressive towards both teachers and fellow learners while under the influence of substances. This created an unsafe and disruptive learning environment. The issue was reflected by the following testimonies:

L-A *"I have seen some of my friends at school struggling because of drugs. They use drugs to escape from problems, but it only makes things worse. They worry too much*

*about finding money for their next dose, which often results in disputes – even disputes over spare change.”*

*L-A “Sometimes, when I see my classmate’s using drugs, they can get aggressive, and it is scary. After abusing the substance, they might become violent towards teachers. This situation makes me feel worried, and it is tough to focus on learning when our teachers are afraid to come to class because of the violent behaviour.”*

*L-A “As a learner of School A, it is scary to see the violence happening in our school. Some learners are fighting and even stabbing each other, and this is because of the presence of gangs. It is hard to focus on learning when we are worried about our safety all the time.”*

#### **5.4.6.1.2 Drug Types and Sources**

Learners reported that the drugs used in their school included Xanax, weed, and alcohol. They communicated that suppliers of the drugs were fellow learners within the school. It is unclear where the drugs were obtained. However, learners suspected that local community members were involved in supplying drugs. The statements from the participants captured their thoughts:

*L-A “In our school, some of us learners use drugs like Xanax, weed, and alcohol. Two or three boys in our class began trying it, and we asked them why. They said it helps them feel motivated to do schoolwork and concentrate, especially weed. But now, it does not seem like it is helping them anymore. It is hard for them to quit, and it is causing problems at school, which could affect their future.”*

*L-A “In fact, we do not know how these drugs came to the school. But as learners here, we think it is the people from our community who are harming our future by bringing these drugs. We are part of this community, and we know who these people are that are damaging our society. But we are scared to point them out because they are too dangerous, and sometimes they collaborate with the police through bribes. Speaking up could put our lives in danger.”*

#### **5.4.6.1.3 Gang Activity**

Learners informed us of a strong presence of gangs at their school who actively recruited other learners from various grades. They furthermore submitted that the existence of different gangs, including those from different areas and schools, contributed to the



violence within the school. Participants reported having witnessed at some point gang members engaging in fights and stabbings, further escalating the dangerous atmosphere in and around the school. The information derived from the discussions were captured in the excerpts below:

*L-A “I can confirm the gang problems we have in our school. They actively target and recruit learners from different grades, making the situation worse. These gangs are not only from our school but also from nearby areas and other schools. Their presence leads to increased violence, and I have personally seen them engaging in fights and using weapons. Our learning environment is deeply affected by this, and it is difficult for teachers to maintain control and for us to focus on our studies.”*

Overall, peace club members highlighted significant issues of drug abuse, violence, and gang activity in their school. These problems did not only jeopardise the safety and well-being of learners but were also a hindrance to the learning process due to teachers' fear and the resulting loss of classroom time. Subsequently, there was consensus among the participants that the school administration, teachers, parents, and relevant authorities needed to address these concerns promptly. The development of strategies to create a safer and more conducive learning environment for all learners called for urgent attention.

#### **5.4.6.2 Causes of School Violence**

The statements from the discussions stressed a concerning issue regarding the lack of guidance. This gave grounds for delinquent behaviour among the learners.

##### **5.4.6.2.1 Lack of Guidance and Support**

The absence of proper guidance and support structures, both within the family and the community, was highlighted as a contributing factor to learners' involvement in drug dealing. Participants suggested that, without proper guidance, learners were easily recruited by drug lords, prioritising their involvement in illegal activities over their education. This was captured in these statements:

L-A *"I strongly believe that the absence of proper guidance within families and our community is a major factor leading learners into drug dealing. In our discussions, we highlighted how some learners lack guidance at home, leaving them susceptible to the influence of drug lords. It is heart breaking to see them prioritise illegal activities over their education, seeking a sense of belonging and support that they are missing at home."*

L-A *"I have noticed that some learners, including myself, end up using drugs because our parents do not guide us well. Even though our parents sent us to school, some do not have the time to teach us how to live and avoid bad things. It is tough when our own parents drink and get drunk in front of us because then it is hard for them to tell us not to do drugs. Growing up, we really need love and direction to succeed."*

L-A *"I see a big problem with security and support in our community. We know there are people selling drugs but reporting them does not help much because they have connections with the police. At school, there is not enough checking at the gate, making it easy for drugs to get inside. Some security guards even sell drugs to us instead of keeping us safe. The school leaders are not doing much to stop this, and our parents need to work together to fight drugs in the school without always relying on the police. As learners, it is up to us to focus on our education and stay away from drugs."*

#### **5.4.6.3 Effects of violence**

The participants shared the impact of violence on learners within their school based on eyewitness and personal experiences. The detrimental consequences identified included the prevalence of fear induced by acts of violence and the absence of a secure and protected learning environment.

##### **5.4.6.3.1 Fear of Violence**

The learners expressed a sense of fear when attending school due to the unpredictability of violence in and around school. Moreover, this fear highlighted the impact of violence on the learners' psychological well-being and their ability to focus on their education. The following statements reflected their fears:

L-A *"I feel really scared to go to school because violence can happen unexpectedly. This fear makes it hard for me to focus on my schoolwork and affects my mind. The violence makes me stressed, and it's tough for me to learn and do well in school."*

L-A *"I see violence at school because it is near a place where people drink alcohol. This violence causes a lot of suffering, even for the teachers who fear the learners. It gives our*

*school a bad reputation and makes it look bad. Personally, I would not want my child to attend this school in the future. It feels as if I would be harming their future.”*

#### **5.4.6.3.2 Lack of Safety**

The focus group statements suggested that violence in schools was a significant concern. Participants emphasised that the fear was rooted in the uncertainty of when the violence was likely to occur, implying a lack of a safe and secure learning environment. Statements to this effect were:

*L-A “I get really worried about violence at school. It is scary because we never know when it might happen. This makes the school feel unsafe, and it is hard to focus on our studies. The fear is always there because we cannot predict when violence might occur.”*

*L-A “On one Friday, we had an assembly to remember a child who was stabbed by drug users at school. It happened in a place we usually respect, where we pray and talk to God. The family of the boy who passed away was there. It looked as if two groups of gangs were fighting each other, right in front of the teachers and parents. This event shows that, even if you are not involved, just being a learner in this school makes you constantly afraid and insecure.”*

#### **5.4.6.4 Curbing school violence**

During the focus group discussions, participants expressed their viewpoints regarding potential strategies for curbing school violence. Furthermore, the challenges encountered by educators while implementing disciplinary measures on delinquent learners were highlighted. The analysis of the discussions revealed several recurring themes which were integral to the comprehension of the complex nature of the issue.

##### **5.4.6.4.1 Strict Teachers and Corporal Punishment**

The participants mentioned that, in some schools, violence was less prevalent because teachers were strict and employed corporal punishment. This raised questions about the effectiveness and ethics of using physical punishment as a disciplinary method since this tactic was out lawed. However, these measures were effective in keeping learners from misbehaving, indicating a potential difference in disciplinary approaches across schools. Gauging from the discussions, some participants support corporal punishment. Their testimonies were as follows:

L-A *"We talked about schools where teachers were strict and used to hit learners. Some learners believed it stopped bad behaviour, but I am not convinced that hitting is the best solution because, even if we pressure the teachers to arrest them, if they hit us saying we have rights, that makes their job very difficult for them to punish us."*

L-A *"In some other schools, the parents and the school have a rule. If a learner causes trouble at school, like fighting or having drugs, they can suspend me for a month. During this time, I would stay at home and reflect on my actions before coming back to school."*

#### **5.4.6.4.2 Support of Parents**

Participants reported that schools with less violence enjoyed the support of parents. Parental involvement and co-operation played a crucial role in maintaining discipline and reducing violence in schools. Two excerpts below reflect the discussion:

L-A *"We talked about how parents can really make a difference in reducing violence at schools. When parents are supportive and involved, it helps create a better atmosphere. It's like a team effort between the school and the parents."*

L-A *"I believe we are like a team in this education journey: teachers, learners, and parents. We all need each other, forming a strong bond like an equilateral triangle. For us, the learners, to receive the best education, parents and teachers need to work together. Our teachers are not just here for a job, they treat us like their own, beyond just learners. Some of us might lack that care and advice at home, but teachers step in, becoming like parents and guiding us through our learning."*

#### **5.4.6.4.3 Resistance to Discipline**

However, some participants raised concerns about curbing violence. It appears that some learners resist disciplinary measures by threatening teachers when they attempt to involve parents. Resistance was a sign of a breakdown in authority and a lack of respect for teachers' attempts to establish order in the classrooms. As a result, those learners involved continued with their unaccountability and unchecked rowdy behaviour. The concerns were reflected in the following thoughts:

L-A *"Some learners do not listen to teachers and get defensive when parents are called in to school. They threaten the teachers, and it creates chaos. They should understand that discipline is important for everyone to learn in a peaceful environment."*

L-A *“We all know that some learners who do not show respect to teachers may be influenced by the drugs they use. It is as if they cannot see adults properly anymore.”*

The discussions drew attention to a complex issue involving fear, violence, disciplinary measures, and parental involvement in schools. It underscored the need for creating safe environments, exploring alternative disciplinary methods, and fostering collaboration between teachers, parents, and learners to address and mitigate the causes of violence in schools.

#### **5.4.7 School B**

##### **5.4.7.1 Current Situation**

Participants shared insights into the intricate dynamics surrounding bullying, poverty, and drug dealing within their school. The challenges learners face, and the need for comprehensive support systems, guidance, and a safe school environment to address these issues effectively were discussed.

##### **5.4.7.1.1 Bullying**

The prevalence of bullying within the school was a serious threat to a conducive learning environment. Bullying was a significant issue affecting peace club members and their peers, leading to disruption of classes and a sense of fear and vulnerability within the school community. Their fears and vulnerability were reflected below:

L-B *“During school hours, I am frightened of going to school when it comes to bullying. In most cases, the bullies don’t allow me to concentrate on my schoolwork, but they force me to do their unfair work.”*

L-B *“There are times when I feel so scared to go out of the classroom during breaks because I am aware of bullies who can harm me and steal my money or food. It makes me feel frustrated as they do not give me a reason to be alive. This bullying leaves me inventing numerous reasons to get out of going to school and lie because I am ill. It is tough.”*

#### 5.4.7.1.2 Drugs

The link between poverty and the involvement of learners in drug selling was a prominent theme. Participants shared those learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, where resources may be limited and parental support may be lacking, were engaging in such activities as a means of survival. This resulted in the influx of drugs in their school which, in turn, had undesirable consequences on learners and educators. The participants had this to say about drugs:

L-B *“Having a little bit of financial support, especially at home, makes me desperate to do whatever it takes to earn money and achieve my goals. Sometimes, I do not even realise how dangerous the things I am selling can be because I am so focused on my own goals. It is as if I become selfish.”*

L-B *“My parents do not give me much attention. They just push me to work hard, come back home, and help the family financially. But it is tough because our schools lack resources, and our tools are broken. This makes it hard to stay motivated in school. So, it feels easier to turn to drugs for fun and to make money to support my family. It is not ideal, but it seems to be the only option sometimes.”*

#### 5.4.7.1.3 Fear and Intimidation

Participants expressed concern regarding the prevailing climate of fear and intimidation within their school. The learners were dissatisfied with certain behaviours, while the act of rebuking rowdy learners was met with a sense of fear and intimidation. Learners stated that the fear arose from the inherent anxiety of potential reprisals and the anticipated repercussions associated with confronting individuals engaged in illicit drug activities. This pervasive fear subsequently fostered an environment of silence, thereby impeding the effective resolution of disruptive conduct and instances of bullying within the school. These statements captured the researcher’s attention:

L-B *“We are sometimes scared to report that older boys from school force us to sell drugs by older boys who carry guns. Teachers and the Principal are also scared to confront them, so we keep quiet and pretend we are happy about it to save our lives.”*

L-B *“Security also cannot help because they do not carry guns, so they are also scared of them. There is also an increase in cases that we have seen with our own eyes, kids being violated in front of us, so we keep quiet because of fear.”*

#### **5.4.7.1.4 Disruption of Education**

During the discussions, it emerged that classes were often disrupted by unruly learners. The involvement of learners in drug selling disrupted the learning environment, affecting the academic progress of other learners. Participants indicated that, after break time, it was hard to focus because of learners who will be high on drugs. They shared that the learners became rowdy during class time and in some cases threatened educators, thus disturbing classes. This theme emphasised the importance of maintaining a safe and conducive atmosphere for effective education. The following testimonies were given:

L-B *"When I take drugs, they make me do things I would not normally do. It is as if they take control, and I cannot stop myself from doing bad stuff. They mess with my thinking, and that is why I end up making wrong choices."*

L-B *"Sometimes, the reason we cannot control ourselves in front of teachers is that some of them already think we are troublemakers, especially during breaks. They treat us like we are stupid, even when we are trying to behave in class. The drugs also play a part in making us misbehave."*

#### **5.4.7.2 Causes of school violence**

The statements from the discussions stressed a concerning issue regarding the use of abusive language by teachers towards learners. As a result, there were instances of violence and confrontation within classrooms. However, some other causes like as security measures were acknowledged by the learners. This often involved a learner and an educator.

##### **5.4.7.2.1 Abusive Language**

Learners shared that one major cause of violence in the classroom was the use of abusive language by teachers. When teachers belittled learners and used derogatory words, it created a hostile environment and triggered emotional responses in learners. This verbal abuse evoked feelings of anger, humiliation, and disrespect, provoking some learners to retaliate. Their sense of frustration was evident in these statements:

L-B *"When someone at school finds out that I am pregnant, they start calling me names like "queen of boys" or other hurtful things. It makes me and some of us really upset. We*

*feel sad, ashamed, and start doubting ourselves. Even other learners start teasing us, especially when teachers join in."*

*L-B "We share our personal stories with the teachers, hoping for help and understanding. But sometimes, when the teachers are angry, they use those stories against us, swearing at us. In those moments, we feel hurt and might retaliate by using their own personal stories against them. It is tough."*

#### **5.4.7.2.2 Lack of Respect**

Another contributing factor was the lack of respect exhibited by teachers towards their learners. Disrespectful comments, such as, "You are dressed like a prostitute", undermined the dignity and self-esteem of learners. According to the learners, this disregard for their individuality and personal boundaries evoked strong emotional reactions, escalating the potential for confrontation, particularly with female learners. Comments from these interviews were captured in the excerpts below:

*L-B "I like the style of another girl, so I decided to cut my skirt short like hers. But the teachers did not understand and thought I was trying to get the boys' attention. They called me an attention seeker. Frustrated, I started ranting about their fashion choices and fake hair."*

*L-B "Teachers, both male and female, come into the toilets to search for drugs while we are using them. Even if they suspect us, they search without asking for our permission. It feels invasive and uncomfortable."*

#### **5.4.7.2.3 Limitations of Security Guards**

During discussions, it emerged that, although security guards were present in schools to ensure the safety of learners and to maintain order, their numbers were insufficient to effectively monitor the overcrowded schools. Learners argued that such limitations left room for misbehaviour and violence to occur without immediate intervention in their school. Consequently, it became increasingly difficult to address incidents promptly and to ensure a secure learning environment. Some of the limitations mentioned were:

*L-B "Our school is huge and has numerous rooms but few security guards. Break times are always hard for them because they do not have eyes on their backsides. This is where bullying takes place. The bullies even scare the prefects who should be helping but do not report them. However, sometimes, we do not feel that our school is safe."*



L-B *“This is why there are not enough security guards and, as a result, terrible things may happen and sometimes they cannot get there fast enough to stop it. It is terrifying that nothing is resolved fast enough and, indeed, it’s difficult for one to study peacefully when one is not safe.”*

#### **5.4.7.2.4 Bribery of Security Guards**

Participants revealed that some learners bribed security guards, thereby compromising their integrity and effectiveness. The involvement of security guards in illicit activities, such as accepting drugs or other substances from learners, raised ethical concerns. It also further eroded the trust placed in them to enforce discipline and ensure school safety. Some of the revelations were captured in the following assertions:

L-B *“Some security guards are not satisfied with what they earn, so they let learners pay them to avoid reporting them for selling drugs. Sometimes, they even sell the drugs to us themselves to make more money. It is not right, but that is what is happening.”*

L-B *“As a learner here at school, it is really disappointing to know that some learners try to bribe the security guards. This makes them less trustworthy and affects how well they can keep our school safe and in order. It is even worse when we hear that some security guards accept drugs or other things from learners. This is very wrong, and it makes us doubt their ability to maintain discipline and keep us safe. Trusting them becomes a big challenge when we see things like this happening. We need security guards who are focused on their job and can be trusted to make our school a safe place.”*

#### **5.4.7.2.5 Bias and Favouritism**

Participants pointed out that security guards were biased by being stricter with certain learners compared to others. They argued that this potential favouritism raised concerns about an unfair and unequal treatment system within the school. This bias contributed to an environment where discipline was not consistently enforced and, in some cases, incites tensions and conflicts among learners. These learners would belong to a certain gang. This is reflected in the excerpts below:

L-B *“When guards see you join a group with this kind of activity, they start speaking of you badly, taking you as if you were the same as them. It can happen any other time; it*

*may not be your fault, but at certain moments security officers make wrong allegations against you trying to prove something.”*

L-B *“If you refuse to have sex with some male security guards, they might make allegations against you that you never engaged in. They do such things only to punish you and force you into dating them, which is wrong.”*

#### **5.4.7.2.6 Variation In Strictness Based on School Location.**

Peace club members believed schools located in suburban areas tend to be stricter compared to those in high-density or ghetto areas. This variation in strictness was attributed to different socio-economic factors, community norms, and resources available to the schools. It was observed that the disciplinary measures and support systems may differ, leading to varying levels of control over learner behaviour. The following comment highlights the issue:

L-B *“In my experience at school, I have noticed that our school, which is in a suburban area, has stricter rules compared to some schools in busier or more crowded areas. Our teachers and staff really stress following the rules. I have heard that, in some other schools, the rules are not as strict because of the different situations they face. But in our school, they want us to follow the rules and behave properly. This might be because of how our neighbourhood is and what people expect from us.”*

#### **5.4.7.2.7 Possession of Dangerous Weapons**

Possession of dangerous weapons was a contributing factor to school violence. Shared experiences suggested that some violent learners carried dangerous weapons, such as knives, which were used to intimidate and scare other learners. Consequently, this presented severe threats to the safety and well-being of everyone within the school premises. Participants argued that the presence of weapons created an atmosphere of fear as they often resulted in physical harm and even fatal incidents as witnessed. The information is reflected in the excerpts below:

L-B *“As learners, especially us girls, we do not feel safe at school. There are some guys who bring weapons to school. The security is afraid to confront these learners about the weapons because they fear getting hurt or even killed. This allows those learners to use their weapons to intimidate us and pressure us into being their girlfriends. It is scary.”*

L-B *“As a learner at school, I can tell you that having dangerous weapons in our school causes a lot of problems. Some learners bring knives and other scary stuff to school to threaten and frighten others. When these weapons are around, I feel very afraid. They have caused actual harm and serious incidents that make the school a scary place. It's hard to concentrate on learning when you are always worried about your safety. We need our school to be a safe and peaceful place where we can focus on our studies without fearing for our lives.”*

#### **5.4.7.3 Effects of Violence**

Participants shared the effects of school violence which was very worrisome. A number of issues stemming from school violence and its effects were discussed and covered in this section.

##### **5.4.7.3.1 Emotional Distress**

Participants mentioned that the continuous exposure to abusive language and disrespectful behaviour from teachers severely impacted the learner's emotional well-being. Some participants shared that the humiliation experienced in front of classmates, coupled with derogatory comments, led to low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and feelings of powerlessness. The experienced violations were captured in following excerpts:

L-B *“I go to school and the violence here really messes with our emotions. When teachers are mean and disrespectful, it hurts us a lot. They embarrass us in front of our friends and say mean things that make us feel small. It makes me feel like I am not good enough, and I start feeling very anxious and sad.”*

L-B *“I feel as if I have no power in these situations. Going through this regularly really affects how we feel inside. It's hard to focus on our studies and feel good about ourselves when we're treated like this. It's a tough situation for all of us.”*

##### **5.4.7.3.2 Anger and Frustration**

Learners who endured embarrassing treatment may respond with anger and frustration. They might feel the need to defend themselves or seek retribution, which might manifest as violent confrontations with teachers or engaging in aggressive behaviour. These highly

charged emotional responses can interfere with the learning environment and create a hostile and tense atmosphere. This was reflected below:

L-B *“When we, the learners at School B, are treated in a way that embarrasses us, it really makes us mad and frustrated. We do not want to just accept it quietly; we want to stand up for ourselves. Sometimes, we end up arguing with the teachers or acting aggressively.”*

L-B *“These strong feelings make it super hard to focus on our schoolwork. The whole school atmosphere becomes tense and uncomfortable. Going to school becomes tough because nobody wants to deal with this hostility and bad atmosphere. It is not a good situation for any of us.”*

#### **5.4.7.3.3 Confrontational Behaviour**

Peace club members indicated that confrontational behaviour was a constant feature at their school. They reported that some learners chose to confront teachers directly when subjected to abusive language, expressing dissatisfaction and asserting their right to be treated with dignity and respect. Such opinions were captured:

L-B *“It is also difficult for us if a teacher speaks harshly to us and we cannot control ourselves; sometimes, we answer back at the teacher. How can one respect someone who insults us as much as possible?”*

L-B *“Respect is crucial; it works in two directions. Age is irrelevant regardless of whether you are young or elderly. Today, parents want us to respect them, yet we do not show the same respect back to the parents. This happens quite often due to deficiency of respect everywhere.”*

#### **5.4.7.4 Curbing School Violence**

Peace club members shared that it was crucial to address the involvement of older individuals associated with gangs and provide targeted interventions to steer young learners away from the path of violence. From the discussions, it was felt that parents and other stake holders should contribute towards maintaining peace and security in schools.

#### **5.4.7.4.1 Seeking Parental Intervention**

Participants believed involving parents in conflict resolution is important. The discussion noted that some peers resorted to informing their parents hoping for support and resolution. Learners argued that involving parents could bring attention to the problem and prompt discussions between the school administration, teachers, and parents to address the issue of violence in and around school and implement necessary changes. Some of ideas shared were:

*L-B “When we bring our parents to talk to the teachers, it seems as if the teachers get upset and feel that they are not doing their job right. Instead of finding a solution, they argue with our parents. Later, when our parents leave, they make us feel ashamed for involving them. They even mock us in front of the whole school, calling us weak.”*

#### **5.4.7.4.2 Support Forums and Their Absence**

One observation was that schools in the low-density suburbs often had support forums, while those in high-density areas such as the ghettos, lacked similar platforms. These support forums played a crucial role in addressing violence and drug abuse by providing a space for open discussions, sharing information, and implementing preventive measures. Learners lamented that the absence of discussion forums in township schools limited opportunities for collaboration and the exchange of strategies to tackle issues associated with school violence. These statements showed their frustration:

*L-B “I go to School B, which is in a busy area, and we don’t have those helpful discussion forums that some schools in quieter places have. These forums would be good for us because we also face issues such as violence and drugs.”*

*L-B “Seeing schools in quieter areas have these places where learners can talk and share ideas to deal with problems makes us wish we had that too. We have good ideas, and we want to work together to make our school safer. Not having a chance to discuss these important issues feels as if we are missing out.”*

#### **5.4.7.4.3 Collaboration**

The need to establish collaboration among teachers, parents, and learners to address the problem of violence and drug abuse in the school emerged from the discussions. Learners firmly believed that, by standing together and speaking with one voice, they could actively work towards creating safer school environments and safeguard the school. From the various opinions raised by learners, collaboration enables the pooling of resources, knowledge, and experiences, ultimately strengthening the efforts to challenge disruptive behaviour and substance abuse. Some of the shared options included:

L-B *“Let me say, as one of the learners at this school, the problem facing our school includes violence and drugs. However, when teachers and parents and learners talk together it brings about a great impact towards improvement of safety in our school.”*

L-B *“As we’ve observed, when working together as a team, we exchange valuable knowledge and gain from each other. This makes us more powerful in preventing wrongdoing and drug issues affecting our learning environment.”*

#### **5.4.7.4.4 Challenging Drug Suppliers and Associated Risks**

It was noted that challenging drug suppliers is dangerous due to their potential for violence and retaliation. Drug lords regard their activities as business. The suppliers hold significant control over the drug trade in their areas, and often resort to extreme measures to protect their interests. It was acknowledged that this posed a significant challenge in addressing drug abuse within the school, as the fear of reprisal discouraged everyone in the school from speaking out and acting against these suppliers. Their testimonies included:

L-B *“Trying to stop us from using drugs might seem selfish, but it is because we are already addicted to them. If we stop using drugs, the people who supply them would not make any money. Unfortunately, the drug business thrives on violence, which helps them make more profit.”*

L-B *“Stopping the supply of drugs could lead to a big problem because it would mean taking away what some people rely on for their daily living.”*

## **5.4.8 School C**

### **5.4.8.1 Current Situation**

Discussion of the current situation at School C by the peace club members painted a grim picture. It appears the school is plagued by fear, gangs and poor security. Many issues contribute to school violence, and these are discussed below.

#### **5.4.8.1.1 Fear and Uncertainty**

The focus group information highlights a pervasive atmosphere of fear and violence within the school. Learners expressed a deep sense of fear and uncertainty, describing this as a fear of the unknown. This fear was a result of the constant threat of physical harm due to the widespread presence of violence in and around school. Fear had profound psychological effects on learners, resulting in an environment characterised by anxiety, stress, and trauma. The ever-present threat of violence impedes learners' ability to learn and thrive academically. The focus group's accounts suggested that learners' personal and emotional well-being is compromised due to the prevailing fear and violence within the school. Some of the sentiments were:

*L-C "Thinking about violence at my school messes with my mind and emotions. I'm scared of not knowing what might happen, and it's messing with my head. I feel strange and restless. Focusing on my schoolwork is a struggle, and I lose sleep because I'm worried something bad might happen. My emotions are taking a hit too. I can't enjoy school like I used to."*

*L-C "Violence at my school is so widespread that I find it hard to learn and excel at my academic pursuits. I find it hard to concentrate and focus on my studies because when there is a possibility of violence, fear and anxiety arise. My mind remains occupied with concerns about what may be occurring and the security of my schoolmates and instructors instead of concentrating on the lesson at hand. It has ruined my exams and my overall academic life because it is difficult for me to cope with the lessons given at school. The fear makes me believe that I am not performing well academically."*

#### **5.4.8.1.2 Gangs**

One significant source of this fear was the existence of rival gangs within the school environment. Group participants mentioned that learners from different gangs were enrolled in the same classes, leading to frequent conflicts and the potential for violence. The mere presence of these rival gang members in the same classes poses a constant risk; fights often break out at any moment. This has created an atmosphere of tension and insecurity, making it difficult for learners to feel safe and to focus on their education. Notably, the learners also highlighted isolated incidents where individuals not affiliated with the school, but associated with the gangs, entered the school premises to instigate conflicts. These testimonies summed up their experience:

*L-C “As for me, when I know that there is another gang at the school with which some other group of learners compete, it makes me less secure in the school surroundings. It seems as if I must be vigilant all the time, monitoring my back and ensuring that I don’t end up somewhere unwanted. In my case, however, even the fact of not being in a gang does not guarantee my complete safety at school as the presence of the gang implies still possible trouble in which I’d be tangled up too. Similarly, gang activity in the school makes the school less cohesive and supportive as it breeds hostility and further division among the learners.”*

*L-C “I have seen how conflicts between different gangs in our school lead to more violence. There are physical fights happening inside the school and even outside the school grounds. This has made learners like me feel scared and anxious, and it’s not good for our learning. I’m always worried about violence at school, so I cannot relax or act like I normally would. Learners are always on edge, and it is affecting our grades because we cannot focus on class.”*

#### **5.4.8.1.3 Compromised Security**

Participants shared that the lack of control over access to the school allowed external individuals to import violence and chaos into the school environment. They argued that such incidents intensified the learners’ fear and contributed to a pervasive sense of vulnerability. Such thoughts were reflected below:

*L-C “In my school, the security is not very good, and it is causing problems for the whole school atmosphere. Because we do not have enough security rules in place, there is a*



*higher chance of things getting chaotic and people behaving badly. Sometimes, learners do not follow the school rules, damage school stuff, and disrupt classes, which makes it hard for all teachers and learners. It is likely because of these issues that some learners are missing school, and our academic progress is suffering. It is tough to expect a good education in a situation like this.”*

*L-C “I feel really exposed, and it is tough to shake off that feeling. It sticks with me whenever I leave a room at school. The whole atmosphere at school feels shaky and not secure, and it is hard to ever feel completely safe. Every day, I wonder if some kind of trouble is heading my way, and that just makes me feel even more insecure. This sense of threat makes it hard for us to focus on anything else when it's always on our minds.”*

#### **5.4.8.1.4 Severe Consequences and Physical Risks**

Personal experiences shared within the focus group further emphasised the severe consequences of school violence. Participants recounted instances where conflicts escalated, resulting in severe injuries or death, from stabbings. This narrative highlighted the grave physical risks faced by learners in hostile school environments. Participants shared that:

*L-C The violence I have seen at my school has caused a lot of visible harm. I have witnessed fellow learners with bruises, cuts, and injuries from fights. Our school has also suffered damages such as broken windows, doors, and furniture. The whole place now looks run-down and beaten up due to the violence. Even the bathrooms have been vandalised, and graffiti is everywhere. This physical damage has really made our school environment less pleasant and not so welcoming for learners.*

*L-C “I noticed some big changes in how I and others felt because of the increased violence in our school. It made us all more worried, and we felt trapped, scared, and unsafe. Some learners stopped paying attention in class, and some even started acting aggressively. I was so anxious and paranoid that it ruined my friendships and made it hard to talk to my teachers. Violence doesn't leave any of us untouched. It messes with our emotions.”*

The focus group data revealed a distressing reality characterised by fear, violence, and a lack of security within schools. The presence of rival gangs, conflicts spilling into classrooms, and external instigators contributed to an atmosphere of ongoing risk and danger for learners. The physical and psychological harm caused by this violence did not only jeopardise learners' safety but was also an impediment to educational progress.

