

**MANAGING PHYSICAL ABUSE AMONG LEARNERS IN A  
GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL IN KWAZULU-NATAL: A CASE STUDY**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

in the subject

**EDUCATION MANAGEMENT**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**JANUARY 2016**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude and sincere appreciation to all role-players who have contributed to the successful completion of my research project. A special thank you is extended to the following people:

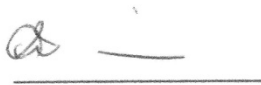
- My supervisor, Professor SA Coetzee, for always believing in me and continuously giving me expert guidance and motivation to persevere and succeed.
- My late parents, Suria-Kumarie and Brijraj Jugroop for instilling in me the love of learning and the power of an enlightened mind.
- My husband, Kumar, and daughters, Theshmira and Pavani, for their understanding, patience and continuous love during my studies.
- Vanisha, a dear friend for her relentless help, support and guidance.
- My principal and colleagues at work for their encouragement and continued support.
- Lynette Posthumus, for editing my work.
- The Head of Department of the Department of Basic Education, KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, for the permission to conduct this research.

Above all, I would like to thank God Almighty for giving me the strength, peace of mind, faith and encouragement to complete my studies.

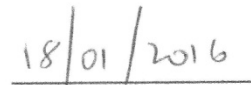
## DECLARATION

I declare that **MANAGING PHYSICAL ABUSE AMONG LEARNERS IN A GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL IN KWAZULU-NATAL: A CASE STUDY** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



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## **ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on the manner in which the School Management Team (SMT) manages physical abuse among learners, providing guidelines on how to act in a proactive and constructive manner.

A qualitative approach was used and the research was designed as a single case study. National education specific law and policy regulating learner misconduct, the SMT's management of physical abuse of learners as well as the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education's policies were used to benchmark my evaluation of current management practices with regard to physical abuse among learners against such laws and policies. The research findings on the current management practices, factors that contribute to physical abuse, reasons and effects of physical abuse and the role of the SMT in handling physical abuse were based on an analysis of School A's Code of conduct for learners and its Discipline Policy and information extracted by means of interviews.

### **Key concepts**

Physical abuse, learner behaviour, misbehaviour, management, school discipline, Code of conduct for learners, proactive and constructive management, School Management Team.

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

Culture of Learning and Teaching	COLTS
Head of Department (at school level)	HoD
Representative Council of Learners	RCL
Republic of South Africa	RSA
School Management Team	SMT
Department of Basic Education	DoBE
National Schools Violence Study	NSVS
Head of Grade	HoG
South African Police Service	SAPS

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATED TITLES OF LAWS AND POLICIES**

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996	Constitution
Guidelines for the consideration of governing bodies in adopting a code of conduct for learners	Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners
National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996	National Education Policy Act
South African Schools Act 84 of 1996	Schools Act
Children's Act 38 of 2005	Children's Act

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## **CHAPTER 1: Background, problem formulation and aim**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study aimed to review the effectiveness of the School Management Team (SMT) in the management of physical abuse among learners with a view to providing guidelines on how to deal with this form of misconduct in a proactive and constructive manner. Existing education policies of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education<sup>1</sup> as well as national education specific law and policy regulating learner misconduct and the SMT's management of physical abuse learners were studied to enable me to benchmark my evaluation of current management practises with regard to physical abuse among learners against such laws and policies.

### **1.2 Background**

The National Schools Violence Study conducted by Burton and Leoschut (2013:xi) found that 22.5% of high school learners have been threatened with violence or had been the victim of an assault, robbery and/or sexual assault at school during 2012. While this figure extrapolates to 1,020,597 learners who had encountered violence at school during 2012, it does suggest that the levels of violence in secondary schools had remained relatively constant over the past four years. The study sample comprised of 5939 learners, 121 principals and 239 educators. In total, more than a fifth of the learner participants had experienced violence at school.

According to Tau (2013) people do not realise just how endemic violence by learners has become. He further reported that these violent incidents happen almost on a weekly basis and that there has been vast under-reporting on them. General Secretary of the SA Democratic Teachers Union, Mugwena Maluleke, said the union was “deeply” concerned about the increasing levels of violence in schools. “This is a societal issue which needs the involvement of the public” (Tau 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> The Department of Basic Education was created in 2009 after the Department of Education was divided into the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Higher Education and Training. Similarly, the provincial Departments of Basic Education became the provincial Departments of Basic Education (DoBE 2012).

Violent incidents are not limited to co-education schools (i.e. schools where girls and boys are taught together) but also occur at girls schools.

Gender theorists, such as Dr Elaine Millard and Prof. Rob Pattman explain how people's expectations of what men and women ought to be like shape interactions and perceptions. Males and females are made into men and women by the roles they play. Masculinity is understood as meaningful only in relation to femininity and as constructed through interplay of opposites and alternatives (Frosh, Phoenix & Pattman 2003:85). Girls involved in violent acts in school are thus developing femininities in the same way as boys developing their masculinity. It seems as though the behaviour of adolescent boys and girls are becoming very similar as girls are no longer perceived as being caregivers and homemakers. With gender transition, females now developed a new level of assertiveness which is accompanied by aggression and violent tendencies. This is reflective of the change in the behaviour of learners. Coeyman (2003:1) reiterates the above:

But today girls become more verbal at an earlier age. Our culture pushes girls to become more and more mature at younger ages. Girls need to feel in control of their situation today more than they did in the past.

"Violence is overwhelmingly the domain of young men" (Cunningham 2000:2). Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamia, Lamani, Machakanya (2003:2) and Besag (1991:16), regard violence at schools as "a boys' problem". This is further reiterated by Morris (2005:25-48) who points out that school officials tend to view the behaviour of girls as less threatening than that of boys. Dr Artz, an international researcher who is the director of the School of Child and Youth Care at University of Victoria, contends that: "Girls are just as capable of inflicting violence as boys are and always have been" (cited in Fitzpatrick 1998:1). The topic of this study is the physical abuse among learners and the management of this misbehaviour.

### **1.3 Motivation for the study**

Various factors have motivated this study. To begin with, it is a requirement I need to meet before I can complete my Master of Education in the subject Education Management.

The most important reason is linked to my profession. I have been involved in education at secondary school level for the past twenty three years and over the years I have developed a personal interest in learner discipline. This interest can be attributed to the fact that I am a member of the school disciplinary committee of the participant school, School A, and have seen an escalation of violence among learners and the negative effects thereof.

The decision on how to discipline learners who have engaged in physical abuse is left to the discretion of each school and its governing body. Creating and maintaining safe, disciplined schools and classrooms is one of principals' and educators' most challenging duties (Joubert 2008:1). As a member of the SMT at School A I spend most of my non-teaching time dealing with deviant behaviour instead of nurturing learners and concentrating on leading them to academic excellence. I found my role is rather one of reforming (or at least attempting to) aggressive, non-compliant, deviant behaviour than teaching. The reasons as to why girls are involved in physical abuse at school need to be explored.

Violence can impact negatively on the lives of girls. It is thus important for the SMT to find effective ways to manage physical abuse by female learners.

#### **1.4 Statement of the problem**

According to Enoch (2006) the escalation of violence in South African schools is a reflection of society. This contention was reiterated in a recent school-based violence report by SACE (2011:10) wherein it is concluded that exposure to crime and violence in the family context increases the risk of school-based violence. This report reflects the effects of spouse abuse, child abuse and neglect, community and media generated violence, poverty and single parenting which reverberate in schools (SACE 2011). According to Herrera and McCloskey (2000:1048) abused and neglected girls are more likely than their non-abused counterparts to commit violent offences. Herrera and McCloskey (2000:1048) further argue that girls who engage in violence may do so in response to their own victimisation. Many children bring the baggage of dysfunctional homes straight into the school environment and "unpack their pain masqueraded in the wraps of misbehaviour and underachievement" (Gootman 2001:5). Currently this plays out in the school situation as a form of physical abuse between learners (Gootman

2001:5). This brings the need to investigate factors that put learners at risk of resorting to physical abuse and the reasons why learners alluded so easily to violence in solving disagreements to the fore. It is essential that the SMT has knowledge of the factors if it wants to manage the problem of girl-on-girl violence effectively.

The importance of researching the management of physical abuse among learners is emphasised by the high incidence of school violence. Dr Lynette Jacobs, a lecturer at the School of Education Studies at the University of the Free State, conducted a study on school violence among 690 high school learners in Gauteng, the Free State and the Eastern Cape. The study, which was published in December 2012, showed that both boys and girls are victims as well as aggressors of incidents of school violence (Jacobs 2012:107). In the National Schools Violence Study, Burton and Leoschut (2013:34) state that 30,3% of the participant learners were threatened with violence at least twice in 2012, while 21% had experienced this three or more times in 2012. A total of 28% of sexual assault victims recounted at least two incidents of sexual assault in the past year, while close to a third (30,5%) of sexual assault victims had been subjected to such violence three or more times in 2012. In March 2013 it was reported that a 15-year-old girl was accused of stabbing a 17-year-old girl when they started fighting while walking home from school (*News 24* 2013(a)). In October 2013 video footage of two girls kicking a 15-year-old girl in the face and pushing her against a window resulted in an outcry of concern among education leaders (Lindeque 2013). Padaychee (2014:5) expresses concern that school children are increasingly getting out of hand and that schools are becoming violent environments where learners and educators alike are under attack.

Following the increase in violent incidents at schools and in an attempt to find answers, the DoBE held a summit in Gauteng on the 7 March 2014 aimed at reviving the debate on how to discipline learners, *inter alia* also learners involved in violent incidents at schools. The spokesman of the DoBE stated that the DoBE did not have a national Discipline Policy and that it was left to schools to decide how to discipline learners. The DoBE spokesman further stated that after this summit the minister will be looking at new approaches and at what policy could be put in place to assist schools (Padaychee 2014:5). It thus seems that the DoBE regards a national Discipline Policy as a possible solution. However, Dr Lynette Jacobs indicated that as much as universal policies and

guidelines are important, solutions to school violence need to be found in the context of each school and community. Jacobs (cited by Mtshali 2013) states that “[a] one-size-fits-all approach won’t work – this is a comprehensive problem, and communities must deal with it in a comprehensive way. We need to act responsibly... too much is at stake,” she said. The onus therefore rests with the SMTs of individual schools to try and find a solution to the problem of learners engaging in physical abuse.

The acceptance of abnormal situations, such as sexual violence and the use of physical abuse to solve problems as normal by learners, places SMTs in a dilemma regarding how to manage physical abuse if learners perceive it as normal and acceptable. This then makes the case even stronger for management to be proactive and constructive and thus reduce the situations of constant acceptance by learners that they have to either be victims of violence, or perpetrators of random acts of physical abuse as a common way to resolve problems among themselves.

The question now arises: How could the SMT of School A manage physical abuse among learners more effectively?

The following sub-questions were probed to clarify the research problem:

- What are the legal prescripts regulating the management of physical abuse among learners?
- What are the contributory factors that prompt girls to fight with each other physically?
- Are those policies of School A which are relevant to the management of physical abuse, effective and in compliance with legal prescripts?
- How do the SMT of the participant school manage physical abuse among learners and are these management practices effective and in line with legal prescripts for managing physical abuse?
- How can physical abuse be handled in a constructive and proactive manner in a girls school environment?

## **1.5 Aim and objectives of the study**

This research comprises an investigation into the way in which the SMT of School A establishes and maintains discipline among learners who engage in physical abuse. In order to answer the research question a researcher has to formulate an overall aim and pinpoint achievable objectives that would enable the researcher to achieve that aim (Hofstee 2006:86). This is done in the next section.

### **1.5.1 Aim**

The overall aim of the research study was to evaluate the SMT's management of physical abuse among learners in the selected school and to make recommendations to ensure more constructive and proactive management.

### **1.5.2 Objectives**

The objectives which I hoped to achieve can be stated as follows:

1. To ascertain the legal prescripts for managing physical abuse in schools.
2. To investigate the factors that prompt girls to fight with each other physically in general and in School A in particular.
3. To determine whether School A's policies relevant to the management of physical abuse among learners are effective and lawful.
4. To explore how the SMT of School A manage physical abuse among learners and to consider the effectiveness and lawfulness of these management practices.
5. To make recommendations on how the management of physical abuse at School A could be improved.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Under this section, the significance of the study is discussed. The impact of relevant policy, scholarly contributions and legislation on the school's policy and the SMT's role in discipline management is explored. This study was noteworthy as it introduced new and innovative disciplinary measures to the selected school on how to deal with

physical abuse among learners. This study could further inform the DoBE on the development of a national Discipline Policy as the above study is relevant and topical.

Typical of a case study such as this one is that it allows me to consider the views of the participants. This makes the case study design suited for insider research. As insider researcher, I had easy access to the research site. I was in a position to attend disciplinary meetings and present my ideas on more proactive and constructive management of learners who abuse other learners physically to these meetings as an insider.

Within the micro-environment of schools, I made an impact as well. As Cluster Co-ordinator of Accounting, my field of subject expertise, I interact with eleven schools in my district. The knowledge gained from this research was imparted to these schools which could help them to manage physical abuse among the learners more effectively and ultimately improve academic results in the district. I also encouraged the SMT to network with other neighbouring schools to develop programmes and policies to enable learners to develop their thoughts, feelings and experiences in order to prevent a recurrence of violence.

With regards to the social value of the study, I hoped that the participant learners who were the beneficiaries of the research would acknowledge that disputes could be resolved without engaging in physical abuse. Positive intervention strategies identified through this research were put in place. The research has been of immense value to School A as it introduced a new wave of action from its SMT which handled disputes in a new and innovative manner, being proactive and constructive. The research resulted in School A introducing participant learners to alternate ways to solve disputes, giving learners a voice and introducing anger management as a sanction for misconduct involving physical abuse.

## **1.7 Delimitation of the field of study**

The delimitation of the field of study was done by an analysis of the most important concepts, a demarcation of the scope of the study and by setting a programme of study.

## 1.7.1 Conceptual analysis

In an attempt to determine what is relevant to the field of study and what not, a conceptual analysis was done with regard to the following concepts: **School Management Team, management, Code of conduct for learners, discipline** and **physical abuse**.

### 1.7.1.1 School Management Team

In this study the **SMT** refers to the school principal, the school deputy principal and the various heads of departments at School A. This team is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the learners behave according to the school's Code of conduct for learners.

### 1.7.1.2 Management

Abbott (2014:1) refers to classroom **management** as the broad range of skills and techniques used by educators to keep learners organised, disciplined, purposeful, polite, on task, and academically achieving during a class. With the effective execution of classroom management strategies, educators can reduce the behaviours that hinder learning for individual learners as well as groups of learners while enforcing the behaviours that facilitate or enhance learning. This explanation of classroom management can be extended further to behavioural management, ensuring that learners abstain from engaging in fistcuffs in matters of disagreement with other learners, maintaining a polite, controlled demeanour and effectively resolving their disputes in a nonviolent manner.

Stuhlman (2015:1) defines **management** as:

... the organizational process that includes strategic planning, setting objectives, managing resources, deploying the human and financial assets needed to achieve objectives, and measuring results. Management also includes recording and storing facts and information for later use or for others within the organization. Management functions are not limited to managers and supervisors. Every member of the organization has some management and reporting functions as part of their job.

Van der Westhuizen (1991:39) defines **management** as the process of planning, organising, activating and controlling an organisation's operations in order to achieve a



co-ordination of human and material resources essential in the effective and efficient attainment of objectives. According to McFarland (1974:6) **management** is defined for conceptual, theoretical and analytical purposes as that process by which managers create, direct, maintain and co-operate purposive organisations through systematic, co-ordinated, co-operative human effort. From the above definitions it is clear that **management** consists of specific components, namely planning, organising, leading and controlling. In this study, **management** is regarded as an active process which co-ordinates human and material resources essential to the efficient attainment of objectives at School A. With **management**, I refer to behaviour management in this study. The term **management** includes the SMT's decision making on and dealing with physical abuse in School A in order to control and direct learners' behaviour in a proactive and constructive manner. Managing learners' behaviour in a proactive and constructive manner includes preventative discipline, corrective discipline (punishment) and supportive discipline, this is discussed in more detail in chapter 2 (cf. chapter 2, section 2.2).

Proactive management refers to an approach that promotes academic achievement and prevents disruptive behaviour. Proactive management is designed to be preventive rather than reactive by minimising opportunities for inappropriate behaviour (Rathvon 2008:73). Proactive management strategies are ones which a school puts in place to reduce the risk of behaviour problems and encourage good behaviour (Department of Education, Papua New Guinea, 2009). In this study proactive management means dealing with disruptive behaviour in a positive manner, looking at remediation rather than punitive measures and thus having the SMT behave in a constructive manner. Constructive management in this study therefore refers to positive behaviour management of learners.

### **1.7.1.3 Learner**

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2006, s.v. 'learner') the word **learner** describes a person who is learning something. As this study focuses on a girl school, "learner" will refer to girl learners.

#### **1.7.1.4. Code of conduct for learners**

A Code of conduct for learners refers to an official Code of conduct for learners and gives legal force to the standards of conduct conducive to the betterment of all the learners (Department of Education document as stipulated in the *South African Schools Act 84 of 1996*<sup>2</sup> (hereafter referred to as the Schools Act) (RSA 1996a, s (8)). A school's Code of conduct for learners should reflect the views of parents, educators and learners on how the learners should conduct themselves. The collective will of the school community should be expressed in the Code of conduct for learners (Department of Education 1997:2).

#### **1.7.1.5 Discipline**

Discipline in education is a complex phenomenon and not an easy concept to define because of the varied contexts it is used in. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2006, s.v. 'discipline') the concept **discipline** means the training of people to obey rules or a code of behaviour. According to Savage (1999:9) "discipline is frequently viewed as an unfortunate by-product of education". Kohn (1996:58) defines discipline as training expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behaviour which aims at producing moral or mental improvement. For the purpose of this study **discipline** will refer to the process of creating a disciplined school environment. As referred to above, (cf. chapter 1, section 1.7.1.4) there are three kinds of discipline that a SMT needs to be aware of viz. preventive discipline, corrective discipline and supportive discipline (cf. chapter 2, section 2.2).

#### **1.7.1.6 Abuse**

In the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (RSA2005a, s (1)) **abuse** is defined as follows

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<sup>2</sup> In this report the consolidated South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 as amended by the Education Laws Amendment Act (Education Laws Amendment Act 100 of 1997, Education Laws Amendment Act 48 of 1999, Education Laws Amendment Act 53 of 2000, Education Laws Amendment Act 57 of 2001, Education Laws Amendment Act 50 of 2002, Education Laws Amendment Act 1 of 2004, Education Laws Amendment Act 24 of 2005, Education Laws Amendment Act 31 of 2007), Basic Education Laws Amendment Act 15 of 2011 was used (hereinafter the Schools Act).

**'abuse'** in relation to a child, means any form of harm or ill-treatment deliberately inflicted on a child, and includes –

- (a) assaulting a child or inflicting any other form of deliberate injury to a child;
- (b) sexually abusing a child or allowing a child to be sexually abused;
- (c) bullying by another child;
- (d) a labour practice that exploits a child; or
- (e) exposing or subjecting a child to behaviour that may harm the child psychologically or emotionally;

From this definition it is evident that a learner who physically attacks another learner commits the offence of child abuse.

Carstens and Du Plessis (2009:594) define **child abuse** as

[T]he physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, maltreatment or negligent treatment of a child under the age of 18 years by another person, in circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened

They define **physical abuse** as a form of child abuse that relates to the physical maltreatment of a child that leads to physical injury (temporary or permanent) with potential fatal outcome.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2006, s.v. 'abuse') the concept **abuse** means "to use badly or wrongly, to treat cruelly or violently, to speak to someone in an insulting and offensive way".

The World Health Organization (2002:5) definition of "violence" is:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

The use of physical violence thus constitutes "physical abuse" and if a child is the victim, it also constitutes "child abuse" in terms of the Children's Act.

For the purpose of this study **physical abuse** will refer to violent physical contact between learners that result in physical and or psychological injury.