#### **5.4.8.2 Causes of school violence**

The statements from the discussions stressed an on-going concern regarding the use of gangs and substance abuse. As a result, there were instances of violence and confrontation within the school.

##### **5.4.8.2.1 Gang Affiliation and Recruitment**

It was observed from the discussions that the involvement of older community members associated with gangs, with a known history of criminal activity and incarceration, was identified as a primary cause of violence. Participants shared that the individuals targeted and recruited young boys within the community into gang culture. By enticing these young learners with the promise of acceptance, power, and material benefits, they exploited their vulnerability and manipulated them into engaging in negative behaviours within the school. The following testimonies painted a picture of the scenario in the school:

*L-C “In life orientation, we have learned that children's development can be influenced by many different people and factors, including their families, peers, and the community around them. It has proven to be the case here at my school because some of my schoolmates who hang out with older community members who are well-known gang members have changed so much. They are too aggressive and unapproachable, and they are extremely disruptive. Everyone is intimidated by them, even the teachers are afraid to discipline them harshly because they are looking out for their safety outside the school premises.”*

*L-C “I have seen learners in lower grades being bullied into gangsterism. Seniors take advantage of the fact that we look up to them and they use it to their advantage by influencing the weak ones to do wrong things for them. This keeps getting worse because the school board has put their views above the views of every other learner. So even when such instances are reported they are dismissed or are not dealt with accordingly because they just assume that a senior is always mature enough to do the right thing in every situation.”*

*L-C “Learners from lower grades have been allocated mentors and tutors from older grades due to poor performance, but instead they have started hanging out in dodgy corners of school to smoke.”*

#### **5.4.8.2.2 Drug Dealing**

The participants noted that the influence of criminal individuals went beyond recruitment, but also involved learners in the sale of drugs, specifically marijuana (weed) within school premises. Participants reported that they supplied the drugs to the recruited learners, who were then tasked with distribution within the school environment. According to the learners, the presence of illicit substances further exacerbated the disruptive and dangerous atmosphere within the school. The testaments below reflect the situation:

*L-C “The use of drugs at my school disrupted the school and had effects on the school environment. For one, the distribution and use of drugs on school grounds has led to a range of legal and disciplinary consequences for both learners and staff members. It led to health and safety concerns because learners and staff are exposed to dangerous substances and their related health risks. It created a culture of disruption often after consumption as learners disturb teachers during their lessons, trying to exert their power over them.”*

*L-C “School has not been the same ever since learners have found a way to make drug sales at school without being caught. The pass rate has significantly decreased. There is even a lack of basic manners as learners do not see the need to follow the school roles. There is no order whatsoever. Learners now feel that they can do whatever without consequences – such as skipping classes to go and smoke in private places. The safety of girls has also been compromised because of young males that are always under the influence of drugs in school premises.”*

#### **5.4.8.2.3 Desire for Recognition and Power**

Peace club members shared that learners who were associated with gangs sought recognition and validation through their involvement in disruptive and troublesome behaviour. They argued that the reason why they do this was to establish a reputation of being bullies, troublemakers, and their actions were driven by a desire for attention and dominance. By gaining notoriety, they believed that everyone, including teachers and school administration, would acknowledge their authority and give them special treatment as they dared the power to disrupt school according to them. The excerpts below highlight the situations:

L-C *“There are learners who have a strong need for power and validation at my school. Some learners feel that they are not getting the respect they deserve, or that they are being treated unfairly by their peers or by the school staff. This has led to feelings of anger and resentment, which most of the times manifest in destructive or violent behaviour. However, not all learners in my school are the same, and not everyone who feels the need for power and validation acts in this way. Some use this need for recognition to do well in school. These learners are often mocked and are called ‘Teacher’s pet’, but they have channelled their energy in the right way.”*

#### **5.4.8.2.4 Symbolism and Gang Identification**

Participants shared that gang members often utilised symbols and specific clothing items, such as hats, to signify their affiliation to a particular group. These visual markers help to identify and differentiate between various gangs within the school. The visible symbols perpetuate divisions and conflicts among learners, contributing to an environment conducive to violence. Participants shared testimonials such as:

L-C *“In-group bias has become a big thing at our school. Learners are so eager to identify with a group because you are mocked, and you are not ‘cool’ if you do not belong. Many learners feel a strong sense of identification with their own kind, and they distrust or even demonise members of other groups. This has led to division and conflict within our school because, if you do not belong to a particular group, you are automatically against them. There are always violent acts that break out during school hours where one gang group is angry at the other. Learners often find themselves in situations where they must prove themselves by doing something rebellious and against the school law to be considered an acceptable member of a certain gang group.”*

L-C *“Different groups have their own way of dressing, of speaking, and of doing things. Individualism is not the most popular thing at our school. There are certain after-school activities that I want to be a part of, but I cannot because I will be an outcast in my group. I know a lot of learners who are sacrificing who they are and what makes them happy because of the need to belong. As a result, there is low morale, no enthusiasm, and poor performance across all areas. School is not a fun place for me.”*

#### **5.4.8.3 Effects of Violence**

The participants shared the impact of violence on learners within their school based on eyewitness and personal experiences. The detrimental consequences identified included

the prevalence of fear induced by acts of violence and the absence of a secure and protected learning environment.

#### **5.4.8.3.1 Feeling of Insecurity**

The main consequence of accessibility to the school, and the ease with which individuals from outside can enter, induces a pervasive feeling of insecurity among the learners. Knowing that anyone can access the school premises at any time, even posing as a learner by borrowing uniforms, created a constant sense of vulnerability and fear. This feeling hampered the ability of learners to fully focus on their studies and inhibited their overall well-being, and was shown by the following opinions:

*L-C “I am worried about the compromised security and uncontrolled access at my school because it could put me and my fellow learners at risk. If someone were to gain unauthorised access to the school, they could cause serious harm, and this has happened before. The compromised security makes me feel unsafe and anxious, which can make it difficult to focus on my studies.”*

*L-C “It deeply saddens me as a learner here that the safety of over a thousand learners is left in the hands of only two security guards who are only armed with sticks. When an adequate safety system is put in place, they are not only helping us as learners but also the teachers and every staff member. I would do so much better in my academics – and I am not only one who thinks this – if I did not have to worry about my own safety at a place where I should be the safest.”*

#### **5.4.8.3.2 Difficulty in Identification**

The large learner population in public schools, combined with the lack of consistent monitoring and identification procedures, presents a challenge in identifying intruders or individuals causing disruptions. Without a reliable system in place to track attendance and verify learners' identities, participants held the opinion that it was difficult for teachers and security guards to distinguish between genuine learners and those who are there to cause trouble. This further compromised the overall safety and security of the school environment. These concerns were reflected in the following statements:

*L-C “As someone who is going to be a learner at this school, I am concerned that the security measures cannot tell apart real learners from possible intruders. This means that anyone could enter the school without permission, and that could be dangerous. Plus, if*

*the security guards cannot tell who is [genuine], they might waste time before responding to an emergency – such as we have seen happen recently.”*

*L-C “I can imagine at least three scenarios off the top of my head where the lack of proper monitoring and identification procedures caused serious trouble here at school. There was a learner in my class who was carrying a weapon, and the school security guards missed it because they could not see what was hidden in plain sight since we do not have modern technology to detect harmful tools. The learner managed to get into class and, when a teacher was being confrontational about their misbehaviour and noisemaking, they stabbed the teacher on the shoulder, and that is just one of many incidents. This could have been prevented if the monitoring system was taken seriously.”*

*L-C “I find that this issue affects not only my academic life but my social life as well, because I am always worried about saying the right thing to everyone so that I do not end up on anyone’s wrong side just in case they are armed.”*

#### **5.4.8.4 Curbing School Violence**

During the focus group discussions, participants expressed their viewpoints regarding potential strategies for curbing school violence. The analysis of the discussions revealed several recurring themes which were integral to the comprehension of the complex nature of implementing a new programme in schools.

##### **5.4.8.4.1 Intervention and Rehabilitation**

Peace club members shared that it was crucial to address the involvement of older individuals associated with gangs, and to provide targeted interventions to steer young learners away from the path of violence. The discussions highlighted that programmes aimed at rehabilitation, mentorship, and skill-building could offer alternatives and positive influences, breaking the cycle of recruitment and criminal activity in their school. Suggestions were echoed in these excerpts:

*L-C “Intervention and rehabilitation programmes would really be helpful in breaking the cycle of criminal activity if implemented in my school. These programmes help provide support and guidance to learners who may be at risk of engaging in criminal activity and have helped them to turn their lives around. These programmes also help to create a more positive school culture, encouraging learners to be more proactive at school to increase overall attendance.”*

L-C *“I have closely witnessed the journey and the change that these programmes – a few that have been implemented so far – have had on learners. My older brother, who is two grades ahead of me, was part of the mischievous learners who needed intervention. In a few words he is like is a new creation. His grades have since gone up. He now has this new-born enthusiasm for school, and he is so hopeful about the future. He has a healthier relationship with teachers, and he is a good influence on me and my friends.”*

#### **5.4.8.4.2 Drug Awareness and Prevention**

Participants suggested that educational initiatives focused on raising awareness about the consequences of drug abuse could play a vital role in discouraging learners from engaging in drug-related activities. Members firmly believed that collaboration with the SAPS and community organisations could help combat the supply and distribution of drugs within the school environment. This is reflected in the excerpts below:

L-C *“As a learner, I found the campaigns to raise awareness about different issues helpful. They have used guest speakers, educational programmes, and community discussions to get the message across. These efforts have made us learners more aware, and we now pay attention to important topics and support each other to make positive changes. Personally, I have felt the impact of education on mental health, helping us stand together during tough times. It also improved our abilities to express ourselves through writing and visuals, which are crucial for improving our literacy. The campaigns have also shed light on cyber-bullying, an important issue we need to tackle.”*

L-C *“As a learner here, I believe that the SA Police Services (SAPS) must work closely with the community to reduce drug problems in schools. SAPS has been doing operations to find and take away drugs through community collaboration. They have also joined forces with community groups to help kids and families and educate everyone about staying away from drugs. These efforts have made our school safer and better for learning. But there's still work to be done to keep improving.”*

#### **5.4.8.4.3 Promotion of Positive Role Models**

The discussion recommended that fostering an environment that celebrated positive behaviour and educational achievements could help shift the focus from negative attention-seeking activities to more constructive pursuits. Encouraging the involvement of mentors, teachers, and community leaders could provide learners with alternative role models to emulate and look up to. This comment reflects the ideas revealed:

L-C *“In my opinion, looking at the teachers at school and all the good they do encourage me to study hard and stay focused. They are like our heroes, showing us how to reach our dreams. I am confident I can make my big dreams come true. Seeing their homes, cars, and how they dress motivates me to work hard for my things and be strong in pursuing what I want.”*

#### **5.4.8.4.4 Strengthening School Security**

The discussion concluded that implementing stringent security measures within the school premises could help restrict the access of external and internal individuals seeking to cause disturbances. Participants felt that this could involve increased surveillance, controlled entry points, and collaboration with the Police (SAPS) to maintain a safe environment for learners and staff. This was shown in the following interactions with the participants:

L-C *“I think making our school more secure can really help calm things down. When we learners feel safe, we are less likely to cause trouble. If we have more security guards, it might discourage learners from misbehaving. Security cameras can also catch and deal with any issues that come up. Knowing these security measures are there would make me feel safer and less likely to see or be a part of any problems at school. I believe having these measures and keeping them updated is important. It helps make our learning environment safe and positive for all of us.”*



## **5.5 Chapter Summary**

The primary objective of this chapter was to examine the nature, causes, and prevalence of school violence within the Umlazi district. A mixed methods approach was employed to fulfil this objective, incorporating surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. The quantitative data analysis revealed that a significant portion of learners experienced exposure to violence on a weekly basis, with a higher incidence among male learners. To gain a deeper understanding of the situation, interviews were structured based on the quantitative findings, involving teachers, parents, and security personnel. Additionally, the perspectives of learners were gathered through focus group discussions. The outcomes of these interviews and focus group discussions have raised significant concerns. The findings unveiled a disturbing scenario characterised by pervasive mistrust, breakdowns in communication channels between schools and parents, the use of abusive language, threats of violence, a pervasive bullying culture, a rising incidence of substance abuse, and instances of theft. In the following chapter, we will delve into a detailed discussion of the key discoveries emerging from the interviews and focus group discussions.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

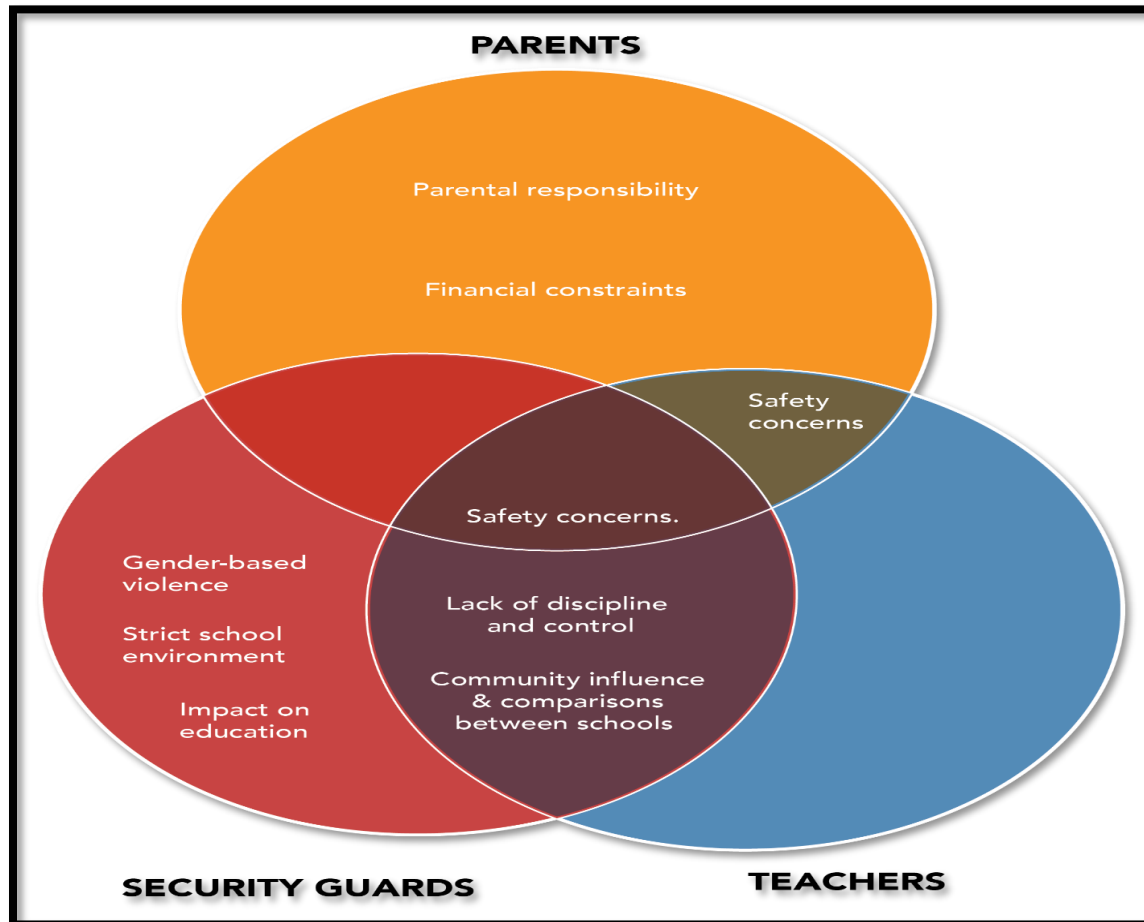
### **QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents interviews with educators, parents, and security guards. The discussion encompasses a thematic analysis of seven overarching themes that included: the state of schools, factors contributing to school violence, personal repercussions of occurrences, broader implications, prevailing security environment, perceptions of alternative programmes, and the role of peace clubs. Also, focus group discussions were carried out with learners from the three participating schools, with four central themes identified: the current state of affairs, underlying causes of school violence, the ramifications, and strategies for the mitigation of instances of school violence.

## 6.2 Interviews

### 6.2.1 Current Situation in School



**Figure 6-1** Diagram 6:1 Current situation in school (Self-Generated).

The physio-psycho-social status of the three schools was subject to varying interpretations by the participants (parents, teachers, and security guards). The absence of a unanimous consensus regarding the schools' status could be attributed, in part, to their distinct geographical locations. Geographical disparities led to divergent experiences among participants, consequently influencing their perceptions of the physio-psycho-social status of their respective schools (Cooley-Quille *et al.* 2001; Bacchini and Esposito 2020). The divergence in perception accentuated the presence of dynamic factors within the physio-psycho-social environment of Umlazi, which exert an influence on how individuals interpret violence. Bacchini and Esposito (2020) conclude that

continuous exposure to violence leads to desensitisation. The difference in feedback can be explained by examining the schools' different locations, as established by the South African Human Rights Commission (2008), that nature of violence was reliant on the social context in which it occurred. Lamb (2021) shares that Umlazi is one of the most volatile communities in Kwa-Zulu Natal. A variety of crimes are committed with different frequencies in the district there by desensitising communities.

Both teachers and parents expressed a shared concern about the disturbing prevalence of violence within schools, which raised significant safety apprehensions. Teachers indicated that they were not immune to acts of violence; occasionally they became targets of such incidents. Their collective acknowledgment pointed to a broader social problem: Umlazi community's inherent safety challenges permeating into the school environment. The correlation between community violence and school safety mirrored the prevailing nature of Umlazi District as a notoriously unsafe community in South Africa (Duma 2013; Lamb 2021). The district frequently ranks among the top 30 in terms of reported crime incidents from the police (South African Police Service 2023). The prevalence of violence in communities creates an atmosphere imbued with fear and anxiety; residents remain uncertain about the potential risks and developments that may transpire. Dunbar-Krige, Pillay and Henning (2010: 7); Mabasa and Muluvhu (2019) reach the conclusion that schools situated in troubled areas inevitably become intertwined with the troubled community's ecosystem. Given the overwhelming impact of destabilising social forces, institutions succumb to their effects. Comparatively, schools located in affluent suburbs do not struggle to maintain a conducive school environment (Du Plessis and Mestry 2019). Violence in learning institutions can be attributed to a wide range of factors that reflect an intersection of the environment and the individual. An understanding of the motivation for people's behaviour can develop through an examination of the settings where the individual lives (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

The emotions of teachers and security personnel were characterised by a sense of powerlessness, trepidation, and contemplation of resignation. Their vulnerability stemmed from the prolonged direct interaction with learners, serving as the primary point of contact within the school environment. Confronted with the pervasive issue of violence

within schools, both teachers and security personnel found themselves grappling with a profound sense of helplessness. Participants conveyed a sense of surrender in an attempt to address disruptive behaviours among learners. The lack of adequate support and opportunities for skills development in dealing effectively with instances of school violence was evident. The prevailing feelings of frustration led both teachers and security guards on a path towards resignation. Their efforts to effect change were perceived as futile. These findings are consistent with the frustration-aggression theory which contends that frustration gives rise to instigations for various types of responses (Miller *et al.* 1941). In 2011 the South African Democratic Teacher's Union (SADTU) reported that 67 000 teachers resigned citing learner violence and challenges with school management (Vally, Dolombisa and Porteus 1999; Hlatshwayo 2018). The implications of these actions to the provision of education and the teaching profession can only be left to the imagination.

As a coping mechanism, the adoption of passive behaviours was preferred as a safer alternative to confrontation, given that some learners responded to confrontational approaches with violence, creating an environment where a sense of impunity prevailed. Shiva-Kuma *et al.* (2017) argue that power dynamics within educational settings impede the development of mutual respect, engagement, and the overall effectiveness of learning in schools. Consequently, at the three schools there existed an atmosphere characterised by a permissive attitude, ultimately contributing to a rise in unaccountable acts of violence and the proliferation of delinquent behaviours among learners. Notably, this permissiveness provided a fertile ground for the emergence of gender-based violence, a concern highlighted by the security personnel in their reports concerning incidents both within and around schools. This contradicts the notion that teachers from violent backgrounds and communities were more likely to perpetuate violence against their learners to maintain discipline (Ghorab and Al-Khaldi 2014; Dewan 2021). Rather, school staff adopted passive behaviour as a benign alternative, given that some learners responded to confrontational approaches with violence in and around school premises (Bhengu 2020; Mashego 2022; Gumede 2023)

A prevailing lack of discipline and control within the three schools under investigation was evident. Both groups identified a nexus between the escalating disciplinary issues

and the absence of support from pertinent entities, notably the Department of Education and parents. There is concurrence that efforts to uphold discipline were tempered by the need to navigate a delicate balance, ensuring compliance with government rules and regulations while contending with parents who displayed a protective stance towards their children's unbecoming behaviours and absenteeism. Some parents were unwilling to take responsibility for their children's misconduct, consequently promoting unruly conduct among learners (Nhambura 2020). Confirmation of hostilities and lack of trust between the parents and educators in maintaining discipline promoted delinquent behaviour is reported in a number of studies (Minj 1999; Singh, Mbokodi and Msila 2004; Rusnak 2018; Ahmed, Rönkä and Perälä-Littunen 2021). Epstein and Sheldon (2000) argue that a child's growth is linked to three spheres of influence: the family, school and community. The point reinforces Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory. The individual occupies the centre of developmental influences. Consequently, the results of a lack of co-operation between parents and educators is explained by the systems theory which attests that working in silos is detrimental for development. Brits (2011) encourages people to share knowledge beyond their functional boundaries.

The principle of *in loco parentis*, which translates to "in the place of a parent," imposes a duty upon educators to ensure the physical and psychological safety of all learners under their supervision (Masinga 2016). The *loco parentis* principle implies that educators bear the responsibility of providing diligent supervision concerning the psychological and physical well-being of learners, who are inherently impressionable and immature individuals. The practice of spanking a child is widely accepted as a method for addressing disciplinary issues within an African family. Conversely, it is generally discouraged within the school setting as it has been outlawed (Naong 2007).

This creates a dilemma for teachers, who often serve as parents in their personal lives. Hence, when teachers adopt *loco parentis* during school hours, they draw from a parental and professional perspective. This situation reveals the conflict between traditional cultural norms and contemporary values. As the old African proverb suggests, "It takes a village to raise a child." However, this clash between cultural traditions and modern ideologies has blurred the lines regarding the appropriate tools for managing learners in

schools. If there remains ambiguity about the most effective methods for addressing discipline, issues such as school violence are likely to persist and pose ongoing challenges in educational environments. There is no standardised form of punishment. Mwamwenda (2004) comments that parents should have trust in the educators as they are fully aware of what they are doing.

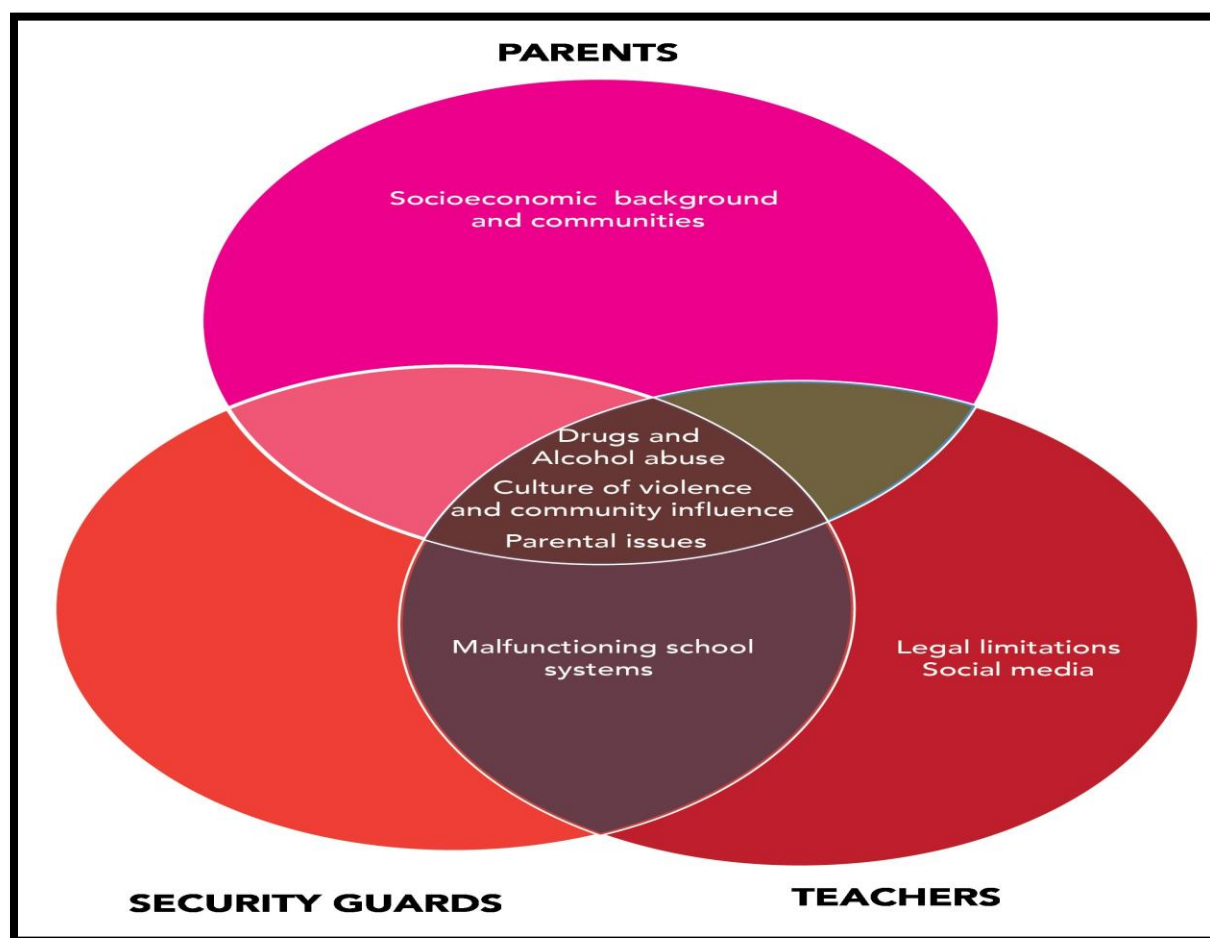
The issue of some children experiencing neglect, with the school bearing the primary responsibility for their care and development, is a cause for concern (Ndamani 2008). These circumstances are often associated with households led by single parents. In such cases, parents typically devoted a significant amount of their time and energy to the family's financial stability, striving to make ends meet. Often, children in these families were left with a sense of neglect, as their parents were frequently absent due to work commitments and the demands of sustaining the household. Statssa (2011) confirms that, 44% of the households in Umlazi were female single-headed households. Burton and Leoschut (2013) national survey revealed that one out of three learners resided in single-parent households, while one out of every seven was being raised by their grandmothers. There appears to be a relation between delinquent children and predominantly single-parent household upbringing as opposed to those with both (Antecol and Bedard 2007). The effects of the environment were salient to this study; thus, taking into account different elements of the macro-system (Bronfenbrenner 1979) some inference on the nature of their influence on the individuals could be made.

Security personnel and parents expressed unanimous consensus regarding the influence of the broader Umlazi community on the prevailing atmosphere within the schools. Both agreed that the schools reflect the broader neighbourhood, indicating a strong connection between the two. The current school's environment was essentially an extension of the inhabitants of Umlazi. As a consequence of this alignment, schools grappled with learners frequently skipping classes due to concerns related to violence. The social challenges prevalent within communities in the end, permeated the school environment in which they were situated with varying degrees (Burton and Leoschut 2013).

In summary, the current school's environment can be characterised in innumerable ways. The schools in this study were marked by safety concerns, ineffective monitoring systems, pervasive fear and anxiety, a prevailing sense of helplessness, and the influence of a challenging community environment. Additionally, financial constraints

prevented some parents from transferring their children to better-organized schools, either within different sections of Umlazi or outside, leaving them frustrated with limited options.

### 6.2.2 Causes of School Violence



**Figure 6-2** Causes of School Violence (Self-Generated).

Consensus among the three sets of stakeholders – the parents, teachers, and security personnel – highlighted one prominent cause of violence in the schools: The pervasive influence of substance abuse, that is, both drugs and alcohol. This was an issue of concern and significance. Evidence from various testimonials revealed a concerning trend of heightened involvement in alcohol and drug consumption among learners. This phenomenon appeared to be facilitated by the ready availability of alcoholic beverages



within local communities. South Africa is one the highest consumers of alcohol for 15-year-old children (Peer *et al.* 2013). Indeed, South Africa leads the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in terms of alcohol consumption (Peltzer, Davids and Njuho 2011; Pengpid, Peltzer and Ramlagan 2021).

Accessibility to alcohol can be credited, in part, to the socio-structural disarray prevailing within the communities. Notably, in instances where communities go as far as engaging drug vendors within schools and subsequently distributing the substances there, the prevalence of alcohol within these communities is not surprising. Consequently, the Umlazi environment in which children are raised is characterised by excessive alcohol consumption by adults, significantly influencing the behavioural patterns adopted by younger individuals. The social learning theory assumes that modelling influences learning principally through informative functions. Observers individually acquire their knowledge through symbolic representations of modelled activities rather than specific stimulus-response associations (Bandura 1971). It is imperative to emphasise the link between alcohol and drug abuse on the one hand, and the community and the violent behaviours in this context on the other (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana 2010; Dlungwane 2017; Hunter 2020).

There was consensus among participants on the issue of absent parents being a significant contributing factor to instances of school violence. Absentee parents played a pivotal role in character development of their children through failure to provide the necessary supervision and guidance. The participants elaborated that many parents were preoccupied with pursuing financial stability, often to the detriment of their children's well-being and upbringing. Literature shows that families lacking structure, implementing inconsistent rules, and employing harsh and irregular disciplinary practices raised children with a propensity for violence and other weird behaviours (Khoury-Kassabri, Astor and Benbenishty 2009; Van De Merwe, Dawes and Ward 2012; Singh and Steyn 2013). It was also discerned that the Umlazi District exhibited a notable prevalence of single-parent households, with a predominant majority of these families being led by females (44%) (Statssa 2011).

In the absence of active parental presence, particularly the father, children from such households tended to seek guidance and instruction from other community members. Unfortunately, some community figures engaged in unlawful activities, including drug distribution, excessive alcohol consumption, and involvement in the sex trade, become default role models. Consequently, children within these environments were inadvertently exposed to potentially harmful influences and advice. When examining the current conduct of learners, particularly those engaged in delinquent behaviours, it is plausible to argue that they were modelling wrong community members. Behaviour modelling or vicarious learning, is in line with the social learning theory, which states that, behaviours are learned either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of models (Bandura 1971). Adding to the intersection between the individual and their upbringing, the social aggression theory identifies modelling as another instigator of aggressive behaviour (Bandura 1983).

Studies have shown that children with absent parents are most likely to be involved in delinquent behaviour (Barber 2004; Howell 2015; Kroese *et al.* 2021). Given the unique social dynamics inherent in Umlazi, combined with the allure of a more comfortable lifestyle, the propensity for delinquent behaviours among learners, particularly females, will be further amplified. Absent parents are less equipped to shield their children from engaging in misguided conduct absorbed from the broader community. For instance, Antecol and Bedard (2007) found in their study that the presence of a father in a child's teenage years decreases the probability of smoking by 5.3%, drinking by 1.2%, sexual intercourse by 3.4% and marijuana by 2.2%. Thus, it can be argued that children from families characterised by a lack of affection and care, sibling rivalry, absent fathers, and uninvolved parents are more likely to perpetrate violence in school settings (Pedro 2012).

One major contributing factor to the issue of school violence in the Umlazi neighbourhood is the prevalent culture of violence within the community, which has a discernible impact on its residents, including children. The culture of violence as a pivotal underlying cause of school violence was acknowledged. To understand the learners' behaviour, there is need to recognise the socialisation process with the immediate environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that children are a developing organism that interact with

their environments; their actions are an expression of their interactions and personal individualities. Thus, the influence of the dangerous Umlazi surroundings on the shaping of learner behaviours is recognised in this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979) accepted systems such as family, peers, teachers, neighbourhoods, and the mass media as having an impact. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) established that the physical, social, and economic characteristics of neighbourhoods and communities significantly impact the likelihood of violence in educational settings.

It is noteworthy that certain members of the community were identified as engaging in criminal activities such as drug trafficking, assassinations, prostitution, and affiliation with gangs. In the absence of paternal figures in the lives of many learners, some turned to these individuals for guidance and inadvertently adopted their behaviours and values. This pattern is especially concerning, as learners tend to emulate the conduct they observe in their immediate surroundings. Umlazi District has gained notoriety as one of the most violent townships in the province of Kwa-Zulu-Natal (South African Police Service 2023). Persistent exposure of learners to violent behaviours within their larger community environment further reinforces the adoption of these manners. In essence, children tend to replicate what they are consistently exposed to, a phenomenon akin to the "bobo doll experiment" (Bandura 1971). This, in turn, exacerbated the issue of school violence at study sites, as learners incorporated aggressive tendencies into their own psyche. Sibisi (2016) substantiates the view explaining that, children hailing from black and coloured communities were more susceptible to adverse circumstances and bear a heightened vulnerability to school violence.

A dysfunctional school system and related support structures was an additional determinant of school violence. Within this context, the prevailing education policies often constrained educators and security personnel capacity to address disruptive behaviour by learners. For instance, in cases where a learner engaged in disruptive behaviour within the classroom environment, the act of removal from their teaching-learning space is regarded as a transgression against their entitlement to an education. Consequently, teachers found themselves in a conundrum, unable to employ corrective measures to rein in delinquent disruptive behaviour. Eisenbraun (2007) simplifies the underlying causes of

violence in schools to encompass location, size, ethnic distribution, social policies, and physical condition. This study identified seven specific factors that often contribute to school violence: the absence of supervision and discipline, a poor school climate, inadequate policies addressing violence, insufficient conflict resolution and social skills programmes, the availability of weapons, gang activity, and a lack of mental health facilities. Amagoh (2008) explains that, with the systems theory, the behaviour of the entire structure is determined by the interaction of the components. Senge (2006) argues for the need to recognise the overall patterns of an unfolding situation to understand change. With schools facing rampant violent behaviour, it was important to explore the school ecosystem, its existing structures, and how they function to maintain a healthy school environment. A dysfunctional school environment fosters an atmosphere of unaccountability among learners, who recognise the fact that they are unlikely to face punitive consequences for their misconduct.

Furthermore, an additional dimension to this issue arises when parents are summoned to participate in resolving behavioural challenges in their children. Instead of co-operating, they often aligned themselves with their progeny. In these instances, learners come to realise that their parents consistently supported their actions, irrespective of their misconduct within the school environment (Nhambura 2020). Evidently, to the learners, parents invariably take their side, rendering the school administration impotent in its efforts to address disciplinary issues (Ahmed, Rönkä and Perälä-Littunen 2021). The breakdown in both support systems and school structures serves as fertile ground for the proliferation of school violence and the perpetuation of an environment where accountability is conspicuously absent.

Teachers articulated distinct factors contributing to school violence, with a notable emphasis on the role of social media platforms. The emergence of novel disruptive behaviours, such as challenges on platforms like TikTok, actively promoting disorderly behaviours among learners were cited as a cause for concern. Moreover, the ever-growing desire to generate engaging content on social media in order to monetize it has led some learners to exhibit extreme behaviours in real-time. These encompass actions such as violent confrontations, instances of bullying, and engaging in sexually explicit dances, commonly referred to as "branded content creation." It should be acknowledged

that the unchecked influence of social media, when placed in the hands of individuals lacking appropriate guidance, has yielded profoundly adverse effects within the learner population; in extreme cases it has caused death (Sonjica 2021; Khumalo 2022; Ngema 2023b).

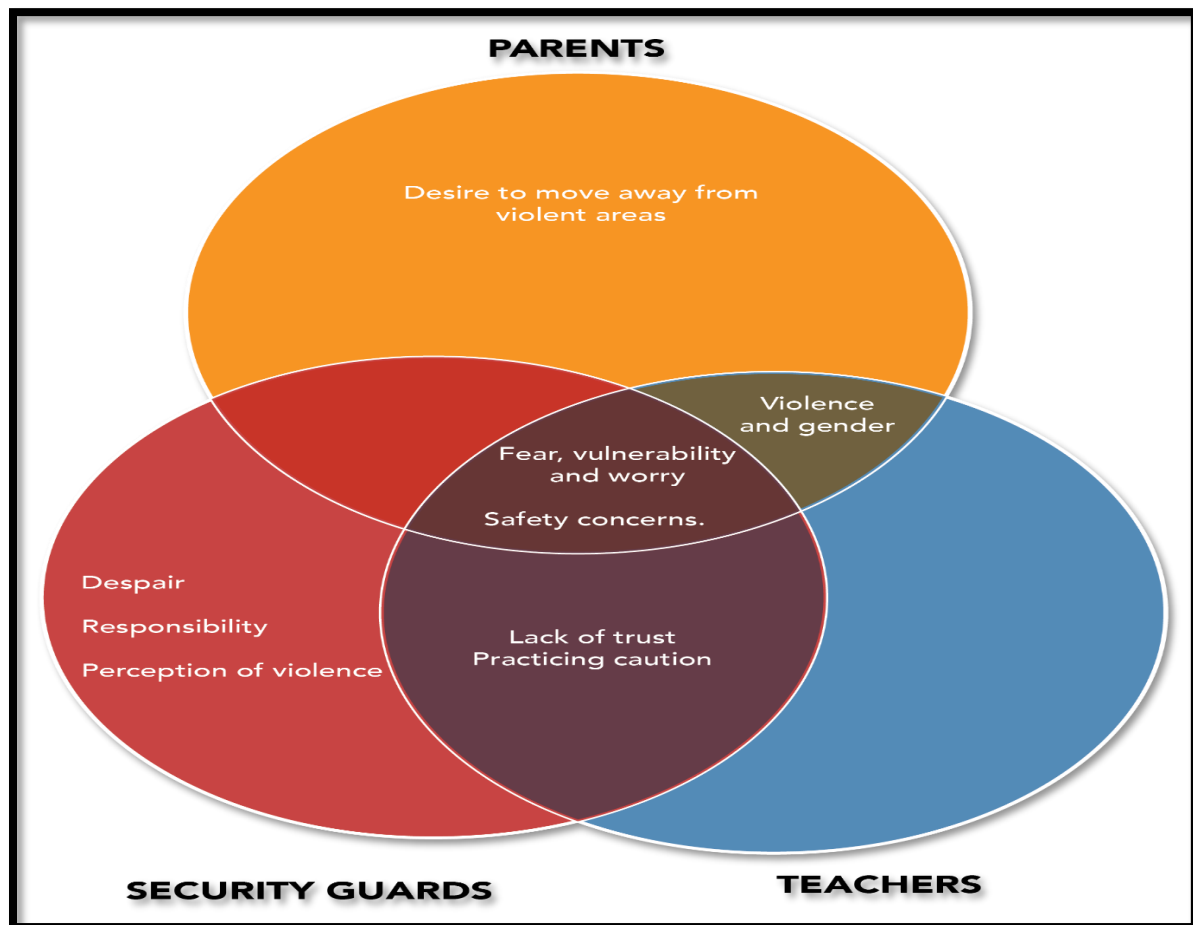
Furthermore, the recent emergence of the phenomenon of 'influencers' on social media platforms has gained a pivotal role in shaping the behaviours of learners. Influencers often promote specific agendas that resonate with the interests of young learners, effectively serving as role models. Consequently, some learners emulate these leading to delinquent behaviours in certain instances. Acts of learners modelling behaviour influencers can be intimately connected to the over-arching issue of absentee or disengaged parents. In this context, children are consistently exposed to unfiltered information through social media, thereby exerting a profound influence on their deportment and attitudes in the absence of adequate parental guidance or supervision. Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, TikTok and Twitter have drawn the attention of legislators in Europe and the United States of America due to rising cases of abuse, cyberbullying and trolling among the young learners on these platforms (Kwan *et al.* 2020; Cataldo *et al.* 2021).

The socio-economic background emerged as one of the factors contributing to instances of school violence. It was noted that learners from less stable family environments displayed increased frustration. Subsequently, the manifestation of violent behaviour in these learners could be ascribed to their attempts to alleviate or express pent-up frustrations. It is plausible to reason that the emergence of violent tendencies in learners with unstable backgrounds had links to their frustrations arising from specific social life circumstances. Eisenbraun (2007) contends that the disruption of familial structures due to social adversities, such as illness, divorce, death, or incarceration, detrimentally affected children. Seen through the cognitive-neo-association model, bad experiences could engender either a 'fight' or 'flight' response, contingent upon immediate circumstances, prior learning, and genetic predispositions (Berkowitz 2012). Given the focus of the present study on aggression in learners, particular attention was assigned to the fight response.

Legal constraints curtailed teachers' ability to address unbecoming behaviour issues in learners, thus contributing to incidents of school violence. This left the teachers with limited effective means for intervention. The expansion of children's rights in legal

statutes, in part, has emboldened some learners. They are aware that their actions are less likely to result in significant consequences. This perception led to a sense of impunity and, subsequently, contributed to instances of school violence. Evidently, the primary determinants of school violence comprise multiple factors that include absentee parenting, and substance abuse involving drugs and alcohol, and the prevalence of a culture that tolerates or promotes violence as a means to an end. However, there were additional influences, albeit less prevalent, such as social media and that of socio-economic backgrounds. These exceptions serve to underline the multi-faceted nature of the issue of school violence while emphasising the importance of considering various contributory elements in its analysis.

### 6.2.3 Personal Effects of School Violence



**Figure 6-3** Personal Effects of School Violence (Self-Generated) .

The consequences of school violence on participants included fear, anxiety, and worry. Parents, teachers, and the security personnel believed the occurrences made them feel vulnerable and unable to control the outcomes of learner behaviour. They believed outcomes were unpredictable, thereby causing fear and anxiety. Teachers and security feared for their safety as the learners could harm them if agitated by the monitoring and control of behaviour. Parents on the other hand feared that the unpredictable school environment did not guarantee the safety of their children. This in turn caused a sense of fright and anxiety at the three schools and within the community. This was an indication that high-density schools tend to suffer from fear of the unknown due to the volatile environment they live in. Literature has long established that victims of violence in and around schools exhibit a sense of fear and vulnerability (Nickerson and Spears 2007; Bellflower 2010; Wilson, Douglas and Lyon 2010; Maring and Koblinsky 2013).

Expressions of apprehension, helplessness, concerns for their own safety, and confidence to maintain discipline while dealing with learners exhibiting violent and disruptive behaviour were recorded. The high levels of violence and crime constantly worried parents about children's safety at school. Additionally, security guards, tasked with maintaining order, reported fear and trepidation, particularly in situations involving illicit activities. These shared experiences were a reflection of broader South African societal issues relating to violence, security, and crime. There are regular reported cases of the murder of law-and-order personnel, not only in Umlazi but countrywide (Mhlongo 2022; Ngema 2023b; SABCNews 2023).

Nonetheless, the study by Sinthumule and Tsanwani (2017) of Vhembe District in Limpopo Province, South Africa found that the presence of security guards in schools increased safety. However, although Vhembe is a safer environment compared to Umlazi District, this does not guarantee security. Rather, people involved in security in Umlazi are more exposed to violent confrontations due to the nature of the neighbourhood. This perhaps explains why security in Umlazi are tame about maintaining school violence for fear of their lives.

Along with the negative attitude, parents also expressed a lack of faith in the ability of the education system to protect and support the children's academic development. This was primarily due to concerns about violence and bullying in schools. There were questions and voiced dissatisfaction about the effectiveness of the system in addressing the issues

about neighbourhood safety and law enforcement. Violence in schools and communities was exacerbated by the absence of police officers and inadequate security measures around schools. The absence of police is due to the police service itself being short staffed (Brandt 2023; Schrieber 2023). As a result, there were poor security measures in the wider South African society; thus, schools were directly affected.

To manage potential risks associated with their role, security guards from the different schools employed varying strategies. Some chose to limit their involvement, while others took a more proactive approach to protect both learners and school property. This brought attention to the challenging decision-making process faced by security guards in an effort to balance their duty to safeguard learners against potential physical harm and property damage. Overall, the interviews shed light on the complex dynamics within the education system, with varying perspectives on safety and learner engagement. Moreover, there were some testaments of gender-based violence.

On the other hand, educators discussed selective engagement as a coping strategy. Their focus of attention and efforts were on learners who exhibited positive behaviour and a genuine desire to learn. Teachers expressed a willingness to work with motivated learners who did not disrupt the classroom environment, which reflected a strategy to prioritise certain learners for educational support. The observation that teachers sometimes reached a breaking point that led to a disconnection from learners is a distressing reality. Sibisi (2021) reports educators facing the highest levels of mental fatigue, burnout, and psychological distress compared to other professions in South Africa. This disengagement, particularly when exacerbated by an issue such as drug use among learners, poses a genuine threat to the quality of education provided in schools. The suggestion that this might reflect broader staff sentiments and the overall learner profile raises important questions about the school environment and the need for systemic changes.

The findings shed light on significant challenges within the South African educational context. The vulnerability and fear experienced by particularly female teachers due to their gender was a concerning revelation. Reliance on male colleagues by female counterparts for support in managing disruptive learner's points to potential disparities of absent fathers in general and a general lack of respect for women. The murder of young female college learners and women at the national level as reported in the media is

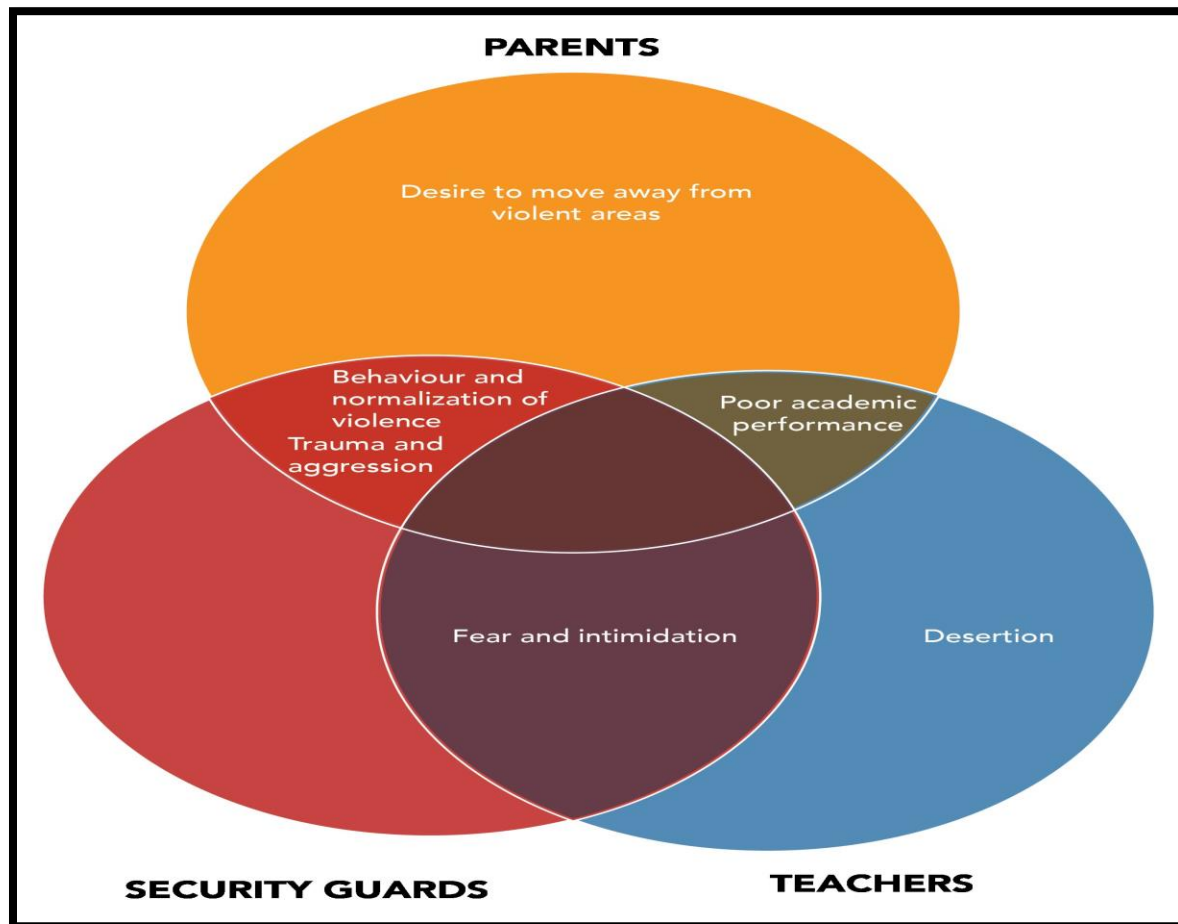


alarming. Mashiya (2014); Petersen (2014) conclude that male teachers played a significant role in modelling learners. Further exploration into the influence of gender experiences on teacher-learner interactions and peer dynamics might provide valuable insights for addressing school violence.

Parents' concerns regarding the impact of violence and drug addiction in schools on their children's behaviour and well-being are valid and noteworthy. Parents struggling with the fear of their children adopting aggressive or violent behaviours at home underscores the far-reaching consequences of belligerent behaviour beyond the school premises. The uncertainty faced by parents in addressing concerns about school safety highlights a need for better communication and support mechanisms between the parties. Overall, these observations emphasise the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address the challenges faced by both educators and parents in ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment for learners.

A variety of perspectives on school violence in the South African context were evident. One prominent theme was the profound concern among parents for their children's safety. A strong desire was shown to escape dangerous neighbourhoods such as Umlazi in search of a safer environment and better educational opportunities. This was the result of the direct impact of the community's socio-economic conditions on their perceptions of security. On the other hand, security guards conveyed a sense of hopelessness, and saw learners as a 'lost generation', reflecting the broader societal challenges of inequality and unemployment.

#### 6.2.4 Effects of Violence Learners



**Figure 6-4** Effects of Violence on Learners (Self-Generated).

Interviews provided compelling evidence of the multi-faceted effects associated with bullying and violence in Umlazi and in South African schools generally. Parents' keen observations of behavioural changes in their children, including aggression, withdrawal, and diminished interest in school, evidenced the profound impact of negative experiences on learners. This confirms similar conclusions by Dupper (2013); Badri (2014) that children and adolescents endured emotional trauma manifested in symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, diminished self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness and disempowerment subsequent to experiencing acts of violence.

Equally concerning was the normalisation of violence among learners, which has become a distressing routine in their lives (Yesufu 2022). The revelation that some learners perceive violence as an effective problem-solving strategy highlights the urgent necessity for inclusive intervention targeting learner thinking but also the broader social and cultural context. Such action is in line with the Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) worldview advising that, to effect change in an individual's thought process, one should look at a learner's upbringing, life experiences, culture and education (Christie *et al.* 2015: 11). Addressing these issues necessitates evidence-based strategies that emphasise non-violent conflict resolution, promotion of a safer school culture, and community engagement in fostering a more supportive educational setting in Umlazi and similar contexts.

Teachers reported the prominent theme of fear and anxiety, pointing to the significant emotional toll that violence exacts on learners. Insecurity and the fear of reprisals from peers further compound the negative emotions, ultimately hampering learners' ability to engage with educational content. Importantly, the consequences of fear and anxiety often extend beyond the immediate situation, potentially affecting learners' long-term well-being and mental health, with possible repercussions on academic performance. Devers *et al.* (2012: 11) observe that victims often display a lack of interest and poor concentration, ultimately impacting their academic achievement. As a result, victims might no longer prioritise education due to diminished concentration levels and lowered self-esteem (Masinga 2016: 147).

Additionally, the theme of fear and intimidation, as security personnel mentioned, stressed the pervasive atmosphere of apprehension pervading the study sites. The fear of physical harm or aggression effectively silences learners, inhibiting their ability to express themselves, and stifling their personal and academic growth (Pereznieto *et al.* 2010). This situation holds implications for the creation of a safe and supportive school environment. Here learners can freely voice their concerns, access appropriate resources, and focus on their academic and personal development. The interconnectedness of physical and emotional safety within the educational context, and further emphasis on the urgency of addressing violence in schools to ensure the holistic well-being of learners is brought to attention. The target area would be classrooms since,

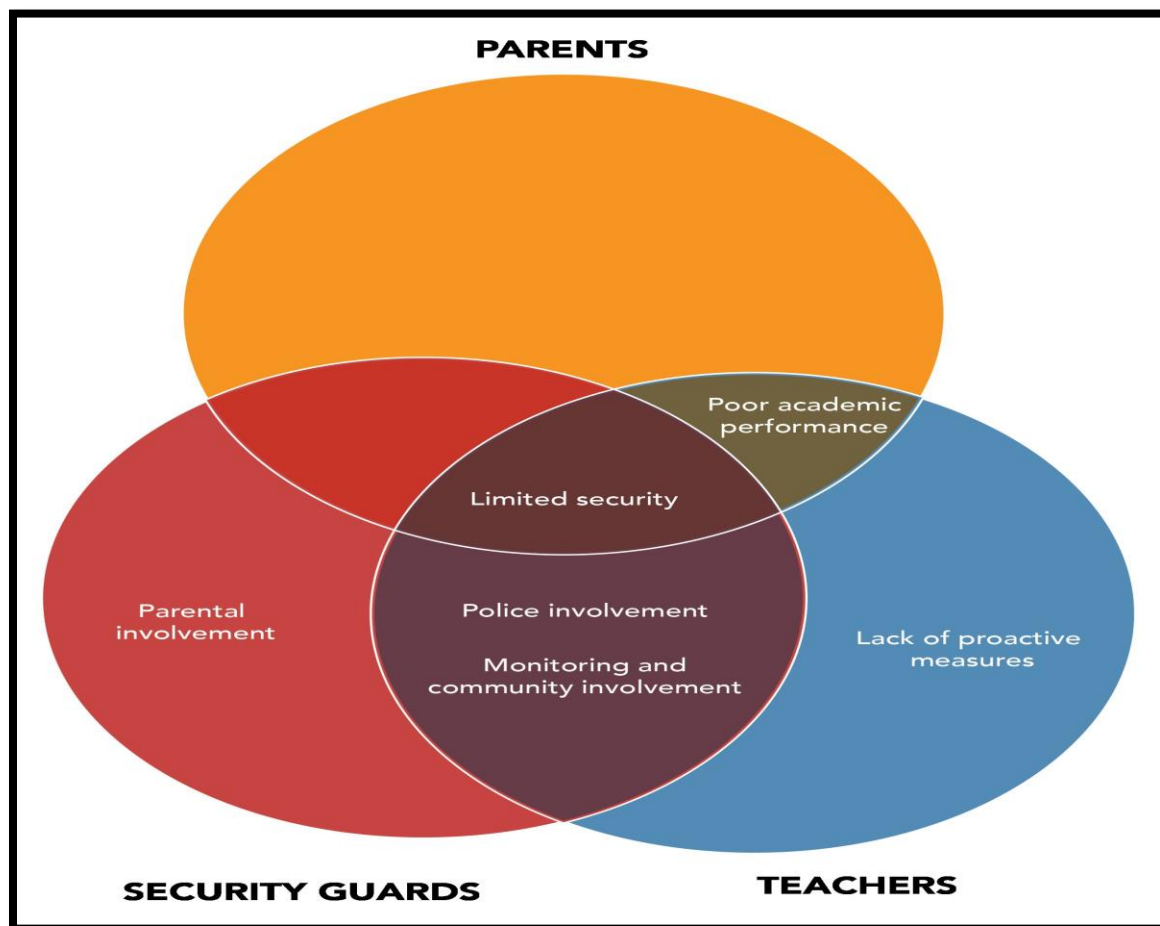
as Burton and Leoschut (2013) note, learners perceive classrooms as the most unsafe environment, where victimisation frequently occurs. Furthermore, the observation that violence hampers learners' ability to concentrate on their studies and subsequently results in poor academic performance is reflected in the South African National Examinations Report of 2019 – 2021; accordingly the NSC ExamReports (2021) reports that School A averaged a pass rate of 70%, while School B averaged 73% and School C 87%. This highlights the multi-faceted consequences of violence within educational environments. Though the average marks might look high, the argument is that, given the right conditions, these very schools could produce better results.