### **1.7.2 Scope of the study**

The research took place at a multicultural girls school in an area south of Durban. The study concentrated on the management of physical abuse at a selected girls school and in particular the role of the SMT to ensure more constructive and proactive management of girls who have contravened the school rules by resorting to physical abuse of co-learners. This report centres on the effectiveness of the School Management Team (SMT) in the management of physical abuse among learners with a view to providing guidelines on how to deal with this form of misconduct in a proactive and constructive manner. The function of a school's SMT is to assist the principal with his or her mandate to undertake the professional management of the school; including managing learner behaviour (RSA 1996b, s 16(3)). The members of the SMT of School A are responsible for the discipline of the learners in the particular grade that they are in charge of. The school principal is kept informed of the discipline issues as they ensue. The school governing body only gets involved when the principal deems that a disciplinary hearing needs to be held due to the severity of the offence. In the event of an incident of physical abuse the SMT member is involved in the investigative process. It is the SMT member who handles this dispute by liaising with the parties concerned, viz. the victim, the perpetrator, the parents as well as keeping the principal informed. If the SMT member feels that the nature of the offence is serious enough, then the SMT member recommends to the principal that a disciplinary hearing needs to take place as per the stipulations in the school's Code of conduct for learners. Since the focus of my research was on the "management" of physical abuse among learners, rather than the disciplinary process, the role of the SMT emerged as focussed on "management" and that the SMT plays a major role in school management and thus also learner behaviour management.

### **1.7.3 Chapter division of the research report**

The research report is structured in five chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the research, the statement of the problem which culminated in a research question and sub-questions which, in turn informed the aim and objectives of the investigation and the methodological account. In chapter 2 I review the management of physical abuse in secondary schools. Books, journals, education legislation and policy and internet

sources were consulted. This chapter contains a layout of the literature review which forms the grounding of this research and gives direction to the study. In chapter 3 the research design, the data collection and analysis methods, the selection of the participants and the ethical considerations were explained. In chapter 4 a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data were undertaken. Chapter 5 of the report provides the findings conclusions and recommendations. In this chapter I also indicate areas for future research on the topic.

## **1.8 Methodological account**

Under this section the research approach, research design and the methods used for data collection and analysis are discussed.

### **1.8.1 Research approach**

The qualitative research approach was used to determine the effectiveness of the School Management Team in managing physical abuse among learners. According to Fouché and Delport (2011:64) the qualitative approach is used to answer questions about the complex nature of phenomena with the purpose of describing and understanding the phenomenon from the participants' point of view. This type of research was thus suitable to this study as I sought a better understanding of a complex situation of the secondary school learner who uses physical violence as well as the views of the victims of such physical abuse (objective 5).

Creswell (2014:37-39) states that qualitative researchers are interested in determining the meaning that the participants attach to the problem being investigated. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2010:373) emphasise that qualitative research focuses on a social phenomenon from the participant's perspective which requires that the research takes place in as natural a setting as possible. Qualitative research is thus perfect for insider research.

#### **1.8.1.1 Role as insider researcher**

I was in the ideal position to undertake insider research because I am not only an educator at School A but also a member of the SMT. This allowed me easy access to the school, its SMT and the participants (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.2.1). Qualitative

research is an intensely personal kind of research, one that freely acknowledges and admits “the subjective perception and bias of both participants and researcher into the research frame” (Ary *et al.* 2006:45). I consciously tried to remain objective and unbiased in my interaction with the participants, in order to ensure that the study was free from bias and my influence as insider researcher (cf. chapter 1, section 1.9).

Reflexivity refers to the reflection of qualitative researchers on their own data making role and the associations to their research. Reflexivity requires that the researcher is aware of his/her relationship to what he/she chooses to study and why that choice is made (Richards 2015:53). Reflexivity reminds me that as insider researcher I am part of what I am studying.

I had to interact closely with the participants in order to understand their feelings, thoughts and beliefs. As an insider researcher I had to interact with the participants in a natural and unobtrusive manner and in so doing hoped to understand the participants’ perspectives. I did not interfere with the subjects’ responses by giving them my views on anger management and disciplinary measures. I merely observed and noted their responses.

I had to handle sensitive information in a confidential manner ensuring that the participants were not victimised in any way.

### **1.8.2 Research design**

Designing one’s research is a very important part of an investigation, since certain limitations and cautions in interpreting the results are related to each design and also because the research design determines how the data should be analysed. A research design is the plan and structure of the investigation that are used to obtain data to answer research questions (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:31). In this specific research, a case study is used to evaluate the SMT’s management of physical abuse among learners in the selected school and to make recommendations to ensure more constructive and proactive management.

Schram (2006:107) states that whether one considers a case study as a way of conceptualising human behaviour or merely as a way of encapsulating it, its strategic value lies in its ability to draw attention to what can be learned from the single case.

According to Creswell (2014:73), a case study involves an exploration of a “bounded system” (bounded by time, context and/or place), or a single case or multiple cases over a period of time which involved comprehensive data collection using various sources of information.

Case study research can focus on a single case or multiple cases (Yin 2003:20). Three of the reasons why a researcher will opt for a single case study design as identified by Rule and John (2011:21) were applicable to this research, e.g. the researcher had easy access to the case, could study the case in depth and could act as insider researcher. Solutions to the disadvantages of single case study research are found in insider research; by choosing participants that are rich in information; by establishing good rapport with participants and gaining access to evidence in order “test” the validity of evidence offered by participants; by using several sources of information that are rich in relevance to the study; triangulating; by particularising, that is clearly indicating the parameters of the study and; by cautious investigation (Fouché & Schurink 2011:320, 322; Gray 2014:267; Henning 2005:33, 42; Tellis, 1997:6). In this study I acted as insider researcher which ensured access to evidence, I clearly delimited the scope of the study and I triangulated the data collection methods to ensure the validity of the process. Although more cases are available, a single case study was the best design option since I acted as insider researcher and aimed at solving a practical problem (how the SMT of School A could manage physical abuse among learners more effectively) of a specific case; e.g. a multicultural girls school in an area south of Durban.

Furthermore, according to Tellis (1997:6) single case studies are also ideal for a revelatory case where an observer may have access to a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible. The phenomenon of learners being involved in physical abuse was previously inaccessible because such cases were often not reported by the victim or the perpetrator to the relevant person at school. In the event of it being reported it was not taken seriously because girl on girl violence was not regarded as serious. The single case study design thus also, in this regard, proved to be a suitable design for this study.

### **1.8.3 Research methods**

In the next section, I described, explained and justified the methodology that I used to obtain data for this particular study.

### **1.8.3.1 Literature review**

I studied books, reports, various documents as well as electronic sources to gain more information on the research topic. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:117) are of the view that reviewing several sources provides a brief overview of the topic and helps the researcher to define the problem in more precise terms. Relevant literature was reviewed in order to establish what other researchers and authors have already established with regard to the research theme. In chapter two literature on learner behaviour, the whole school approach to behaviour management as well as the factors that contribute to physical abuse were reviewed. Leadership theories, management styles, disciplinary models and approaches to discipline were also reviewed in order to provide guidelines on how the SMT could manage learner behaviour in a constructive and proactive manner.

### **1.8.3.2 The pilot study**

A pilot study is referred to as a feasibility study which is made up of a small sample of the planned study and it is a “practice run” of the planned method so that a methodological question could be answered and the development of the research plan guided (Prescot & Soeken 1989:60, Kim 2010:191). In this research a pilot study was carried out so that I could test and modify the questions if needed. The participants were selected according to the requirements of the research. The interview questions were pre-tested in a pilot study with a few learners and members of the SMT. The six learners were between fourteen and seventeen years of age. The selected site for this pilot study was similar to that of the final site, in that it took place at a girls school in a neighbouring area with very similar demographics of the school population. During the pilot study I took note of the time required to conduct the various interviews. The interview questions set out for the principal, the members of the SMT and the learner victims were clear and did not need restructuring. However, though the questions to the learner victims were clear, it became apparent that the victims want to voice the effect that physical abuse had on them and I thus included questions to that effect in my interview guide for learner victims. Question four asked to the learner offenders in the pilot study seemed to be unclear with regards to the manner in which they had to answer it. This then alerted me to make a note to explain further during the real interview as to what was required for this question.



### **1.8.3.3 Data collection methods**

The methods that I used for data collection in this study were literature study, an individual, semi-structured interview with the school principal, a focus group with members of the SMT and interviews with the learner offenders and victims to gain insight in the management of learners physically abusing one another.

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with learners (offenders and victims) as well as the principal of the participant school. Learners were interviewed in their capacity as either perpetrators or victims of physical abuse. I opted for individual interviews because it allowed me to enquire about unique problems and experiences which participants would not have been comfortable to share in a group scenario. Individual interviews allowed the participants to express themselves freely in a complete and honest manner. These interviews were carried out to determine the factors that prompt girls to fight with each other physically (objective 2). Since it is essential that any research, especially research that includes children, must be ethical, great care was taken not to harm the learner participants during the interviews (see section 1.9 on ethical considerations).

The principal was interviewed to give her viewpoints on the implementation of the legal prescripts regulating the management of physical abuse at the participant school (objective 1).

I have chosen to conduct a focus group with members of the SMT. Tape recordings of the focus group were used to have an actual account of what was said on record. The participants were informed that the recordings would be kept in a safe place and that only I had and will have access to them. Recording made it possible to transcribe the discussion for closer inspection later. The focus group was used to explore how the SMT of the participant school managed physical abuse among learners and considered the effectiveness of these management practices (objective 3).

Conducting a focus group with members of the SMT and semi-structured interviews with both the learners and the principal as well as analysing the records and recordings of disciplinary hearings dealing with physical abuse cases allowed me to cross-verify data collected. It also allowed me to comply with the requirement of single case study

design as expressed by Rule and John (2011:61, 63), namely that the researcher should consider multiple sources of information and multiple data collection methods.

Accessing the recorded disciplinary hearings on cases of physical abuse allowed me to explore how the SMT of the participant school managed physical abuse among learners and to consider the effectiveness of these management practices (objective 3). That, in turn, informed the recommendations I made on how the management of physical abuse at the participant school could be improved.

A literature study of the circulars and relevant policy issued by the Department of Basic Education as well as the Provincial Department of Basic Education was also used in drawing conclusions to this study. Where differences in the answers from the participants in the focus group and individual, semi-structured interviews occurred I used the data collected from the literature study and the document analysis to triangulate. Ultimately, the data collected was used to inform the recommendations on how the management of physical abuse at the selected school could be improved (objective 5).

#### **1.8.3.4 Data analysis method**

Creswell (2014:150-155) believes that the process of data analysis and interpretation can be represented best by a spiral image, a data analysis spiral, because the researcher moves in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data made up of text or images, e.g. photographs and videotapes and exits with an account or a narrative. In this research the data consisted of literature study, document analysis, individual, semi-structured interview with the school principal, a focus group with members of the SMT, and interviews with the learners. The literature study was undertaken first as the content of various applicable laws and policy had a direct bearing on the analysis of documents which followed. The manner in which the documents were analysed had an impact on the type of questions that were put to the principal, the SMT and the learners.

In order to analyse the data I had to read and reread the transcripts in order to become familiar with the matter. The accuracy of the transcripts was also checked against the recordings made during the interviews and focus group in order to verify the accuracy thereof. I then had to analyse the data looking for common features, similar notions and

for shared characteristics. A note of these was made to record commonalities. Using the coding process, I grouped data together according to specific criteria, which made it more accessible. These categories and sub-categories were identified as natural themes. As categories and themes emerged they were colour coded (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos 2011:410).

## **1.9 Ethical consideration**

I conducted an investigation on a very sensitive issue and thus needed to take the utmost care to be ethical, to adhere to moral principles and protect the participants from possible harm. This required from me to have, what McMillan and Schumacher (2010:345) call “constant self-awareness”. It means that I had to be conscious of whose voice I am recording as data, e.g. that of the participants and not my own. Being consciously aware of staying objective helped me to ensure that the views of all the parties involved in the study were captured in an unbiased manner. I obtained ethical clearance from the College of Education’s Ethical Committee at University of South Africa (see Appendix 17).

In order to ensure that the learners were not emotionally or psychologically hurt, I provided potential participants with clear, detailed and factual information about the study, its methods, its risks and benefits, along with assurances of the voluntary nature of the participation, and the freedom to refuse or withdraw without penalties. In order to ensure that the risk/benefit ratio was favourable to the participants, I ensured that the school counsellor met with the participant learners before their interviews and assessed their emotional and psychological levels of suitability to the study. The school counsellor did this via discussion with prospective participant learners. The counsellor’s recommendation with regard to the suitability of each participant was considered before I proceeded with the interviews. All of the prospective participants were found to be suitable by the counsellor (cf. chapter 3, section 3.5).

Arrangements were made for participant learners who needed counselling after the interview to see the counsellor. Learners were given emotional support by introducing them to the peer counsellors at School A. These counsellors are trained to deal with learners experiencing emotional difficulty. The availability of the counsellor and peer

counsellors was brought to the attention of the learner participants in the information/assent letter (see Appendix 11). The most obvious requirement for ethical research is the protection of the participants' identity by means of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (Babbie & Mouton 2012:523). The concepts of confidentiality and anonymity were explained to the participants (cf. chapter 3, section 3.5).

As already avowed to above, a study can only be ethical if it has some benefit to the participants. I ensured this by selecting participants to whom the research questions apply and for whom the research could hold some benefit. The learners were not exploited just because they were easily reachable to me. This study was of value with regards to the positive management of physical abuse because:

- I, working through the SMT, brought non-violent ways of handling disputes to the attention of participant learners.
- Positive intervention strategies were put in place (cf. chapter 5, section 5.5). As a result of this study, the attendance of an anger management course was made compulsory for all learners who were found guilty of physical abuse.

The first stage of any research project involved official permission to carry out research in a specific community (Bell 1987:42). For the purpose of this research, I sought permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education (see Appendix 1) and also the principal of the participatory school (see Appendix 3). The principal gave permission (see Appendix 4) that the learners and their respective parents could be contacted. I then contacted the parents and sought their consent for the learners' participation in the research (see Appendix 9). Thereafter, I requested the learners to assent to participating in the research (see Appendix 11). If a parent refused to consent, the learner refused to assent or the counsellor indicated that the learner should not be used, the learner was not used as participant. To ensure informed consent and assent an information letter was sent to the parents and learners. In this letter the purpose of the research project, issues of confidentiality and the steps that were to be taken to prevent emotional or psychological harm to the participants were set out (see Appendices 9 and 11).

Accountability is an important element in ethics and ensures that the research is to the advantage of the participants. It is my social responsibility to ensure that the research results are made available to the relevant authorities as well as to the participants. Utmost ethical care was taken when conducting the research (cf. chapter 3, section 3.5). The findings of this research were shared with the school principal of the participatory school, the SMT, the school governing body and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Basic Education. This was done by holding various meetings with the above stakeholders.

### **1.10 Limitations of the study**

It is important that a researcher not only understands the context in which the research objectives were to be achieved but also acknowledge and appreciate possible constraints that could be imposed on the study. The subjectivity of the researcher is one of the limitations inherent to qualitative methodology. In the analysis and interpretation of the transcripts, I had to be as unbiased and objective as humanly possible and had to ensure that my personal views did not taint my interpretation of the data. The research explored personal and sensitive issues and the participants were assured of their anonymity. The present study focussed primarily on female adolescents as I felt that there was a need for this research as there was a significant increase of incidents of girl on girl physical abuse. This limits generalising of the findings to boy adolescents. It should also be noted that in this study, being a qualitative single case study, the findings can only be “generalised” to the broader population from which the sample was selected. Thus, the findings only relate to the population of the participant school. However, the findings will be made known to a wider population, viz. the eleven schools that I communicate within my interaction as cluster co-ordinator (cf. chapter 1, section 1.6). The findings of this research can be transferred from a specific situation to another, making transferability useful in other settings, populations, or circumstances.

Since the learner participants are, due to the school context, in a subordinate position to me as educator acting as insider researcher, they could have been inclined to give socially acceptable answers instead of reflecting on their true feelings and perspectives. Every effort was taken to ensure that the learners were at ease and gave answers that were truthful. To encourage them to be open and truthful in their answers, I emphasised

the fact that their anonymity was guaranteed and that what they reveal will not be discussed with anybody else.

## **1.11 Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made and are addressed in chapter 5, section 5.3.

- School A's SMT does not use constructive and proactive management when dealing with learners who have physically abused other learners.
- This study assumed that there was an increase in incidents of learners fighting at school and that the SMT of the participant school needed to be more proactive and constructive in order to offset the negative effects of this kind of physical abuse.

## **1.12 Summary**

There is a need to recognise that physical abuse of learners is real and prevalent at schools. It is important to avoid the assumption that physical abuse is perpetrated by boys only. If there is to be a positive culture of teaching and learning at schools, then the learning environment must be safe, disciplined and conducive to learning. This study is motivated by the need for the SMT to act in a non-punitive manner concerning incidents of physical abuse thus trying to improve the behaviour of learners which will lead to a decrease in incidents of physical abuse.

The most important aspects discussed in this chapter include, *inter alia*, the statement of the research problem, aims and objectives of the study, significance of the study, clarification of concepts, scope of the study, chapter division, research approach, role as insider researcher, research design and method, and ethical considerations.

A literature review which provides a clear perspective on the management of physical abuse among learners is dealt with in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: Literature review: Managing physical abuse among learners**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is the literature review on SMT's management of physical abuse among learners. In this chapter I looked at the risk factors that prompt girls to physically fight. In chapter 4 I determined which of these risk factors are present at School A. These factors were in turn used to inform my recommendations on constructive and proactive disciplinary management which are presented in chapter 5 (objective 2). In this chapter, I also explored leadership theories as well as the different management styles, disciplinary models and approaches to discipline in order to discover effective and more proactive interventions.

### **2.2 An overview of learner behaviour**

In this section I reviewed the following aspects which have a bearing on the manner in which the SMT manages learners who physically abuse co-learners:

- definition of learner behaviour
- learner misbehaviour and the implication thereof for school discipline policies
- a rise in the number of learners involved in physical abuse
- behaviour management strategies

“Learner behaviour” refers to the manner in which learners relate to their peers, parents, family members, educators, and other members of the school community (Blandford 1998:2). For a school to run smoothly the SMT has to put adequate measures in place to manage misbehaviour. These behaviour management strategies must correlate with physical abuse committed by learners.

Blandford (1998:2) maintains that learner behaviour falls in a continuum from cooperative to totally unacceptable behaviour. Physical abuse among learners is a form of learner misbehaviour that is totally unacceptable. According to Amatea (cited in Weeks 2001:50) a person's behaviour whether co-operative or unacceptable, is maintained and structured by interaction with other people. Managing interaction between learners is one of the avenues available to SMTs to manage physical abuse among learners. Preventive discipline refers to measures taken to pre-empt

misbehaviour by keeping learners engaged, while corrective discipline refers to measures taken when learners are not following school rules and supportive discipline refers to measures taken to assist learners with self-control (Charles 1999:1).

The SMT must ensure that disruptive behaviour is dealt with in a positive manner so that the learners at the participant school can feel safe. To ensure that the school environment becomes a positive teaching and learning space devoid of physical abuse the SMT must provide proper proactive and constructive management and leadership. This must be done in the legal framework and must reflect in the school discipline policies.

There has to be effective management of these learners by the SMT in order to curtail such negative behaviour. As is evident from the *Alternatives to corporal punishment*, the Department places the emphasis on support rather than disciplinary action (Department of Education 2000:10). Punitive environments predictably promote anti-social behaviour such as aggression, violence and vandalism (Mayer 2002:85). There exists a number of alternative, non-violent ways (as opposed to corporal punishment) of establishing and maintaining discipline at school. Certain misdemeanours may be handled by register class educators under the supervision of the HoDs, some by the HoDs themselves or by the grade tutors. The serious cases which may attract suspension or expulsion must be handled by the school principal and/or the disciplinary committee (Department of Education 2000:26; RSA 1998, item 13.2-13.1).

In order for behaviour management to be effective the factors that contribute to physical abuse as discussed in the following section need to be taken into account by the SMT.

### **2.3 Factors that contribute to physical abuse**

The following factors that contribute to physical abuse were identified by means of the literature review and are discussed in the same order than introduced: learners' home environment and the community, competition among learners and its effect on learners' self-esteem, role played by the media, a lack of support services for misbehaviour, factors related to the school and classroom environments, certain socio-economic factors, peer group and the need for power and popularity and inattentiveness by learners on set school tasks.



The first factor that may contribute to girls physically abusing other girls relates to the learners' home environment. "Most violence that is inflicted upon children is committed in the home and thus tends to be hidden" (UNICEF 2011). This is further reiterated by a report completed on behalf of the (Department of Education (United Kingdom) 2012:1) which emphasises that a negative parenting style, characterised by severe, inconsistent discipline, is clearly associated with more severe child antisocial behaviour. Parents who are unpredictable and indifferent have their children exposed to risk factors which increase the possibility that these children will be involved in criminal and violent acts (Mncube & Harber 2013:2).

"Harsh, inconsistent parenting and exposure to violence in the home and community increase the risk that children will grow up to use violence, or to be the victims of violence themselves" (Gould & Ward 2015:1). Social Learning Theory suggests that a child learns behaviour from interaction with parents and these behaviours are maintained through modelling and reinforcement (Department of Education (United Kingdom) 2012:3).

Another dimension, revealed by the study conducted by Bender and Emslie (2010:195), is seen in the homes where there is too much freedom, and too much wealth. The lack of solid parent-child relationships and clear discipline structures create environments favourable to unacceptable and violent behaviour. Gould and Ward (2015:1) stress that parenting has "a direct impact on children's behaviour, which affects their ability to realise their potential". The fact that bad parenting can have a detrimental impact on a child's educational development is thus evident. Peplar (2005:14) identifies hostility in the relationship between mothers and daughters as a cause of negative social cognitions which in turn cause the daughters to have difficulty in forming positive relationships with their peers.

Pienaar (2003:261) mentions that the involvement of parents is essential in maintaining discipline, both in and out of the school. The Department of Education (2000:49) regards parental involvement as one of the crucial factors leading to a successful school experience. Parental involvement involves factors such as the amount and nature of support provided, how parents interact with the school and educators, and the ability of parents to provide the support required by their children.

The lack of respect for authority comes from a lack of values which should have been instilled at home, this includes respect not shown by parents to those who hold authoritative positions in the community (Rossouw 2003:431). Parents expect the schools to teach their children proper conduct, without admitting their own responsibilities in that regard (Rossouw 2003:426). This expectation by certain parents about the role of the school is irresponsible. Positive parenting, e.g. where parents have good relationships with their children, are consistent, use non-violent forms of discipline, treat their children according to their developmental stages and supervise their children, is a prerequisite to preventing violent behaviour (Gould & Ward 2015:2).

Violence is rife in many South African communities. The carrying of weapons is common, economic constraints face large sections of the poor communities, dagga and “hard” drugs are readily available, and alcohol and drugs are sold illegally to underage learners on a vast scale (Jacobs 2012:104). In his study on learner discipline in South African public schools, Rossouw (2003:426) found that the decline in discipline in most schools originates from the communities rather than from schools. Communities in general play an integral role in shaping the home environment of the learner which in turn affects the manner in which learners resolve conflict at school. Schools servicing communities where there is a lack of respect for authorities are considered to become blueprints of the destructive ecology reigning in such communities (Bloch 2009:75). There is a clear link between exposure to violence in the community and a lack of anger control and even psychopathic tendencies in adolescents (Schraft, Kosson & McBride 2013:1030). The probability that a child will exhibit antisocial and aggressive behaviour if the child was a victim of community violence is high (Schraft *et al.* 2013:1039). This is also confirmed by McCoy (2013:255) who links the fact that American children are exposed to violence in their homes and communities to the lack of self-regulation among learners.

The role played by the media is another contributory factor because media reporters are agents who help construct the public’s perception of an issue (Carlyle, Slater, & Chakroff 2008:169). The media influences beliefs and perceptions regarding “norms of acceptable behaviour” and “influences the shaping of conceptions of reality” (Carlyle *et al.* 2008:168-169). Baron, Byrne and Branscombe (2006:431) confirm that violence in the media increases aggression in children. It may also result in children being

desensitised to the feelings of compassion towards those that are hurt by the aggression (Orpinas 2006:52). According to Siegel (2004:158) the average child views approximately 8000 murders on television and in cinemas before completing elementary school. The problem with this is that the violent movies provide the child with a script which is easy to remember and follow. It is not only the bad people who use violence but also the “good” people. Violent retaliation is presented as acceptable (Orpinas 2006:52).

Learners are constantly exposed to violence in the media and this adds to them seeking violent solutions to disputes in their personal lives. Orpinas (2006:65) states that, if children’s role models, such as: actors, educators, parents and family members set examples of aggressive behaviour, this type of behaviour then becomes the norm. A good example of such exposure is cat fights (where women use physical violence against one another). “Cat fights” is a common phenomenon in soap operas and is even referred to as being “a soap convention” (Gay 2015:1). Dellasega and Nixon (2003:34-35) have found that song lyrics and videos influence the behaviour of young girls, as they often make aggression against women appear acceptable. These song lyrics and videos encourage people to fight as violence is portrayed as acceptable.

Inadequate support services for misbehaving learners, is another factor that contributes to physical abuse. There is a lack of programmes at schools to help learners overcome deviant behaviour. Learners who behave in such a way that they disrupt the class or disturb others, or place other learners or educators at risk, should be offered help in private, outside the classroom (Department of Education 2000:10). Sugut and Mugasia (2014:131) affirm that functional guidance and counselling departments need to be started in all secondary schools to help address learner problems.

The next factor can be found in the manner in which schools respond to social behavioural problems. In spite of a strong legislative framework, corporal punishment remains widespread in South Africa, in the school setting, where it is illegal.

Data published in the report titled “South Africa’s Children: A Review of Equity and Child Rights” (UNICEF 2011) shows that:

- Nearly 1 in 5 children experience corporal punishment at school;
- 27% of high school learners feel unsafe at school.

In addition to physical, emotional and psychological harm, corporal punishment teaches children that physical violence is an acceptable means of conflict resolution (UNICEF 2012). Most experts agree that “corporal punishment does nothing to fulfil the disciplinary goal of developing a child’s conscience so as to enable him or her to behave well...” Hitting children can cause physical and psychological injury. It inhibits positive child development and positive forms of discipline (UNICEF 2001). The ill-effects of corporal punishment in promoting violence enhance the fact a punitive environment in the classroom and the school is a contributing factor to physical abuse. This reiterates that corporal punishment is incompatible with proactive and constructive management of learners who engage in fisticuffs.

According to Mayer’s observation (2002:85) punitive environments predictably promote anti-social behaviour such as aggression, violence and vandalism. School discipline plans that rely on reprimands, loss of privileges, detention, suspension and expulsions have little or no positive value to the learner. Colvin and Edwards (1993:363) mention that when schools are confronted with social behavioural problems, the general management response is reactive; which is an ineffective response for learners with severe behavioural problems. Schools assume that learners will thereby learn the “right way” of behaving, and comply with the expectations of the school.

Bloch (2009:58), Kollapen (2006:2) and Mestry, Moloji and Mahomed (2007:95), among others, accentuate that the South African school environments are often disastrous and destructive. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in such environments (De Wet & Van Huyssteen, 2005:17). Taylor (2004:58) contends that school and classroom climates have to be positive and safe, rules should be taught systematically and should correlate with the school’s mission, and the principles of behaviour management should be understood and practiced by all staff members. It is this kind of environment that will aid the SMT in its goal of being proactive and constructive when dealing with deviant learners.

The socio-economic factors as experienced by the learners may also be a contributory factor to physical abuse. Learners at the participant school were very much like the learners in Van Wyk’s study, in that they came from diverse home circumstances, some living in small council houses, while others live in rural areas. Often the adults are

unemployed, and some households are headed by females or grandparents (Van Wyk 2001:198).

An increase in single parent-households and a pre-occupation with constitutional rights has made some learners oblivious to discipline (Oosthuizen 2002:2). The South African government commissioned the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in February 2007 to perform a study on the nature of crime in South Africa. This study (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa 2007) concluded that South Africa is subjected to increased levels of violence due to among other reasons, poor child nurturing and meagre youth socialization.

Children who feel socially alienated from their peers often tend to misbehave. This finding (“the significant relationship between isolation and poor behaviour”) is supported by Butchart (1998:242) where he indicates that emotional extrication from friends, family and peers results in feelings of seclusion and estrangement for the child which in turn finds expression in misbehaviour. Peplar (2005:16) also confirms this view, emphasising that feelings of seclusion may ultimately expand into “psychological pains” which can lead to acting out in the form of, *inter alia*, physical assault, gang violence or substance abuse. Learners who experience not being loved or cared for, being rejected or abandoned, being depressed or made out to be incompetent may hit, kick, get into fights or verbally threaten or insult others (Lekganwane 2011:12).

A further factor that could lead girls to engage in physical abuse are the levels of competitiveness that exist between these learners which could in turn result in the girls developing a poor self-esteem (Duncan 2004:149). Specific areas of competition which include weight, attractiveness and clothing may result in a feeling of personal inadequacy and hostility which may lead to aggressive behaviour (Cowan & Ullman 2006:400). Poor self-esteem leads to the creation of tumultuous friendships among certain learners which could result in them resolving disputes aggressively (Duncan 2004:149). Competitiveness relates closely to the next factor; e.g. the need for power and popularity.

In order to develop a positive self-image, a girl needs to be accepted by her peers and needs to feel that she belongs and fits in. The peer group also assists in the learning of social skills, such as communication, sharing, listening, and cooperating. According to

Dellasega and Nixon (2003:17) the peer group is the training ground for relational skills. In this context, the relationship between peer group pressure and competitiveness is a complex, interrelated relationship. Aggressive behaviour can result in the peer either being rejected or gaining popularity. Both rejection and gain of popularity may promote aggression which can lead to physical abuse between girls.

Same sex peers can easily exclude someone from their group if that person does not fit in with their kind of thinking or behaviour attributes. A group of same sex peers tend to be less tolerant of girls who annoy them as opposed to being in a group of peers of the opposite sex. This may result in a girl feeling isolated, rejected or even an outcast. In an attempt to gain acceptance from a peer group some girls may then engage in aggressive behaviour (De Bruyn & Cillesen 2006:435). And so a vicious cycle starts because the aggressive behaviour promotes rejection from and often a decrease in affiliation with pro-social peers and an increase in interactions with others who have poor social skills (Bell, Foster & Marsh 2005:169).

Some girls may view aggressive girls with awe, admiration and even envy which in turn provide the aggressive girl with the feeling of superiority that she may crave (Baron *et al.* 2006:437). Bender and Emslie (2010:189) suggest that “many aggressive learners have high levels of status, popularity, and admiration from their peer group at the school”. This seems to make aggressive behaviour at school not only acceptable, but also a factor that adds to the popularity or social standing of a learner. Learners may also engage in aggressive behaviour as a result of them having special education needs as discussed in the next paragraph.

Smit (2007:53) posits that the demographic characters of many schools have changed over the last decade. This can be attributed to the introduction of inclusive education system where learners who experience barriers to learning and who were previously accommodated in special schools are now accommodated in main stream schools or so-called “full service schools” (Department of Education 2001, paragraph 1.5.6.3; Department of Basic Education 2010, paragraph 2.7; 3.2.2). Education White Paper 6 – Special needs education: Building an inclusive education and training system (Department of Education 2001) aims to accommodate all learners, irrespective of their disabilities, social difficulties or learning needs within ordinary schools or learning contexts (Joubert cited in Boezaart 2009:516). In terms of White Paper 6 (Department

of Education 2001, paragraph 1.5.6.3), inclusive education is the most effective means of opposing discriminatory attitudes, developing hospitable communities, building a society that was inclusive and achieving true education for all. Although the above stated intention for an inclusive education system has its merits, it is not without challenges. For example, it creates new behaviour management challenges for educators and mandates an attitude of support, patience, accommodation and acceptance from educators and co-learners. Certain medical conditions (for example brain damage and autism) and psychological conditions (for example psychotic disorders) may lead to “perceptual problems, attention deficits, hyperactivity, lack of social perception and a general lack of perception of proper behaviour” (Prinsloo & Gasa 2011:492). This may lead to conflict, which can be a contributory factor to violent behaviour.

Learners who have difficulty working for extended periods on a set school task experience chronic underachievement in their school work. They experience not being loved or cared for, being rejected or abandoned, being incompetent and depressed. These learners may hit, kick, get into fights, or verbally threaten or insult others. These behaviour patterns may cause experiences of frustration when educators try to control the learners and this may lead to peers disapproving of the violent behaviour (Kerr & Nelson 1998:13). Similarly, other learners may discriminate and mistreat children with disabilities.

The above risk factors will affect the manner in which girls who engage in physical abuse are managed. One aspect that will affect how the situation is managed is the leadership style the principal, SMT and individual educators has adopted.

## **2.4 Leadership theories**

It is important that the SMT of the participant school has knowledge of the following leadership theories to be able to carry out its role as manager of discipline in a proper and well informed manner.

### **2.4.1 The human relations theory**

The human relations theory is a neo-classical theory. This theory gives recognition to the importance of individual as well as group relationships by emphasising the

importance of valuing humans in an organisation (Van Seters & Field 1990:29). This theory is most applicable to the school situation as the learners are continuously interacting with one another and in that interaction groups can sometimes become violent (Van Seters & Field 1990:29-35).

Bhindi and Duignan (1997:119) argue that irrespective whether in educational, religious, public service or business organisations, authentic leaders encourage and support ethical ways of thinking and people-centred ways of doing things. They propose that leaders should be more sensitive and caring in their attitude and relationship and more adaptable and flexible in their practices, if they are to release the potential, and tap the diversity of talents of all employees under their leadership.

Specific characteristics of this type of leadership theory can be deduced from sources dealing with employment issues. Grey (2009:47) suggests that management, according to the human relations theory, could be reconfigured as an altogether more humane undertaking, which ameliorated rather than inflamed social conflict and, perhaps most important of all, was about 'helping' rather than exploiting the worker. Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman (2009:8) state that the Hawthorne Studies conducted by Elton Mayo and his colleagues at the Harvard Business School led to the discovery that the relationships between workers and their supervisors has potentially a greater influence on output than any manipulation of environmental conditions.

Human relations theory engaged directly with emerging understandings about the "depth" of personhood. It suggested that "beneath" the economic motivations of Taylorist workers lay some more profound realities, which requires a very specialised kind of manager (Rose 2005:50).

A leader with this style will support the learner to suppress her aggressive tendencies by being constructive and proactive in the management of all learners, rather than being punitive after the fact. Under this type of leadership the learner will be shown the benefits of positive intervention by the SMT which will aid the learner in conflict resolution.



### **2.4.2 The behavioural scientific theory**

To manage physical abuse at schools effectively, management should take into account the perceptions, needs and values of the victims and the offenders (Akroni 2013:1). Behaviourists believe that learners are conditioned by their environments with no innate will to be self-determined, thus human behaviour needs to be regulated and controlled through rewards and reinforcement (Kohn 1996:68-69). Moreover, this idea is supported by Kerr and Nelson (1998:13) who state that when assisting learners with behaviour problems, the learning environment should be taken into account. Thus, behaviour modification techniques suggest that specific rewards and punishment will yield predictable results in the behaviour of children. The negative and positive effects of rewards and reinforcement must be taken into consideration when using behaviourism in controlling behaviour (Van Seters & Field 1990:32-33).

Attention is given to the specific behaviour that learners show and not the reasons why they demonstrate these behaviours (Ayers & Gray 1998:6). Behaviour is studied in the classroom setting rather than in distant past or early events and importance is placed on measuring present situational causes of the behaviour that is the forerunner and the resulting actions surrounding the recognised behaviour (Martella, Nelson & Martella 2003:30). On the foundation of this theoretical background, behaviourally-oriented professionals have planned and applied many intervention programmes, plans and precise techniques which are grouped into two major groups, i.e. behavioural enhancement procedures and behaviour reduction procedures. In the behaviour enhancement procedures, fulfilling techniques attempt to reinforce, uphold or enhance the occurrence of an appropriate behaviour. In the behaviour reduction procedures punishment techniques are used to remove the occurrence of inappropriate behaviour (Kazdin 1990:699). However, while mild punitive techniques can be effective, punishment should be considered as the last effective intervention since it results in temporary suppression of undesirable behaviour rather than elimination thereof (Ruder 2005:8).

### **2.4.3 Non-directive intervention theories**

Edwards (2000:19) states that assumptions involving non-directive intervention theories are premised on the principle that children develop from an inner unfolding. The

process may be associated with the innate responses of the child to self-correct his/her behaviours. Intervention in the form of external control is not necessary to control behaviours (Taylor 2004:16). One of the basic ideas of this theory is that “one cannot change positively, grow or learn by force” (Bonfanti s.a.). Children are self-motivated to conform to any standard of behaviour modelled to them. The educator will have to direct the child’s behaviour so that children will know how to emulate them. This is where the difference lies between behavioural conditioning and education (Bonfanti s.a.). Glasser (1986:80-94) is one of the principle advocates of this theory in which the role of the educator is essential.

In terms of this leadership theory, the educator has the role of helping children to learn how to control their own lives responsibly (Edwards & Watts 2008:28). By always providing learners with two choices, educators will assist their learners to take on increasing responsibility for themselves, as well as helping them to develop greater control over their own behaviour (Edwards & Watts 2008:28). When using leadership theories, educators will help students recognise the consequences of their behaviour, and can then guide them to change their behaviour so that better consequences will result (Edwards & Watts 2008:28). Learners must internalise their behaviours and recognise that by weighing the negative and positive consequences of their behaviour, they have the power to control it (Taylor 2004:16). The cornerstone of this non-directive approach is that the capacity to determine what is right or not for an individual lies in their power to determine.

#### **2.4.4 Van Niekerk’s leadership model**

Van Niekerk (2015:65-89) developed a leadership model that distinguishes between short- and long-term leadership. According to this model, the educator as a leader influences learners in two ways. Firstly, the leader influences the circumstances under which leadership is provided by creating an environment within which the learners can learn to the best of their ability. Secondly, the educator takes actions to empower the learners to develop optimally. The tasks that the educator has to perform in order to achieve long-term success are: the creation of a vision, effective communication of the vision, creation of the desirable value climate to contribute to the achievement of the vision, training and development of the learners and, finally, empowerment of the learners. In relation to this study the vision is for the SMT to manage physical abuse

proactively and constructively. The first task of effective long-term leadership is thus the establishment of an inspiring vision.

Van Niekerk (2015:67) states that the educator as the leader in the classroom is the ideal person to encourage the development and implementation of a vision in cooperation with the learners. Learners should know precisely what is expected from them and they should then be deliberately guided to achieve that (Van Niekerk 2015:68). Once envisioning takes place, then the next task is to communicate this vision. There are many possible ways of communicating the vision and at times learners may even be unaware that the educator is communicating the vision consciously. It is not necessary that they should always know this, as long as effective communication of the vision keeps them aligned with the vision and focused on attaining it (Van Niekerk 2015:70).

With regards to this study it is the task of the SMT to communicate to the learners that the vision of the school is to have no incidents of physical abuse taking place among its learners and should such incidents take place, then it would be dealt with as a breach of the school's Code of conduct for learners (Learner's Code of Conduct of School A 2014:6). Every person should be treated with dignity and respect and the whole class should know that negative opposite behaviour, such as belittling others, abruptness, discourtesy, name-calling, bullying and rudeness will not be tolerated. Respect for the talented, as well as for the less talented and academically challenged, is essential (Van Niekerk 2015:70). The SMT has to ensure that every learner at School A does have their right to safety, dignity and respect guaranteed and that its Code of conduct for learners is upheld at all times by the learners thus ensuring the safety of all learners.

The different management styles that can be adopted by the SMT of the participant school will be discussed below.

## **2.5 Management styles**

The SMT of the participant school must be aware of the different management styles and its implications for the management of girls involved in physical abuse. Bucher and Manning (2005:56) find that a safe school is one in which the total school climate allows for interaction in a positive, non-threatening manner that reflects the educational mission of the school while fostering positive relationships and personal growth. It is

the task of the SMT to ensure that action is taken in a school to address violent and aggressive behaviour, thus ensuring safe schools. Squelch and Lemmer (1994:56); Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1997:20); Van Deventer and Kruger (2003:142); as well as Zabel and Zabel (1996:124) distinguish three prominent educator classroom management styles, namely an autocratic or authoritative, a democratic or participative and a *laissez-faire* or permissive classroom management style.

In order to manage a school an appropriate management style must be used. What will constitute an appropriate management style will depend on the situation (Van Deventer & Kruger 2003:144). According to Tiwani (2010:38) each situation requires a unique course of action by the educator and each situation will therefore have to be analysed and adapted to the educator's personality, and the forces in the environment or situation. Educators have to ensure that the barriers that underlie the learners' behaviour are addressed through relevant strategies such as creating safe learning environments, communicating safety and order, providing effective classroom leadership, focussing on instructional issues, and developing high expectations for learners.