Reference to the disruptive effects of violence on the quality of education is particularly noteworthy in several studies (Flannery, Wester and Singer 2004; Henrich *et al.* 2004; McGaha-Garnett 2013). There is an emphasis on the broader implications of violence on the educational system, impacting not only individual learners but also the overall learning environment. This disruption, as suggested, might hinder learners from pursuing realistic academic ambitions, shedding light on the cyclical nature of violence and underachievement. An escalating prevalence of aggressive behaviour among school children was a significant observation. It brings attention to the concerning trend of violence begetting more violence and the potential normalisation of aggressive conduct within the school environment. That some learners resort to violence and intimidation as their primary means of conflict resolution due to their experiences, is a poignant commentary on the socialisation of violence within the Umlazi community. The inclusion of security personnel perspectives further corroborated this observation. Their recognition of unexplainable anger among learners accentuates the broader implications of violence within educational settings. Inexplicable anger, as pointed out, can escalate conflicts, and hinder the development of a positive learning environment.

Educators testified that some learners expressed a desire to leave their current school in search of a more conducive and supportive educational environment. The desire for better educational settings reflects the learners' recognition of the importance of quality education for their academic success and overall development. Such aspirations resonate with the broader educational discourse emphasising the significance of a nurturing learning environment. The issue of financial constraints actively preventing learners from transferring to safer schools introduces a compelling socio-economic

dimension to the analysis. The inequalities within the South African education system were historically shaped by segregationist apartheid policies. Access to a safe and quality learning environment was not equitably distributed. This situation leaves learners in mainly township and rural areas feeling trapped and helpless, highlighting the socio-economic barriers that hinder their ability to pursue educational goals.

#### 6.2.5 Current Security Status



**Figure 6-5** Current Security Status (Self-Generated).

From the discussions, some parents' lack of awareness of the current security status in the schools suggested a potential dearth of consciousness or engagement. Improved communication should be prioritised. However, this was concerning as it was either ignorance or reluctance to share thoughts. This problem stemmed from the lack of co-

operation from parents/guardians as teachers mentioned, as well as interruptions in combating delinquent behaviours in schools. The findings revealed inadequate security measures in schools, though specific details were not provided. A participant noted that ineffective security programmes stemmed from insufficient community involvement and learner supervision. In addition, monitoring learners requires more personnel than are currently available, indicating staffing challenges.

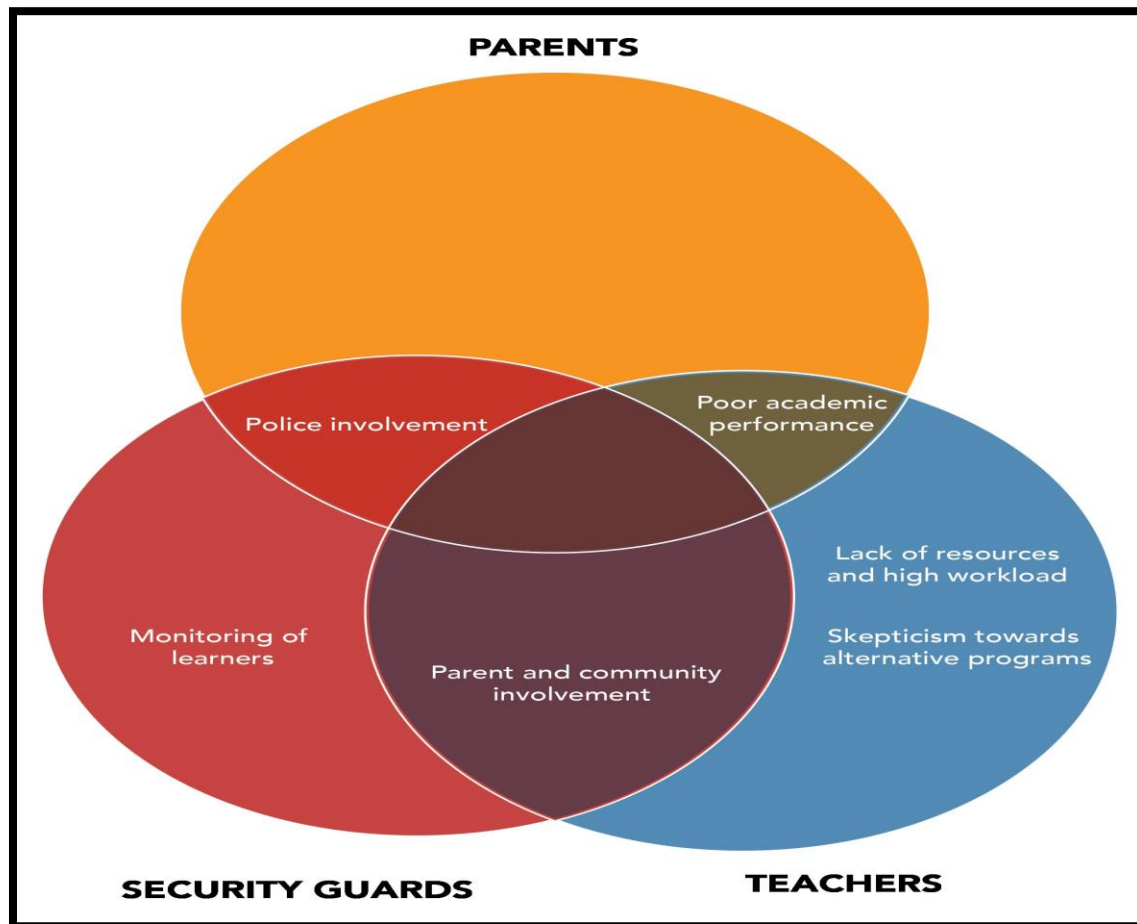
On a positive note, the participation of the police was acknowledged in addressing various important issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, discouraging questionable behaviours, and emphasising the importance of education. A proactive approach from the police can be beneficial in creating a safe and conducive learning environment. However, the analysis also points out an important issue of the inconsistency in the level of police involvement. This suggests that there might be a lack of sustained support or a need for more standardised approaches on how the police can engage with the schools. The absence of the South African Police Services (SAPS) is a result of being short staffed (Brandt 2023; Schrieber 2023). It could be beneficial for the schools and law enforcement to collaborate more closely to ensure a consistent and effective approach to addressing these issues across all schools involved.

Significant challenges regarding the monitoring of learners in the school environment were real. Given the concerns about the risks associated with monitoring, such as indiscipline and violent reactions, the importance of alternative and safer methods of supervision cannot be over emphasised. It is crucial to prioritise the safety and well-being of both learners and school staff. School A made use of community participation in one of its security programmes. Community involvement in addressing issues such as drug and alcohol abuse was deemed effective; members stood guard around strategic areas at break time as a deterrent to drug-related activities, demonstrating a positive effort to create a safer school environment. The actions are aligned to national programmes such as the Stop Walk Anti Bullying Programme, and the provincial Safe Schools Programme. This was an indication that improvised methods were applied to discipline in schools despite lacking formal recognition. However, the absence of community involvement in the other schools suggested a missed opportunity. Encouraging community participation

across all schools could potentially lead to more comprehensive and consistent security programmes that benefit the entire school community, as found in School A (Souto-Manning and Swick 2006; Daniel 2011). Sentiments on the issue of parental involvement and the impact on school security programmes are noteworthy. Occasionally, it emerged that parents created issues within the school, making it difficult for the administration to enforce efficient security programmes. This drew attention to a complex dynamic between schools, parents, and learners: the conflict or convergence between the micro- and meso-system from the point of their developmental influence (Renn 2003). Learners find themselves having to consider their identity. The perception of parents shielding their children and portraying the school administration negatively was a hindrance to effective discipline and security measures. Schools and parents require improved communication and collaboration to foster more supportive and constructive relationships conducive to peaceful school settings.

Furthermore, the observation that schools lacked proactive procedures to prevent incidents of violence and to promote a safe and peaceful learning environment is a significant concern. The prioritisation and implementation of preventive measures and strategies to create a secure and conducive learning environment must receive serious attention. This may involve improved staff training, conflict resolution programmes, and community engagement to address underlying issues and promote a culture of safety and respect within and outside the school. Overall, the comments highlight the importance of addressing both internal and external factors to enhance school security and maintain a positive educational atmosphere through innovative conflict prevention programmes such as peace clubs.

### 6.2.6 Perceptions of Alternative Programmes



**Figure 6-6** Alternative Programmes (Self-Generated).

A critical matter related to the safety and security of learners in educational institutions was parents with no further recommendations and who are oblivious of other initiatives on safety measures. This posed a potential gap in communication or awareness between the school administration and parents, indicating an opportunity to keep parents informed about safety protocols and initiatives. The relationship between the school and parents has an important influence on the learners. As Lai and Lin (2017) contend, the systems theory emphasises organisational relationships and interdependence among system components and organisation-environment relationships to function optimally. The recommendation to increase security and law enforcement presence was a common response to concerns about school safety. Security guards advocating for an increased police presence, especially during high-traffic volumes such as home time and school



hours, underlined the urgency of the issue. The implication that the current police presence was inadequate raised questions about the effectiveness of existing security measures. It may be beneficial for schools and local law enforcement agencies to collaborate and reassess current security strategies to ensure they align with the evolving safety needs of the school community.

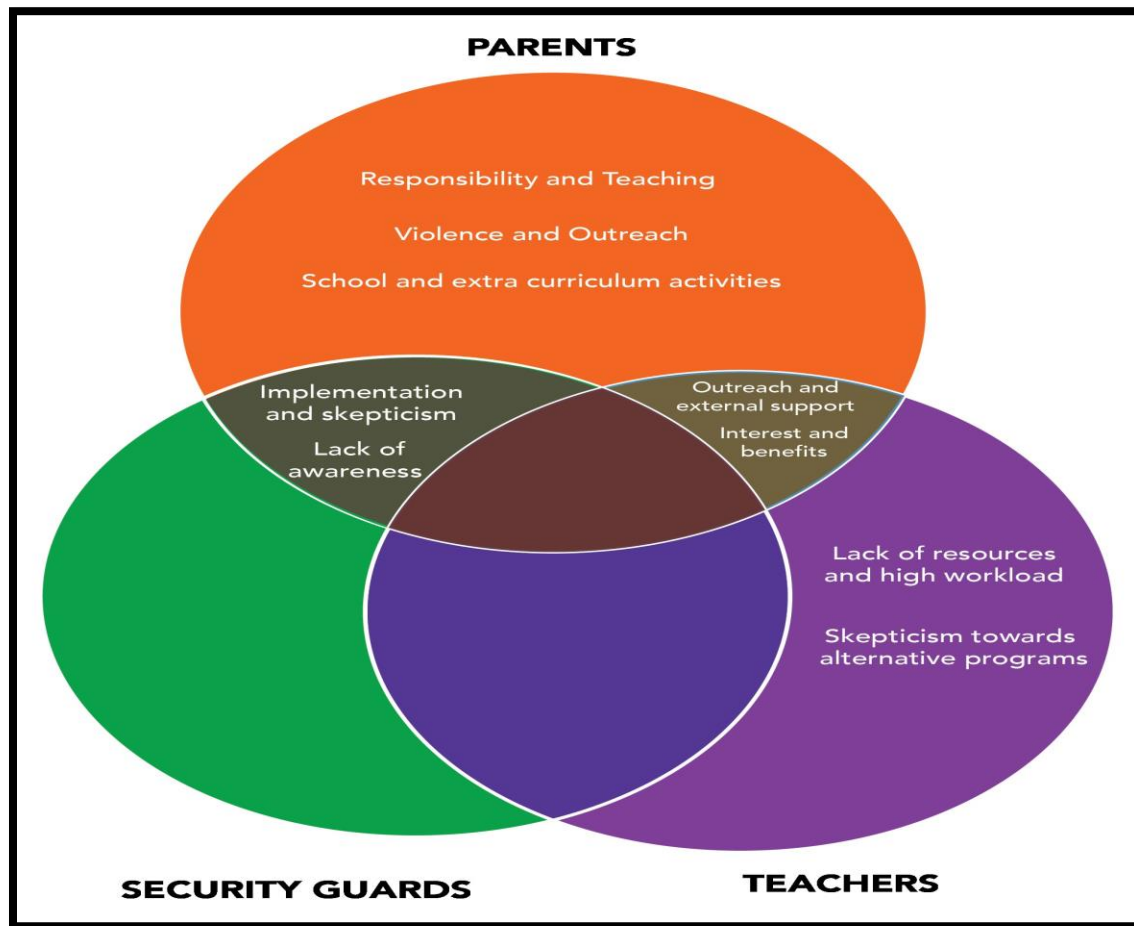
The security guards' recommendation regarding collaboration between the school administration, the community, and parents to combat substance abuse was valuable. Substance abuse is a complex issue requiring a multi-faceted approach involving the broader community's significant contribution to prevention and intervention efforts. The idea of community and parental participation in school activities, akin to community forums, highlights the importance of engagement beyond the classroom (Kelty and Wakabayashi 2020). This approach can foster a sense of collective responsibility for learners' well-being and safety. Persistent behavioural issues in schools can be linked to a lack of communication and harmony among various community stakeholders. Such engagement stresses the importance of improved co-ordination and collaboration among school management, teachers, security personnel, parents, and the community. Effective communication and co-operation are vital for implementing successful security and intervention programmes.

Divergent perspectives from educators and parents on involvement in children's education reveal potential areas of tension. Although educators believe that parents should trust them to carry out their duties, some expressed frustration that parents were not doing enough to support their children's education. This disconnect points to a need for improved communication between teachers and parents and the nurturing of a deeper understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities in a child's education. In analysing the data on alternative programmes for teachers aiming to make a significant difference in classroom expression, several noteworthy findings emerged. A prevailing sense of doubt among educators was detected, possibly indicating a resistance to change rooted in the already substantial workload they carried. The apprehension was further underscored by frustration and anger in their responses, stemming from the overwhelming volume of responsibilities. These sentiments appeared to contribute to a perception of the working environment as stressful and hostile, largely due to the scarcity of resources within the schools. The data hinted at a sense of routine in which teachers

felt compelled to perform their core instructional duties and little else. This portrayal of a strained and under-resourced educational environment pointed to a cry for systemic support and resource allocation to black townships and rural schools.

Recommendations aimed at addressing challenges associated with volatile school environments were of interest. Proposals included occasional visits by law enforcement officers to oversee learners' activities as a means of maintaining discipline and safety; and community and parents' active roles in monitoring children, particularly during break times when the risk of substance abuse was heightened. These recommendations spotlighted the broader societal context of the educational challenges, and the need for mitigatory collaborative efforts beyond the confines of classrooms. The data reveals the complex interplay of factors influencing the effectiveness of alternative programmes for teachers. It also emphasises the importance of holistic approaches in addressing the multi-faceted issues facing educators and learners alike.

### 6.2.7 Peace Clubs



**Figure 6-7** Peace Clubs (Self-Generated).

Peace clubs transform education from an authoritarian learning pedagogy to one that incorporates justice, inclusiveness, and respect (Harber 2018). The revelation that teachers had no prior knowledge of peace clubs was a significant finding as it drew attention to potential challenges likely to be faced in the promotion and implementation of intervention initiatives within the school community. This lack of awareness among educators could ominously hinder the successful establishment and functioning of peace clubs in schools. The absence of prior knowledge about peace clubs suggests a deficiency in the dissemination of information or promotional efforts within the education system. It should be recognised that awareness and understanding among teachers are fundamental to the success of peace clubs and other extra-curricular activities. Teachers

play a pivotal role in guiding and supporting learners' involvement during such initiatives. Therefore, efforts to address this awareness gap and to ensure that teachers are well-informed about the aims and benefits of peace clubs should be considered an essential step in their implementation and sustainability within the school environment.

Generally, the positive views about the potential benefits of peace clubs, despite the lack of prior knowledge, reflect a promising receptiveness to such programmes. Educators recognised several potential advantages to implementing peace clubs within the school community. First, they identified the potential for peace clubs to offer support to troubled learners, which can be particularly crucial in addressing the needs of those facing various behavioural challenges. Secondly, teachers perceived peace clubs as enhancing guidance on conflict resolution skills, thereby contributing to a more harmonious and peaceful school environment. Thirdly, the notion of providing a supportive space for learners resonated positively with the teachers, as it supports the concept of holistic education and learners' overall well-being.

However, reservations regarding the effectiveness of peace clubs, possibly influenced by a prevailing sense of pessimism within Umlazi, were expressed. This scepticism highlights the demand for clear communication and evidence-based information to address any misconceptions and concerns that may exist regarding peace initiatives as an extra-curricular activity. Some teachers recognised the value of extra-curricular activities in fostering holistic development among learners. This suggests a comprehensive perspective on education that extends beyond academic achievement. The scepticism expressed by security guards regarding the role of peace clubs in reducing violence points to the requirement for widespread awareness-building efforts and training programmes for all stakeholders involved in school safety and security. It is essential to demonstrate the potential impact and benefits of peace clubs in fostering a safer school environment.

In summary, although the teachers may have initially lacked awareness of peace clubs, their positive attitudes towards the potential benefits of such programmes, and the recognition of the role of extra-curricular activities in child development, indicate a

willingness to explore and support initiatives aimed at promoting peace and well-being within the school community. Addressing their concerns about effectiveness and providing them with more information might further enhance their engagement and support for such initiatives.

However, the teachers' identification of potential challenges associated with the implementation of peace clubs highlights several significant obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure the success of peace promotion initiatives within the school community. The lack of interest expressed by both learners and teachers is a critical concern. This lack of enthusiasm may stem from the prevailing social and environmental factors that affect the perception of programmes that aim to promote peaceful environments. The schools have traditionally invested more in sporting as compared to social curriculum activities. The importance of developing strategies to engage and motivate both educators and learners to actively participate in social extra-curricular activities such as the peace clubs may bring about a paradigm shift.

Furthermore, the use of terms such as 'lost generation' to describe learners, along with the belief that they are not capable of positive change, reflects a broader sense of hopelessness and lack of faith in the potential for transformation. Stereotypical perceptions of groups or individuals often prevent holders of such attitudes from seeing the potential of the others (Said 1978). There is need for a holistic approach that includes not only educational interventions but also efforts to address the social and economic challenges facing both learners and the broader community. Further analysis of the interviewee's statements provides a strong argument for the value of extra-curricular activities in reducing child violence. Sentiments were drawn from educators' personal experiences highlighting their involvement in extra-curricular activities during school as beneficial for them to stay focused and to remain on track. Personal perspectives lend credibility to the belief in the positive impact of extra-curricular activities such as peace clubs.

The teachers emphasised the significance of external support and involvement in implementing peace clubs or similar programmes. Recognition of the importance of

outside experts or speakers engaging with learners suggests a pragmatic approach in addressing challenges associated with programme implementation. By welcoming external voices to interact with learners, teachers recognised the potential for fresh perspectives and guidance to enhance the effectiveness of the initiatives. This reflects an openness to external collaboration and a willingness to explore new strategies for promoting peace and reducing violence among learners. The widespread use of drugs and alcohol by learners was a notable issue that poses a direct threat to the well-being of learners and creates a hostile and disruptive environment, itself a hindrance to the effectiveness of peace clubs. Addressing substance abuse alongside the implementation of peace initiatives within the school community should be a priority.

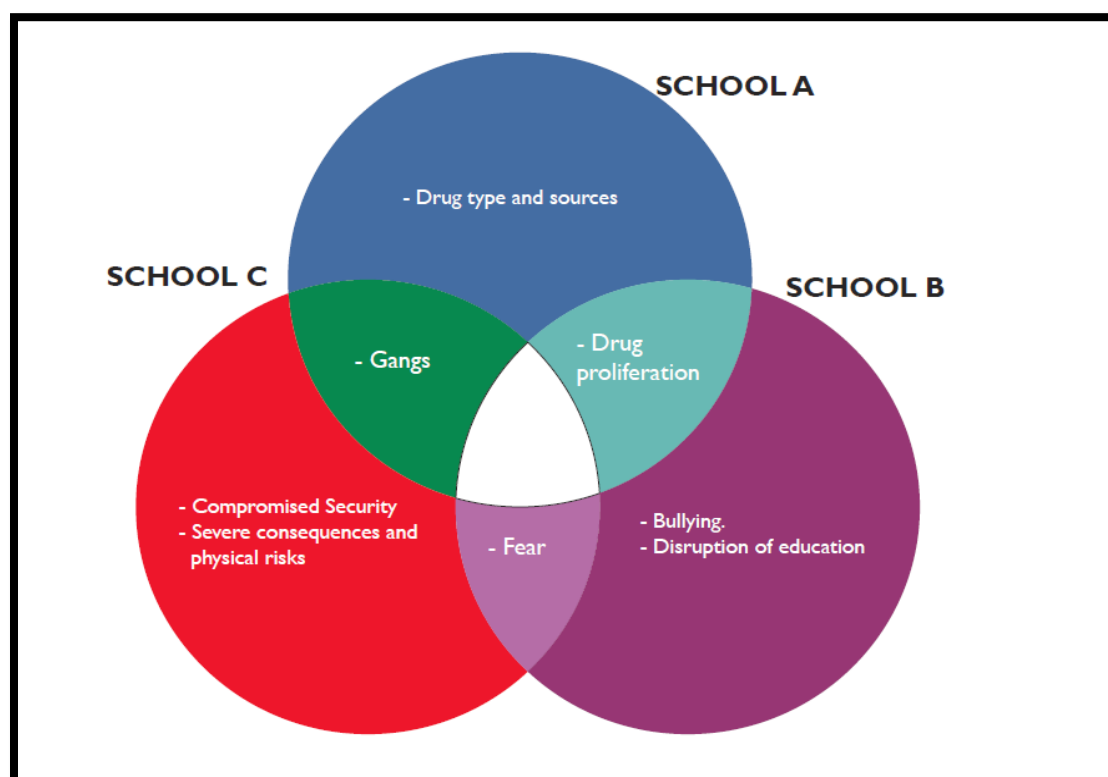
The potential for peace clubs in extra-curricular activities imparting crucial life lessons, particularly emphasising their role in teaching children responsibility and the importance of treating others with respect and dignity must be acknowledged. Despite this belief, there was a candid admission of uncertainty regarding the schools' financial capacity to support additional activities, pointing to a potential hurdle in their implementation. Particularly, the high levels of violence in the neighbourhood were recognised as a significant factor that would undermine any gains of peace clubs in extra-curricular activities. Although they could turn out as unsuitable for all learners in the challenging environment, the benefits to some far outweigh the challenges. The necessity of proactively reaching out to learners, reflects a commitment to personal development through interactive participation in programmes. Interestingly, there was a comparison drawn between learners from township schools and those from more affluent neighbourhoods. This appeared to reinforce the belief that the school environment plays a significant role in determining the success of extra-curricular activities. A subtle implication was that learners from better-resourced schools may be better behaved due to their access to a wider selection of extra-curricular programmes.

Looking back, although the challenges that teachers, security guards, and participants identified are indeed substantial, they also stress the intricacy of the issues. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach that includes attending to issues of substance abuse, providing training and awareness to both teachers and learners,

fostering a sense of hope and belief in positive change, and securing support from both the government and the community. Successfully implementing peace clubs and similar initiatives will require concerted efforts and a commitment to improving the overall school environment and the well-being of learners.

### 6.3 Learner perspectives

#### 6.3.1 Current Situation



**Figure 6-8** Situations in Schools and Shared Experiences (Self-Generated).

Based on the discussions, drug abuse is a significant issue among learners, contributing to violent behaviour, with conflicts in and around school on a weekly basis. Learners described situations where individuals fought over money to purchase drugs; some learners became openly aggressive towards teachers and peers while under the influence. A notable theme emerging from the interviews is the strong connection between poverty and learners' involvement in drug selling and, perhaps, crime in general. It was found that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, facing limited resources and

lacking parental support, often turned to drug-related activities as a means of survival. Consequently, this led to an influx of drugs within the school environment, resulting in adverse consequences for both learners and educators. Studies have shown a relationship between poverty and narcotics-dominated neighbourhoods (Becker 1968; Jonck *et al.* 2015; Cheteni, Mah and Yohane 2018; Dong, Egger and Guo 2020; Alloush and Bloem 2022).

The presence of drugs like *Xanax*, weed, and alcohol within the schools was noted. Mamabolo (2020); Hunter (2021) also identify other drugs such as *nyaope*, *whoonga* and *kataza* which were acknowledged to be in the three schools. The fact that these drugs are accessible to learners is a significant concern for academic progress and recruitment into crime. Learners were identified as suppliers, and there was suspicion that outside school friendships and kinships were driving the drug supply and recruitment in drug manifested communities (Bourgois 2003; Angles 2012; Van Dun 2014; Zubillaga, Llorens and Souto 2015; Jensen and Rodgers 2022) . It can be reasoned that learners know the drug suppliers. Mamabolo (2020) highlights that one in three learners aged 13 to 18 years was involved in substance abuse within school premises (South African Medical Research Council 2010). A decade later 66% of the South African high school learners were engaged in substance abuse (Tshitangano and Tosin 2016; Singh and Bhoola 2017; Mohale and Mokwena 2019). This is an indication of an increased consumption of alcohol.

Discussions highlighted those unruly learners, particularly those involved in drug selling and abuse, were the main culprits in disrupting the learning environment, negatively impacting the academic progress of colleagues (Tiwani 2010; Nemati and Matlabi 2017; Mkhize and Shembe 2022). The fact that some learners were high on drugs during class time is a clear obstacle to effective learning. Such learners are often not in control of their senses, thereby increasing the likelihood of disrupting classes. The large empirical evidence of learners engaged in drug abuse indicates a more disruptive class environment. This affects the delivery of quality education. Learners were dissatisfied with certain behaviours, but felt hesitant to address rowdy, unruly peers due to a pervasive sense of fear and intimidation. This fear stemmed from anxieties about potential reprisals



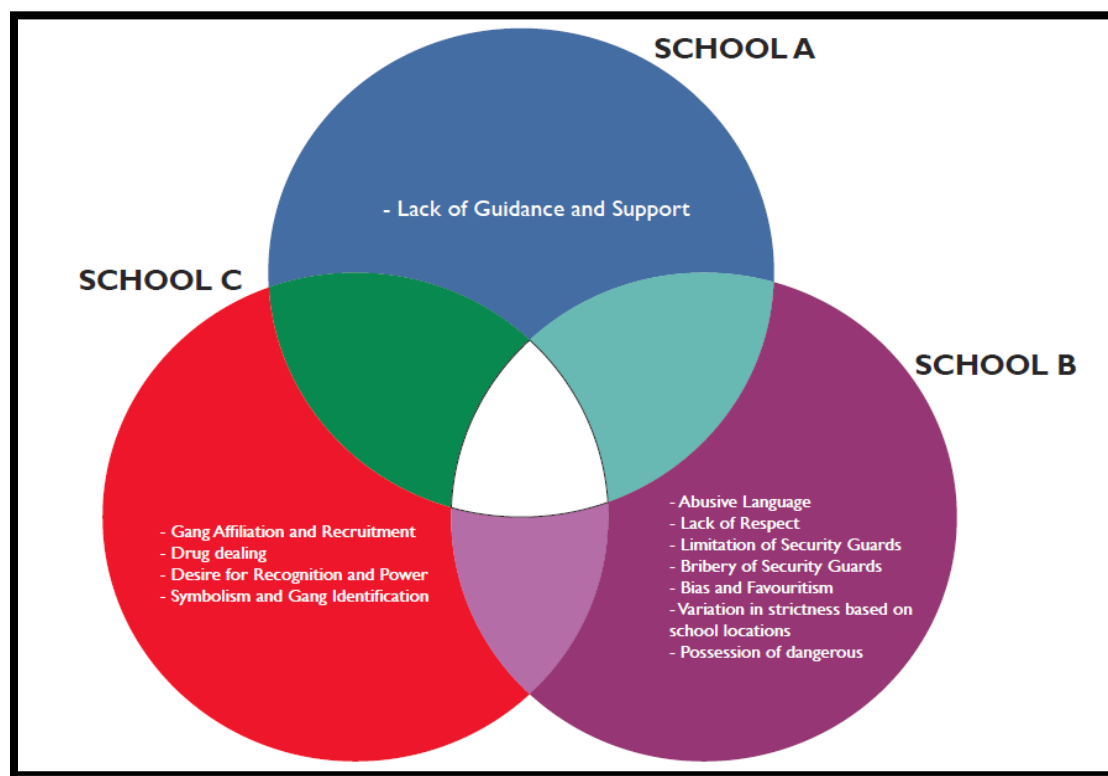
and repercussions associated with confronting learners involved in illicit drug activities. Ajani (2020); Hunter and Morrell (2021) confirm that learners engaged in substance abuse carry weapons, and verbally and physically threaten other learners and educators when confronted. Consequently, an environment of silence prevailed, obstructing the effective resolution of disruptive conduct and instances of bullying in the schools. The pervasive atmosphere of fear and violence, with learners experiencing a profound sense of dread, often described as fear of the unknown, negatively affected the school's environment. The fear was perpetuated by the constant threat of physical harm, which was perceived as ever-present due to widespread violence in and around the school. The psychological toll was significant, resulting in an environment marked by anxiety, stress, and trauma, ultimately hindering learners' academic progress and well-being (De Wet, Jacobs and Palm-Forster 2008; Antonowicz 2010; Devers *et al.* 2012).