### **2.5.1 An autocratic management style**

The autocratic management style is characterised by the strong leadership role of the educator; one-way communication, little opportunity for creative thinking or learner participation; rigid discipline and an unapproachable educator (Unisa 2006:6). Autocratic educators have a low opinion of human nature, and believe that learners cannot control their own behaviour. They believe that they must use their authority to control learners by determining and enforcing standards of behaviour in the classroom. In this management style the educator becomes an authoritarian figure who exerts too much control, imposes strict rules, makes a great fuss over any minor infringement of the rules, and tends to be paranoid about opposition to his/her authority. Instead, learners become ill-disciplined and uncooperative, and develop a negative attitude towards the learning area, and according to Jackson (2002:57), some learners may even refuse to go to school.

While this style of leadership is characterised by a one-way communication between the educator and his/her class and a lack of harmonious relations, Van Deventer and Kruger (2003:144) maintain that it has the advantage of good performance. This management

style implies that learners work well in a strictly controlled learning environment; they do not take responsibility for their actions; they tend to “fear” certain educators, especially those who are authoritative; they lack self-control; and continue to misbehave despite being subjected to beatings and sarcasm. This management style encourages learners to be rebellious, as they retaliate and show off their resistance (Tiwani 2010:36). An autocratic management style will not be conducive for girls who engage in physical abuse as the aim of the SMT is to be corrective rather than to encourage rebelliousness and further aggression.

### **2.5.2 A democratic or participative management style**

The democratic management style is characterised by a calm and inviting teaching attitude, namely self-expression by learners and a team spirit between educator and learners (Unisa 2006:6).

The participative leadership style contains individual and collective goals. It requires the use of strategy backed by compassion (Pontefract 2013:69). Zabel and Zabel (1996:124) argue that democratic managers balance the educator-directed and learner-centred activities so that they can assume more directive approaches to determine content and learning activities. Sound and effective discipline should exist in a democratically-led and democratically-managed classroom. Furthermore, Kruger and Van Schalkwyk (1997:22) contend that an educator who adopts this management style will let his/her learners take part in decision making, in classroom policy, rules and procedures, the organisation of class activities, and the maintenance of order in the class. Learners should be involved in all issues that relate to them so that they may also regard themselves as part of the solutions to classroom-related behaviour problems.

The democratic management style has the primary objective of building commitment and consensus among the various stakeholders at school. This style encourages educator input in decision making and motivates by rewarding team effort (Cardinal 2013:1). The democratic management style allows learners to develop in a responsible and self-controlled manner. These learners could thus play a vital role in the decision making process with the SMT in finding positive ways to solve their disputes. This management style will be suitable and applicable to the proactive approach of learner discipline.

### **2.5.3 A *laissez-faire* or permissive management style**

According to Tiwani (2010:37) permissive educators believe that if left alone, learners will make good decisions and behave favourably. Under this management style few rules are set and learners are allowed a great deal of freedom. They do more or less as they please. According to Van Deventer and Kruger (2003:142), the *laissez-faire* leadership style, is characterised among other things, by little attention to policy-making, which then results in poor discipline. While it is true that no single classroom management style is 100% better than the others, the *laissez-faire* management style is more destructive, as it gives learners a free reign to do as they please (Tiwani 2010:37).

The *laissez-faire* leadership style allows too much freedom to learners (Unisa 2006:6) and this is not suitable to the management of learners who fight as there has to be parameters within which Discipline Policy exists.

I regard the disciplinary models of Ginott and Dreikurs as the best suited disciplinary models to aid in the management of physical abuse and those are discussed below.

## **2.6 Disciplinary models**

Good discipline ensures that an environment conducive to teaching and learning exists in a school. Classroom management models that have been developed assist educators and the SMT in adopting counter measures against misbehaving learners. Those include: the Ginott model and the Dreikurs conceptual model. The Ginott model has been chosen as it focuses on the role of communication in rectifying inappropriate behaviour. This model also stresses the value of a proactive approach whereby learners form part of the solution because the focus is on self-control. The Dreikurs model deals with learners who project their negative feelings about themselves into misbehaviour. Learners' low self-esteem maybe a factor contributing to using violence to resolve disputes (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3). This model was chosen as the negative feelings that learners experience can lead to acts of violence.

### **2.6.1 The Ginott model**

The Ginott model is based on interpersonal interaction between learners and educators. This model concentrates on influencing unsuitable classroom behaviour into suitable

classroom behaviour via communication. Ginott (1973:20) referred to this specific style of communication between educators and learners as “congruent communication”. The congruent communication focuses on addressing the activities of the learner and not the learner’s character. A proactive approach where learners are made to feel accepted is recommended. There are constructed strategies for educators to develop self-esteem, self-confidence and reducing fear, and frustration in the classroom (Ginott 1972:23). These strategies strongly endorse the principle that educators should attack the problem not the child.

In terms of this model the best approach to assist learners is developing a democratic classroom. The democratic educator aids learners to acquire self-discipline and self-motivation (Hudson 2006:37). In a democratic classroom, the educator and the learner co-operate in establishing classroom rules and penalties for negative behaviour. Self-discipline is the goal of positive discipline which results in learners being liberated, which in turn may impact positively on the accountability attached to their decisions (Woolfolk 1998:333).

#### **2.6.1.1 Labelling and negative criticism**

Many educators are not aware of the harmful effects of labelling and criticising children negatively. Using labels to criticise children is self-defeating and damage their self-image (Kauffman *et al.* 1991:5). The labels used frequently become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children usually demonstrate behaviours characteristic of the labels associated with them. Labels manifest negative attitudes in children and they are difficult to erase. Ginott (as cited in Taylor 2004:33) articulates that educators should not criticise children; too much criticism is detrimental to their welfare and social growth, because it deflates self-esteem and interferes with learning. Ginott (as cited in Taylor 2004:33) recommends that the educator should give suggestions and advice and make brief statements to learners for improving their performances and seek their input on corrective behaviour. Thus the criticism should not be aimed at the person of the learner but at the performance or behaviour. Acknowledging learners’ feelings promote self-worth and confidence and provide an avenue for free expression. When educators have faith in learners, the learners begin to have faith in themselves (Gatongi 2007:210).

### **2.6.1.2 Dealing with feelings**

In offering assistance to learners the educator assures them that support is available to them readily. Children need to feel that they can depend on the educator to assist them when confronted with problems. If educators and parents do not assist children in solving their problems, they will attempt to solve them on their own. Frequently, this approach will lead to inappropriate behaviours (Taylor 2004:35). Educators should never repudiate their feelings or their learners' feelings. Their behaviour should always be honest. Educators must learn to express their anger or displeasure without damaging the character of the learner (Marshall 2005:24).

According to Mountrouse (1999:10) when children are not permitted to express their feelings, these feelings are stored and buried in their subconscious minds. These unexpressed feelings cannot be acknowledged by educators and these feelings, may be unleashed or directed toward inappropriate behaviours. When feelings are addressed, children feel nurtured and recognised. Talking to children and assisting them in describing their feelings, aid in developing understanding and promote self-esteem. It also provides the opportunity for educators to develop social skills to teach children how to cope successfully with their feelings by transforming inappropriate behaviours to appropriate behaviours (Taylor 2004:35). An angry educator must express his instructions clearly and resolutely without insulting or humiliating the learner. When tempted to explode in wrath, they should ask themselves, "Am I dealing with the anger in a way I expect my learners to do, or am I modelling the behaviour that I want to see in my classroom?" (Wynne & Ryan 1997:240).

### **2.6.1.3 Inappropriate behaviour and punishment**

When learners misbehave one of the negative consequences of such behaviour is punishment. Punishment for inappropriate behaviour may be accomplished by either withdrawing a positive reinforcer or employing aversive consequences, such as reprimands, isolation, or time out (Taylor 2004:36). Many conditions arising in the classroom necessitate rectifying comments from the educator. Ginott (1973:22) recommends "directing" where educators explain the situation and then offer adequate, alternative behaviour as a method of correcting. Sometimes learners need to be informed what they could do to counter negative behaviour (Ginott 1973:23).



Educators can alter behaviour with intimidations and reprimands, but this engenders animosity, agitation and untrustworthy behaviour. However, they can impact behaviour through consideration and understanding, which can turn adverse situations into triumphs for both educators and learners (Morrel 2000:54).

Educators should not misplace their tempers, offend others or opt for name calling. They should not be discourteous, cruel or irrational, but rather endeavour to demonstrate the behaviour they expect from the learners in their classrooms. They should be well-mannered, obliging and courteous. They should handle conflicts in a calm and constructive manner. Learners observe how adults handle difficult situations (Bray 2005:134).

From the above it can be concluded that communication between educators and learners is pivotal in ensuring that inappropriate behaviour is converted into appropriate, acceptable behaviour. Ginott (1973:20) called this particular style of communication between educators and learners “congruent communication”. This congruent communication entails addressing the actions of the learner and not the learner’s character.

#### **2.6.1.4 Managing inappropriate behaviour**

Many types of inappropriate learner behaviour may push educators to overstep their bounds and to resort to threats, rudeness or punishment. In terms of the Ginott model these are negative responses which are non-productive and ineffective in eliminating bad behaviour. Ginott (1973:20) states that punishment is more likely to enrage learners, especially if it is accompanied by various degrees of physical force. Learners frequently become hostile and full of anger after being punished and educators should thus rather find effective alternatives to punishment as effective discipline requires educators to act with kindness and patience. Punishment does not stop inappropriate behaviour; it simply makes learners more skilful in covering up their behaviour (Taylor 2004:37).

Taylor (2004:37) firmly believes that an educator making negative comments promote inappropriate behaviour among children. Taylor (2004:37) further indicates that constant negativity or belittling are unlikely to convince a learner to improve his/her behaviour, rather it may be a personal attack of the learners’ self-esteem. Inappropriate

behaviours of learners, if at all possible, should not be addressed before peers. Educators sometimes make use of protracted directions and explanations. With precise messages, educators show that they value the learners' capacity to behave independently and this will encourage teamwork, promote individual choice, and nurture accountability as the learners will display more constructive behaviour and their self-esteem will improve (Jones & Jones 2001:44).

## **2.6.2 The Dreikurs conceptual model**

The Dreikurs conceptual model is based on the premise that learner behaviour is mostly a result of the need to belong or not feeling worthwhile. Dreikurs and Soltz (1992:55) trust that learners' misbehaviour is due to incorrect goals such as acquiring attention or averting attention from themselves in order to conceal the fact that they cannot manage with the academic material.

### **2.6.2.1 Exacting revenge**

Learners who were not taught boundaries may take educators' attempts to manage their misbehaviour very personally and experience such attempts as unfair and aimed at hurting them. The importance of being taught boundaries is that it prevents misbehaving learners from taking out their revenge on anyone near them. Revenge can manifest in destructive acts such as destroying their own or another person's property, kicking, tripping, hitting or throwing objects on the floor (Taylor 2004:76). The aim of revenge is closely related to the aim of power. These learners sense they should be permitted to do as they wish and believe anyone who tries to prevent them as an enemy. Since the above learners do not care about consequences, they are very difficult to deal with. The educator should try and create circumstances that allow unforgiving learners to show their aptitudes or strengths, assisting to encourage these learners that they can behave in a manner that brings recognition and standing (Goodman & Lesnick 2001:229).

### **2.6.2.2 Assisting children in correcting their misbehaviour**

Before misbehaviours of children can be corrected, educators must provide strategies to assist them in internalising their misbehaviours. Educators must make learners aware of their misbehaviour and make them recognise what they are doing as well as the impact

that their misbehaviours have on others (Taylor 2004:76). Dinkmeyer and Dinkmeyer (1976:664) identified the following steps that educators need to take in order to establish a good rapport with children. Firstly, educators need to ascertain learners' motives and help learners understand their motives. Secondly, educators should assist learners to exchange their mistaken goals for useful ones and encourage learners to become committed to their new goal orientation. Lastly, educators must teach learners to apply logical consequences and arrange for group discussions regarding class rules and problems. Encouragement enables beliefs of being an influencing member of a group. It helps learners endure themselves as they are.

The reasoning of the Dreikurs model is contrary to that of aversive discipline which concentrates on punishment (Strahan, Smith, McElrath, & Toole 2001:30). This model does not emphasise the use of punishment in explaining good discipline. The best form of discipline is regarded as internal discipline which results from the courteous development of each learner. The role of the educators is to transform the incorrect goal behaviour into the correct goal. This re-routing of incorrect goals should be done in a positive way. The model considers learners will internalise these rules and take ownership of them, because it was adopted via a joint decision by educators and learners (Monroe 2005:317).

### **2.6.2.3 Understanding misbehaving learners**

Inappropriate behaviour does not occur in a vacuum. Educators must become cognisant of psychological reasons for misbehaving, as well as having knowledge of principles of child growth and development (Taylor 2004:77). Once educators have the knowledge of why the learners are misbehaving, they can then assist learners in recognising, altering or changing their goals and behaviours. Due to a variety of factors such as developmental, environmental, social, and poor role models, many children do not understand fully why they behave as they do. When the educator assist them in understanding their goals and motives, misbehaving behaviours are significantly reduced. The members of the SMT need to have knowledge of the contributing factors that have led learners at School A to engage in violent behaviour. Based on this knowledge the members of the SMT can then attempt to handle misbehaving learners in a proactive and constructive manner ensuring that positive discipline paves the way forward.

Martella *et al.* (2003:7) reinforce Rudolph Dreikurs' natural consequence model. This model is founded on the belief that people gain knowledge through their collaboration with the environment. In this collaboration our behaviour is subjected to natural as well as logical consequences. According to Charles (2005:337) natural consequences arise from the learners' behaviour. Logical consequences are organised by someone else, may be an educator or a member of the SMT.

If these consequences are sprung on learners at the time of the encounter, then this will be regarded as punishment. When consequences are applied, educators should not act as self-proclaimed authorities. They should indicate the correct behaviour as required by society and ensure the rules accepted by the learners are enforced (Sanders 2001:19). Consequences must be applied consistently in order to be effective. Learners must be assured that whenever they choose to misbehave, consequences will be applied. Learners choose to suffer the consequences as a result of choosing to misbehave. The reaction of the learner has nothing to do with the reaction of the educator (Hyman & Snook 2000:489).

#### **2.6.2.4 Advantages**

There are several advantages for educators using the natural consequence model. It allows educators to assist children in recognising, identifying, and correcting misbehaviours, thus decreasing discipline problems in the classroom. Strategies and techniques are developed to assist children in understanding how they behave as they do and provide assistance for them to minimise, correct, or reduce maladaptive behaviour such as using physical abuse to solve a dispute with another learner. It is important that consequences will relate as closely as possible to the misbehaviour, so learners can see the connection between them (Buluc 2006:30). The strategies and techniques employed are designed to assist children in recognising and internalising their behaviours. No significant changes can occur in behaviours before children learn to bring problems to the conscious level. Discipline problems are corrected through the use of logical sequences rather than punishment and rewards. It further assists educators in focussing on the causes of behaviours before corrective action is taken (Taylor 2004:78).

The natural consequence model allows for educators to play the role of counsellor whereby educators explain to learners the effect of their actions on the learners themselves as well as on other people.

#### **2.6.2.5 Disadvantages**

The disadvantages of the model are few. Since educators are not trained mental health specialists they may have some difficulty determining the goals and motives of the learners. There is no way of determining whether or not learners are revealing their true motives, either because they believe that their motives will not be accepted or they do not know how to identify them. Educators may find it difficult to engage in conversation with learners in a non-authoritative way (Taylor 2004:79). This model will be difficult to implement in a law and policy framework that makes provision for punishment.

### **2.7 Approaches to discipline**

The following approaches to discipline will be discussed in which the role of the learner, the school and the parent are highlighted: The learner-centred approach and the whole school approach to learner behaviour management.

#### **2.7.1 The learner-centred approach**

It is the learner who has to acquire skills and knowledge in order to become a productive citizen. Citizenship involves more than just being able to stay on course, keeping a cool head, hanging on and not losing it (Oosthuizen 2010:41). The Department of Education (2000:9) urges educators to use discipline proactively and constructively. This will lead to learners undergoing an educative corrective approach which will enhance learners' self-control and to respect others and realise that there are consequences to their action.

##### **2.7.1.1 Learner ownership**

In October 2003, Norkem Park High School in Gauteng adopted an approach of learner ownership based on a paper by Dr Louis Swanepoel on the positive influence that a healthy organisational culture can have on a school's discipline (Oosthuizen 2010:41). While listening to the paper, Norkem Park's deputy principal (who is responsible for

maintaining and developing learner discipline at the school) decided to apply the approach at the school in a unique way. The essence of this strategy is that learners have to experience the school as their own and have to accept responsibility for it themselves. This was found to have a very beneficial effect on discipline; especially in teaching learners' self-control and self-direction and emphasising the difference between right and wrong.

#### **2.7.1.2 Promote self-insight in the learner**

People are more complex than they appear to be. Bad and good behaviour are often symptoms of a deeper dynamic. It is therefore desirable that a learner who consistently transgresses not only be punished but also be given the opportunity to develop insight into his own person (Oosthuizen 2010:45). According to Burton (2008a:17) schools are generally seen as mechanisms to develop and reinforce learners with pro-social attitudes and as sites where individuals are prepared for the role they are to play in society at large. The SMT of the participant school therefore have the potential of being a positive reinforcing agent in preventing acts of physical abuse among learners, by making these learners aware that their behaviour is not functional and detrimental to their personal image.

#### **2.7.1.3 Value-centred education and the learner**

In 2010 Oosthuizen conducted research among 1357 secondary learners in the Potchefstroom district which revealed some interesting facts. These learners were asked which values caused them to obey class rules and which values caused them to ignore the same class rules. The learners' answers indicated that their self-esteem played an important role in their obeying class rules (Oosthuizen 2010:50). School A's disciplinary management system is based on a system of eight core values which is entrenched in its Code of conduct for learners and which they are constantly reminded of.

#### **2.7.1.4 Peer assistance and conflict mediation**

Peer mediation is a programme in which learners are trained to facilitate mediation of conflict situations among their peers. This training helps learners to deal with their own conflict situations constructively, and assist other learners to resolve their conflicts

peacefully (Naidoo 2012:7-8). The system consists of either the learner council or a specially selected group of learners who are trained in peer assistance skills and conflict mediation skills. Knowledge and experiences can be shared via supportive peer relationships. Peer helpers are role models and improve beneficial coping skills as the peers as well the learners are sources of reference for one another (Visser 2005:149).

Mentoring often has a targeted component aiming to support particular groups of children or individuals. Mentoring has responsive elements to its function and it has to be proactive (Hendry 2009:64). There are a group of peer counsellors at the participant school who are grade 11 learners and who undergo training as mentors. These mentors help by providing support to those learners who are experiencing difficulty in coping with high school and all its demands both academically and socially. Peer counsellors can act as socialisers by exhibiting model behaviour (Coetzee 1999:28). According to research the positive influence of such a peer helper system often spills over into the classroom because there is much less aggression and conflict between learners (Oosthuizen 2010:55). Mentoring is a voluntary activity for mentor and mentee. Mentors provide a range of supports, from a listening ear through to practical advice and support with goal setting. Part of the mentor's role is to be a positive role model (Hendry 2009:62).

#### **2.7.1.5 Discipline is a learning process**

Discipline should be regarded as a learning process and not as a process of punishment. This approach requires that educators set clear rules and that the rules indicate the limits in which the child may move. The positive side of discipline forms the basis for dealing with infringements and prevents incidents from being dealt with as unrelated events (Oosthuizen 2010:57). Research by Callender (1997:98) maintains that discipline refers to general beliefs concerning the observance of rules. Discipline should be associated with ideals and principled behaviour and not only with punishment.

#### **2.7.2 Whole school approach to learner behaviour management**

Despite the various methods and techniques applied by schools to maintain an acceptable standard of order and discipline, many schools do not succeed in doing so.

Research<sup>3</sup> conducted during 2003 into organisational culture confirms that one of the most important reasons for a lack of discipline in schools is the absence of a culture of order and discipline in schools rather than inadequate disciplinary methods or techniques applied (Oosthuizen 2010:62).

This therefore means that, should a school be able to succeed in establishing an effective culture of discipline, it can form a firm foundation on which the role-players may continue to build in order to create a healthy disciplined teaching and learning environment.