Acts of invincibility by the rowdy and unruly learners helped to validate bullying in schools. The prevalence of bullying in schools is a major threat to a conducive learning environment. For instance, in School A, 50% of the learners reported experiencing some of violence every week; in Schools B and C, this was 66% and 68% respectively. Bullying affects not only peace club members but also their peers, leading to disruptions in class, and a sense of fear and vulnerability among the school community. Personal experiences shared in the focus group highlight the severe consequences of school violence that often include serious injuries and stabbings. It can be concluded that the lack of accountability and its consequences among learners was a driving force of delinquent behaviours in schools.

Additionally, learners conveyed a strong awareness of gang activity, with active recruitment occurring across various grade levels. Schools located in townships often fall prey to gangsterism due the legacy of violence and availability of violence (Harber and Muthukrishna 2000; De Wet 2016). The existence of multiple gangs, some originating from different areas and schools, contributed to the persistent violence within the schools. Participants recounted witnessing gang members involved in fights and stabbings, further exacerbating the dangerous atmosphere in and around the school. A particularly distressing aspect of this environment was the existence of rival gangs within the schools itself.

Participants noted that learners from different gangs were placed in the same classes, resulting in frequent conflicts and the constant potential for violence. The mere coexistence of rival gang members in these classes created an ever-present risk, with fights erupting at any moment. This tense and insecure atmosphere made it exceedingly challenging for learners to feel safe and to concentrate on their education. Additionally, isolated incidents where individuals not affiliated with the school but associated with the gangs entered the premises to provoke conflicts, adding an external layer of risk and instability to the school environment. These findings underlined the urgent need for wide-ranging measures to address gang-related issues, and to enhance the safety and well-being of both learners and educators within the schools.

### 6.3.2 Causes of School Violence



**Figure 6-9** Spheres of School Violence (Self-Generated).

From the discussions, several causes of violence in the three schools were identified. The difference in explanation can be linked to the neighbourhood dynamics in which the schools are located. In School A, the issue of delinquent behaviour was linked to lack of

guidance among learners. The lack of guidance and support, both within the family and the community, is a significant factor contributing to learners' involvement in drug dealing (Burton and Leoschut 2013). A child's immediate family, school context, and the general cultural values, laws, and practices, have an impact on the development of a child's behavior (Härkönen 2007). Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that children are a developing organism that interacts with their environments; their actions are an expression of the interactions and personal individualities.

Umlazi District is home to poor working-class people, single headed families who spend considerable time seeking sources of income. In their absence, other outside agents of socialisation – such as church community elders and social media – fill the gap without being filtered or evaluated. Umlazi has shown empirical evidence of being a violent community. With abundant violence, chances are that children with absent families are socialised by the wrong community members. More so, with the growing influence of social media and the abundance of content, its positive role in children's life is subject to debate. Children and adolescents are particularly susceptible to media influence due to incessant exposure (Hudson, Windham and Hooper 2005; Livingstone 2007).

Thus, inadequate parental care, the poor socio-economic backgrounds of learners, peer influence, and exposure to mass media contribute to violence (Netshitangani 2014). This suggests a need to strengthen social media monitoring strategies and mentorship for at-risk learners to keep them engaged in education and away from illegal activities. Hence, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, TikTok and Twitter have drawn the attention of legislators in Europe and the United States due to rising cases of abuse and bullying (Goanta and Ortolani 2021).

The classrooms were viewed as another main source of conflict in schools. Learners experienced verbal abuse from teachers; abusive language and derogatory comments from teachers created a hostile classroom environment. This form of behaviour triggered emotional responses in learners such as anger, humiliation, and disrespect, which sometimes led to retaliation. Classrooms are regarded as the most unsafe environment, where victimisation frequently occurs (Burton and Leoschut 2013). Disrespectful

comments by teachers, such as criticising a learners' attire, negatively impact their self-esteem and dignity. This disregard for individuality and personal boundaries can lead to emotional reactions and confrontations, particularly among female learners. The frustration theory, formulated by Dollard *et al.* (1939) posits actions driven by instincts such as peace and tranquillity. The disruption or frustration of these instincts are reflected through the occurrence of aggressive behaviour (Dollard *et al.* 1939). The continuous mistreatment causes frustration among learners, thereby leading to violent reactions. Emotional violence needs to be monitored as it has more far-reaching consequences compared to sexual violence because of its traumatic effect on child development (Garbarino 1978; Shengold 1991; Hart *et al.* 2002). As some educators lack respect, addressing teacher-teacher relationships and communication is essential for a more conducive learning environment.

Additionally, while security guards were present in schools to maintain safety and order, there were concerns about their effectiveness due to insufficient numbers. South African public schools tend to be under-resourced (Sedibe 2011; Mestry and Ndhlovu 2014). This limitation allowed for misbehaviour and violence to occur without immediate intervention, making it challenging to ensure a secure learning environment. Learners highlighted that security guards sometimes displayed bias, being stricter with certain learners compared to others. The favouritism raised concerns about unfair treatment which contributed to an environment where discipline was not consistently enforced. This could also lead to tensions and conflicts, particularly among groups of learners associated with specific gangs. Some learners reportedly bribed security guards, compromising their integrity and effectiveness. This unethical behaviour eroded trust in security personnel to enforce discipline and maintain school safety. This creates an unsafe environment due to lack of consistency. The cause of such actions can be linked to a rampant culture of corruption in South Africa which is ranked number 73 on the corruption index list (Transparency International 2019 ).

Complacent application of rules and policies in schools was viewed as a cause of violence in schools. The analysis suggests that schools in suburban areas were stricter compared to those in townships. This difference can be explained by various socio-economic

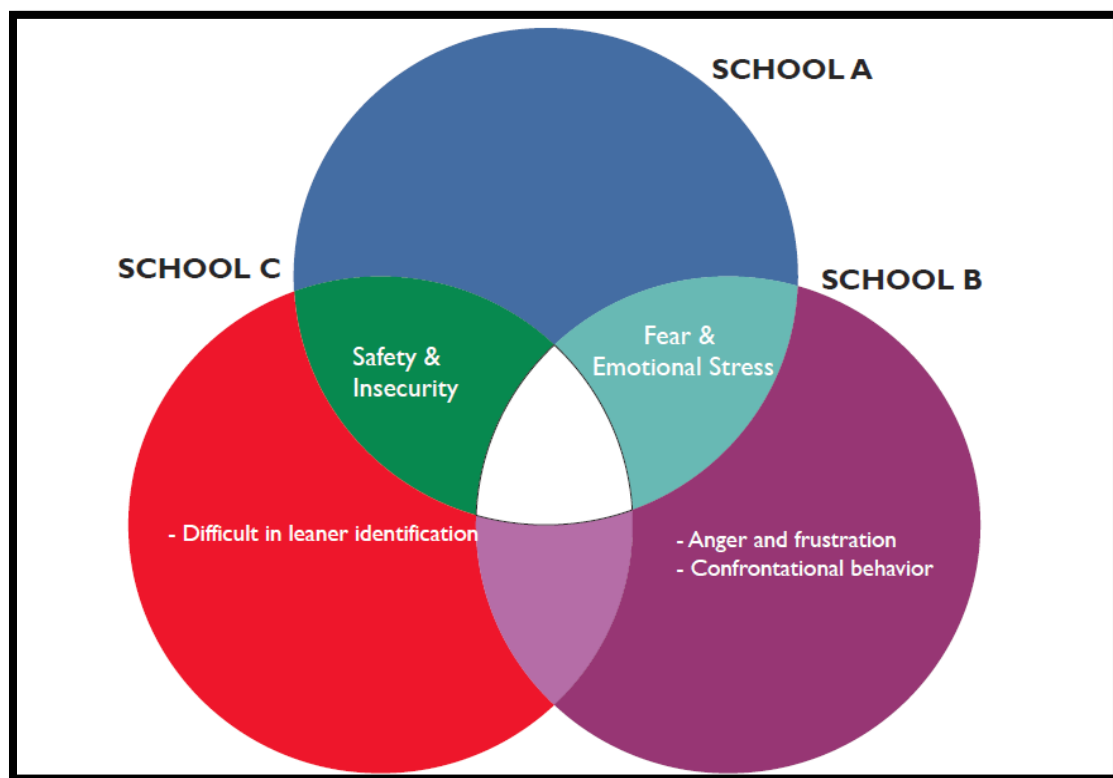
factors, community norms, and available resources. Township schools lack policy and infrastructural support, thus resulting in poor maintenance of law and order in schools. Bezuidenhout and Joubert (2003); Eisenbraun (2007) explain that poor facilities, a shortage of educators, an inequitable educator-to-learner ratio, a lack of discipline, and a disorganised school environment enable school violence. Underlying causes of violence in schools encompass location, size, ethnic distribution, social policies, and physical condition (Eisenbraun 2007). Township schools generally lack adequate monitoring systems, thereby allowing delinquent behaviour. This study identified seven specific factors that often contribute to school violence: the absence of supervision and discipline, a poor school climate, inadequate policies addressing violence, insufficient conflict resolution and social skills programmes, the availability of weapons, gang activity, and a lack of mental health facilities.

The presence of dangerous weapons such as knives among some learners was identified as a contributing factor to school violence. This is a reflection of a society where weapons and guns are easily accessible. These weapons, in turn, are used to intimidate and scare learners, posing significant threats to the safety and well-being of everyone within the school premises. Berkowitz (2012) argues that the presence of weapons can potentially contribute to aggression. For example, learners carrying weapons on school premises witnessing a fight or other forms of aggressive behaviour could serve as a trigger for aggressive conduct (De Wet 2007). The weapons give a false sense of security and invincibility, in turn causing aggressive behaviour among some learners who could be gang affiliated. Additionally, learners use gang symbols and specific clothing items, such as hats, to signify their affiliation from other gangs in the community. These visual markers contribute to divisions and conflicts among learners, creating an environment conducive to violence. These schools are marked as gang territory, causing conflicts in the schools

Moreover, the involvement of older community members with a history of criminal behaviour and incarceration in recruiting young boys into gang culture is highlighted. These individuals exploit the vulnerability of young learners by offering them acceptance, power, and material benefits. Meyer (2005: 11) argues that the prevalence of high levels of violence within numerous South African schools can be ascribed to a complex amalgamation of historical legacies, recent socio-economic challenges, and political

pressures, all of which impact individuals, families, schools, and communities. Bruce (2007: 64); Clark (2012: 83) add that the lingering effects of the apartheid system and past political violence serve as explanatory factors for the present-day violence observed within society. This involvement extends to drug distribution within school premises, specifically marijuana. Learners associated with gangs seek recognition and validation through disruptive and troublesome behaviour. They aim to establish a reputation as bullies and troublemakers, driven by a desire for attention and dominance within the school environment. Such behaviour can be fuelled by a lack of affection and validation from their families.

### 6.3.3 Effects of Violence



**Figure 6-10** Effects of Violence (Self-Generated).

The discussions revealed that the learners' fear associated with school attendance, stemming from the unpredictability of violence, exerting a profound influence on their psychological well-being and their ability to engage effectively in their education. The consequences of this fear are twofold: first, it significantly affects the psychological well-

being of the learners; and secondly, it impedes their capacity to concentrate on their educational pursuits. One noteworthy aspect of this analysis pertains to the emotional toll inflicted upon the learners due to their exposure to abusive language and disrespectful conduct from teachers. This continuous exposure was found to have a negative impact on the emotional well-being of the participants (Curry 2003). Notably, the experiences of humiliation in front of peers, coupled with derogatory comments, were identified as primary contributors to distress. Furthermore, the emotional distress brought about by abusive language and disrespectful behaviour from teachers has far-reaching implications for learners' mental health, manifesting in the form of reduced self-esteem, heightened anxiety, depression, and feelings of powerlessness (Center for Disease Control and Prevention 2013)

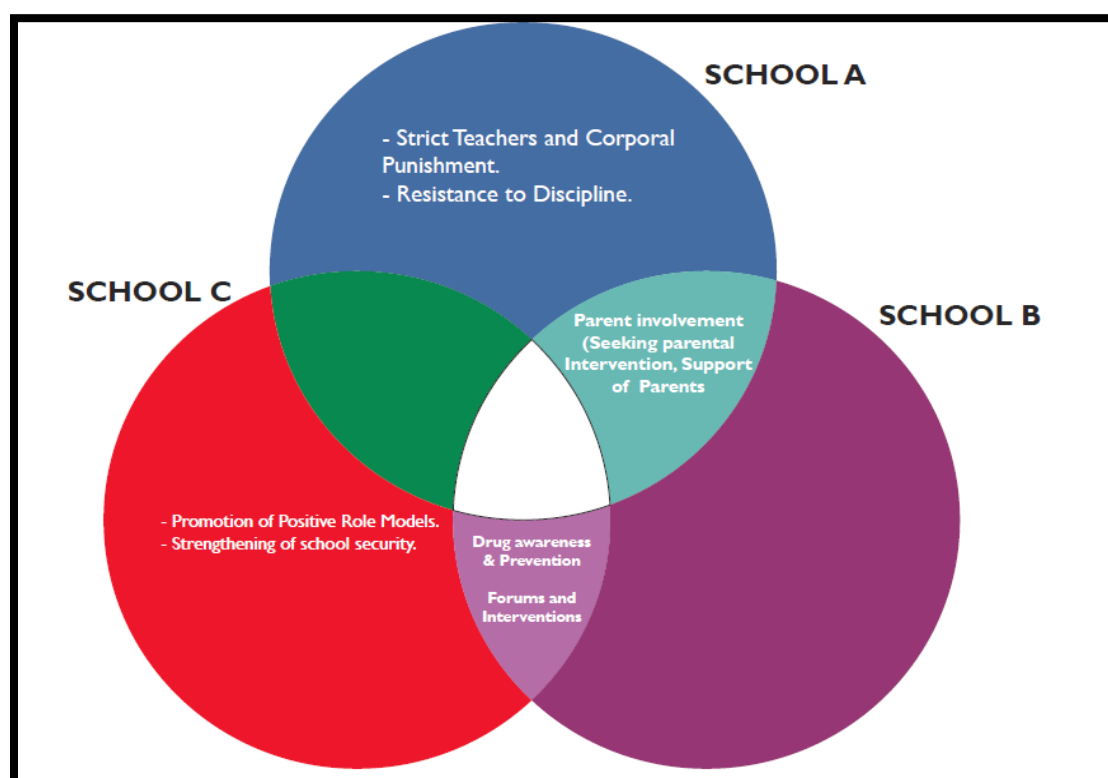
Learners who have endured embarrassing treatment may react with intense emotions such as anger and frustration, potentially leading to confrontational behaviour or even violent confrontations with teachers. General Strain Theory (GST) explains that, when learners experience strain or stressors, this increases the likelihood of them experiencing negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, creating a motive for corrective action. In some cases, this may lead to unlawful or delinquent behaviour (Agnew 2001). These emotional responses disrupt the learning environment and foster a hostile atmosphere within the classroom and school. Insights from peace club members highlight the prevalence of confrontational behaviour in the schools, with some learners opting to challenge teachers directly when subjected to abusive language, asserting their right to be treated with dignity.

Moreover, participants consistently emphasised that the prevailing fear among learners was chiefly rooted in the unpredictability of when violent incidents might transpire. This erodes the establishment of a safe and secure learning environment. This uncertainty regarding the timing of potential violence contributed significantly to a palpable sense of insecurity among the learners. One salient factor contributing to this insecurity was the accessibility of the school premises and the ease with which external individuals can infiltrate the environment. The notion that anyone, including individuals masquerading as learners through borrowed uniforms, could access the school at any given moment generated a persistent feeling of vulnerability and fear. The absence of teacher

supervision, manifesting through absenteeism and a dearth of behavioural monitoring and control systems, creates a climate of anxiety and fear among learners, ultimately interrupting the quality of education (Dewan 2021). The analysis underscored the challenges posed by the large learner population in public schools and the absence of consistent monitoring and identification procedures. Circumstances make it difficult to differentiate between genuine learners and potential troublemakers. This lack of a reliable learner identification system further compromises the overall safety and security of the school environment. This enabled delinquent behaviour in and around schools.

This pervasive sense of vulnerability has a detrimental impact on the learners' ability to fully engage with their studies and inhibits their overall well-being. The gravity of school violence is a pressing concern. The fear learners experience is primarily attributed to the uncertainty around the timing of violent incidents. This, in turn, compromises a secure learning environment. Learners attending disorderly educational institutions with unkempt surroundings, pervasive graffiti, and poor hygiene levels are particularly susceptible to violent acts (Eisenbraun 2007).

#### 6.3.4 Curbing School Violence





**Figure 6-11** Curbing School Violence (Self-Generated).

The discussions established a significant connection between parental involvement and the prevalence of violence in schools. Schools with lower levels of violence benefit from strong parental support (Ndamani 2008; Farooq and Asim 2020). This support manifests in various ways, including co-operation with school authorities and participation in conflict resolution processes (Jeynes 2007; Farooq and Asim 2020). The participants emphasised the importance of involving parents in addressing conflicts and incidents of violence within the school environment. Learners tend to seek assistance from their parents, possibly hoping for support and resolution.

The findings suggest that parental involvement not only contributes to maintaining discipline but also serves as a catalyst for raising awareness of issues related to violence in and around schools. Parents who doubt educators should trust them as they know what they are doing (Mwamwenda 2004). This awareness, in turn, encourages open discussions and collaboration among the school administration, teachers, and parents, ultimately leading to the implementation of necessary changes to mitigate violence and to create a safer learning environment. Structure, patterns, and relationships emerging from interactions among components, make each system a contributor (Lai and Lin 2017).

A notable disparity between schools in low-density suburbs and those in high-density areas, commonly referred to as townships, regarding the existence of support forums has been noted (Farooq and Asim 2020). In the low-density suburbs with middle class families, forums play a pivotal role in addressing issues of violence and drug abuse by providing a platform for open dialogue, information sharing, and the implementation of preventative measures. This is due to the shared beliefs and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977; Feuerstein 2000). Conversely, in the township areas, the absence of such discussion platforms was observed, limiting opportunities for collaboration and the exchange of strategies to combat school violence. Schools located in affluent areas do not struggle to maintain a conducive school environment (Du Plessis and Mestry 2019).

Participants stressed the urgent need to foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and learners to tackle the ubiquitous problems of violence and drug abuse in schools. A

consensus emerged among learners that unity and collective action were essential in their efforts to create safer school environments. Surprisingly, programmes such as the School Based Crime Prevention Programme have been established nationally to mobilise communities to assume responsibility for educational institutions in their localities. This will enhance learners' awareness regarding the ramifications of violence.

Despite this, there seemed a to be a gap and a lack of an action plan. The lack of knowledge of such programmes was an indication of a deficit in cascading information, or complacency. This is best explained by the theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1977). Bourdieu (1977) asserts that schools mirror the socio-economic cultural beliefs and status of parents; thus, the beliefs of middle-class families differ from that of lower-class families. The way the families invest in education differs, as influenced by finances, ultimately shaping parental involvement in schools.

Collaboration was seen to pool resources, knowledge, and experiences, thereby strengthening the resolve to address disruptive behaviour and substance abuse effectively. The importance of involving older individuals associated with gangs, and the emphasis on targeted interventions to steer young learners away from the path of violence was revealed. Programmes focusing on rehabilitation, mentorship, and skill-building were highlighted as potential alternatives to break the cycle of recruitment and criminal activity within the school community. Lessons can be drawn from the After School Game Changer Programme launched in 2016 in the Western Cape. This programme aims to improve learner outcomes, reduce the school dropout rate, and mitigate risk-taking behaviour through sports and recreational activities.

Drug abuse within the school environment emerged as a deeply concerning issue. One prominent theme stood out: the fear associated with challenging drug suppliers. This highlights the real and immediate dangers these individuals pose. The characterisation of drug lords viewing their activities as a business shed light on the organised and calculated nature of the problem around Umlazi. The suppliers exert significant control over the drug trade in their respective areas, coupled with their willingness to resort to extreme measures to protect their interests; this spotlighted the complexity of the issue. The fear of reprisals is a significant barrier to addressing drug abuse within the school

community as it silences potential witnesses and detracts from any collective effort against drug dealers and suppliers.

Instead, participants' suggestion to implement educational initiatives to raise awareness of the consequences of drug abuse is a promising step forward. It acknowledges the importance of prevention and early intervention in dissuading learners from engaging in drug-related activities. By educating learners about the harmful effects of substance abuse, the school can empower them to make informed decisions, and to resist the pressures exerted by drug suppliers. Additionally, the proposed collaboration with the South African Police Service (SAPS) and community organisations reflects a recognition of the need for a multi-pronged approach to combat the supply and distribution of drugs in schools. The Safe Schools Programme in the Western Cape can be imitated to challenge delinquent behaviour in schools. Despite Brandt (2023) noting that SAPS is short staffed, at least one visit per term would suffice.

This collaborative effort could potentially lead to better enforcement of anti-drug laws, increased surveillance, and community support systems to help curb the influence of drug suppliers within the school environment. However, participants highlighted the dangerous nature of the drug trade within the school community, marked by the fear of reprisal and the control exerted by drug suppliers. To address this issue effectively, there can be a two-fold approach: educational initiatives such as the Walking Bus Project to empower learners with knowledge, and to collaborate with law enforcement and community organisations to disrupt the drug supply chain.

The discussions emphasised the importance of proactive measures to counter the negative influence of drug-related activities in the school community. By fostering an environment that celebrates positive behaviour and educational achievements, the school can effectively redirect the attention of learners away from harmful pursuits. This approach acknowledges that individuals often resort to negative attention-seeking behaviours when positive recognition and opportunities are lacking. Encouraging the involvement of mentors, teachers, and community leaders is a crucial step in this endeavour. These individuals can serve as role models and sources of inspiration for learners, offering guidance and support that may be lacking elsewhere (Bandura 1971).

By providing learners with alternative role models to emulate and look up to, the school can help shape their values and aspirations in a more positive direction. There is need for a holistic approach to addressing the issue of drug abuse within the school community. It highlights the significance of creating an environment that promotes positive behaviours and educational achievements while also emphasising the role of mentors and community leaders in shaping the future of the learners. Ward (2007) posits that people often acquire information from various social experiences that include models of behaviour, authority figures, and discipline from parents. By implementing these strategies, the school can work towards preventing drug-related activities to foster a healthier, more supportive atmosphere for its learners.

However, there was a contrast in the prevalence of violence within the different schools. The lower incidence of violence in some schools was the result of strict disciplinary measures they employed, including the controversial use of corporal punishment. This observation prompted a critical discussion on the effectiveness and ethics of employing physical punishment as a means of maintaining discipline, particularly considering its prohibition by government. The discussions shed light on the ongoing debate regarding the merits and drawbacks of corporal punishment as a disciplinary tactic within educational settings. The concept of '*in loco parentis*', which translates to 'in the place of a parent', imposes a responsibility on educators to ensure the physical and psychological welfare of all individuals under their supervision (Masinga 2016). This principle underscores that educators bear the duty of maintaining diligent supervision concerning the mental and physical well-being of those entrusted to their care. This moral code drives learners into accepting corporal punishment and viewing educators as parents. Thus, participants expressed support for corporal punishment for its efficacy in deterring misbehaviour. However, this is a significant conflict of culture and law.

In addition, the need for enhanced security measures within school premises to prevent external and internal individuals from causing disturbances was emphasised. The measures include increased surveillance, controlled entry points, and co-operation with the South African Police Service (SAPS) to create a secure environment for both learners and staff. Despite these proposed strategies, participants acknowledged that curbing

violence in schools posed significant challenges. Some learners were reported as resisting disciplinary measures by resorting to threats against teachers. This was interpreted as a manifestation of a broader breakdown in authority and a lack of respect for educators' attempts to establish order in the classrooms. The threats to teachers has led to resignations, as Hlatshwayo (2018) reports. Consequently, these learners continued to engage in disruptive and unchecked rowdy behaviour at the expense, not only of their own education but also that of their peers. Questions emerged as to the adequacy of current disciplinary methods, and the necessity for innovative approaches to restore order and to foster a safe learning environment for all learners.

#### **6.4 Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter has delved into the empirical findings from the interviews and focus group discussions, which were designed to address the primary research objective of this study. The chapter commenced by presenting an in-depth analysis of the prevailing conditions within the education institutions under examination. Subsequently, it explored the origins and repercussions of school violence as interpreted through the insights garnered from the interviews and focus group discussions. The discussions culminated in the synthesis of potential strategies aimed at mitigating the issue of school violence. The next chapter will provide a detailed account of the action research phase of this study, during which participants actively implemented the proposed strategies to combat school violence.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN:**

### **ACTION RESEARCH**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

As noted previously, School D withdrew from the study shortly after the survey was administered, thereby reducing the number of the participating schools to three. There was no explanation from the school as to why they did so. The researcher respected their decision. Following the survey, focus group discussions were successfully organised in the remaining three schools. As attendance was voluntary, learners chose to attend based on their individual preferences.

The average number of participants in the focus group discussions was approximately ten learners in School A, eight learners in School B, and ten learners in School C. The discussions were held on a weekly basis over a span of five to six months. In Schools A and B, discussion lasted for six months, and for School C, it was five months. During the sessions, the participants willingly collaborated and devised a peace programme intended to spread the message of non-violence throughout their respective schools based on the transformative worldview. The Transformative Learning Theory suggests that participants learn from experiences which challenge existing beliefs and perspectives, leading to a change in how they understand themselves and the world around them.

Nevertheless, upon analysis, it was observed that the programmes formulated by the participants encompassed a broader scope of socio-psycho issues rather than solely focusing on non-violence. Each programme was carefully crafted to mirror the personal experiences and perspectives of the learners involved. This chapter specifically addresses the action research component of the study, which was devised and executed within two of the three schools under investigation. It should be noted that one school dropped out from the FGDs and one from the surveys, thereby reducing the study to a 50 percent success rate. The aim of this section is to provide comprehensive responses to the following research questions from the three schools:

1. To establish and operate peace clubs over eight months in four schools as a vehicle for building non-violent strategies for handling conflict
2. To evaluate the outcomes of the peace clubs at the four schools.

## **7.2 Feedback from the Focus Group Discussions**

Prior to commencing the action research at the three schools, a preliminary investigation was conducted to explore the nature, extent, and consequences of school violence. This initial phase aimed to establish a comprehensive understanding of school violence from the perspective of the learners. The data analysis facilitated an in-depth examination of school violence, specifically focusing on the learners' world view. Based on the outcomes from the focus group discussions, it became apparent that six key areas – bullying, physical assault, verbal abuse, theft, threats of violence, and the misuse of alcohol and substances – needed targeted intervention strategies. Armed with this insight, peace clubs were launched at all three schools between January and April 2022. The peace clubs operated up to June and August of that year. The subsequent sections will detail the researcher's experiences and reflections throughout this transformative journey with the groups.

## **7.3 Action Research**

To comprehend and effectively address the issue of school violence, it is imperative to incorporate peacebuilding strategies within the educational system. Harber (2018) posits that peacebuilding strategies aim to fundamentally transform the educational landscape by targeting the underlying causes of school violence. In support, Dewan (2021: 89) emphasises that peacebuilding encompasses a set of core competencies, which include empathy, solidarity, participatory practices, democratic engagement, and the cultivation of both individual and collective agency among learners. A combination of strategies and competencies are key factors to meaningful and effective peacebuilding.

### **7.3.1 Researchers' Role and Position in Peace Clubs**

Action researchers should adopt the perspective of an insider and perceive themselves as integral members in the context of their investigation (McNiff and Whitehead 2011: 8). Researchers assume specific roles when facilitating the action research process, and the execution of these roles holds immense significance for the overall trajectory of the research effort, potentially leading to either failure or success. Herr and Anderson (2015) argue that the position of an action researcher plays a pivotal role as it influences the relationships with the setting and participants; the aspect determines the effectiveness of the actions undertaken, and their alignment with the fundamental philosophical underpinnings of action research.

In this study, the researcher's position of being an African, a non-native speaker of the local language, and representing a higher learning institution was acknowledged. There was an expectation to converse in the native language, irrespective of not being a local resident. Locals commonly resorted to speaking exclusively in isiZulu when communicating, which posed a challenge for effective communication. To minimise potential tension, effort was made to use basic isiZulu to facilitate communication. Although some participants were receptive to this approach, others remained less responsive. In African communities, speaking in English is often an opportunity for being stereotyped as a boastful individual, which might not be true.

There are differences in cultural beliefs, norms, and values between isiZulu and chiShona. The researcher had to be mindful of maintaining eye contact which in the local context, is considered disrespectful for a younger person to make direct eye contact with an elder. To address this, participants were reassured that such cultural norms were inoffensive, creating a relaxed environment that encouraged open dialogue. Precautions regarding pointing out learners during interactions was exercised as the action could be perceived as demeaning or belittling. Consequently, conscious effort was made to respect and adhere to these cultural norms, aiming to avoid any unintended offence to the local community. Also, an effort was made to learn participants' names to create a good



rapport. To bridge the communication gap, a research assistant was hired to provide additional support.

The difference in educational expectations led to a divergence in the understanding of the significance of research and scientific knowledge among school administrators. Some administrators failed to grasp how the research could be instrumental in advocating for external support from the wider community. Often, individuals from privileged backgrounds are perceived as entitled and presumptuous, assuming they possess all-encompassing knowledge. To mitigate this perception, the researcher chose to communicate elementary isiZulu when engaging with participants. This approach aimed to foster an environment of equality and prevent the highlighting of disparities in literacy levels, especially when communicating with parents, and elderly guardians. Additionally, the researchers consistently affirmed the learners' thoughts and validated their feelings whenever they shared their experiences. These actions positioned the researcher as an older sibling figure, facilitating a sense of trust and enabling participants to freely discuss issues that affected their daily lives. Braun and Clark (2013) highlight the crucial role of effective interaction skills in establishing rapport and building trust in research settings.

The nurturing of learners emerged as an important aspect of the research, and the researchers assumed multiple roles to fulfil this responsibility. They served as the primary liaison between participants and the acquisition of necessary resources. For instance, when participants expressed the need for refreshments during each session, the researchers ensured that this requirement was met. Moreover, when participants requested the involvement of the Durban University of Technology (DUT) for an academic career day, it became the researchers' responsibility to make the event a reality. In the second project, participants suggested inviting a guest speaker to address the learners. A suitable individual was identified by requesting the desired profile, through contact with networks specialising in ex-offender affairs, such as the Agenda Network. Overall, the researchers assumed various roles throughout the research process, including facilitator, probing interviewer, nurturer, resource provider, scribe, and liaison. The multi-faceted engagement was necessary to support and effectively cater for the needs of participants and, ultimately, in achieving the research objectives.

## **7.4 Entry into the Group**

### **7.4.1 School A**

The initial engagement with the learners commenced through the administration of surveys across various classes, facilitated by the designated educator. This activity took place during the learners' third term of 2021 when they were in Grade 9. See appendix 5. In January 2022, the survey results were given to the learners after which an invitation for their voluntary participation in the study was extended. It emerged that the use of English as the medium of presentation created a language barrier, so assistant educators helped to mitigate this by translating. Interested learners were asked to write down their details on a piece of paper while waiting for confirmation of a venue by the school administration. On the first day of the meeting the venue was announced. At the same time, although a potential research assistant had been identified, the details of her contract were still being finalised. This impacted the way the study results were presented to the learners. Nevertheless, with the assistance of the designated educator, the purpose of the study was effectively conveyed, and volunteers were sought. Interestingly, the number of participants who expressed their desire to participate by providing their names was three times greater than the number of individuals who physically attended the sessions. Of the estimated 40 learners who expressed interest in participating, only eight eventually did so. This decline in participant numbers raised several lingering questions and doubts for the researchers.

The communication barrier and the reception of a non-isiZulu speaker was a constant limitation. This recurrent pattern within the community involved learners and staff opting to communicate in isiZulu, despite their awareness that the researcher was not proficient in their language. Furthermore, the researcher's youthful age and relative lack of experience in undertaking impactful projects posed a significant challenge in being perceived as a credible and serious person. Regrettably, some staff and administration often perceived the project as a futile endeavour or merely charitable work that had questionable potential value and purpose to their school.

Nevertheless, establishing the peace clubs within the school proved to be successful, and the learners were engaged for approximately six months. The club meetings took place every Friday from 1pm to 2pm. The selection of this specific time slot was based on the guidance provided by the educator, considering that it coincided with the designated cleaning hour for the learners. This arrangement aimed to ensure that meetings did not interfere with the learners' schedule and end up being perceived as an excessive demand on their time. Other learners would be occupied already with classroom cleaning activities. By the time the meetings concluded, the remaining learners would have completed their cleaning tasks and going home. Throughout the duration of the club meeting, the designated educator secured a clean and spacious meeting venue. The head teacher played a pivotal role in supporting the efforts through facilitating the provision of the venue and fostering co-operation among the teaching staff and learners. Above all, the head teacher consistently reminded the learners about the importance of attending the early sessions, which greatly contributed to the overall success of most of our meetings. One parent called the researcher, and questioned its relevance, arguing that it was a waste of time. The parents had assumed that the project was compulsory and did not understand the purpose of a consent letter. The misunderstanding could be attributed to the educational background common among most families in the study location.

During the initial peace club meeting, both research team members reintroduced themselves formally; learners also took the opportunity to introduce themselves. Evidently learners were already familiar with one another, while it was our responsibility to familiarise ourselves with them. Following the introductions, the statistical data was presented to the learners in a discussion-oriented manner.

Before exploring deeper into the discussions, we invited the learners to share their expectations for the group. Initially, the learners perceived the peace club as a platform for psycho-social support; they expressed their frustrations with personal challenges they faced in their lives and at school. The direction of the peace club seemed fluid, as the learners were internally conflicted and grappling with issues that required an outlet for expression. Due to the sensitive nature of information being shared, it was important to

create a secure and nurturing environment for all participants. It was necessary to establish group rules. The rules set by the participants included principles such as privacy, refraining from laughter, mutual respect, and active listening. By implementing these rules, the learners gained a sense of control, as they had collectively established a community governed by their own norms. The research team's role became one of following the participants' lead and providing guidance, when necessary, while respecting their autonomy and facilitating a safe space for open discussions.

Ms. B, the research assistant, played a crucial role in leading the peace club discussions. Her active involvement as a registered social worker, and an isiZulu speaker, was significant for the project, given her professional background and linguistic proficiency. Ms. B, as a resident of Umlazi, was also able to provide an in-depth understanding of the community dynamics within which the study was conducted. In this capacity, she assumed the primary responsibility for facilitating the discussions, while the researcher transitioned into an observer role, mainly observing the proceedings with considerate participation.

At the conclusion of each session, Ms. B compiled a report detailing the discussion that took place and shared her personal reflections and thoughts on the day's agenda. This practice provided a detailed record of the session's activities and served as a platform for the research assistant to express her own impressions and insights about her experiences through the lenses of a social worker and a researcher. This greatly improved the validity and reliability of the data collected. Interestingly, during the discussions, the learners expressed a reluctance to approach their educators; instead, they found a sense of liberation and openness in sharing their experiences with us. This finding prompted further exploration of the learners taking comfort in confiding in the club members rather than their educators. This response drew attention to the unique role and impact of the peace club in providing a safe space for the learners to share their thoughts and emotions freely.

The provision of psycho-social support extended for nearly five months. Discussions within the peace club revolved around various topics, including family dynamics and both

current and past relationship issues. Revelations from the discussions were that female learners were already engaged in sexual activity. Therefore, mentoring became a significant theme within the club's discussions, aimed at mitigating the risks associated with teenage pregnancy. It was observed that the learners had not received adequate adolescent education within their respective homes. Cultural taboos surrounding discussions on sex education between mothers and daughters, and instances of absent parenting, contributed to the lack of guidance in this area. A vacuum existed in terms of child socialisation, as they turned mostly to social media platform videos, community members, and peer support groups for decision making.

Furthermore, the detrimental effects of growing up in broken homes became increasingly evident, particularly for those raised by single mothers. Drawing from personal experiences and those shared by the learners, it was recognised that single parenting alone did not sufficiently contribute to the holistic development of a child. The children sought outside validation to gain self-confidence in who they are and the decisions they made. After five months of weekly meetings, the learners were finally introduced to the idea of a peace campaign and discussed the idea of implementing a peace project within their school. This marked a significant milestone in their engagement with the peace club activities, demonstrating their growing sense of ownership and involvement in shaping the club's undertakings and initiatives. In addition, it gave them an opportunity to spread the idea of what they wanted for their school.

#### **7.4.2 School B**

During the third term of 2021, the learners, who were in Grade 9 at the time, actively participated in the baseline survey to mark the initial engagement phase. This survey proved to be the most successful for the schools involved, largely attributed to the deputy principal's strong enthusiasm for research. From the beginning, he explicitly emphasised his unwavering commitment to the project's success, establishing a supportive environment. His proactive approach and willingness to assist with any requests demonstrated a recognition of the project's value to school safety issues. Unfortunately,

the principal informed us of his impending retirement at the end of the year. Consequently, a new deputy principal was slated to assume the position in January 2022.

The newly appointed deputy principal was willing to support the project, although the transition in terms of support was not entirely smooth. Acknowledging that he, too, was new to the position, there was need for time to acclimate to the new role. Despite occasional feelings of being overwhelmed, he remained supportive throughout. The second half of the survey was completed, although better results could have been achieved.

The assistance the deputy principal gave extended beyond the initial survey phase. Notably, he played a crucial role in securing a venue for the peace club's activities. With a total of ten Grade 9 classes, the researcher and the research assistant were responsible for visiting each class to recruit participants for the peace clubs. However, a recurring challenge surfaced during this process. Although a substantial number of learners initially expressed their interest by listing themselves as club members, only a small fraction of them attended the first engagement session. In School B a total of 40 participants signed up, but only 14 learners followed through and participated in the activities. The language barrier was not a primary issue, as the research assistant led the recruitment efforts. Instead, it was later learned that some learners assumed that membership of the peace clubs involved free benefits. When they discovered that there were no tangible incentives, their interest diminished, and they withdrew from participating.

Following protocol, the research team introduced itself to the newly recruited volunteers who, in turn did the same. These learners also were already familiar with one another, but we had to try to learn their names. Among all three FGD groups, this one proved to be the most active and welcoming. During our initial discussion, we gave an overview of the purpose and goals of the initiative. In subsequent dialogue with the volunteers, we sought their thoughts on the initiative and how they believed it could be used to address various issues within their school. Interestingly, the recurring issue of troubled learners resurfaced once again, with these volunteers seeking solace in our initiative. It became apparent that we were dealing with a group that had experienced trauma, struggled with

self-esteem, faced instances of bullying, and came from troubled backgrounds. Ms. B facilitated the discussion sessions, which focused on themes of healing, acceptance, and forgiveness.

During the mentoring phase, which spanned six months, the researcher's role primarily revolved around guiding and supporting the learners. A collaborative approach was used, allowing the learners to determine the discussion topics. Facilitation of discussions was left to the assistant, given her expertise in the subject matter and the seriousness of the sessions. The researcher assumed a more passive role of observer, occasionally contributing to prevent feelings of exclusion.

These discussions proved to be candid and authentic, although the use of English sometimes intimidated certain learners, leading to limited participation. Recognising the exhaustion of all topics of interest, the learners were encouraged to design a project that would promote peace in their school community. In emphasising ownership of the project, learners were told that they would lead its formation and execution, thereby instilling a sense of control and responsibility.

#### **7.4.3 School C**

Learners from School C initially participated in a survey during the third term of 2021 while in Grade 9. Owing to pandemic-related measures, including class rotation and frequently revised timetables, the process of data collection faced challenges and often suffered from compromises. For instance, during the survey period, learners attended school only twice a week, which compressed weekly workload into two days, leaving limited opportunities for comprehensive data gathering. Furthermore, learners alternated between morning and afternoon sessions on a weekly basis, prompting the researcher to seek assistance from an educator to administer the questionnaires during their classes. This rotational arrangement persisted until it was modified in February 2022, thereby hindering consistent data collection. However, following this adjustment, the designated educator recommended initiating focus group discussions at the respective school.

The researchers proceeded with a class-by-class approach, introducing themselves and clarifying the objectives of their initiative. Learners were invited to indicate their interest by writing their names on a piece of paper. It emerged that, although learners were interested in participating, they were apprehensive about potential ridicule from their peers. Despite a substantial number of learners initially showing interest, only ten girls attended the first session. This raised concerns about the absence of male learners. Data indicated that males constituted most victims of bullying and physical assault. Upon inquiry, the girls explained that they hesitated to participate due to the fear of being perceived as weak and being mocked. Nevertheless, the first engagement took place in April 2022, following the established protocol of introducing the researchers, explaining the study's purpose, presenting the results, and seeking the participants' interpretations of the findings.

The learners established the ground rules for the engagement process. As expected, the learners began by confiding in the researchers and sharing their traumatic experiences, highlighting the need for assistance and healing. At this point, Ms. B assumed a prominent role, as the learners again perceived this initiative as a form of psycho-social support. Notably, what set school C apart was the exclusive participation of female learners, rendering the engagement more affiliated to a collective conversation among girls. Consequently, my role transformed into that of an observer rather than an active participant.

Unfortunately, the floods that occurred in KZN in April 2022 disrupted the focus group discussions due to the closure of school premises for several weeks owing to lack of water. Additionally, school schedules were altered, classes often ended at 1:00 pm, conflicting with the designated study time of 2:00 pm to 3:00 pm. As a result, the discussions were frequently postponed. Despite the limited duration of our interactions, the discussions had a profound impact on the learners. However, it was apparent that the assigned educator faced challenges in adequately supporting the crucial stages of the study, particularly during project formulation. This was due to either feeling overwhelmed or reluctance. Moreover, the educator's availability became increasingly infrequent, leaving us to navigate the school independently. Despite our efforts to communicate the intention of conducting a peace campaign, the assigned educator disregarded our



messages. Consequently, despite the learners' enthusiasm, fuelled by their exposure to footage from School B, the peace club was ultimately discontinued, leading to grave disappointment. So, we accepted that, at school C, the campaign was a failure. Before leaving, we expressed our gratitude to maintain positive relations with the administration, as it was important to avoid severing ties for future purposes.

## **7.5 Project planning**

During the research process, it was crucial to prioritise the involvement and engagement of the participants. Burton (2008) emphasises the significance of considering the perspectives and opinions of learners when developing and executing activities to address school violence. By allowing learners to take ownership and actively contribute to peace initiatives, a sense of belonging and ownership was fostered, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and success rate of the initiatives. Dewan (2021: 153) suggests that initiatives to mitigate school violence should adhere to the principles of peace, diversity, and tolerance, thereby promoting a culture that respects and upholds human rights. This approach ensured a comprehensive and inclusive framework for addressing the issue.

Moreover, it was realised that it is essential to involve educators when implementing new projects within a school setting. Educators possess valuable insights and familiarity with the school community. Recognising this, there was close collaboration with educators assigned by the school administrators to facilitate the research process. The educators played a crucial role in providing uninterrupted access to the learners, and ensuring the availability of necessary facilities that were vital for the successful execution of the research. This collaboration included teacher interviews and securing appropriate venues to carry out the research activities effectively. By actively engaging educators, the researcher was able to establish a conducive environment for data collection and analysis.

The study drew guidance from Stringer (2014) who emphasised the importance of developing a framework of interpretation that considers the group process when

conducting action research projects (Scharbatke-Church 2011). Stringer (2014) outlined several crucial steps in this process:

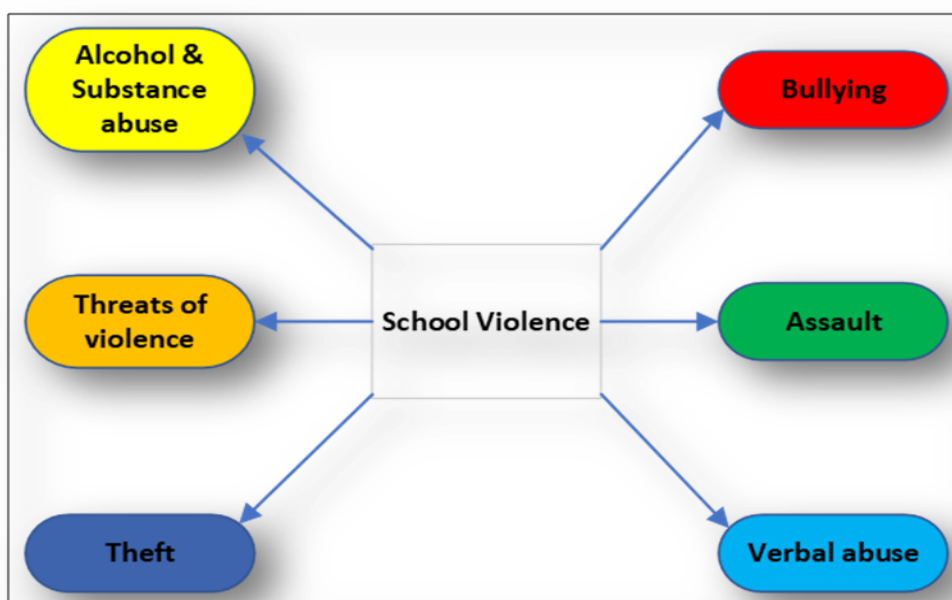
- Meeting with the group
- Setting an agenda that gives clarity on the purpose of the project
- Gaining understanding of the issues that need to be addressed
- Identifying priorities for action
- Formulating follow up activities and tasks to address the highlighted issues
- Identifying personal tasks for group members
- Determining a set time target to carry out the project, and
- Assessing resources required for the set activity.

At the outset of the project, a lack of prior knowledge regarding the specific areas of interest for the learners was acknowledged. The research took on an exploratory nature, with the researchers placing trust in the learners to devise a suitable strategy that could be implemented within their respective schools. Embracing this approach, a more hands-off role was adopted, allowing the participants to explore and navigate the project formulation independently. Instead of assuming a direct approach, the roles of guide and facilitator provided the needed support and counsel. By empowering the participants to own the peace project, the researchers fostered a sense of autonomy, and enabled the participants to actively engage in the exploration and formulation of the research strategy.

### **7.5.1 Situation Analysis**

During the peace club discussions, two dedicated sessions were allocated to brainstorming the various issues that required attention within the learners' respective schools. At the culmination of these two discussions, the participants in the three peace clubs collectively identified six specific areas of concern that necessitated intervention. The areas are presented in Figure 7.1. Notably the issues identified by the learners were consistent with the baseline data and the outcomes of the focus group discussions. This indicated a convergence between the shared concerns expressed by participants and the

initial data analysis, further reinforcing the significance and relevance of the identified areas for intervention.



**Figure 7-1** Areas Needing Intervention (Self-Generated).

## 7.5.2 Devising the Action Plan

### 7.5.2.1 School A

The peace club at School A, upon identifying delinquency, drug, and alcohol abuse as requiring immediate intervention, they dedicated a session to determine a suitable strategy for raising awareness among Grade 10 learners. An environment where learners were encouraged to engage in independent thinking was encouraged. During group discussions, it was generally agreed that delinquent behaviour in certain learners was primarily attributed to lack of motivation and insufficient appreciation of education. Learners shared their observations that some schools in the vicinity had once had the privilege of hosting university representatives to talk about higher education. Experiencing such visits often boosted the impact of hearing stories from university learners thereby instilling a greater sense of focus and motivation, to pursue higher education. In contrast,

their own School [A] had never received a visit from any university, despite its proximity to Mangosuthu University.

As the participants deliberated, ample time and privacy was provided, emphasising the importance of fully developing a comprehensive programme along with a motto. At the conclusion of the second session, the learners invited us to hear their planned initiatives and the necessary resources required to execute the peace project. The learners expressed their primary need for a university representative to address their peers, providing advice and insight into the university experience. Their chosen motto was "Our future is in our hands." To facilitate this, the research team approached DUT recruitment to arrange a visit and presentation for the learners. Due to limited resources, the researcher was unable to provide t-shirts for the peace club members. Nevertheless, the learners drafted a programme outline to be presented to the visiting representative from DUT.

The draft programme:

- Introduce the peace club, its members and objective
- Briefly talk about DUT and introduce our guests
- Question and answer session
- Conclude by thanking guests, responsible educators, and the learners for attending.

Despite encountering challenges in securing the participation of DUT for the programme, eventually an agreement was reached. DUT stipulated that the school schedule would need to align with the institution's programme, as an obligation to attend official functions if invited. After two weeks of deliberation, a mutually agreeable date was set, with the hope that DUT would not receive any conflicting official invitations. Fortunately, this was the case, and our programme received priority. The planning and execution of the programme, in total, covered four weeks.

### **7.5.2.2 School B**

At School B, the participants expressed their concerns regarding behavioural issues among their peers from the very beginning of our engagement. The learners strongly believed that the underlying cause of problems within the school stemmed from a lack of guidance and warnings about the consequences of their actions for Grade 10 learners particularly male perpetrators. It became evident that there was no need for further inquiry into their desired course of action. When it came time to develop a project plan, the learners requested to host a motivational speaker to address the Grade 10s, especially one who could reach out to males. The learners indicated that they would co-ordinate the programme.

To explore potential options for a motivational speaker, the Agenda Network, an active Facebook group where ex-offenders discuss their experiences in prison and provide advice to viewers, was contacted. The Agenda Network promptly responded to the enquiry via Facebook. Subsequently, Mr. X was approached and presented with the programme details a week later. A meeting was arranged with the learners to introduce them to the profile of our guest speaker and to gauge their impressions. The learners agreed to have Mr. X visit their school. Bringing Mr. X to the school incurred costs, but with the assistance of my supervisors and well-wishers, it was feasible. The learners were enthusiastic about the opportunity to hear from him and presented their programme outline and motto for the day: "Let's make our school a better place." A draft programme was prepared and shared with the school administration and Mr. X for their review and input.

Draft programme:

- Introduce the peace club, its members and objectives
- Introduce the two guests
- Closing remarks, thank the educators, learners, and guests for attending.

## **7.6 Project Implementation**

### **7.6.1 School A**

On the designated day, the representatives from Durban University of Technology (DUT) arrived to deliver a presentation about the wide range of courses offered by the institution. It was evident through the visible excitement among the Grade 10 learners that the significance of the occasion began to dawn upon them. As the number of learners in attendance increased, so did their anxiety, reaching a point where the selected presenter contemplated resigning due to the overwhelming fear associated with public speaking. At that, our team sought to reassure and encourage the speaker to step outside his comfort zone, while emphasising the importance of completing the assigned task.

Concurrently, the remaining members of the action team collaborated with DUT to distribute informational flyers and pens to the eager learners once they settled down. To ensure discipline was maintained throughout the event, the assigned educator and four additional colleagues diligently worked together, particularly due to the presence of a few boisterous male learners. The remaining learners exhibited enthusiasm, as they were genuinely curious about the motives behind DUT's visit to their school, specifically targeting the Grade 10 learners.

The educator introduced the action team and played a pivotal role in overseeing the smooth execution of the programme. Subsequently, the learners took centre stage and introduced their own programme, expressing their aspirations for an improved school environment and academic excellence. Despite initial concerns, the learners showed composure during their presentation, exceeding expectations. To commence the main segment of the event, a member of the action team introduced the DUT recruitment team, who delivered an informative presentation shedding light on the learner experience.

The presentation lasted approximately 15 minutes and was followed by an open floor for questions. Several learners inquired about the enrolment process at DUT, indicating their eagerness to pursue higher education. Afterwards a project member expressed gratitude to the school administration, the DUT recruitment team, and the learners for their

attendance. Personally, I was glad to witness the learners successfully carry out the programme autonomously, without intervention and guidance. It was a satisfying moment, seeing learners conquer their fears and take charge. As part of their assigned tasks, the learners had the responsibility of getting feedback from their peers regarding the peace project, gauging their thoughts and suggestions to enhance its impact in the future. A week later, we gathered again to discuss the feedback received and to evaluate the project they had spearheaded. This is fully discussed in the project evaluation section.

### **7.6.2 School B**

On the day of the presentation, the learners demonstrated their organisational skills by assigning specific roles to each group member. A notable aspect was their collaboration in setting up the public address system, an unexpected eagerness displayed by female members who were keen on learning about its setup. The group chose the theme, "Let's make our school a better environment" for their project. Upon the arrival of the two guests, the group members introduced themselves and initiated conversations. Meanwhile, the remaining Grade 10s gradually gathered in the main hall, creating an atmosphere of anticipation. Unfortunately, it was disheartening that three group members were absent on the day of the presentation and it was not communicated why they did not come to school, potentially affecting the dynamics and overall performance of the group.

As the main hall filled with the Grade 10s, the presence of two educators, including the school deputy principal, helped establish order and set the programme in motion. Once all the learners were present, the group members assumed responsibility for conducting the programme. However, there were instances where some peers exhibited disruptive behaviour, particularly during the presentation of the project and its purpose. Male learners were conspicuously rowdy and dismissive. However, the determination and resilience of the presenting learner who remained undeterred and focused on the task was worth acknowledging. To break the ice and engage the audience, the first guest, a singer, performed two songs. This performance managed to capture the attention and involvement of most learners. Due to time constraints, the entire performance lasted approximately five minutes, as the school day concluded at 4 pm. Following this, Mr. X

took the centre stage to share his experiences in prison. Initially, some learners continued to display dismissive behaviour, but as he spoke, and learners became increasingly engaged in his storytelling.

At the stroke of 4 pm, when school was officially over, it was expected that most learners would leave. Surprisingly, only a handful walked away, while the rest remained, attentively listening to Mr. X's words of wisdom and advice. He concluded his speech precisely at 16:10. As a sign of appreciation for the programme, learners requested the first guest to perform an additional song. Following the performance, several learners approached the guests, expressing their admiration and requesting to take pictures.

After the programme concluded, the educators who had assisted in organising the event were thanked. To their surprise, the educators not only commended the programme but also expressed a desire for its expansion on a larger scale, involving other grades. Furthermore, they remarked on their surprise at how deeply engaged the learners were during Mr. X's talk. The group members gathered to discuss their collective joy and gratitude for the successful execution of the programme.

Recognising the importance of feedback, the learners were tasked with gathering thoughts and opinions from their peers regarding the peace project. Their objective was to inquire about their peers' impressions of the project and gather suggestions on how to enhance its impact in future engagements. The group agreed to meet the following week to share and evaluate the collected feedback. The evaluation session would provide an opportunity to reflect on the programme's strengths and areas for improvement, ultimately enhancing the impact of future initiatives.

## **7.7 Project Evaluation**

Scharbatke-Church (2011) argues that, evaluating peacebuilding projects is essential for accountability and learning. Agreeing with this perspective, Dewan (2021: 157) suggests that certain standards should be followed when conducting evaluations. These standards serve as guidelines to ensure a comprehensive and effective evaluation process. The



evaluation of peacebuilding projects can provide valuable perceptions and lessons for future initiatives, which are:

- Feasibility, is it realistic?
- Propriety, is it ethical?
- Utility, does it serve the needs of the users?
- Accuracy, does it accurately determine the value of the programme (Dewan 2021: 157)?

In addition to the standards, Dewan (2021: 157) emphasised that the evaluation criteria for peacebuilding projects should also measure relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and coherence. These criteria give a holistic assessment of the project's performance and outcomes. Building upon this, Franzen *et al.* (2009) assert that programme evaluation plays a crucial role in determining the value of the programme for its participants and identifying areas for improvement in future initiatives. The different sentiments from learners such as the need for career guidance from universities, inclusion of all learners in programmes of this nature, the participation of parents, and other experiences provided critical information for the programme evaluation. By conducting thorough evaluations, peace clubs can gather valuable feedback and insights that contribute to the ongoing development and refinement of localised programmes. Following the event, the members were assigned to pose two evaluation questions to their peers. This process allowed feedback and perspectives from participants to be collected, enabling a deeper understanding of the project's strengths and areas that could be enhanced in the future. The following questions were posed for evaluation:

- What are your thoughts about the peace project, and did you learn something?
- What would you improve if you were to lead such a project?