A school where there is a culture of order and discipline will have the following characteristics:

- Role-player involvement in the management of the school.
- Clear policies and procedures which are easily accessible (*inter alia* as part of the Code of conduct for learners).
- The standard for the disciplinary culture in the school is set by the behaviour and actions of the educators.
- A positive approach to the application of discipline is maintained (Oosthuizen 2010:62).

A whole school approach to behaviour leadership, management and discipline addresses the key aims, practices and plans a school consciously seeks to pursue in their day-to-day activities (Rogers 2007:6). The importance of the whole school approach to the management of discipline is that it allows a school to focus on the various environments and contexts in which children live and develop and which must be dealt with as being part of the discipline solution. The parents and the communities surrounding schools are also seen as part of the whole school approach to discipline management.

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<sup>3</sup> This research was done by Dr Louis Swanepoel towards obtaining his doctorate, entitled: “Bestuurstrategieë vir die verstiging van ’n effektiewe organisasiekultuur in die sekonderê skole vir oorwegend swart leerders” [Management strategies to establish an effective organisational culture in secondary schools primarily for black learners].



Burton (2008b:77) argues for a “Whole school approach” for dealing with violence. In terms of this approach, educators move away from examining individual aspects of the school or context to understanding the school as an entity consisting of, several components, all of which are interdependent. These components include learners, educators and principals, SMTs, school governing bodies and parents or caregivers. According to the SACE School-based Violence Report (SACE 2011:32) all these components interrelate and are found in a wider context, namely the home, community and greater South African society. A whole school approach requires commitment and active participation from all the stakeholders involved (Krige, Pettipher, Squelch & Swart 2000:12). In this study curbing physical abuse depends on the interaction between the above stakeholders to ensure that the school is a safe zone for all learners devoid of incidents of physical abuse among learners.

Three areas that could be included in educating the above stakeholders in the school as a whole are awareness building, efficacy building and skills building (Raskauskas & Modell 2011:62). In this case “awareness building” will include creating an atmosphere among learners that is sensitive to physical abuse where respect and care for each other are observed. “Efficacy building:” is about the recognition of behaviour that might lead to girl on girl violence and the tendency by the relevant stakeholders at school to stop it. “Skills building” includes individual and institutional responses to reducing physical abuse among these learners (Raskauskas & Modell 2011:66). Educating the above stakeholders in the school will lead to learners feeling safe in the school which ensures that a culture of respect and recognition of human dignity is promoted (Venter 2013:245).

Burton and Leoschut (2013:53) highlight, in the National Schools Violence Study, the interdependence between the school, home and neighbourhood environments. The study shows that all of these factors are significant variables in learners’ experience of physical abuse at school. These variables viz. the parent and the community need to be understood by the SMT of the participant school as this forms part of understanding the school as an entity consisting of several components, all of which are interdependent. Schools can enable learners to change their behaviour consciously by giving them the desire and motivation to learn new patterns of behaviour (Rogers 2007:10).

Lester, Cross, Dooley and Shaw (2013:107) affirm that bullying victimisation is associated with loneliness, lack of peer support and not feeling connected to school as well as not feeling safe at school. Therefore the time before the move to secondary school and in the first two years of attending secondary school, seems to be an important period in which to implement a whole school bullying intervention programme to decrease victimisation.

Taylor (2004:57) advocates a pro-active school-wide discipline plan that would be utilised by the entire school to prevent large scale behaviour problems. The following four key factors are crucial for the success of such a pro-active discipline plan, namely the principal's or school leadership's active involvement and support; the display of a collegial spirit by staff members; the development of overall frameworks for the discipline plan or joint school discipline philosophy and; a written, step-by-step plan on how the plan should be implemented (Bowen, Jensen & Clark 2004:208).

Rigby (2002:72) states that a whole school approach ensures that all sectors of the school community are aware of the problems associated with aggressive behaviour and are involved in addressing the problem. A learner's behaviour is shaped by people around her and *vice versa*.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

From the above discussion it is evident that if there is to be a positive culture of teaching and learning in schools, the learning environment would have to be a violence free zone, safe and conducive to learning. The democratic management style is most suited to positive management by the SMT. As for the disciplinary models, the Ginott model allows for positivity in managing discipline issues which lead to self-control. The learner-centred approach applies to the use of discipline proactively and constructively which enhances learners' self-control and emphasises the need to respect others and reiterates that for all action consequences exist.

The focus of the next chapter will be the research design to investigate the role of the SMT in its proactive and constructive management of learners who contravene the school rules and engage in fighting. The methods of data collection as well as ethical considerations will also be explained.

## **CHAPTER 3: Research methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The risk factors that led learners to physical abuse as well as the various leadership theories and management styles were reviewed so that I could make informed recommendations on the management of the phenomenon of physical abuse.

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the research methodology applied in this study, which includes the qualitative research approach, a single case study design, the data collection and analysis methods and ethical considerations. The research methodology was used to review the effectiveness of the SMT in the management of physical abuse among learners with a view to providing guidelines on how to deal with this form of misconduct in a proactive and constructive manner. I used the following data collection methods viz. literature study, document analysis, an individual, semi-structured interview with the school principal, a focus group with members of the SMT and interviews with the learners to gain insight in the management of learners physically abusing one another.

### **3.2 The research methodology**

This section looks at the ontology, epistemology and methodology used to undertake this research. With regards to ontology, positivists believe that there is only one reality that exists and that it is the task of the researcher to discover that reality. They further believe that the world operates in accordance to scientific laws and the world is thus ordered (Mertens 2004: 11). Epistemology concerns the belief that the researcher and the participants of the study were independent of each other. This is further postulated by the positivists. The postpositivists modified this belief by acknowledging that hypothesis, theories and background knowledge possessed by the researcher can influence what is observed (Mertens 2004: 11). In this study, although the researcher acted as insider researcher, a sense of neutrality was observed, thus preventing the researchers' values and biases from influencing the study.

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:55) mention that methodology refers to a design whereby the researcher selects data collection and analysis procedures to investigate a specific research problem. The research design was influenced by the research problem.

The research aim was to evaluate the SMT's management of physical abuse among learners in School A and to make recommendations to ensure more constructive and proactive management.

### **3.2.1 The research approach and design**

This is a qualitative, descriptive and explorative study that is aimed at evaluating the SMT's management of physical abuse among learners. A qualitative study according to Kumar (2014:16), involves only a few participants, the aim being to understand and to describe a phenomenon. Qualitative data is analysed by the use of words and not calculations.

In this research the life world of the participants (learners) was explored in their natural setting (the school) with the view of understanding how the SMT handled the learners who engaged in fisticuffs to resolve their issues. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:397) a descriptive study is aimed at describing and explaining the patterns related to the phenomena by scrutinising the events, beliefs, attitudes and policies that impact on the phenomenon under investigation.

Qualitative research may be used to obtain a more complete or holistic picture of the research topic and is more concerned with "what", "why" and "how" questions than with a "how many" question (Freebody 2003:3; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape 2014:3). By asking these types of questions I would be able to elicit, via the participant's accounts, meaning and experiences of physical abuse incidents in which the participants were involved. Schulze (2003:13) explains that qualitative research is more inductive because it develops meaning from the subject's perspective. Based on these accounts by participants the study delves into the manner in which the SMT of the participant school manages incidents of physical abuse.

I have chosen the single case study design as my qualitative research design. A single case study is a type of research design that involves the intensive study of an individual case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011:33). In this study a single case study design was most appropriate because one phenomenon, namely the management of physical abuse among learners, was investigated. Case studies are the preferred method when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the researcher has little control over events and

when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context (Yin 2009:2). To enhance the trustworthiness of data in case study research, it is essential to use multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin 2009:2). In this study, triangulation was achieved through the use of the following multiple methods of data collection: literature study, an analysis of the written documents, an in-depth interview with the principal, a focus group and interviews with the learner participants. A conversation via e-mail with Dr Lynette Jacobs, an expert in research on incidents of school violence, also assisted in the process of triangulation (Jacobs 2014: personal e-mail conversation).

### **3.2.2 Research population, selecting and sampling participants**

Selection and sampling are used to determine the research population. A population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to certain criteria and to which we intend to generalise the results of the research (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:169). The case study was based on information-rich participants whom McMillan and Schumacher (2010:378) describe as participants that are “knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon the researcher is investigating”.

According to Budhal (2000:59), “selection” focuses on the larger population to be studied, while “sampling” involves a method of choosing a small subset from the larger population. For the purposes of this study, a multicultural girls school in an area south of Durban was chosen as the population. School A is an ex-model C school, and serves a working-class community. School fees are above average and the school is in a good condition with sound infrastructure. The school has many traditions which form an integral part of its daily activities. Discipline is generally good and the school prides itself on good academic results as well as good sporting achievements.

#### **3.2.2.1 Sampling participants**

A “sample” comprises the elements with the most features, representative of the typical attributes of the “population”. The school principal, four members of the SMT and twelve learners from Grades 9-12 were interviewed and the participants that were observed consisted of six offenders and six victims. In this study, purposeful sampling

was used. Purposeful sampling requires that the researcher select specific groups from the population to shed information on the topic of interest (McMillan & Schumacher 2010:167). Thus the chosen participant has a purpose, eg to provide specific data that will enable the researcher to answer one or more of the research sub-questions.

The school principal was selected as she plays an important role in managing school discipline. The SMT has been involved actively in investigations regarding incidents of physical abuse and in the management of such incidents. The learner victims and offenders were chosen for this study as they were involved actively in incidents of physical abuse which had in certain cases led to disciplinary hearings.

The selected participant groups were therefore suited for this research as their valued input assisted me in reaching the aim of this study which was to evaluate the SMT's management of physical abuse among learners in the selected school and to make recommendations to ensure more constructive and proactive management.

### **3.2.3 Data collection methods**

The following data collection methods were used: a literature study, document analysis, an individual interview with the school principal, a focus group with members of the SMT and individual interviews with learner victims and offenders.

#### **3.2.3.1 Literature study**

By means of a literature study, data on law and policy documents was collected to determine the legal prescripts on the management of serious misconduct and physical abuse in particular (objective 1). I have studied the following law documents: The Constitution, the National Education Policy Act, the Schools Act and the Children's Act. A literature study of the circulars and relevant policy issued by the DoBE as well as the Provincial Department of Basic Education was undertaken. The recommendations made (objective 5) on how the management of physical abuse at School A can be improved were benchmarked against the relevant legal prescripts.

#### **3.2.3.2 Document analysis**

Policies are regarded as an essential part of the daily running of a school (Underwood, 2003:217). I thus opted to analyse school policy relevant to the management of learners

who physically abused co-learners. An analysis of the school's Code of Conduct for learners and the school's Discipline Policy was done to determine whether the SMT at the participant school handled physical abuse in a manner that complied with the legal prescripts. The school's Code of conduct for learners was studied to determine whether it addressed physical abuse sufficiently (objectives 1 and 4) (cf. chapter 4, sections 4.2.2-4.2.4). The school's Discipline Policy was also studied to determine how the school managed physical abuse cases (objective 3) and whether that complied with legal prescripts (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3).

### **3.2.3.3 Individual interview with the principal**

In-depth interviews are a powerful method for generating description and interpretation of people's social worlds, and as such are a core qualitative research method. The power of in-depth interviews to illuminate research topics is emphasised by Rubin and Rubin (2012:3):

...When using in-depth qualitative interviewing... researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest. Through such interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own.

The interview strategy according to Ary *et al.* (2006:480) is one of the most widely used methods to gather qualitative data on subjects' opinions, beliefs and feelings about the issue studied in their own words. Briggs and Coleman (2007:208) share a similar definition and view an interview as a preferred tactic to explore people's views and report findings in their own words. The interview technique allows for acquiring information that is personal. The interview means a direct method of collecting information in a one-on-one situation and an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. The interchange is between the participant who has experiences and the researcher who wants to know the experience in order to answer a research question (Ary *et al.* 2006:480).

The school principal was interviewed with regard to the management of the learners who engaged in physical altercations. The interview with the school principal was tape recorded to provide accuracy and detail. The school principal has stated that she has spent her entire teaching career at School A. She is 54 years of age, has been in the education profession for 33 years and has 15 years management experience. She has an

academic as well as a professional qualification. She has intervened in many matters of a disciplinary nature and her input has been invaluable.

An interview guide with open-ended questions was set but questions were modified as the need arose. The school principal was asked the following questions:

1. How do the school's Code of conduct for learners and Disciplinary Policy regulate physical abuse at the school?
2. How common are physical altercations between learners at the school?
3. Why do you think learners engage in physical altercations?
4. How does this type of learner misbehaviour affect the teaching and learning milieu at the school?
5. Do the learners who resort to physical fights have any risk factors in common?
6. How do the SMT handle cases of physical abuse?
7. What role does the DoBE play in preventing incidents of learners engaging in physical fights?
8. What role does the school governing body play in preventing incidents of learners engaging in physical fights?
9. Do you have parental support with regards to learners who have violated the school's Code of conduct for learners by engaging in fisticuffs?
10. If so, explain the role played by the affected parents.
11. What role, if any, does the South African Police Service play at your school?
12. What are the consequences for the learners who engage in physical abuse?
13. Which laws and policies govern the management of physical abuse at schools?
14. Do these laws and policies aid in curbing learner physical abuse?

This interview took place after school hours to make it more convenient for the principal. The principal was willing to answer the questions with regards to the effectiveness of the SMT in its management of incidents of physical abuse among learners (objective 3). The interview was recorded and then transcribed. The result was then analysed by looking for common characteristics, features and notions. Commonalities were recorded. The coding process was used to group together specific criteria, which made the information more accessible.



The following steps were taken during arranging, conducting and writing up the interview. In arranging the interviews the criteria for selection of the applicable participants was determined by the research topic (i.e. there were to be learner victims, learner offenders, the school principal as well as members of the SMT). Once the participant groups were identified, the place of the interviews (School A) was identified, followed by the approximate time of when these interviews were to take place. An interview questionnaire guide was drawn up for the relevant participants in this study. A pilot study was carried out at this stage. Hereafter, the participants were informed of the time and venue for the interviews. Interviews were then carried out and these were tape recorded to ensure the accuracy of transcription. The transcripts were then written out.

#### **3.2.3.4 Focus group**

According to Greef (2011:360) focus groups are an important way of obtaining an understanding of feelings, reactions and problems in a group. All of which are considered important components of this research as I needed to know what the members of the SMT felt with regards to their handling cases of physical abuse among learners, what their reactions were with regards to parental support received, the nature of the problems that they experienced when dealing with learners who engaged in physical abuse. The participants that were selected for this study have the responsibility of managing physical abuse at the selected school. In this study, a focus group was conducted with four members of the SMT. The focus group with the SMT was tape recorded to provide accuracy and detail.

The focus group consisted of three female HoDs and a female Deputy Principal. At the time of the research the SMT of School A was made up female members only. With School A being a girls school, the majority of the teaching staff is made up of female educators. The selection committee on the human resources portfolio of the school governing body have in the past few years opted to select females over males as they feel that it is the female who would best serve the ethos of this girls school.

Of the four participants, three have an academic as well as a professional qualification and one has a professional qualification only. The SMT falls in the age group 45 to 61 and have between 7 and 20 years management experience. Their years of teaching

experience vary from 19 to 40 years. These four members of the SMT have been involved actively in discipline matters concerning physical abuse among learners.

The focus group was arranged after school hours because the SMT members were only available after school hours as they were committed during the work day and could not avail themselves then. Schurink *et al.* (2011:404) state that the researcher should demonstrate awareness that techniques for recording observations, interactions and interviews should not intrude excessively on the on-going flow of daily events.

The focus group discussion was recorded and then transcribed so that references to what was said by the participants would be specific and accurate. An in-depth analysis of the transcripts took place and the findings were then categorised. These categories included reasons for physical abuse, strategies implemented by the SMT to manage the physical abuse and the legal prescripts regulating the management of physical abuse among learners. The following pre-prepared question guide assisted in the focus group with the members of the SMT.

1. How many cases, dealing with physical abuse, do you decide on during a year?
2. Would you say the incidents of physical abuse among the learners are on the increase?
3. How do you differentiate between the different levels of misbehaviour?
4. How does the SMT handle incidents of physical abuse?
5. What kind of parental support does the school receive with regards to learners who have exhibited violent behaviour?
6. Is there adequate policy directive from the DoBE with regards to the procedure to be followed when such abuse occurs?
7. What support does the school get from outside services, like the South African Police Services or any other psychological government services with regard to physical girl on girl attacks at school?
8. Is the school's Code of conduct for learners and disciplinary policy adequate in regulating this type of learner misbehaviour?
9. How does this kind of behaviour affect the ethos of your school?
10. What legal prescripts are you aware of in the management of physical abuse among learners?
11. Which laws and policies govern the management of physical abuse at schools?

12. Do these laws and policies aid in curbing learner physical abuse?

### **3.2.3.5 Individual interviews with learners**

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with offenders and victims at School A in order to find answers to three research sub-questions and fulfil the following three corresponding objectives: Establish why the girls engaged in physical fights (objective 2), determine the contributory factors that led to this type of aggressive behaviour (objective 2), explore how the SMT of School A managed physical abuse among learners and consider the effectiveness of those management practices (objective 3). The focus was to understand these experiences as lived by the learners. The participant learners (offenders and victims) were willing to answer the questions and both groups had at some time experienced aggressive behaviour.

Six learner **offenders** who were involved in incidents of physical abuse in School A were interviewed individually. These learners had first-hand knowledge of incidents of physical abuse as they were themselves perpetrators of such abuse in School A. The learner offenders fell in the age group of 14 to 17. The grades that these learner offenders were in varied from grade 9 to grade 12. The learners who participated did so with written approval from their parents. These learner participants also signed an assent form. With regards to the interviews with the six victims and the six offenders only three were tape recorded and field notes were made of the other nine learners' interview responses because the parents of these learners requested that the interviews not be recorded. The field notes and taped recordings were then transcribed and analysed.

An interview guide was used and the participant learners who were offenders were asked the following questions:

1. Tell me about the instance or instances where you have been accused of physically abusing another learner.
2. How were you disciplined for physically abusing another learner?
3. Did the manner in which you were disciplined discourage you from physically abusing another learner thereafter and if not why not?

4. I gave the learners a list of factors which place learners at the risk of accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a disagreement and ask them to place the factors in order from the one that she regards as most applicable to her personally to the factor least applicable to her. Thereafter I used that placement to probe further.

Below is a list of factors that are usually regarded as factors which place learners at the risk of accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a disagreement. Please place the factors in order from the one that you regard as most applicable to you personally to the factor least applicable to you:

- Violence and physical abuse at home
  - Violence and physical abuse in the community
  - Peer group pressure (Using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove)
  - The need for power and popularity
  - Competition among learners
  - A low self-esteem
  - Violence exhibited as acceptable in the media
  - A lack of support services for misbehaviours at schools
  - Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks
5. Do you think the SMT is effective in the manner in which it handles learners who have engaged in physical altercations?
  6. In your opinion, what could the SMT do to discourage learners from engaging in physical altercations at school?
  7. What was your parents' response to you being in a fight?
  8. What are the steps that you will take to help avoid the occurrence of an aggressive dispute in the future?
  9. What could the school do to promote non-violent learner behaviour?
  10. Do you think that the school's Code of conduct for learners deals with girls who physically attack another learner effectively?

Six learner **victims** who were involved in incidents of physical abuse in School A were interviewed individually. The learner victims varied from Grades 9 to 12 and fell in the age group 14 to 17.

These learners were information-rich because of their involvement in incidents of physical abuse as they were themselves victims of such abuse in School A.

The participant learners who were victims of physical abuse were asked the following questions:

1. What would you say are the main reasons for girls engaging in physical abuse?
2. How have the incident(s) of physical abuse affected you?
3. How did the SMT deal with your physical abuse?
4. Do you think the school's Discipline Policy is successful in minimising incidents of girls fighting at your school?
5. When you were attacked, what was the reaction of your peers? For example, did anybody help you?
6. Did you receive counselling or was counselling offered to you after the incident? If you received counselling, did it help you?

On concluding the individual interviews with the learner participants a discussion on the trustworthiness of the research followed.