### 7.7.1 School A

#### 7.7.1.1 Thoughts about the peace project and learning

During the meeting following the conclusion of the peace project, the participants held an interactive session where they provided verbal feedback. This forum allowed the members to express their thoughts and observations regarding the visit from the Durban University of Technology (DUT). The learners revealed that their peers exhibited a profound enthusiasm at the realisation that DUT had chosen their school as its destination for career guidance for the first time. Several Grade 10 learners expressed their aspirations to enrol at DUT and pursue courses within the fields of technology and engineering. The information derived from the discussions is presented in the excerpts below:

*“Sir, one of our classmates said he wanted to be an engineer, and the subjects he was doing were going to help him get a place in university and he will work extra hard to be an engineer.”*

Group members reported that several learners were motivated to intensify their efforts in order to bring happiness to their parents. The learners, as a collective, found the information shared by the DUT recruitment team to be very useful in acquainting them with the requirements for tertiary education. This was reflected in the excerpts presented below:

*“My classmates had never seen DUT at our school. It caught their interest and gave an idea of what they need to qualify for university.”*

*“I speak for myself. I am happy that DUT came, and I learnt a lot about what is needed for me to be an accountant. I like calculating. The explanation made it clear to me that I can make it and it is not hard, as what I have heard from others from our neighbourhood.”*

This exposure offered learners an understanding of the necessary requirements and the steps needed to pursue their desired career paths after completing secondary education. Learners generally agreed that a school marked by school violence and drug abuse would not produce a conducive environment for effective learning. Overall, the learners perceived the content delivered by the DUT recruitment team as an invaluable resource that helped their understanding of the expectations and commitments associated with

tertiary education. This knowledge instilled a sense of direction and purpose, enabling the learners to align their academic endeavours with their long-term aspirations. It made them recognise that harmful behaviour would derail them from achieving their goals and dreams. Moreover, learners found similarities in their goals of wanting to go to university. The best way to achieve this was to work together and co-exist.

#### **7.7.1.2 Improvements**

Several learners expressed a desire for their parents to be present during the DUT visit to gain a better understanding of tertiary education and its associated requirements. These learners recognised the importance of parental involvement in their academic journey. Parental participation would foster a stronger support system. A proposal was submitted for an annual event on career guidance, where the school administration and DUT would collaborate to organise a day of informative sessions. The initiative would involve the distribution of printed pamphlets and the invitation of community members to attend and learn more about tertiary education. The hope was that such an event would serve as a catalyst to motivate the community to prioritise education and to recognise its significance.

The feedback indicated that Grade 10 learners specifically wished for the entire school to be invited to similar programmes. By extending the invitation to all learners, regardless of their grade level, it was believed that the motivation and focus instilled in learners from the early stages of high school would be further reinforced. This approach aimed to create an atmosphere conducive to academic growth and an encouragement to learners to maintain their dedication to studies. In summary, the learners expressed a desire for increased parental involvement, the establishment of an annual career guidance event in collaboration with DUT, and the involvement of the entire school community in similar programmes. These suggestions aimed to foster motivation, create awareness about tertiary education, and emphasise the importance of education among learners and the broader community.

## 7.7.2 School B

### 7.7.2.1 Thoughts about the peace project and learning

A week after concluding the peace project, a feedback and evaluation session was conducted to assess its impact on learners. The feedback showed that the project had a profound influence on the participants, including those who were initially perceived as unlikely to be affected. The learners reported transformative experiences and shared specific instances of personal growth. One learner recounted an interaction with another learner who expressed a desire to change their behaviour. The individual expressed their fear of ending up in jail and voiced a strong aspiration to achieve success instead. Another learner highlighted a notable transformation in a peer previously involved in supplying drugs within the school. He had engaged in self-introspection and indicated his intention to cease the drug-related activities and become a better peer. These examples illustrate how even seemingly unlikely learners were prompted to reflect on their behaviour and to strive for positive change. The information derived from the discussions is presented in the excerpts below:

*“I could see some change from my classmates, sir. The following day, the programme was talked about during our free time when we were waiting for the next class. For me I could see that people were thinking deeply about what had been said.” (L-B)*

During the evaluation session, learners engaged in profound discussions regarding the reality of imprisonment, as described by Mr. X. A sense of disillusionment was expressed realising that they had a misconception about the nature of prison life. A strong dislike for delinquency and an assertion for aspirations to pursue careers as doctors and engineers was expressed. This shift in perspective demonstrated a new-found determination to distance themselves from negative influences and to strive for professional goals. This was reflected in the excerpts presented below:

*“One of my friends told me that they were now afraid of going to jail. She said she cannot imagine living in such a place with such conditions. She said, ‘No, never! I cannot go there... I would rather stay away from doing things that will send me to jail.’ (L-B)*

*“There is this guy in our class; he is known to sell weed in our class. He came to me since he saw me introducing our speakers. He asked where we got Mr X from and he*

*was fascinated by his stories and he wanted to hear from him.... At the end, he said he is considering stopping selling weed in class because he was lied to about jail life. Sir, to be specific, he said, 'The jail life I was told about was different from what was said.' He was serious that he wants to quit." (L-B)*

Additionally, an educator provided positive feedback regarding the behavioural progress observed in the Grade 10 learners:

*"I did not expect the learners to listen like that when Mr X spoke to them. The whole week in my class there was improvement in behaviour and participation... At some point, we spoke about Mr X and what they thought. I could see that they had a renewed thought about their schoolwork."*

The session revealed significant strides made by these learners in their conduct and attitude. Overall, the feedback and evaluation session highlighted the profound impact of the peace project on the learners, including those who were initially less receptive. The project triggered introspection and transformation, leading to a desire for personal growth, the abandonment of negative behaviours such as violence, drug consumption and distribution, and a renewed focus on academic aspirations.

#### **7.7.2.2 Improvements**

The inclusion of other learners in similar projects was one notable area of improvement that garnered significant discussion during the feedback and evaluation session. Group members expressed a consensus that assigning such projects to specific learners could serve as a catalyst for positive change and a motivation to include other learners in similar projects to abandon negative behaviours or activities in which they may have been involved. The notion of targeting specific individuals with impactful initiatives redirected focus and encouraged better choices.

In addition to targeting specific learners, other participants suggested that the frequency of such programmes should be increased. It was proposed that similar initiatives should be conducted at least once every academic term. The suggestion aimed to ensure sustained engagement and reinforcement of positive values and behaviour throughout the school year. Including more peace programmes in the school's calendar, would give learners more opportunities to reflect, grow, and recommit themselves to positive paths.

Overall, the feedback revealed a collective belief in the power of involving other learners in similar projects, and a strong desire for more frequent programmes. The suggestions reflected a commitment to eliminate school violence, to promote positive change, to foster a supportive learning environment, and to nurture the personal growth and development of all learners.

## **7.8 Researcher's Thoughts About the Peace Projects**

The respective groups from the two schools effectively implemented their programmes. Regrettably, the third group was unable to devise a project plan for their peers. The arrival of the guests during the project day was a particularly stressful moment, as there was uncertainty regarding the level of seriousness they would attribute to the initiative. Furthermore, securing, and sustaining support from the educators presented its own set of challenges, mainly reluctance and taking the project for granted. Upon reflecting on the two peace projects, a notable disparity emerged. That conducted by School A, although successful in influencing learners, was confined to an academic impact. Learners were motivated to concentrate on their studies and to accomplish their personal ambitions.

However, it did not encourage learners to introspect regarding their relationships and the responsibility they hold as members of the community. This discrepancy between the two projects was evident through the focus group discussions, where it was noted that significant contributing factors to delinquency were the absence of parental guidance and misleading influences from the community.

In the second project, the presence of Mr. X in addressing the learners was invaluable as it gave them much-needed guidance and dispelled misconceptions surrounding prison and its repercussions. South Africa is currently grappling with the breakdown of the nuclear family structure, accompanied by an increase in absent fathers and mothers struggling to provide for their families. Consequently, there exists a void in terms of guidance and proper instruction for children. As a result, children are exposed to both positive and negative influences without adequate guidance, thereby promoting delinquent behaviour due to the lack of accountability. During his interaction with the

learners, Mr. X emphasised the severe consequences they would face if they did not rectify their behaviour.

Consequently, by encouraging a change in character, the project succeeded in transforming how learners interact with their peers and educators. This, ultimately, can lead to increased academic productivity, thus fostering their role as productive members of the community. In conclusion, the second project emerged as more impactful since it prompted learners to engage in self-reflection and holistic development. Perhaps the combination of a career guidance day with a guest speaker can produce invaluable impacts among learners.

## **7.9 Conclusion**

This chapter delved into the action research component of the study, shedding light on the initial stages undertaken to initiate and implement the peace project. The discussion encompassed the various steps involved, from project inception to execution. Additionally, the chapter explored the impact of the peace project, considering its outcomes and effects on the target population. Finally, personal reflections and insights regarding the peace projects, offering thoughts and observations derived from the study's findings were provided.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:**

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

#### **8.1 Introduction**

The study was guided by a five-step theoretical framework formulated by the researcher. This framework encompassed conflict transformation, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems, systems thinking, transformative learning and social learning theory. Within the context of widespread violence issues in schools, learners were identified as integral participants in both the problem and its potential solutions. Recognising their significance as often overlooked stakeholders in violence prevention efforts, it became evident that their active involvement in the design and operation of school-based violence prevention programmes was both commendable and imperative.

This concluding chapter serves to explain the realisation of the study's objectives, specifically focusing on the development, implementation, and evaluation of a school-based violence prevention programme tailored for high school learners in the Umlazi District of Kwa-Zulu Natal. The chapter commences with an exposition of the primary findings, followed by a concise summary and concluding remarks concerning the School Violence and Peace Club initiative. The chapter ends with recommendations drawn from the study, including guidance for the prospective development of peace clubs.

#### **8.2 Findings**

This study aimed to explore the role of peace clubs in bringing systematic change in attitudes towards school violence and evaluating their effectiveness in mitigating the problem at four schools in Umlazi District. The study had four specific objectives:

The first and second objectives were achieved by using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions at the four schools. Using these three data collection methods, along with observations, was useful for triangulating. They also provided a



comprehensive and valuable insights on school violence from different stakeholders that included educators, learners, security personnel, and parents.

Objectives three and four were inter-related. In this regard, three schools were initially engaged in the launch of peace clubs. One school opted to withdraw from the research project immediately after the launch. Of the remaining three schools, two of the peace clubs successfully devised and executed an intervention programme guided by the core principles of peace clubs. According to Dewan (2021) these are: empathy, solidarity, participatory practices, democratic engagement, and fostering both individual and collective agency. Conversely, the third school did not develop an intervention strategy. Following the completion of the intervention programmes by the two active peace clubs, a preliminary evaluation was conducted. The outcomes of this evaluation revealed an enhanced awareness among the target population regarding the consequences of violence and other delinquent behaviours. However, it was also noted that there exists room for enhancing the sustainability of peace clubs and their associated intervention strategies, indicating a substantial potential for further development.

### **8.2.1 School-Based Violence**

Schools were encountering challenges that hindered the establishment of harmonious environments conducive to the pursuit of child education. It was evident that safety emerged as a prominent concern within schools. A significant proportion of learners expressed feelings of insecurity, as incidents of violence could potentially occur at any given moment within the school premises. This observation aligns with existing literature on the topics of peace and security in South Africa. Both male and female learners attested to the prevalence of various forms of violence, encompassing physical and psychological aspects, as a recurring source of apprehension. According to the findings, more than half of the learners reported exposure to such instances of violence on a weekly basis. These quantitative indications exhibited a correlation with both local and international literature, which consistently identified high levels of violence within secondary school environments. Nevertheless, the principal revelation arising from this study contradicted the prevailing notion that females were predominantly victimised as,

on the contrary, males were the primary recipients of daily school-related violence. This realisation rendered male learners particularly susceptible to feelings of anxiety and fear within the school context. A culture of silence among male learners appeared to be influenced and perpetuated by an indigenous worldview as coded in the proverb such as '*Indoda ayi khali*,' which translates to the belief that 'a man does not cry, display vulnerability, or express emotions openly'. The character of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* captures the African perception of masculinity.

The findings revealed a prevalent issue within the school environment, primarily centred on threats of violence, theft, robbery, and assault. These instances of multiple forms of violence were found to occur both within the school premises and in the surrounding environs. Threats of violence, notably in the form of bullying, were identified as a prominent manifestation of this problem. Furthermore, the issue of drugs and substance abuse emerged as significant concerns that had a profound impact on various aspects of school life. It was evident that learners across all grade levels were actively engaged in the consumption of substances and drugs during break and lunch periods.

This pervasive involvement in drug and substance abuse appeared to be at the core of numerous challenges faced by the school community. Consequently, the notable impact of these issues was disruption, as classrooms frequently descended into states of ungovernability after recess periods, with learners displaying rowdy and unruly behaviour. This disruption had a profound adverse effect on the effective delivery of education within the schools, as it impacted both learners and educators. Furthermore, the prevalence of gang activity within schools was a concerning trend. These various manifestations of problems within the educational system were found to be closely linked to the underlying structural issues of poverty and inequality prevalent in South African communities.

As a result, the problems have taken a toll on educators, inducing feelings of frustration, fear, and a sense of desertion. Within school settings in townships, there exists an inescapably demoralised workforce, ultimately undermining the quality of education being provided.

### 8.2.2 Causes and Factors Influencing School Violence

A significant key finding of the study underscores that instances of school violence can be attributed to the degradation of the communal psycho-social system. The degradation is evident in the breakdown of family structures, limited support from extended family networks, and the presence of corrupt community influences, all of which have exposed children to negative aspects of society. The research findings from interviews and discussions revealed a predominant trend among learners hailing from broken households primarily led by single mothers. These households are characterised by sub-optimal parenting practices and a history of familial challenges. Notably, there is an absence of father figures, depriving children of essential guidance and discipline. Consequently, the quest for a sense of belonging often led learners to engage in delinquent behaviours. In particular, male learners tend to idolise certain community members who are often involved in criminal activities, as they seek a male role model. From these individuals, they acquire knowledge about violence, drug involvement, and irresponsible conduct. The acquired negative behaviours eventually manifest in the school environment.

Female learners, by contrast, underwent a process of socialisation guided by older female figures and female social media influencers. Influencers played a pivotal role in shaping the behaviours and attitudes of female learners. Unfortunately, they are often exposed to and influenced by the negative and destructive behaviours. One such is the admiration for and emulation of the 'soft life' culture, which covertly encourages females to exploit males for financial gain under the guise of the phrase '*indoda must.*' In reality, the phrase embodies a transactional nature, implying a *quid pro quo* of money for sexual favours. Female learners appeared to shift their respect away from their maternal figures towards social media personalities because of their flashy lifestyle. However, some of the personalities are known for leading scandalous lives, characterised by manipulating males, and making financial demands in exchange for their attention. Furthermore, the proliferation of TikTok challenges has contributed to this phenomenon of school violence, as some of the content therein promotes indecency and the normalisation of grooming behaviours.

Hence, there is a process of cultural adaptation or acculturation in which prevalent behaviour patterns within communities are undergoing change that greatly impacts the traditional values such as *ubuntu*. This transformation is primarily a result of migration, occurring both physically and through media exposure. To illustrate, in traditional African communities, individuals known as '*malumes*' or community uncles traditionally played a role in child-rearing, reflecting the communal belief that it takes a village to raise a child. However, there is now a concerning shift, as certain community members, who traditionally served as custodians of culture, have become involved in activities such as drug distribution, gang membership, illegal alcohol trade, human trafficking, and pimping.

The introduction of various disruptive media platforms has also led to a psychological migration of children, as they adopt behaviours observed in other cultures through media representation. The absence of effective monitoring of social media activities and support systems further exacerbates this situation. Consequently, young learners, due to their susceptibility, readily absorb a wide range of information from these platforms. This increases the likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviours, including but not limited to prostitution and substance abuse.

This leads us to consider the role of social media as a contributing factor in instances of school violence. Although the fundamental methods of perpetrating school violence have remained consistent, there has been a notable change in the nature and sophistication of these acts. A significant development is the utilisation of smartphones by learners. These enable the capture of scenes of violence which can be shared instantly through social media platforms. The recordings are disseminated rapidly to multiple recipients in real-time, depicting instances of school violence or other criminal behaviours as they unfold. Examples of incidents include a range of behaviours, such as physical assault, sexual abuse, taunting, and sustained verbal assaults occurring in the digital realm. Virtual space now poses greater challenges to the mental health of its victims as abuses can now be sustained without limits. It is noteworthy that these forms of abuse often yield severe consequences for victims, including but not limited to feelings of suicide, depression, anxiety, and a heightened fear of attending school (Sonjica 2021; Ngema 2023a). Moreover, it is not only learners who fall victim to these behaviours; teachers

and other school staff members are also affected (Sibanda 2022). Moreover, learners now perpetrate violence by using offensive or degrading memes, gifs and stickers which can be shared on social media platforms and cannot be digitally traced by an ordinary person.

Substance and drug abuse constitute another significant contributing factor in unwelcome behaviours. One adverse effect associated with substance and drug abuse is the diminished sense of judgement and the impairment of full cognitive functions among users. A distinctive characteristic observed in individuals engaged in substance and drug abuse is their tendency toward poor decision-making and displays of violent behaviour. An escalation in the number of individuals engaged in drug and substance abuse within a school environment, results in a higher concentration of individuals prone to poor decision-making and violent tendencies at a single location. As a result, this heightened prevalence of such individuals increases the likelihood of erratic behaviours occurring within the school setting.

Furthermore, schools exhibit characteristics of dysfunctional internal and external support systems. In South Africa, there has been limited investment from the government in lower quantile schools concerning both structural and operational system development. Township schools suffer from understaffing, a lack of essential resources for monitoring and supporting learners during school hours (Dunbar-Krige, Pillay and Henning 2010; Mabasa and Muluvhu 2019). Simultaneously, the level of support from parents and community members towards schools leaves a lot to be desired. The absence of reliable security measures within schools has been identified as a contributor to the prevalence of school violence. Perpetrators of such violence often exploit the vulnerabilities within this dysfunctional system. It is reasonable to postulate that if schools were adequately staffed and received more robust support from parents, guardians, and community members, the incidence of school violence could potentially be mitigated.

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the role of biological factors that contribute to school violence. Adolescents undergo pubertal changes marked by major shifts in physical appearance and hormonal fluctuations, including rapid sexual growth, which can significantly impact their body image and self-perception (Masinga 2016). Subsequently,

the capacity, or lack thereof, to effectively cope with these physiological changes can serve as a trigger for violent behaviour among learners. This biological aspect is further intertwined with cultural practices, such as initiation ceremonies, where violence is used to complete the ritual. Resultantly, experiences of this nature may create a propensity for violence in the behaviour of learners.

### **8.2.3 Effects**

There was evidence that learners experienced significant challenges related to their mental health because of exposure to persistent violence. They consistently lived in a state of apprehension and anxiety, constantly anticipating the possibility of violence occurring within their school environment. Persistent fear, exacerbated by the witnessing of violence within the school, had adverse effects on their overall well-being. These findings were consistent with existing literature which has established a correlation between experiencing violence and the subsequent development of fear and anxiety (Nickerson and Spears 2007; Bellflower 2010; Wilson, Douglas and Lyon 2010). The survey conducted as part of this study confirmed that 43% of the learners in Umlazi were grappling with feelings of fear and anxiety. Consequently, emotional struggles have profound implications for the education of young learners, manifesting in an increased desire to drop out of school, diminished concentration levels, poorer academic performance, and an overall deterioration in mental health. Victims of violence also reported experiencing low self-esteem due to victimisation, in turn leading some learners to adopt coping mechanisms such as alcohol and substance use.

Moreover, it was observed that certain learners felt compelled to join gangs as a means of safeguarding themselves from potential victimisation. During discussions, it became evident that some learners viewed gang membership as a deterrent to potential aggressors. Affiliation to or being part of a gang could offer a form of protection. Existing literature supports the notion that individuals may join gangs with the primary motivation of seeking protection from threats or harm (Burton 2008). Additionally, the study revealed that male learners felt pressured to assimilate into the gang culture, subsequently leading to the adoption of delinquent behaviours.

#### **8.2.4 Peace clubs**

The primary objective of this investigation was to assess the potential of peace clubs to effect substantial changes in attitudes toward school violence. This was pursued by developing a peace model and subsequently appraising its efficacy in addressing the issue within the context of four schools situated in the Umlazi District. Literature has underscored the importance of involving individuals and community members in democratic processes that empower learners to engage in meaningful decision-making and active participation. Directly engaging learners in the planning and execution of initiatives aimed at addressing school violence provided a platform to showcase problem-solving skills, to express their concerns, to ensure their voices were heard, and to foster a sense of constructive community involvement. Over the course of the peace club meetings, there was a discernible increase in self-confidence and belief among the learners involved, attributes that had been lacking at the outset. Rather than solely viewing the peace club as a vehicle for healing, there was a gradual realisation that this platform could also serve broader purposes, such as instilling positivity to other learners who had not yet had similar opportunities to join the club, or who looked down upon it.

On the day when violence awareness programmes were held, the display of mutual support and solidarity among the participants was impressive. Learners exhibited a remarkable level of determination, even when faced with moments of doubt. In instances where stage fright affected individuals, members of the peace club extended support to one another. Most participants showcased a sense of pride in their work and accomplishments, which gradually permeated throughout the entire group. Accordingly, participants successfully attained their predefined objectives, which primarily sought to instil positivity in their respective schools. The educators responsible for overseeing the programme commended the learners' efforts. Furthermore, educators reported a greater level of seriousness among the learners in their academic pursuits, along with improved behavioural conduct.

The peace clubs have shown that, even with a school facing resource constraints, the presence of collaboration between school administration and a group of motivated learners can serve as a valuable strategy for mitigating incidents of school violence within

Umlazi schools. These peace clubs offer participating learners an opportunity to perceive themselves as catalysts for social transformation within school environments. Moreover, engagement in peace club activities fostered self-assurance, leadership abilities, and effective communication skills among the learners. An involved adult, as a guide and facilitator, plays a pivotal role in this context. It was noticed that position plays a critical role in the effectiveness of peace clubs and the attainment of research objectives. The researcher should refrain from imposing their own ideas upon the learners, but instead, should assist by providing guidance on how to realise their objectives. The democratic approach taken in the study to collaborate with peace club members underscored the mutual dependence between the researcher and the participants. This interdependence aligns with the principles of systems theory, which served as one of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

Instead of perceiving the participants as passive recipients of knowledge, the study regarded them as experts in their own right, given their lived experiences. Consequently, the participants were considered the most valuable sources of insights and ideas for the mitigation of school violence. To establish a productive working relationship, icebreaking activities were initiated, fostering an environment in which participants felt secure and self-assured in expressing their perspectives on the issue of school violence. This approach was critical in shaping the internal and external dynamics of the club. A set of ground rules gave important guidance for the procedural aspects of the club's activities as they progressed. These rules served as a framework for determining the approach taken throughout the club's operations.

After the implementation of the programmes, assessment of their effectiveness is crucial for grasping their influence on participants, and identifying areas that require enhancement for future initiatives. During this study, the issue of sustainability emerged as a significant challenge to the continued existence of peace clubs within the three schools. The United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987 highlighted sustainability as the meeting of the present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It was evident that the absence of educators and an external facilitator to consistently guide and support the initiative posed a substantial risk to its



continuity. The validity of this concern was confirmed through conversations with both educators and peace club members. It was discovered that the programme was not carried forward into the subsequent year due to the absence of a mentor to sustain its momentum. This limitation highlights a critical aspect of this study and the issues of sustainability of programmes.

### **8.3 Summary**

In summary, this study successfully accomplished its four predefined objectives: first, to investigate the nature, extent, and repercussions of violence; secondly, to identify the prevailing responses to violence within school settings; thirdly, to establish peace clubs in four selected schools and to sustain their activities over a duration of eight months; and finally, to evaluate the influence of these peace clubs on ninth-grade learners. The study Report is outlined as follows:

**Chapter One:** In this introductory section, the study's primary emphasis was to introduce the research. It began by articulating the problem statement, shedding light on the challenges addressed by the study. Furthermore, the section introduced the study's overarching aims and specific objectives, elucidating the intended outcomes. Additionally, the significance of the study was expounded upon, underlining its importance in the broader context of relevant academic and practical domains.

**Chapter Two:** This chapter discussed literature focusing on school violence. It focused on the nature, extent and consequences of school violence. It also covered the forms of school violence, the factors contributing to school violence, theories of aggression, consequences of school violence, local and international policy and legislation, and intervention strategies.

**Chapter Three:** The theoretical framework was discussed in this chapter. Theories such as conflict transformation, social learning theory, systems theory, transformative learning theory, and systems think theory were explained, together with how they shape the study.

**Chapter Four:** This covered the researcher world view, research methodology and action research. Issues such as sampling, selection criteria, ethical considerations, reliability and validity were discussed.

**Chapter Five:** This looked at the quantitative data, its interpretation and research findings, as well as the qualitative data interpretation from the interviews and focus group discussions.

**Chapter Six:** This delved into the analysis of the qualitative data, with discussions linked to existing literature and theories, and pointing out key themes.

**Chapter Seven:** This focused on the action research of the study. The seven stages of action research were presented and linked to the peace programme. The peace projects were evaluated, including the challenges and successes.

**Chapter Eight:** The final phase of this research centred on drawing conclusions and highlighting the study's key findings. The chapter also presented recommendations arising from the study's outcomes. Areas for further research were also identified.

An initial assessment of the two peace programmes introduced in the schools revealed that learners were prompted to contemplate ways to effect positive changes in their daily lives, both within and outside the school environment. Particularly noteworthy was the impact of the "Mr. X" talks, which shed light on the significance of paternal involvement in children's lives. This programme emphasised that many learners lacked guidance due to absent parents and insufficient parenting skills, often equating financial provision with proper child rearing.

The experience significantly expanded my personal understanding and practical application of action research in solving immediate social problems. In this study, a prime concern was the threat of school violence on educational attainment for learners from low-income communities. This was particularly significant given that the study was conducted in an IsiZulu-dominated community. Limited fluency in the native language required stepping out of one's comfort zone as the researcher could not speak isiZulu.

The positive influence of the peace programmes was encouraging in prompting learners to contemplate their educational futures and the consequences of delinquent behaviour.

Furthermore, an additional source of satisfaction stemmed from observing signs of healing, enhanced self-confidence, improved communication skills, increased proficiency in public speaking, and sharpened problem-solving abilities among the peace club members. The study facilitated enduring relationships between the participants, educators, and school administrators, as ongoing communication through platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook continue. To ensure the sustainability of future peace clubs, a more structured approach to project planning and execution would be necessary. This gave impetus to the proposal of a peace club model that could be based on the organogram below (see p. 176).

#### **8.4 Conclusion**

The initial and essential role of family support in child development in helping to adapt to the challenges of the world is encapsulated in the African proverb, "A tree is only as strong as its roots," where the "roots" represent the immediate family. The study revealed that psycho-social issues affecting children often stem from inadequate parenting, either due to parental unavailability or abandonment. Furthermore, the study emphasised the importance of paternal involvement in safeguarding the well-being of these children.

It was noted during discussions that, in their quest for a sense of belonging, children encounter various influences that may either steer them toward negative or positive paths. The erosion of the nuclear family structure has a destabilising effect on the balanced psycho-social development of these children. Consequently, it is crucial for communities to ensure that education institutions have adequate male and female role models for boys and girls. It is noteworthy that males are disproportionately represented among the victims. The absence of support and recovery mechanisms perpetuates the vicious cycle of school violence, particularly among those more susceptible to violent abuse.

Secondly, it is essential to note that, to gain a comprehensive understanding of violence, one has to consider the broader social context in which these schools are situated. Discussions and interviews revealed an important pattern: schools often reflect the prevalent societal challenges surrounding them. Consequently, the behaviours exhibited

by learners frequently mirror those prevalent within their surrounding communities (Bandura 1971; Bronfenbrenner 1979). Thus, recognising the culture and circumstances of the community can provide valuable insights into the issues schools face. It is indisputable that the environment of a child's upbringing significantly shapes their worldview. In the case of the Umlazi district, this locality is confronted with prevalent issues such as drug abuse, homicides, prostitution, and violent behaviour. Resultantly, within schools in this area, early involvement in romantic relationships and engagement in violent conduct are frequently observed.

Thirdly, it is significant that social media has emerged as a major replacement for traditional peer-to-peer influence among the younger generation. Platforms such as TikTok, in particular, have gained considerable traction as avenues for socialisation. Short-form videos on such platforms can disseminate a wide range of content, both potentially harmful and benign. The user experience on these platforms is curated through algorithms that analyse user preferences and subsequently expose them to content akin to their previously liked materials. For instance, if a child expresses an interest in karate, TikTok's algorithm will actively seek out and recommend similar karate-related videos. Hence, children are susceptible to having their attitudes shaped by the content they encounter, a phenomenon reminiscent of Bandura's Bobo doll experiment (Bandura 1971). Given the relatively limited control governing these platforms, the content seen by children remains largely unregulated, leaving much to the imagination regarding its potential impact.

Fourthly, the prevailing lack of trust between parents and school administrations has highlighted a concern of a potential vulnerability that can be exploited by both learners and other individuals within the community. The absence of trust between educators and parents, who are the primary stakeholders responsible for the well-being and education of children, is particularly problematic. When parents do not have confidence in educators' abilities to nurture and guide their children in their absence, the socialisation of the child becomes difficult. This strained relationship is characterised by mutual mistrust and accusations, which further exacerbate the issue. To effectively nurture children, it is imperative that both groups, educators and parents, establish trust and collaborate in raising the child. Additionally, the existing trust deficit is compounded by inadequate

security measures within the educational system. This combination of factors can lead to a lack of accountability, allowing learners to engage in undesirable behaviours without sufficient oversight.

Finally, the enhancement of the school environment alone does not guarantee a concurrent improvement in the broader community environment. Therefore, it is imperative to establish learner-driven engagement initiatives that extend their influence on the wider community. The objective of these programmes is to raise awareness and subsequently to disseminate the core values peace clubs uphold. These values include empathy, solidarity, participatory engagement, democratic principles, individual empowerment, and collective agency. These principles must align with the aim of both peacebuilding and peace studies.

## **8.5 Recommendations**

Based on the conclusion that peace club extra-curricular activity should be adapted for further implementation and evaluation, the following recommendations are made:

- **Conceptual framework**

Given the interactive and intricate nature of school violence, it is advisable to frame school-based violence prevention programmes within theoretical frameworks. For this study, the frameworks have included: conflict transformation theory (understanding the significance of how we respond to conflict), ecological systems theory (considering the impact of the environment on child development), systems thinking theory (delving into the functional aspect of the ecological system), transformative learning theory (focusing on enhancing conflict management skills), and social learning theory (modelling behaviour for learners). Taken together, they can offer valuable insights for designing effective interventions, and can aid our understanding of the phenomenon of school violence.

Moreover, the incorporation of theory into the development and assessment of the clubs' initiatives is essential to manage conducive learning environments. By grounding these clubs in established theories, programme design and evaluation can benefit from precise

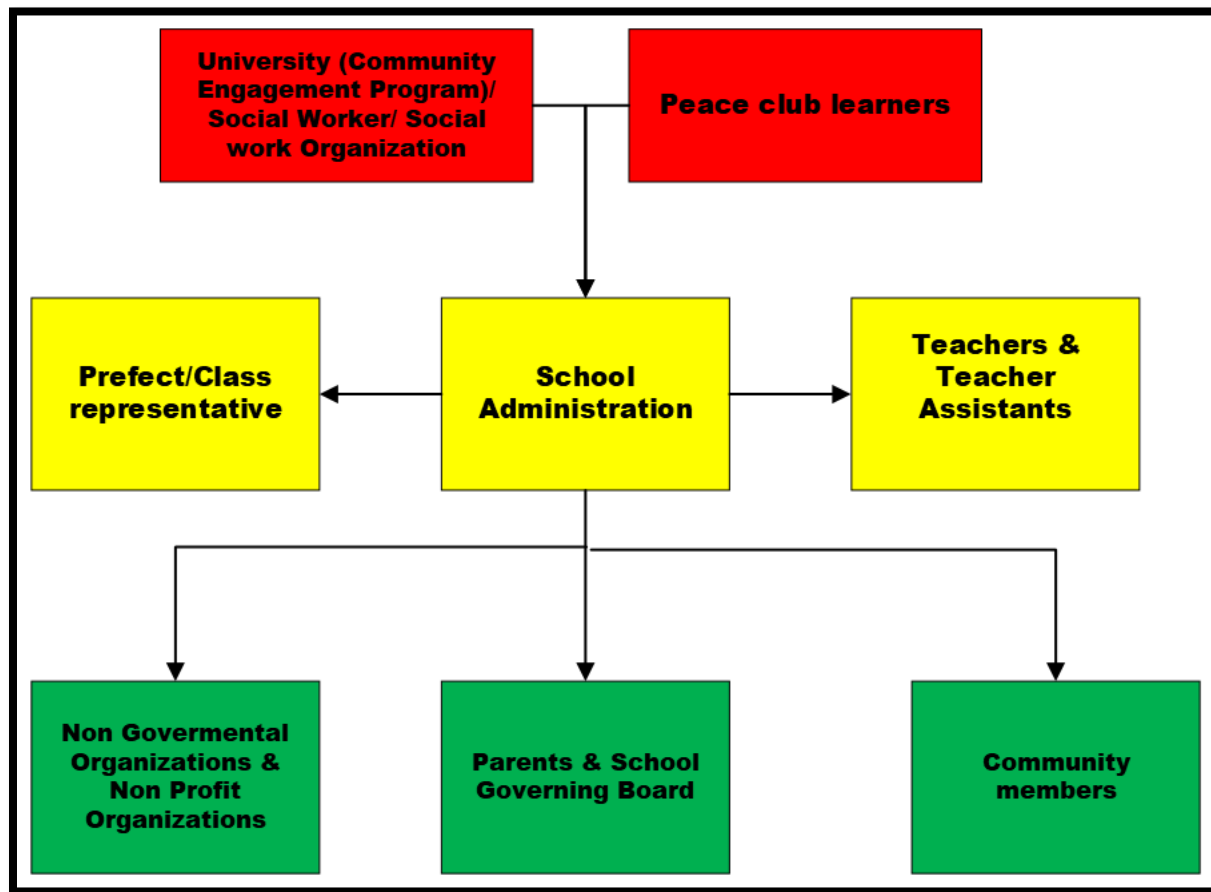
problem identification and definition, and the establishment of specific, realistic goals and objectives. To ensure that the recognised problems are addressed effectively, the programmes must align with the practical needs of the learners, schools, families, and the community as elements of a bio-ecological system (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Participants should be tasked to hold peace awareness programmes at known regular intervals within the year.

- **Structuring of the programme**

Peace clubs should be revised in the following areas:

- ✓ **Time and venue:** To facilitate the effective operation of peace club meetings, it is essential to allocate adequate time and establish a dedicated meeting venue. Negotiation with the school administration should be undertaken to secure a suitable venue. The arrangement should be communicated to the teaching and ancillary staff. It is strongly advised that the peace club programme be run by Grade 9s of that year to allow for a comprehensive and on-going implementation of its objectives. Within this timeframe, four weeks should be allotted for a specific focus on the theme of trauma and healing to ensure that participants are psychologically prepared before proceeding with the regular weekly peace club activities.
- ✓ **Role models:** Learners should actively identify community members whom they perceive as positive role models, or they should delineate the specific traits and qualities they desire in a role model. Facilitators should play a supportive role by helping learners evaluate and connect with these potential role models. It is imperative to encourage identified role models to engage directly with the participants in a physical presence. The aim will be to inspire the learners to adopt non-violent behaviours within and outside the school environment, and to foster respect for human rights and individual dignity.
- ✓ **Facilitators:** In the context of social work within this study, it is advisable to extend invitations to learner social workers from academic institutions to collaborate with learners as part of their practical coursework. Furthermore, higher education institutions actively engaged in community engagement initiatives must be enlisted to provide support and assistance in facilitating peace club's activities.

Below is a proposed Peace Club Organogram:



**Figure 8-1** Peace Club Organogram (Self-Generated).

➤ **Peace Club roles**

- a. **Peace club learner** : Run the Peace Club,  
Discuss issues affecting themselves and other learners  
Formulate peace programs for the school
- b. **University (Community Engagement):** Provide learners involved  
Offer psycho-social support  
Provide mentoring for the Peace Club to function.
- c. **Social worker/Social Works Organization:** provide experienced personnel for psycho-social support.

- d. School Administration:** In sourcing and outsourcing of resources.  
Liaising on behalf of the school body and larger community
- e. Teachers/Teacher Assistants:** Provide moral support.
- f. NGO/NPOs :** Resource support and Networking  
Training and Workshops  
Collaborative projects  
Fund raising and grant writing  
Impact evaluation
- g. Parents and SGB:** Support and encouragement  
Volunteering and Resource mobilization  
Endorsement and recognition  
Financial support  
Conflict resolution and assistance
- h. Community members:** Advocacy support  
Community resource liaison  
Mentors and Role models  
Guest speakers

- **Investing more in structured activities**

Young individuals require engagement in intellectually stimulating and demanding programmes that have been empirically demonstrated to deter participation in delinquent behaviours. The discussions revealed that education institutions often place insufficient emphasis on extra-curricular activities beyond competitive sports, which tend to involve only a select group of learners. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of initiatives within schools designed to enable learners to broaden their knowledge and skill sets. The institutions involved in this study lacked resources, particularly facilities that could support a more diverse range of extra-curricular activities and non-competitive sports. Therefore,



it is imperative to seek additional funding to support a broader spectrum of extra-curricular activities, including but not limited to home economics, scouting, cadet programmes, chess, and table tennis, among others. Most of these do not require significant funding.

- **Immediate and long-term responses to school violence**

- ✓ **Prevention and awareness programme:** This initiative is a response to the daily threats of violence that learners face. Schools should conduct regular awareness campaigns on conflict resolution, empathy, and tolerance. During assembly time, learners must be constantly reminded to report cases of bullying to get immediate assistance. A culture of inclusivity, respect, and open communication within the school should be promoted.
- ✓ **Threat assessment and reporting:** There should be an established threat assessment team comprising a community member, a school social worker, a security guard, and law enforcement liaison. Anonymous reporting mechanisms should be introduced.
- ✓ **Victim support services:** The school should provide immediate support for victims and their families, mainly counselling (learner social workers). A safe and welcoming environment for victims should be assured. A culture of empathy and support within classes should be promoted.
- ✓ **Community involvement:** Partnerships with law enforcement, mental health agencies, community forums and higher learning institutions are encouraged. Study results and victim statistics should be shared with parents during meetings to keep them updated to make evidence-based appeals to parents and other stakeholders.
- ✓ Regulations on the use of social media during class should be devised. Any learner found distributing degrading information must be held accountable.

### **Policy recommendations**

- a) Men's and women's conferences need to be introduced in high schools
- b) There is need to focus on male victimisation
- c) Schools should involve learners in more decision-making; and
- d) School administrators and educators need to practise discipline that promotes human rights.

### **8.6 Future research gaps**

- ✓ An experimental and longitudinal study should be undertaken with a large number of schools in Umlazi to test the impact of peace clubs in enhancing conflict management and the skills required for changing violent and destructive attitudes
- ✓ There is need for a study seeking to adapt the peace club model for learners in primary schools and even universities
- ✓ Studies can be conducted to adapt peace clubs for learners in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province.

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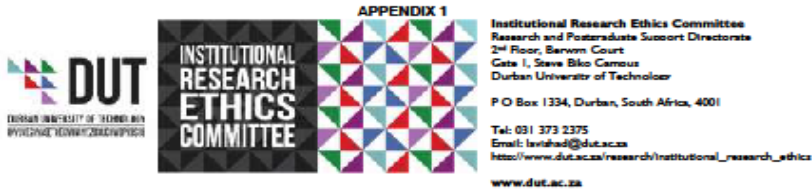
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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 IREC Letter



30 November 2022

Mr I Manatsa  
161 Steve Biko Road  
Berea  
4001

Dear Mr Manatsa

**Building peace via school peace clubs in Umlazi, eThekweni region**  
**Ethics Clearance Number: IREC 233/22**

The DUT-Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

In addition, the DUT-IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that **FULL APPROVAL** is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the DUT-IREC according to the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the DUT-IREC as outlined in the DUT-IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

Professor J K Adam  
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

## Appendix 2 Permission Letter

### APPENDIX 2



#### KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

#### OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200  
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201  
Tel: 033 3921062 / 033-3921051

Email: Phindile.duma@kzndoe.gov.za  
Buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Ref.:2/4/8/7103

Mr Isheachida Manatsa  
161 Steve Biko Road  
Berea  
DURBAN  
4000

Dear Mr Manatsa

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"BUILDING PEACE VIA SCHOOL PEACE CLUBS IN UMLAZI. AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT"** in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from the 12<sup>th</sup> of May 2021 to the 10<sup>th</sup> of October 2023.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 12 May 2021

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

## Appendix 3 Ethics Training Certificate

### APPENDIX 3



# Zertifikat Certificat Certificado Certificate

Promouvoir les plus hauts standards éthiques dans la protection des participants à la recherche biomédicale  
Promoting the highest ethical standards in the protection of biomedical research participants



## Certificat de formation - Training Certificate

Ce document atteste que - this document certifies that

### Isheachida Manatsa

a complété avec succès - has successfully completed

### Introduction to Research Ethics

du programme de formation TRREE en évaluation éthique de la recherche  
of the TRREE training programme in research ethics evaluation

Release Date: 2020/11/30  
CID : NLJHqIzTeD

Professeur Dominique Sprumont  
Coordonateur TRREE Coordinator



Continuing Education Program (5 Credits)  
Programme de Formation continue (5 Credits)



Continuing Education Programme  
Programme de formation continue

Ce programme est soutenu par - This program is supported by :  
European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) ([www.edctp.org](http://www.edctp.org)) - Swiss National Science Foundation ([www.snf.ch](http://www.snf.ch)) - Canadian Institutes of Health Research (<http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/2091.html>) -  
Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS/ASSM/SAMW) ([www.sams.ch](http://www.sams.ch)) - Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries ([www.crdp.ch](http://www.crdp.ch))

[RUB : 20170100]

## Appendix 4 Logbook

### Logbook

Location: Umlazi District

### School A

| School A | Date                                                                                 | Number of Participants | Data collection method               | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | 06/08/21                                                                             | 30 learners            | Survey                               | Learners were hesitant, I needed to speak isiZulu to put across the message. The teacher was there to assist to maintain order. Good discipline in the school.                                                                  |
|          | 13/08/21                                                                             | 24 learners            | Survey                               | Better coordination in terms of collecting data. The teacher is actively telling the learners to settle down before I come in to do the data collection.                                                                        |
|          | Skipped one week to do data capturing and analysis. Prepare for school presentation. |                        |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|          | 03/09/21                                                                             | 1 teacher              | Results presentation and discussion. | Met with the assigned teacher discussed the results and what they were telling. He gave hint on areas that the study could consider and focus on. A very productive conversation.                                               |
|          | 10/09/21                                                                             | 3 teachers             | Interviews                           | Conflicting information about the real state in which the school in. The 2 <sup>nd</sup> teacher wrote some information on a piece of paper, it seemed like she did not want other to hear since there was no sense of privacy. |
|          | 17/09/21                                                                             | 1 security guard       | Interview                            | The interview happened over a casual conversation. The school harbours                                                                                                                                                          |

|                                                                                                                              |          |             |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                              |          |             |             | some known criminal learners. The learners do look very old. He was very open and honest.                                                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                              | 24/09/21 | 1 parent    | Interview   | She seemed very open, the research assistant noted that she is traumatized by level of violence, she must have witnessed something horrific.                                                                                 |
| We had to stop and continue 1 <sup>st</sup> term 2022. It was end of year and learners were preparing for end of year exams. |          |             |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|                                                                                                                              | 20/01/22 | 20 learners | recruitment | We went to 8 classes asking learners to join us in our discussions about what they said in the survey. Learners seemed interested but hesitant to express their willingness.                                                 |
|                                                                                                                              | 24/01/22 | 8 learners  | FGDs        | This was our 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting with the new members. 7 females and 1 male learner turned up. An interesting engagement a lot is happening in the school.                                                               |
|                                                                                                                              | 04/02/22 | 8 learners  | FGDs        | We agreed to have a register, set some ground rules. Learners are discussing sensitive issues. Ms. B has to take over she is a social worker, and she can deal with trauma.                                                  |
|                                                                                                                              | 11/02/22 | 8 learners  | FGDs        | We talked about neglect. This discussion was not planned. We wanted to ask if they knew about nonviolent behaviours. It's good that the learners take charge of the sessions. Bottom-up approach.                            |
|                                                                                                                              | 18/02/22 | 8 learners  | FGDs        | The topic of neglect continued; I'm getting to see the effects of having absent parents. It's tricky to ask about family matters too much exposure, there is less privacy, surface questions are good. An emotional meeting. |
|                                                                                                                              | 25/02/22 | 7 learners  | FGDs        | On learner was absent from school. The learners were interested in knowing about my journey from Zimbabwe to South Africa, what made                                                                                         |

|                                                                                                              |          |                                                                                             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                              |          |                                                                                             |      | me come here and how I am coping and how university life is like. I was open to questions. The learners were very curious.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                              | 04/03/22 | 8 learners                                                                                  | FGDs | We discussed about the experiences in the school, nothing out of the ordinary but peer pressure is a major threat. 5 of the 7 girls have a boyfriend. There is a risk of teenage pregnancy.                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                              | 11/03/22 | 8 learners                                                                                  | FGDs | Learners wanted to continue with the issue of experiences at school, unwanted sexual advances. Shocking that they already know about sex, at their age I knew nothing.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 25 March to 5 April school holiday. Hence research was called off to be resumed in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> term. |          |                                                                                             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                              | 15/04/22 | 8 learners                                                                                  | FDGs | Learners were happy to see us, it's like they were looking forward to meeting. We talked about the causes of school violence and how it is deeply affecting them. It was very emotional, a lot of cases involving trauma from violence be it witnessing or being a victim. We allowed them to vent out. Parents need to be involved in their children's lives more often. |
|                                                                                                              | 22/04/22 | Disturbed by floods, we had to postpone the meetings as advised by the designated educator. |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                                                                                              | 29/04/22 | 8 learners                                                                                  | FGDs | We discussed on what could be done to counter school violence and promote peace. Learners were asked to think of a peace campaign. To discussed during the next session.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                              | 06/05/22 | 8 learners                                                                                  | FDGs | Peace campaign brainstorming. Learners shared their thoughts and agreed that having a university to come talk what is offered might help. These had brilliant ideas, I did not like the one of standing in know areas for smoking. It will put them in danger.                                                                                                            |

|                 |          |            |                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------|----------|------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 |          |            |                | List of required resources were given to me.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|                 | 13/05/22 | 8 learners | FDGs           | Feedback on DUT agreeing to participate in the study. The program design is done by the learners. I was impressed that they organized with little input from us. Ideas on how to counter school violence are there. Support is lacking.                                                                                                                                           |
|                 | 20/05/22 | 8 learners | FDGs           | As we waited for DUT we spoke about the issue of teenage pregnancy and how it is like to date at their age. Clearly these kids are on their own, they lack guidance and support. Parents are usually looking for money to support them. 7 out of the 8 learners are from single headed homes, father figures are missing.                                                         |
|                 | 27/05/22 | 8 learners | FDGs           | DUT agreed to come on 3/06/2022. We just hoped they will not be invited to another school. Learners look excited they rehearse their roles.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>School A</b> | 03/06/22 | 8 learners | Peace Campaign | Peace campaign is a success. I was nervous but the learners did well. I observed that some learners were intrigued by this information, everyone wants to go to university. I thanked DUT for coming through otherwise this would have been a heartbreaking fail for us and the learners.                                                                                         |
| <b>School A</b> | 10/06/22 | 8 learners | Evaluation     | We came with a cake to celebrate our achievement. Learners share their experiences on how it was like to lead the campaign and how the learners responded to the program. There was an agreement that majority of the learners felt the need to stay motivated. We said our goodbyes it was the saddest part we wished the learners well. I hope they will make it to university. |



## Log Book

Location: Umlazi District

| School B | Date     | Number of Participants | Data collection method               | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------|----------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | 12/08/21 | 82 learners            | Survey                               | The deputy principal is very supportive he is personally escorting me to the classes. We covered half of the classes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|          | 19/08/21 | 52 learners            | Survey                               | The deputy principal was waiting for me to arrive so that we can continue doing data collection. He is very supportive                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|          | 26/08/21 | 50 learners            | Survey                               | I covered the remaining few classes. Discipline is a major problem in the school. He even confirmed that that bullying and abuse is strife in the school.                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|          | 05/09/21 | Deputy Principal       | Results presentation and discussion. | Met the with deputy principal and presented the results. We discussed why the research is important. He took the results he said he wants to present them to the SGB and parents day meeting. A way of showing to them that they want to solve the problem of school violence. He shows a lot of enthusiasm more than the other schools I have been to. |
|          | 22/09/21 | 3 Teachers             | Interviews                           | Being a teacher in this school should be the toughest thing                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|          |          |                        |                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |

|  |                                                                                                            |                                |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                                                                                            |                                |             | one can endure. The amount of disrespect they get from these learners its appalling you wonder what happened to respect. I do not blame them for caring less about the molding nurturing learner characters. Some of these kids are beyond redemption. Teachers were not really willing to be involved. |
|  | 30/09/21                                                                                                   | 1 Parent and 3 Security guards | Interviews  | Language barrier was a serious threat at this stage. I just decided to ask in English and let them answer in their vernacular language. This approach helped to get valid and reliable information.                                                                                                     |
|  | We had to stop and continue in 2022. It was end of year and learners were preparing for end of year exams. |                                |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|  | 21/02/22                                                                                                   | Deputy Principal               | Recruitment | The new deputy principal is very helpful. He is hands on. I thought since he is new he would not be involved that much.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|  | 28/02/22                                                                                                   | Deputy Principal               | Recruitment | We finished the classes today so far 40 learners registered. We told them where to meet. Our 1 <sup>st</sup> meeting will be next week.                                                                                                                                                                 |
|  | 01/03/22                                                                                                   | No attendance                  | -           | We were supposed to meet unfortunately when I got there, parents were striking, and they had blocked entrance into the school. We could not access the school, we had to go back.                                                                                                                       |
|  | 10/03/22                                                                                                   | 18 learners                    | FGDs        | We met for the 1 <sup>st</sup> time today. We are shocked by the low attendance. They seemed skeptical about us but there                                                                                                                                                                               |

|                                                                                                 |          |             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|-------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                 |          |             |      | was a positive response we will meet next. We found a representative the one we can communicate with when we are coming.                                                                                                                               |
|                                                                                                 | 17/03/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | Today we discussed the issue of school violence with the learners. What an explosive discussion. These learners have a degree of anger towards educators. I assume they both have been victims of abusive language. We will resume after the holidays. |
| 25 March to 05 April School holidays.                                                           |          |             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| 09/04/22 – 23/04/22 we had to stop because of the infrastructural damaged caused by the floods. |          |             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                                                                                                 | 28/04/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | Learners have anger, we asked them to draw some guiding rules for out discussions. We need to understand the root cause of their and what is causing school violence.                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                 | 05/05/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | One learner came to us he has twinkle eyes, and they made a meme from his face. He looked so depressed about it. We discussed why we hurt each other as black people instead of loving one another. Why is there so much hate?                         |
|                                                                                                 | 12/05/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | Today we discussed who are the perpetrators of school violence and why they are doing it. Almost every learner has been a victim of bullying and emotional abuse. This was an emotional session;                                                       |

|                                    |          |             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                    |          |             |      | these learners have been traumatized.                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                    | 19/05/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | Today it was more of a healing session, we discussed what was hurting the learners. We spoke about family and friends                                                                                                                                         |
|                                    | 26/05/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | An interesting discussion, the learners are taking charge and they determine what they want to talk about. Today we discussed how school violence is affecting them.                                                                                          |
|                                    | 02/06/22 | 10 learner  | FDGs | An explosive session, we spoke about umjolo at their school, peer pressure and relationships i.e. expectations and disappointments. I was lost for words; media surely is influencing today's generation.                                                     |
|                                    | 09/06/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | Today we spoke about what is media doing to todays generation i.e. TikTok and its challenges and how they are stirring trouble in schools and classes. Surely I can see a generational difference on how we perceive life and relationships with our parents. |
| 24 June to 19 July School holiday. |          |             |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|                                    | 04/08/22 | 10 learners | FGDs | Today we spoke about what could we do to challenge school violence in passing. Learners brainstormed and we went on to just have a general talk about their experiences back home what                                                                        |

|  |          |              |                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--|----------|--------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |          |              |                | they liked and what they did not like.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|  | 11/08/22 | 10 learners  | FGDs           | We discussed in detail what we could do to challenge school violence amongst the grade 10s. A lot of interesting ideas. We had to agree on one and at the end they decided to do a peer education campaign. We looked at the required resources, what do we need and where can we get it from. I spoke about the agenda network. They liked the profile and with their permission we spoke to them. We received contact details |
|  | 18/08/22 | 10 learners  | FGDs           | . We planned our program and set the date for the campaign; the school is notified. The Deputy Principal seemed skeptical. We will see next week.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|  | 25/08/22 | 150 learners | Peace Campaign | We started a bit late, but the program was a success I like how the learners and the deputy principal responded. We agreed to meet next week for evaluation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|  | 01/09/22 | 10 learners  | FGDs           | The group members shared what they heard from other learners and their thoughts also. The responses are so encouraging I wish I had more funding I would push this further and include other schools.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

## Log Book

Location: Umlazi District

| School C | Date     | Number of Participants | Data collection method               | Comments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------|----------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | 11/08/21 | 50                     | Survey                               | We decided that I leave a batch of 300 questionnaires with her. She will distribute them during her LO class. Data will be easy to collect since all grade 9s do LO. I will come regularly to collect the questionnaires. We communicated via WhatsApp.           |
|          | 18/08/21 | 53                     | Survey                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|          | 25/08/21 | 60                     | Survey                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|          | 06/09/21 | 70                     | Survey                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|          | 08/09/21 | 33                     | Survey                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|          | 22/09/21 | Deputy Principal       | Results presentation and discussion. | I doubt if he really appreciated the scientific evidence. It looked like I was just wasting his time.                                                                                                                                                             |
|          | 28/09/21 | 3 teachers             | Interviews                           | These teachers claim that they are overwhelmed, and they cannot even spare 15 minutes to share their experiences with learners. From my own observation they take this lightly and don't see the worth.                                                           |
|          | 29/09/21 | 2 securities           | interviews                           | An interesting interview, Ms B had to do it because of language barrier. I can tell that he feels disappointed with the community, and he has lost hope. The 2 <sup>nd</sup> security was hesitant to share information. There is a lot happening in this school. |
|          | 06/10/21 | 2 parents              | interviews                           | Hard to find parents who are willing to talk about the experiences, a vendors                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                                                                      |                    |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                      |                    |             | volunteered to assist, they have children attending to this school. They expected something in return.                                                                                                                             |
| Research called off because it is almost exam time and the learners need to prepare. |                    |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 28/02/22                                                                             | Designated teacher | Recruitment | The teacher is escorting us around to talk to the learners into joining. She is helping us in conveying our message by keeping the learners quiet when we address. This school has serious discipline problems.                    |
| 07/03/22                                                                             | Designated teacher | Recruitment | The assigned teacher asked a junior teacher to assist us, she is helpful but I could tell that the assigned teacher looked irritated by our presence. It is like we are asking too much from her. 35 learners in total registered. |
| 14/03/22                                                                             | 8 learners         | FGDs        | A disappointing turnout from the learners. There is general belief that this is a waste of time hence the low turnout. There is not even a single male learner in this group. Female dominated.                                    |
| 25 March to 05 April School holidays.                                                |                    |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 10/04/22 to 24/04/22. No meetings because of floods.                                 |                    |             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 02/05/22                                                                             | 8 learners         | FGDs        | We discussed about the experiences of school violence, what they have witnessed and personally experienced. It a sad situation and they are on their own.                                                                          |
| 09/05/22                                                                             | 8 learners         | FGDs        | There was no meeting, learners were dismissed early because of water problems. We were told a bit late, we had to go back.                                                                                                         |
| 16/05/22                                                                             | 8 learners         | FGDs        | We continued from where we left. The learners are so invested in                                                                                                                                                                   |

|  |                 |            |      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--|-----------------|------------|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                 |            |      | this session thanks to Ms B. They see her as their mother. I wonder what is happening back home.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|  | <b>23/05/22</b> | 8 learners | FGDs | Today we discussed what it is like to live in Umlazi and how its affecting them. We were basically looking for the causes of violence in and around school .                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|  | <b>30/05/22</b> | 8 learners | FGDs | We had no meeting because there was no study today. We had to postpone.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|  | <b>06/06/22</b> | 8 learners | FGDs | We have to cover ground in this school because the support from the assigned teacher is not strong like the other schools. We discussed the effects of school violence. It was an emotional session, I noticed that these learners have suffered from some of the experiences, and it deeply hurt them.                                                               |
|  | <b>20/06/22</b> | 8 learners | FGDs | Communication with the assigned teacher is becoming difficult, sometimes she responds to some of the messages sometimes she does not respond to them. I assume she is tired of us, and she wants it done.                                                                                                                                                             |
|  | <b>01/08/22</b> | 8 learners | FGDs | Today we shared what we did the other two schools. You could tell that these learners wanted this, but we do not have support anymore and we cannot continue but accept that at this school we have failed. We informed the learners that this could be our last meeting they were sad. We thanked the deputy principal and sent a thank you message to the educator. |



|  |                                                                                                 |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <b>We had to stop as the responsible educator stopped responding to our messages and calls.</b> |
|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|