### **3.3 Trustworthiness of the research**

Babbie (2007:146) states that the trustworthiness of research results refers to their validity, and allows the readers of the research to believe what the researcher has reported. Salkind (2006:113) refers to truthfulness, accuracy, authenticity, genuineness and soundness of a research result. Schulze (2003:56) confirms that when more than one method of data collection is used, the trustworthiness of the collected data is improved. In this the study data collection method triangulation (e.g. interviews, a focus group and document analysis) was used to enhance the trustworthiness of this research.

Schulze (2003:60) further explains that the researcher has to guard against bias. My experience both as a member of the SMT as well as an interviewer was indispensable in helping me to guard against being subjective and biased. I ensured that the participants gave information freely and in their own words without any coercion from my side. The information was recorded objectively. Schurink *et al.* (2011:419) emphasised the following measures in order to ensure trustworthiness viz. credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

### **3.3.1 Credibility**

According to Schurink *et al.* (2011:419) credibility is the alternative to internal validity in quantitative research. For research to be credible, it has to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in a manner that ensures accurate identification and description of the subject. All interview sessions and focus group discussions were recorded to ensure accuracy and validity of the acquired information.

Strauss and Myburgh (2002:57) state that credibility refers to accountability for the entire research investigation, and includes action in preparation for the field research, the authority of the researcher, keeping a reflective journal as well as the participants' control of the data. I kept a reflective journal in which notes and other daily occurrences related to my research were recorded.

In this study, triangulation was achieved through the use of the following multiple methods of data collection, namely in-depth interviews, a focus group, a document analysis and literature study. Triangulation in this study was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject has been identified and described accurately and thus ensured the credibility of this study.

### **3.3.2 Transferability**

Schurink *et al.* (2011:420) state that with transferability the researcher asks whether the findings of the research can be transferred from a specific situation or case to another. Knowledge generated through qualitative methods can still transfer and be useful in other settings, populations, or circumstances (Tracy 2010:845). In qualitative research this means transferring the “generalisation” of the findings from the sample to the research population (Babbie & Mouton 2012:277), in this case, School A's population. The selection of information-rich participants and the use of purposeful sampling ensure transferability (Tiwani 2010:90).

Another measure to ensure transferability is the use of a “thick description” which specifies many details, conceptual structures and meanings as opposed to just a factual account without any interpretation (Geertz 2012:1). Therefore, I had to handpick the learner participants who were either offenders or victims who would be most able to give applicable information about the research topic carefully. They were able to

divulge this information by relating their personal experience of physical abuse at School A. The principal receives all policy documents at school and was able to shed light on the following research sub-question: What are the legal prescripts that regulate the management of physical abuse among learners and whether the management practices are effective and in line with legal prescripts for managing physical abuse? The legal prescripts could provide a high degree of congruence between the research context and other public schools which make the findings inferential “generalizable” or transferable (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton & Ormston 2014:347).

The SMT could provide data on the following research sub-questions: What were the contributory factors that prompted girls to fight with each other physically and the manner of management of such abuse by the SMT?

### **3.3.3 Dependability**

In considering the dependability of my research I asked whether the research process was logical, well documented and audited. Participants (principal and learners) were each given a copy of their transcribed interviews and the members of the SMT the transcript of the focus group discussions so that they could confirm the accuracy thereof. They were also allowed to give their views on the interpretations of the interview and focus group respectively. The reports were accepted as it was with no changes being made. Babbie and Mouton (2012:276-277) refer to this as “member checking” which allows me as researcher to go back to the participants in order to verify authenticity of information. This strategy increase data dependability as participating learners (offenders and victims), members of the SMT and the school principal were in a position to either confirm or disapprove the interpretations made. I made every attempt to remain objective and not to let my position as insider researcher influence the interpretations of the responses, which helped reiterate the dependability of the interpretations.

Dependability is the alternative to reliability in quantitative research, in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study as well as changes in the design created by an increasingly refined understanding of the setting (Schurink *et al.* 2011:420). According to Yin (in Creswell 2009:190) qualitative researchers need to document as many of the steps of the procedures as

possible. Transcripts of the audio tapes from the disciplinary hearings were analysed, the interviews with the school principal and learners and focus group with the members of the SMT were also recorded to ensure the accurate transcription of these interviews.

According to Merriam (in Mtsweni 2008:77) a researcher has to present an audit trail which includes the decisions and themes arrived at. In this research the original data was kept safe for an audit trail. For the purpose of this study such an audit trail was accomplished as follows:

- Written request for permission from the Head of Department: Basic Education: KwaZulu-Natal to conduct research (see Appendix 1)
- Written permission from the Head of Department: Basic Education: KwaZulu-Natal (see Appendix 2)
- Written request for permission from the principal of the participant school to conduct research (see Appendix 3)
- Written permission from the principal of the participant school to conduct research (see Appendix 4)
- Letter requesting participation and consent from the principal (Appendix 5)
- Letter requesting participation and consent from SMT members and confidentiality disclaimer (Appendix 7)
- Letter requesting learner participation and consent from parents of underage learners (Appendix 9)
- Letter requesting learner participation and assent from underage learners (Appendix 11)
- Letter requesting assistance and support from the counsellor at the participant school (see Appendix 13)
- Consent from the counsellor (Appendix 14).
- A letter was also sent to the Disciplinary Committee requesting permission from them to have access to six recorded disciplinary hearings dealing with physical abuse cases (see Appendix 15).
- Participants signed confidentiality disclaimer (Appendix 16)
- I was given permission by the Research Ethics Clearance Committee of the College of Education (Unisa) (see Appendix 17).



- Copies of interview transcripts with the school principal, the learner offenders, learner victims and a focus group with members of the SMT were also made available and attached to this report.
- Expert guidance was also given by my university professor who has immense experience in mentoring qualitative research projects.

### **3.3.4 Confirmability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (in Schurink *et al.* 2011:421), the researcher has to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another study. This can be done by looking at the data carefully, and establishing whether it does help to confirm the general findings, and may lead to the same implications. As already mentioned, multiple data collection methods (literature study, document analysis, individual, semi-structured interview with the school principal, a focus group with members of the SMT and interviews with the learners) were used in this study to eliminate any researcher bias, and therefore ensured that the findings were reliable. Strauss and Myburgh (2002:58) state that confirmability is a measure used to prevent researcher bias. Similar studies at the participant school would be able to confirm results attained from this study.

### **3.4 Qualitative data analysis**

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of the data collected. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving further into understanding, representing and interpreting the data (Creswell 2014:183). The idea of analysis implies some kind of transformation. A collection of qualitative data is processed via analytic procedures, into a clear, understandable, insightful, trustworthy and even original analysis (Gibbs 2007:1). I constantly reflected on the data received, organised it, and tried to discover emerging patterns. Babbie (2007:378) looks at qualitative analysis as the non-numeric examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. This is also applicable to the other data collection methods used in this study.

Schurink *et al.* (2011:403) contend that data analysis can be conducted according to specific steps. These steps, which serve as a guideline to the process of qualitative data analysis, include preparing and organising the data, reducing the data and visualising, representing and displaying the data.

### **3.4.1 Preparing and organising the data**

The process of preparing and organising the data consists of planning for the recording of data, data collection and preliminary analyses, managing the data and reading and writing memos (notes).

*Planning for the recording of data:* Schurink *et al.* (2011:404) contend that, before data collection commences, researchers should plan how they will ensure that data is recorded in a systematic and thorough manner. The fieldwork plan should be appropriate to the setting and the research participants, and facilitate analysis. Before data collection commenced, I used colour-coding of notes for data analysis and for planning further data collection and for writing my final conclusions. With qualitative research the researcher aims at capturing, portraying and explaining the social worlds of those under study (Spencer *et al.* 2014:279).

*Data collection and preliminary analyses:* Data recording strategies that were used had to fit the setting and the research participants' sensitivities, and these were only used with their consent. Flick (in Schurink *et al.* 2011:404) warns that researchers should take care to limit recordings to what is absolutely necessary for the research question. Schurink *et al.* (2011:405) contend that data analysis in qualitative research necessitates a twofold approach. The first involves data analysis in the field during data collection while the second involves data analysis away from the field following a period of data collection. This second part, known as the office approach, may be conducted between visits to the field, prior to, as well as after the completion of data collection. Generally the office approach focuses more on the pragmatics: "... the sorting, retrieving, indexing and handling of qualitative data" (Gibbs 2007:1-2). I used triangulation by following both the field and office approach when conducting data analysis during data collection in order to ensure that this study was trustworthy.

*Managing the data:* Here data is organised into file folders, index cards or computer files, and ultimately converted to appropriate text units such as words or sentences, and into the entire story, for analysis either by hand or computer (Schurink *et al.* 2011:408). Strauss and Myburgh (2002:17) explain that in managing the data, the data analyses produces themes, categories and sub-categories which are supported by direct quotations from the participants, which are then verified against existing literature, and the final results are contextualised. Schulze (2003:56) reiterates that data collection needs to be continued until the point of saturation is reached, i.e. no new information on the research topic is forthcoming. Any method of managing data, according to Schurink *et al.* (2011:408) has to enable the researcher to organise the data and assist him/her to retrieve and manipulate it more easily.

*Reading and writing memos:* This refers to reading through the data in order to be more familiar with it, as well as to writing memos in the margins of field notes in short phrases, ideas or key concepts that occur to the reader (Schurink *et al.* 2011:409). In reading through the data I was able to edit minor issues to ensure the field notes were more reliable and manageable.

### **3.4.2 Reducing the data**

In this step the following three processes take place, namely generating categories and coding the data, testing the emergent understandings and searching for alternative explanations and interpreting and developing typologies.

*Generating categories and coding the data:* Bogdan and Biklen (2007:173) state that categorisation and coding can be regarded as two distinct steps, namely mechanical data reduction and analytical categorisation of data into themes that reflect the hard work of reducing mountains of raw data into manageable piles. The report of the results was presented in a descriptive form, supported by direct quotations from the raw data. This means that in this study, there were verbatim accounts of conversation, transcripts and direct quotations which were deemed important data as they indicated the thought process of the participants. I followed the process suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007:173) to reduce the data I have collected by searching through my data for regularities and patterns and then identifying coding categories by writing down words and phrases that represent my topic of study.

These coding categories provided a means of sorting the descriptive data that was collected so that the relevant material could be used.

*Testing the emergent understandings and searching for alternative explanations:* Before coding is undertaken which leads to the development of categories and themes, Kreuger and Neuman (2006:452) suggest that important aspects that are needed for analysis but not in the data should be included. This entails a search through the data during which one challenges the understanding, searches for negative instances of the patterns and incorporates these into larger constructs if necessary. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:476), “pattern seeking” entails examining the data in as many ways as possible. Researchers try to understand the complex links between the various aspects of people’s mental processes. They determine how well the data illuminates the research problem and which data are central to the story that is unfolding about the selected phenomenon.

*Interpreting and developing typologies:* Interpretation involves making sense of the data (Schurink *et al.* 2011:416). Flick (in Schurink *et al.* 2011:416) mentions that although interpretation is at the core of qualitative data analysis, its importance is seen differently in the various approaches or strategies. To accomplish this phase of the research the data collected was analysed with a view to identifying topics, themes and categories.

The focus group discussions with the members of the SMT were recorded to provide the necessary accuracy required for the research. After the focus groups, the recordings were played back immediately and transcribed. The individual interviews with the participant learners and the principal was also recorded and then played back and transcribed. I also made field notes of the observations during the interviews to assist with the analysis and to gain a better understanding of the participants and their reactions towards each other.

Via a process of coding in various colours, the transcriptions of the focus groups and individual interviews were analysed carefully in order to identify the important facts. These facts were then divided into categories to make management of data easier. This enabled me to identify the legal prescripts for managing physical abuse in schools, to determine the factors that prompt girls to physically fight with each other, to explore how the SMT of the participant school managed physical abuse among learners and to

consider the effectiveness of these management practices and to determine whether these measures comply with the legal prescripts for managing physical abuse. The field notes were used to substantiate elaborate on and corroborate the findings.

Developing typologies or systems for categorising things or concepts is a very useful aid when making sense of qualitative materials. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998:144) contend that by developing typologies, one begins to make conceptual linkages between seemingly different phenomena. A typology is a conceptual framework, in which occurrences are categorised according to their common characteristics (Schurink *et al.* 2011:416). At this point I tried to elicit an underlying sense of meaning in the data.

### **3.4.3 Visualising, representing and displaying the data**

In this step the following final phase takes place, namely, *presenting the data*. Babbie (2007:389) refers to this process as “concept mapping”. This relates to the presentation of the data in the text, in terms of the themes or categories in the study (Schurink *et al.* 2011:419). In this study, after completing phase one, which was the collection of data from the members of the SMT as well as the participant learners, regarding their experiences in relation to girls engaging in physical abuse, I continued with phase two of the research. This included the exposition of guidelines on the effective involvement of the SMT in managing physical abuse among learners based on the research results, drawing of conclusions, making recommendations and pointing out possible limitations of the investigation.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

Responses were kept confidential and this promise was communicated to the participants at the beginning of the research. This was to protect the privacy of the participants and to avoid them being labelled by other learners and to protect their self-esteem and their levels of confidence. All the necessary precautionary measures such as taking into account ethical considerations such as avoidance of harm to the participants, gaining the informed consent of the participants and respecting the confidentiality of the participants were taken to ensure that all the participants decided for themselves the extent to which their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours would be exposed.

**TABLE 3.1: Summary table: Obtaining ethical clearance**

Sample/ Participants	Process to obtain permission and consent	Letter requesting permission/ participation/ consent/ assent	Informed consent letter	Data collection instruments
<b>DoBE: KwaZulu- Natal  Principal</b>	Request and obtain permission from:  • DoBE  • Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official form for requesting permission from the Head of Department (DoBE: KwaZulu-Natal) <i>Appendix 1</i></li> <li>• Letter requesting permission from the principal <i>Appendix 3</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DoBE: KwaZulu-Natal permission letter <i>Appendix 2</i></li> <li>• Permission letter from principal <i>Appendix 4</i></li> </ul>	Permission requested to do interview with principal, a focus group with SMT members, individual interviews with participant learners and an analysis of relevant documents (School A's Code of conduct for learners, Discipline Policy of School A, reports and audio recordings of disciplinary hearings dealing with physical abuse cases).
Principal	Request participation and consent from the principal	Letter requesting participation and consent from the principal <i>Appendix 5</i>	Consent letter from principal: <i>Appendix 6</i>	Interview guide for the principal (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.3)
4 SMT members	Request participation and consent from SMT members	Letter requesting participation and consent from SMT members <i>Appendix 7</i>	Consent letter from SMT members: <i>Appendix 8</i> will be securely held on file and available on request to examiners and the REC	SMT focus group guide (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.4)

**TABLE 1: Summary table: Obtaining ethical clearance (continued)**

Sample/ Participants	Process to obtain permission and consent	Letter requesting permission/ participation/ consent/ assent	Informed consent letter	Data collection instruments
Members of Disciplinary Committee	Requesting participation and consent from the  Principal (see above) and members of the Disciplinary Committee	Letter requesting permission from the Disciplinary Committee to observe disciplinary hearings dealing with physical abuse cases <i>Appendix 8</i>	Consent letter from Disciplinary Committee members to be held securely on file and available on request to examiners and the REC	Disciplinary Committee members were asked to allow access to recorded cases of disciplinary hearings dealing with physical abuse cases. Field notes made during the interviews will be kept securely on file and be available on request to examiners and the REC
12 Learners  • 6 victims  • 6 offenders	Underage learners – requesting participation and consent from parents/guardians and participation and assent from learners <i>Appendix 9</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter requesting learner participation and consent from parents of underage learners <i>Appendix 9</i></li> <li>• Letter requesting participation and assent from underage learners. <i>Appendix 11</i></li> </ul>	Consent letters from parents <i>Appendix 10</i> and assent letters of underage learners <i>Appendix 12</i> will be held securely on file and be available to examiners and REC on request	Learners were asked to assent to individual interviews. Interview guide for learner victims: (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.5)  Interview guide for learner offenders: (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.5)
School Counsellor	Requesting participation and consent from the school counsellor	Letter requesting participation of the school counsellor. <i>Appendix 13</i>	Consent letter from School Counsellor to be held securely on file and available on request to examiners and the REC. <i>Appendix 14</i>	No data collection from the counsellor. Interview prospective learner participants and determine their readiness.

I obtained written permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Office Manager (Appendix 5) and thereafter written permission from the principal of the participant school (Appendix 7). I sent an information letter to the District Office Manager and the Principal of the participant school briefly detailing the nature of the study and its intended impact on governance of discipline at school (Appendix 1 and Appendix 3).

I always observed ethical considerations and eliminated any element of bias in this study (cf. chapter 3, section 3.5). These included avoidance of harm with respect to the participants, voluntary participation of the participants as all of the participants were interviewed by the school counsellor and all twelve of the learner participants were found to be suitable and enthusiastic to be part of the study, obtaining their informed consent, guarding against the deception of the participants, avoiding violating their privacy, anonymity, confidentiality and ensuring the competence of the researcher. These ethical measures are discussed briefly below.

### **3.5.1 Avoidance of harm**

The fundamental ethical rule of social research is that it must bring no harm to participants. Learners can be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner (Babbie 2007:27). The rights and dignity of the participants were respected by explaining to them that their participation was voluntary and that they could refuse or withdraw from taking part at any time. All participants were assured of complete confidentiality with their names remaining anonymous. The researcher has an ethical obligation to protect participants within all possible reasonable limits from any form of physical discomfort that may emerge from the research project (Creswell 2014:64). Participants should be thoroughly informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation (see the letters requesting participation and consent Appendixes 9 and 11). Such information offers the participants the opportunity to withdraw from the investigation if they so wish (Strydom 2011:115). In this study participants were informed about the nature of the research and they were at liberty to withdraw from the study, if they desired to due to personal reasons.



### **3.5.2 Voluntary participation**

Participants should at all times be participating voluntarily and without coercion (Rubin & Babbie 2005:71). In this study all participants were made aware of the topic of research and that their participation was purely voluntary.

### **3.5.3 Informed consent and assent**

Strydom (2011:117) maintains that informed consent and informed assent in the case of minor participants imply that everything about the study, including the expected duration of the participants' involvement, procedures that are to be followed during the investigation, and the advantages and disadvantages of the research and dangers to which the participant may be exposed should be revealed to the participants. I adhered to the above-mentioned requirements. The purpose, advantages and disadvantages of the study was explained to the learners in a manner that they understood and their informed assent was gained (cf. Appendix 11). I informed the participants that they were selected as they met the criteria set for the research study (cf. Appendix 9).

### **3.5.4 Deception of the participants**

Deception refers to misleading participants, deliberately misrepresenting facts or withholding information from participants (Struwig & Stead 2001:69). Strydom (2011:118) is of the opinion that no deception whatsoever should be inflicted on the participants. In this study the participants were informed about the nature of the study as well as the methods that would be employed, namely individual interviews with the learners as well as the principal, a focus group discussion with the members of the SMT, and document analysis (see Appendix 5, 7, 11).

### **3.5.5 Violation of privacy, anonymity, confidentiality**

Every individual has the right to privacy and it is his or her right to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed (Strydom 2011:119). Participants should be informed of all possible limits to this principle as well as the steps to be taken to ensure that no breach of this principle will take place (Morris 2006:246).

Since I acted as an insider researcher at the school where I teach people who know me and my affiliation to the school may be able to identify the school.

I brought this to the attention of the school. This made it even more important that none of the learner participants were identifiable. Responses were kept confidential and this promise was communicated to the participants at the beginning of the research. This was to protect the privacy of the participants and to avoid them being labelled by other learners, and to protect their self-esteem and their levels of confidence. All the necessary precautionary measures such as taking into account ethical considerations, avoidance of harm to the participants, gaining the informed consent of the participants and respecting the confidentiality of the participants were observed to ensure that all the participants decided for themselves the extent to which their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours may be exposed.

### **3.5.6 Competence of the researcher**

Researchers are ethically obliged to ensure that they are competent, honest and adequately skilled to undertake the investigation (Walliman 2006:148). I have completed a B Admin Degree and a Higher Diploma in Education as well as BEd (Honours). I have been teaching for the past 23 years and currently hold a Head of Department post at the participant school in an area South of Durban. I have studied literature on the research methodology as well as the topics related to the study extensively. I have attended the following workshops to empower myself further viz. “School Discipline - Where did we go wrong?” on 20 May 2014, Deputies and Heads of Departments Conference entitled “We have the Power” on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> September 2014, “Discipline workshop” held by Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysersunie on 9 September 2014, “Managing Bullying and Cyber-bullying” in October 2013, “Learner discipline in South African Schools” in March 2015, “Dealing with difficult parents” on the 26 March 2015 and “The development of a strategy & the implementation of policy for the prevention & management of bullying and peer victimisation,” held by the Education Safety & Governance Association on 10 June 2015. This study was also supervised by a university expert experienced in qualitative research projects.

### **3.5.7 Plagiarism**

I took great care not to plagiarise. My dissertation was run through turn-it-in programme and I received a positive report (cf. Appendix 18). The following resources were used viz. web pages, books, interviews, articles and other dissertations and extreme caution was undertaken not to plagiarise.

## **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter I explained the use of a qualitative approach to research and the research design and methods were presented. This was achieved through reference to data collection methods and data processing, sampling, data analysis and validity. A purposeful sample of participants enabled me to obtain in-depth information on the research topic. Once the participants were identified, measures to ensure the trustworthiness of the research and ethical measures were explained to them clearly. It was also explained in this chapter that literature study, document analysis, individual, semi-structured interview with the school principal, a focus group with members of the SMT and interviews with the learners were used to collect data. In the next chapter the qualitative data collected is presented and interpreted.

## **CHAPTER 4: Data analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In chapter 3 the design and methodology of the study were presented. This was done by addressing aspects such as sampling, data collection and data processing, trustworthiness, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

In this chapter the focus is on the data collected. The data is presented according to the objectives of the study (cf. chapter 1, section 1.5.2).

### **4.2 Literature study on legal prescripts for managing physical abuse in schools**

Objective 1: To ascertain the legal prescripts for managing physical abuse in schools. Three main themes that impact on how the SMT will manage physical abuse among learners came to the fore from the literature study. Firstly, it became evident that the law mandates that schools should promote and observe the learners' human rights. Secondly, there are the law and policy that regulate school safety and the SMT's obligation to ensure a safe school and to act proactively to prevent incidents where learners opt for physical abuse to resolve disputes. Thirdly, there are the law and policy that regulate how schools should manage incidents where physical abuse has occurred.

#### **4.2.1 Law mandate for the observance and promotion of learners' human rights**

According to section 184 (1) (a), (b) of the Constitution (RSA 1996b), the functions of the South African Human Rights Commission must include promoting respect for human rights and a culture of human rights, as well as the protection, development and attainment of human rights. Various Acts emphasise the need for school management to observe and promote learners' human rights. The National Education Policy Act (RSA 1996c, s 3(n)) indicates that the Minister of Basic Education has to determine the national education policy for the control and discipline of learners at education institutions. In terms of section 4(b) this policy should be directed towards enabling the education system to contribute to the full personal development of each learner, and to

the moral, social, cultural, political and economic development of the nation at large, including the advancement of democracy, human rights and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

Similarly, the Children's Act (RSA 2005, s 6(2) (a), (b), (c)) mandates that all proceedings, actions and decisions in a matter concerning a child must -

- Respect, protect, promote and fulfil the child's rights set out in the Bill of Rights;
- Respect the child's inherent dignity;
- Treat the child fairly and equitably;

To give effect to the law mandate contained in the National Education Policy Act, the *Guidelines for the consideration of Governing Bodies in adopting a Code of conduct for Learners* (hereafter Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners) demands that schools' codes of conduct reflect constitutional democracy and human rights, set standards of moral behaviour for learners and equip them to be responsible citizens (RSA 1998, item 1.3; 1.4). Thus, it may be argued that the governing body is mandated to adopt a Code of conduct for learners that will enable educators to educate and discipline learners in a way that promotes respect for human rights. This, in turn, makes positive discipline mandatory, because positive discipline implies that discipline be grounded in human rights (Coetzee 2010:480); in fact, this is the main aim of positive discipline.

The need for schools' ethos to be based on the following rights is thus obvious: children's rights (section 28 of the Constitution) and the right to have their best interests be regarded as paramount, the right to have one's dignity respected and protected, the right to life, the right to freedom and security of the person which includes the right to bodily and psychological integrity, and the right to a basic education. Schools' ethos must be visible in the values and attitudes of the whole school population. As Tiwani (2010:54) aptly argues, the values and attitudes of the principal, the educators and the learners must be based on the Bill of Rights.

#### **4.2.2 Law and policy on school safety**

The protection of children against “abuse, neglect, maltreatment and degradation” is guaranteed in section 28(1) (d) of the Constitution which according to Sloth-Nielsen (2013:7-11) makes the protection of children in its broadest sense a constitutional matter. It is of paramount importance that in ensuring the safety of the learners, the learners’ best interests be placed first. Section 28(2) of the Constitution (RSA 1996b) requires that the best interests of a child and also all children be regarded as of paramount importance in every matter concerning a child or children (RSA 1996b). One can argue that it will always be in the best interest of a child to be safe and free from violence. It is imperative that schools act in the best interests of the children at all times and regard the safety and well-being of all children of paramount importance.

The National Education Policy Act (RSA 1996c) further interlinks with the Schools Act with regards to the positive management of physical abuse at schools. Section 61 of the Schools Act as amended by section 5 of the Education Laws Amendment Act 24 of 2005 (RSA 2005b) empowers the Minister to make regulations to provide for safety measures at public schools. The Regulations for safety measures in public schools (RSA 2001) gives effect to this provision. It provides that:

- No one may carry, store or possess any dangerous objects on the school premises,
- No one may enter the school premises under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs,
- The principal may take steps to safeguard the school premises and the people on them, and may forbid anyone from entering the school premises without permission (RSA 2001, s 5(1)-(2)).
- Visible policing should be present at all sporting or cultural events at school, and parents should be encouraged to participate in community policing forums (RSA 2001, s 9(3)-(4)).
- Public schools should have action plans to counter threats of violence, and to ensure the safety of all learners, staff members and parents (RSA 2001, s 9(5)-(6)).

Section 8(5) of the Schools Act (RSA 1996a) states that provincial Ministers of Education are required to determine the following disciplinary matters, namely learner behaviour that constitutes serious misconduct, disciplinary proceedings to be followed in cases of serious ‘misconduct’, and the provision of due process in order to safeguard the interests of learners and other parties involved in disciplinary proceedings at public schools. The onus rests with the school to inform the DoBE of instances of serious conduct and the due process that was undertaken by the school.

#### **4.2.3 Law and policy on school discipline**

Section 12(1) (a) to (e) of the Constitution (RSA 1996b) guarantees the right to freedom and security to everyone. This right includes the “right not to be deprived of freedom arbitrarily or without just cause, to be free from all forms of violence, not to be tortured, and not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way”. Stemming from this clause corporal punishment has been abolished in South African schools.

Tiwani (2010:54) states that legislation and school discipline policies regulate the behaviour of learners and provide educators with environments conducive to teaching and learning. Policy on discipline must be directed towards advancing and protecting fundamental human rights (RSA 1996b, s 4(a)).

The data collected from the Children’s Act is presented below and is relevant to the SMT who have to deal with victims and offenders of physical abuse because these managers need to be aware of the rights of the children and therefore the limitations in which they have to work. In accordance with Section 2 of the Children’s Act (RSA 2005, ss 2(b)(iii), (iv); 2(d), 2(f) & 2(i)) the objectives of this Act are to give effect to the following constitutional rights of children:

- “Protection from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation”;
- “That the best interests of a child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child”;
- “To make provision for structures, services and means for promoting and monitoring the sound physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional and social development of children”;
- “To protect children from discrimination, exploitation and any other physical, emotional or moral harm or hazards”;
- “Generally, to promote the protection, development and well-being of children”.

With regards to Chapter 2 Section 6, subsection (4) (a), (b), in any matter concerning a child

- An approach which is conducive to conciliation and problem-solving should be followed and a confrontational approach should be avoided; and
- A delay in any action or decision to be taken must be avoided as far as possible.

Chapter 2 section 7, subsection (1)(i),(ii), states in order to be acting on behalf of the best interest of a child the following factors need to be taken into consideration where relevant to protect the child from any physical or psychological harm that may be caused by:

- Subjecting the child to violence or exploitation or other harmful behaviour.

It is imperative that the SMT of the participant school acts in the best interests of a child at all times, regarding the safety and well-being of the child. The SMT has to act in a proactive and constructive manner when dealing with learners who have engaged in physical abuse, which is an approach conducive to conciliation and problem-solving. The SMT of the participant school has to act within the ambit of this Act, thus ensuring that the rights of the child are not infringed on.

#### **4.2.4 Law and policy on schools' Codes of conduct for learners**

Section 8(1) of the Schools Act (RSA 1996a) empowers the governing body of a school to maintain discipline in a school, *inter alia*, by adopting a Code of conduct for learners which should be aimed at establishing a disciplined and purposeful environment in order to facilitate effective teaching and learning in schools (RSA 1996a, s 8(1)). Such a code must prescribe behaviour that respects the rights of learners. The Code of conduct for learners has to list the things learners may not do, or have to do, as well as the communication channels, grievance procedures, and due process in conducting a fair hearing (RSA 1998, item 3.4). The school's Code of conduct for learners must be in line with the Constitution and the Schools Act and classroom rules must be in line with the school's Code of conduct for learners. This Code of conduct for learners has to be displayed at the school, and copies of it have to be made available to every learner (RSA 1998, item 1.5).



The classroom discipline plans should aim at promoting positive discipline, self-discipline, and also exemplary conduct, as learners learn by observation and experience. Meanwhile, the Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998, item 7.2), are quite clear on the disciplinary process, namely “that learners should be protected from abuse by adults and other learners”, it must be expeditious, fast, just, corrective, consistent and educative, and where possible, the parents should be informed of disciplinary matters involving their children and be involved in the correction of their behaviour.

#### **4.2.5 Code of conduct for learners and corrective measures**

The relevance of the following guidelines to the management of physical abuse in schools ensures that the SMT of the participant school acts in terms of the Code of conduct for learners. In terms of item 7.6 in the Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998), corrective measures or disciplinary action should be commensurate with the offence or infraction concerned, and must be consistent. Furthermore, corrective measures may become more severe with subsequent repeated infractions, and suspension or expulsion may follow. Regarding minor infractions, the guidelines suggest the following corrective measures: verbal or written warnings, supervised school-work that will contribute to the learners’ progress at school, or the improvement of the school environment, the performance of tasks to assist the offended person, agreed on and affordable compensation, the replacement of damaged property, and the suspension from specified school activities, such as sport or cultural activities. It further provides that a learner can only be suspended from attending a public school for disciplinary reasons as a correctional measure for a period of no longer than a week and as a precautionary measure or as a sanction for serious misconduct.

In accordance to item 7.7 in the Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998), in cases where a learner cannot adjust to the school and where his/her behaviour is objectionable in that it violates the rights of others, he/she will be referred to the principal. Through consultation with his/her educators, and the site of learning based team in consultation with the parents or guardians every effort should be made to assist him/her to adjust. This will include referral to the education support services for treatment. If all these efforts fail, the principal will refer the matter to the governing body, which may make a decision in the best interest of the learner and the other learners at the school. These provisions as stipulated in the Guidelines for a Code of

Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998) assist schools in functioning within the strict parameters of such policy and thus ensuring the fair, consistent, objective and transparent manner in which schools are to handle behaviour issues.

#### **4.2.6 Code of conduct for learners and suspension**

With regards to the suspension of a learner section 9(1) of the Schools Act (RSA 1996a) prescribes the following:

- The governing body may, on reasonable grounds, suspend a learner suspected of serious misconduct as a correctional measure, pending disciplinary proceedings;
- The learner must be given a reasonable opportunity to make representations regarding any precautionary suspension;
- Precautionary suspension may not exceed seven school days, unless a longer period is approved by the provincial head of department;
- Disciplinary proceedings against any learner under precautionary suspension must take place within the seven day suspension period, or any extension thereof approved by the provincial head of department;
- The school may suspend a learner for up to seven school days as a result of serious misconduct;
- If the governing body recommends the expulsion of a learner to the provincial Head of Department, it may extend the suspension for a further period not exceeding fourteen days, pending the decision of the provincial Head of Department on its recommendation.

The Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998, item 7.6) emphasises that the suspension of a learner should only be considered after every effort has been made to correct the learner's behaviour. The above guidelines make it the responsibility of the school, the learners, including the RCL, the educators, the governing body and the parents to address disruptive behaviour occurring at school.

With regards to the management of physical abuse the SMT has to ensure that the rights of the perpetrator as well as the victim of violence are upheld. In order to do this the SMT has to act in the Constitution (RSA 1996b), the Children's Act, the National Education Policy Act (RSA 1996c) and the Schools Act (RSA 1996a) all of which

govern management of learners who have violated the school's Code of conduct for learners.

Discipline and punishment may not amount to torture; in other words, it may not be cruel, inhuman or degrading. In effect, therefore, it may not infringe upon children's Constitutional rights to human dignity and physical integrity (RSA 1996a, ss 10; 12(1)(c), (d), (e)). The National Education Policy Act (RSA 1996b, s (3)(n)) prescribes that policy on school discipline must prohibit the use of corporal punishment and any disciplinary measures that subject a learner to psychological or physical abuse. Furthermore the Schools Act expressly prohibits corporal punishment. The SMT of the participant school had to deal with learners who engaged in fights constantly, and it had to find its own method of eradicating this unacceptable behaviour taking into account that this discipline had to be undertaken in a positive manner whereby the learner's human rights were not infringed upon. This had to be done in conjunction with the school governing body and in the legal framework.

#### **4.2.7 Findings in relation to objective 1**

- Law mandates that schools should promote and observe the learners' human rights. Schools should consider the following law and policy documents to ensure that procedures are just and fair. These include the Constitution, the Schools Act, Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners, Children's Act, National Education Policy Act, and Regulations for safety measures in public schools and circulars and relevant policy issued by the DoBE.
- School A's policies and management are in line with legal prescripts as stipulated by the Bill of Rights, section 12 (1) (c), (d) and (e) of the Constitution, where all learners have the right to be free from all forms of violence and School A's handling of physical abuse cases do not amount to torture, is not degrading, inhumane or cruel. These prescripts are entrenched in School A's Code of conduct for learners which observes and promotes learner rights when dealing deviant learners.
- According to the Schools Act, sections 8 (5) which refers to due process being followed in disciplinary matters whereby the interests of the learner are safeguarded is exhibited in School A's Discipline Policy as well its Code of

conduct for learners. Section 9 (1) (a) of the Schools Act allows that a learner may be suspended from school after a fair hearing for a period not longer than one week as recommended by the school governing body. However at School A the decision to suspend may be taken after an internal hearing not involving members of the school governing body has been concluded (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4). School A follows the prescript of section 9 (1) (b) of the Schools Act which allows that the school governing body may recommend that a learner be expelled from school, pending the final decision by the Head of Department.

- Section 7 of the Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners, explains the due process regarding disciplinary procedures for learners. School A's Discipline Policy as well as the Code of conduct for learners is in compliance with these guidelines in ensuring that disciplinary proceedings are expeditious, fair, just, corrective, consistent and educative.
- Section 2 (b) (iv) of the Children's Act stipulates that the best interests of a child are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. At the participant school, the best interests of the learner are catered for in the expeditious manner in which discipline matters are categorised and dealt with as per the Code of conduct for learners.
- The National Education Policy Act, under section 4 (b) promotes the advancement of democracy, human rights and the peaceful resolution of disputes. School A accedes to the above in the manner in which it handles its disciplinary matters in seeking a remediative, rather than punitive outcome.
- Regulations for safety measures in public schools, section 9 (5), (6) indicates that there should be action plans in place to counter threats of violence, and to ensure the safety of all learners, staff members and parents. The Discipline Policy of School A accommodates for the above safety measures and is therefore in compliance with this prescript.

### **4.3 Factors prompting girls to fight with each other physically**

Objective 2: To investigate the factors that prompt girls to fight with each other physically in general and in School A in particular was dealt with by first doing a literature review on factors that prompt girls to fight with each other physically in general. The factors identified through the literature review were then used to inform

the questions dealing with the factors that prompt learners from School A to physically fight. Below I present the data dealing with the factors that prompt learners from School A to fight physically.

The twelve learners who were interviewed individually have at some stage in their secondary school lives been involved in an incident of physical abuse, either as victims or offenders. The learner participants shared varied reasons as to why they were involved in incidents of physical abuse. A discussion of the aspects that prompt girls to fight with each other physically are as follows: contributing factors to physical abuse, perceptions by the learner offenders on risk factors, findings in relation to objective 2 and the effects of physical abuse on the victims.

### **4.3.1 Contributing factors**

The contributing factors that will be discussed below are family background and poor parenting, boys, social media and revenge, gossiping, name calling and vulgar language, jealousy, dominance and anger, misunderstanding and peer pressure.

#### **4.3.1.1 Family background and poor parenting**

Victim 1 explained that one of the contributory factors to girls engaging in physical abuse could be the type of background the learner comes from. She says “If they come from aggressive or abusive homes ... sometimes they come from aggressive society. At home there could be abusive or alcoholic parents.” Victim 1 explained further that she is an orphan who lives in a children’s home and that she was “taken aback by the manner in which parents deny their child’s misbehaviour”. The principal also alluded to the above by saying that “[m]any learners have not had the life skills of appropriate conflict management taught to them, especially at home.” She feels that poor adult role models shape the learner into becoming aggressive. She further stated that “Poor behaviour is linked to poor or absent parenting. Grandparents or other relatives are unable to teach appropriate interpersonal skills.”

SMT 1 said “The calibres of learners we are now inheriting are poorly behaved or they come from homes where violence is the norm”. Offender 5 stated that “there was not much done at home with regards to my fighting at school”, she was just told to “control her feelings and walk away”. This is indicative of the lack of sound parenting. SMT 4 expresses “What is concerning is that

learners who come from homes where violent behaviour is the norm often exhibit this kind of behaviour at school.”

The above findings reinforce the fact that violent home environments lead to violent learners and the behaviour of parents influence the behaviour of their children as stated by Rigby (2002:153), (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3). All categories of participants in this study were in agreement on this point.

#### **4.3.1.2 Boys, social media and revenge**

Victim 2 and Victim 4 as well as Offender 4 mentioned boys and the effects of social media as a reason for fighting. The school principal also feels that the influence of TV, electronic media and games have added to the reasons for girls engaging in physical abuse. A need for revenge is evident as another reason for prompting physical abuse between the learners as Offender 4 states “It was cattish, girlish behaviour, I know but I wanted revenge.” This ties in with Dreikurs’ disciplinary conceptual model where he speaks of learners exacting revenge and as a result opt for negative (and even violent) behaviour (cf. chapter 2, section 2.6.2.1).

#### **4.3.1.3 Gossiping, name calling and vulgar language**

Victim 3 cites gossiping, name calling and the use of vulgar language as well as “getting involved in stories that do not concern them,” as reasons for girls fighting. Victim 4 also feels gossip is a cause for girls to fight. Offender 2 believes that name calling is a reason for fighting as she states, “I was called a female dog by another learner.” This led to Offender 2 retaliating by hitting the other learner. The principal contended that learners resort to verbal abuse and gossiping, often on social media or to one another and this leads to physical abuse at school when the learners end up confronting each other.

#### **4.3.1.4 Jealousy, dominance and anger**

Victim 4 spoke of the need for “dominance and jealousy” as reasons for girls fighting. Victim 5 stated that girls get into fights because of anger management issues. She says, “The main reason for girls engaging in physical abuse would be that the problem was not solved in the right manner and there was a build-up of anger in the bully.” Victim 6 also alluded to this by saying “Some girls have short tempers and can’t control their anger.” Offender 6 spoke of anger getting the better of her: “The situation quickly escalated and I hit her on the back of her head for disturbing our game.” It is clear by this learner’s reaction that her anger got the better of her and resulted in her hitting the other learner. The principal also observed that sometimes learners are hasty in their actions as they engage in acts of physical abuse without knowing the actual facts of a particular situation. Offender 5 stated that after her altercation at school she was told by her parents “... to just control my feelings and walk away if I happen to get angry by what is said by other people.” This advice given by the parent of the above learner offender reiterates that anger needs to be curbed in order to avoid physical abuse.

#### **4.3.1.5 Misunderstanding and peer pressure**

Offender 5 placed misunderstanding between herself and the victim as her reason for fighting as she explains “... it was a misunderstanding between me and the victim, where she said a comment that I wasn’t so comfortable with and one thing led to another. I was at fault and I admit I shouldn’t have responded to anything that was said but I was young and immature so physically abusing her was my way of responding.”

In addition to misunderstanding between learners leading to physical altercations Offender 3 gives her reason for fighting as peer pressure, as she explains “... my friends told me to fight her. Because of pride, I had to prove myself by fighting.” The principal feels that peer pressure also plays a role in why girls tend to fight. In her interview the principal stated that “Learners who are very frustrated and have poor interpersonal relationships resort to physical assault to address their feelings of anger.” In the next section the effects that physical abuse has had on the victims as per their interview discussion was explained.

### 4.3.2 Perceptions by the learner offenders on risk factors

The learner offenders were given nine factors that are usually regarded as factors which place learners at risk of accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a disagreement. The learners had to rate these factors in order from the ones most applicable to them to the ones least applicable to them (Number 1 being most applicable and number 9 being least applicable).

**TABLE 4.1: Responses of learner offenders on risk factors**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>Offender 1</b>	<b>Offender 2</b>	<b>Offender 3</b>	<b>Offender 4</b>	<b>Offender 5</b>	<b>Offender 6</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home	8	1	7	8	4	9
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community	3	3	4	4	9	3
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	1	9	3	7	8	8
4. The need for power and popularity	2	8	1	9	1	7
5. Competition among learners.	9	6	2	6	3	6
6. A low self-esteem.	4	4	8	1	2	5
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	5	7	5	5	7	2
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	7	5	6	3	5	4
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	6	2	9	2	6	1

From the above table it is evident that factor 4, the need for power and popularity seems to be the most common factor for accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a disagreement as two of the six learners rated this factor as number 1.

Factor 9, i.e. Learners struggling to concentrate on set tasks seem to be a fairly popular choice as two of the six offenders have rated this factor as number 2 and Offender 6 has given it a number 1 as a reason for accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a dispute. Peer group pressure has ranked number 1 for Offender 1 and has ranked number 3 for Offender 3.

It is evident from the above table that the nine factors as listed in the table above have different acceptance values for each learner depending on the learner's experiences and circumstances. The responses, however, are quite varied and make it impossible to conclude on a common factor. The result is of course also affected by the small sample



and it would be very interesting to do a quantitative study on these factors. This exercise, however, was valuable in that the learner offenders started to think about why they opt for the use of physical abuse. What comes to light is that all of the above nine factors do play some role in each of the offenders' choices with regards to the factors for accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a disagreement.

The school principal agrees that learners who resort to physical fights have certain risk factors in common. She says that poor or absent parenting is probably the main risk factor as learners do not have the appropriate interpersonal skills taught to them at home. This is an additional factor to the ones discussed in the table above.

#### **4.3.3 Findings in relation to objective 2**

- Poor parenting and the type of family background that the learner comes from has a bearing on promoting aggressive behaviour among learners.
- The influence of TV, electronic media and electronic games has added to the reasons for girls engaging in physical abuse.
- A need for revenge is evident as another reason for prompting physical abuse.
- Gossiping, name calling and the use of vulgar language lead to anger and violent confrontation among learners.
- Jealousy, need for dominance and poor anger management lead to girls fighting.
- Coping skills for dealing with anger is lacking among learners.
- Poor interpersonal relationships among peers lead to misunderstandings and physical altercations.
- The need for power and popularity seems to be the most common factor for accepting physical violence as this need rates highest among learners and it supersedes their need to act in a rational manner.

#### **4.3.4 The effects of physical abuse on the victims**

Though I did not originally envisage investigating the effects of the physical abuse, the pilot study brought to light that learner victims want to voice this and I thus amended my interview guide to include questions on the effects. What follows is the data extracted by means of those questions.

The manner in which physical abuse affected the learners was discussed quite openly by the victims. The effects of physical abuse are linked to some of the factors that cause physical abuse to take place, e.g. low self-esteem and awareness of cyber-bullying are both a cause as well as a resultant effect.

Victim 1 averred that her **self-esteem** was lowered when she was abused by a junior learner. The fact that Victim 1 held a leadership (school prefect) position and was shown this level of disrespect by a fellow learner increased her feelings of self-doubt. She stated: “I started doubting myself as a leader. I questioned my capabilities as a leader.” However, her friends on the prefect team helped her to cope with these feelings and, interesting enough, that brought “the prefect team together, the prefect girls united with this.”

Victim 2 disclosed that she became more aware of cyber bullying as a result of the abuse she endured.

Victim 5 also experienced a **self-realisation**. She averred that her incident of physical abuse did not affect her in any negative way but “it has taught me that solving things physically won’t solve the problem.”

Victim 4 became **aware of the school’s Discipline Policy** after her incident of physical abuse as this policy was being applied to deal with her situation. Victim 6 received the sanction of **withdrawal** of some of her **school privileges** and she interpreted it as “I got demerits and I couldn’t participate in some occasions at school.”

Victim 3 speaks of **physically** having bruises on her body and **emotionally** becoming very weak as she mentioned “It has made me cry and I am usually not my normal self where I don’t interact with others. I would just be in my room crying.” Victim 4 was also affected emotionally as she recalls “It made me feel weak and vulnerable.”

#### **4.3.5 Findings on objectives 2 and 3**

- A low self-esteem among learners as well as a degree of self-realization for some learners that act out violently in anger served no purpose as this did not resolve conflict.
- Victims became aware of the school’s Discipline Policy as it was being applied in their cases.

- Emotional weakness and feelings of vulnerability as learner victims/offenders withdrew from interacting with other learners, as a result of engaging in fights.

To consider School A's policy relevant to the management of physical abuse among learners with regard to its effectiveness and lawfulness (objective 3):

- The Code of conduct for learners was studied and it was found that with it being based on a system of eight core values, learners at School A were expected to behave in a manner which upheld these core values. There were appropriate behaviours attached to these values as indicated in Table 3.

#### **4.4 School A's policy on managing physical abuse**

The data extracted by means of the document analysis of School A's Code of conduct for learners and Discipline Policy is presented in this section. Objective 3 reads: "To consider School A's policy relevant to the management of physical abuse among learners with regard to its effectiveness and lawfulness". As is evident from the Literature study, section 8 of the Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) (cf. chapter 1, section 1.7.1.3) compels school governing bodies of public schools to adopt a Code of conduct for learners, with the aim of establishing a disciplined and purposeful environment where effective teaching and learning can take place.

School A had a fully developed and functioning Code of conduct for learners with a preamble stating the vision, mission and the aims of the school:

- Learner's responsibilities and an undertaking by learners;
- Codes of behaviour;
- School rules to enable effective organisation;
- School rules to ensure the safety of the learners;
- School rules to uphold the shared core values;
- Rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders;
- Disciplinary procedures and contraventions

School A's Code of conduct for learners is based on eight shared core values. Learners at School A are expected to behave in a manner which uphold these core values. Table

3 will reflect the eight core shared values and a list of appropriate behaviours that are attached to these values.

**TABLE 4.2: Eight shared core values and appropriate behaviours**

Core value	Respect	Discipline	Honesty	Education	Pride	Unity in diversity	Democratic principles	Communication
Appropriate behaviour	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect yourself.</li> <li>2. Treat others as you wish to be treated.</li> <li>3. Respect those in authority.</li> <li>4. Respect other's property.</li> <li>5. Respect and use good manners and avoid negative body language.</li> <li>6. Be open-minded; respect other's cultures and beliefs.</li> <li>7. Listen to others and respect confidentiality.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understand, accept and obey school rules, regulations and procedures.</li> <li>2. Obey instructions given by those in authority.</li> <li>3. Accept the consequences when you misbehave.</li> <li>4. Practise self-control by avoiding violent confrontation, verbal and physical.</li> <li>5. Take responsibility for your own behaviour.</li> <li>6. Correct offenders around you in a polite and constructive manner.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be true to yourself and truthful to others at all times.</li> <li>2. Keep promises and honour commitments.</li> <li>3. Behave in a trustworthy way.</li> <li>4. Be loyal and understanding.</li> <li>5. Hand in found items.</li> <li>6. Accept honest opinions.</li> <li>7. Express yourself honestly but tactfully.</li> <li>8. Admit when you are in the wrong.</li> <li>9. Don't make excuses.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take responsibility for your own progress.</li> <li>2. Participate in everything actively.</li> <li>3. Persevere to achieve your goals.</li> <li>4. Communicate ideas and uncertainties.</li> <li>5. Show tolerance towards other learners and educators.</li> <li>6. Behave appropriately in classrooms.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be proud of who you are.</li> <li>2. Protect the good name and image of School A and speak of it with pride.</li> <li>3. Care for uniform and wear it with dignity and present an image of self-confidence.</li> <li>4. Take care of personal hygiene.</li> <li>5. Respect and volunteer to help others.</li> <li>6. Present schoolwork done to the best of your ability.</li> <li>7. Keep the environment neat so that we can all have pride in it.</li> <li>8. Participate in school activities and functions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect others despite differing cultures and beliefs.</li> <li>2. Practise understanding, tolerance, openness and patience.</li> <li>3. Work together as a team, promoting group activities.</li> <li>4. Create a happy environment, showing friendliness towards learners and staff.</li> <li>5. Be willing to learn, adapt and mix, developing friends of different cultures.</li> <li>6. Be an individual but interacts within the group.</li> <li>7. Don't impose your culture or beliefs on others.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Treat others as equals.</li> <li>2. Practise your democratic rights responsibly.</li> <li>3. Voice your opinions using the correct channels.</li> <li>4. Listen to other viewpoints.</li> <li>5. Evaluate all ideas and be a responsible voter.</li> <li>6. Practise freedom of speech without abuse or confrontation.</li> <li>7. Work positively with your elected representatives.</li> <li>8. Be informed about school matters.</li> <li>9. Support and encourage transparency.</li> <li>10. Participate with an open mind, being</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do not use language negatively or abusively or to offend or exclude others.</li> <li>2. Express opinions constructively and non-violently, using the correct channels.</li> <li>3. Respect the right to freedom of speech.</li> <li>4. Listen in order to understand others.</li> <li>5. Encourage others to participate.</li> <li>6. Be willing to compromise to come to a common understanding.</li> <li>7. Take the responsibility to be informed.</li> <li>8. Offer your language skills in the classroom where appropriate.</li> </ol>

						8. Discuss issues through the correct channels. 9. Resolve conflict constructively.	willing to compromise. 11. Use democratic means in all decision making. 12. Accept the majority decision but seek consensus.	
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Every learner at School A signs the Code of conduct for learners and thus pledges her commitment to the shared core values. Table 3 shows that a high level of discipline is valued at School A and that if learners violate the shared core values then there will be resultant consequences for those learners. The core values included in the school's Code of conduct for learners provide an ideal springboard to promote proactive and constructive behaviour management. Respect as a core value promotes learners aspiring for the maintenance of both self-respect and respect for others; thereby supporting proactive and constructive behaviour management. Discipline as a core value speaks of abiding by the set school rules and indicates that deviations from such will be handled in a constructive manner. Honesty as a core value ensures that learners behave in a trustworthy way and that they are tactful in their interactions with each other and this further serves proactive and constructive behaviour management. Education as a core value promotes tolerance, communication and taking responsibility for one's behaviour which is synonymous with proactive and constructive behaviour management. Pride signifies self-respect and upholding the schools name in a favourable light by engaging in positive activities that does not bring the school's name in disrepute, this promotes proactive and constructive behaviour management. Unity in diversity emphasises that conflicts should be resolved constructively and this links directly to proactive and constructive behaviour management. Democratic principles as a core value do not support abuse or confrontation but is a proponent of positive actions and transparency, endorsing proactive and constructive behaviour management.

Thus, it is clear that School A's Code of conduct for learners which includes the eight core values of the school places the SMT in a favourable position to adopt a strategy to manage physical abuse among learners in a proactive and constructive manner.

At the participant school the disciplinary hearings take the form of an internal hearing, rather than a disciplinary hearing as stated in section 8 of the Schools Act. Though the Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998, item 7.7) makes provision for a consultative process (internal "hearing") in instances where "a learner cannot adjust to the school and where his/her behaviour is objectionable in that it violates the rights of others" the outcome of such proceedings is not punitive in nature. There thus exists a discrepancy with regards to procedures in terms of the school's Code of conduct for learners and legally prescribed procedures.

At School A, with regards to physical assault (a category 5 offence as per the Code of conduct for learners), the investigation is followed by an internal disciplinary hearing, where all parties, e.g. the learner victim, learner offender, parents of the involved learners and the SMT are present. The school governing body does not form part of this internal hearing. These internal hearings take place to expedite positive constructive outcomes which are remediative rather than punitive.

However, should the principal, in the case of repeat offenders or serious cases of physical abuse decide that a disciplinary hearing in terms of section 9 of the Schools Act is required the matter is referred to the disciplinary committee of the governing body.

School A's Code of conduct for learners contains five offence categories. Endangering the safety of others is regarded as a category 4 offence, which draws suspension as a corrective measure. A disciplinary hearing as discussed above (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4) will be held to establish if suspension is the most appropriate sanction. Physical assault is deemed to constitute serious assault and this is a category 5 offence in the Code of conduct for learners, which draws suspension pending expulsion. Section 5C of the school's Code of conduct for learners reads:

...Courteous, respectful language and behaviour are expected. Aggressively argumentative behaviour, intimidation, victimisation, fighting, abusive or foul language and lying will be strictly punished.

The code does not distinguish between various types of physical abuse. It merely states that serious assault is a category 5 offence and that a tribunal will be held to establish if suspension should be applied and that the decision to expel will be ratified by the KZN Education Department. Thus, in this case a full governing body hearing will be held.

SMT member 2 mentions that the Code of conduct for learners outlines the various category offences and the punishment for each offence clearly. She further states "...the Code of conduct includes the different policies and parents are requested to sign that they have read the Code of conduct for learners and will abide by these codes."

SMT member 4 speaks of a directive in the Policy Handbook for Educators which is a departmental directive on which the school's Code of conduct for learners is based. SMT member 4 feels that although expulsion could be sought for learners who have



engaged in physical abuse, School A does not follow this route as they do not trust that the DoBE will uphold such a decision or recommendation from the school governing body.

SMT member 1 agrees with the above statement and adds that the process of suspension or transfer through the DoBE takes a very long time. Due to the lack of action and support from the DoBE with regards to expulsions and suspensions, SMT member 3 indicates that as being a reason for School A enforcing its own learner isolation as a precautionary measure for a period of not more than five school days (the learner is isolated in the foyer but work or tests are sent down for each period).

On whether the school's Code of conduct for learners is adequate in regulating physical abuse as learner misbehaviour, SMT member 1 expresses that even though School A has a Code of conduct for learners and a Discipline Policy in place, "...it is still very limiting when it comes to serious cases." SMT member 1 explains that punishment is constructive, learners are given main detention (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school), or they have to write reflective essays and counselling is offered. SMT member 4 feels that a loophole in the school's Code of conduct for learners is that it is reactive rather than proactive, as she expresses "...should a learner bring a weapon to school with the intention of using it, we would not know until it has been used."

SMT member 3 feels that due to School A having such a well-defined Code of conduct for learners with serious consequences for violent behaviour has resulted in a decrease in the number of incidents of violent behaviour in School A. The principal of School A also confirms that there has been a decrease in incidents of physical altercations at the school.

SMT member 2 feels that serious assault which is a category 5 offence in School A's Code of conduct for learners needs to be explained further with sub-categories as to what exactly constitutes serious assault.

In their interview the learner offenders were asked whether they thought that the school's Code of conduct for learners effectively dealt with learners who engaged in physical abuse. Offender 1 felt that the school's Code of conduct for learners was not effective in preventing girls from engaging in physical abuse as she said that "...there are

certain things in the Code of conduct for learners that tell us to respect one another,” but she maintains this is not enough in preventing future fights. Offender 2 avers that the school’s Code of conduct for learners is not effective, because if it was effective she said “... there won’t be fights.” Offender 3 argued that the Code of conduct for learners was effective as it is made up of rules and there are consequences if the rules are broken. Offender 4 asserts that the disciplinary hearings are effective as it leads to learners being afraid of getting into future fights. Offender 5 mentioned that there is no exact punishment in the Code of conduct for physical abuse. This, however, is untrue as physical abuse is regarded as a category 5 offence in the Code of conduct for learners and this leads to a disciplinary hearing. Finally Offender 6 held that the school’s Code of conduct for learners is effective in preventing physical abuse as in her case it did not focus on punishing but helped her to make things right with the victim.

The school governing body also plays an active role in disciplinary hearings as stated in the Code of conduct for learners of School A. According to the principal the school governing body is very supportive of the schools programme as it assists with disciplinary hearings, grant budget allocations to send HoDs and other staff on workshops to improve their skills in dealing with disciplinary problems.

#### **4.5 Management of physical abuse in School A**

In this section data is presented on how School A manages physical abuse cases and the determination of whether the management practises are effective and lawful (objective 4). The data in this section is presented as follows: learner victims’ perspectives on the manner in which the SMT managed incidents of physical abuse followed by the learner offenders’ perspectives on the manner in which the SMT managed incidents of physical abuse. Further to the learner offenders’ perspective, the following discussion ensued on: the procedures followed, the sanctions laid down, the learners’ views on the management of physical abuse, the principal’s perspective on the management of physical abuse, the SMT’s perspective on the management of physical abuse and the effectiveness of disciplinary measures.

#### **4.5.1 Learner victims' perspective on the management of physical abuse**

Victim 1 experienced the SMT as very supportive. She said, "The HoG heard all sides of the story and counselled me and she addressed the offender. The principal was notified of the incident and a disciplinary hearing was set up." It was evident from the responses from the other five victims that the same procedure was followed in their cases too. They all had to attend a disciplinary hearing. In terms of the school's Code of conduct for learners, physical abuse is a category 5 offence, which makes a disciplinary hearing compulsory. All five victims revealed that counselling was offered as part of the remediation. Victim 3 indicated that she had to attend two main detentions (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday during which the learners are tasked with community service in the school) and Victim 6 had to engage in some form of community service. Both Victims 3 and 6 were tasked with community service as a further remediative measure since their detentions/community service coincided with that of the offenders in their respective cases.

All 6 victims were offered counselling and 5 attended the counselling and found it very helpful. Victim 1 signified "... it was successful because it helped me overcome it (the fight)." Victim 2 said "...yes and it did help me." Victim 3 stated that the counselling that the SMT arranged for her made her realised that she should "... not to stoop to anybody's level," and she learnt not to be bothered by what people say. The counselling taught her self-confidence. Victim 4 was counselled by her HoG as well as the school counsellor and it helped her overcome the incident. Counselling was offered to Victim 5 by the SMT but she did not attend, no reason was given why she did not attend the counselling session. The best success story with regard to counselling is that of Victim 6 who made peace with the offender and they became friends after they both received counselling.

#### **4.5.2 Learner offenders' perspective on the management of physical abuse**

Discipline must be positive and constructive as per national law and policy (DoE 2000: preface) (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.1). This section focused on the procedures followed by School A in its handling of the learner offenders involved in acts of physical abuse, followed by the sanctions that were laid down by the school and the resultant views of the learners on the manner in which the SMT handled their cases.

#### **4.5.2.1 The procedures followed**

After her physical altercation Offender 1 indicated that she was sent to the principal's office and the fight was discussed with only the people who were involved (i.e. the HoG, the principal and the learner victim). Offenders 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 were first sent to the principal's office. The matter was then investigated further by the relevant HoG. Due process was followed as per the school's Code of conduct for learners and Offenders 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 had to attend an internal disciplinary hearing at school. The principal, the relevant SMT members, the learners' parents as well as the learners were present at the hearing (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4).

#### **4.5.2.2 The sanctions laid down**

Due to the nature of the physical contact involving Offender 1 which entailed shoving and pushing, the matter did not go to a hearing as the misunderstanding was resolved and the learners involved were counselled by the principal and the HoG. Offender 1 felt that the SMT "had managed to sort the situation" (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.1). The best interest of the learner took precedence in the manner in which the SMT resolved this dispute.

The common sanction that was applied for Offenders 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 was that they each received a warning letter which stated that any further aggressive/violent behaviour would lead to the matter be referred to the school governing body with a recommendation for suspension or expulsion (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.6).

Offender 2 received two main detentions (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school.) and she also had to attend an anger management course with an external counsellor. The learner's parent had to pay for this course. Proof of attendance to this course was required.

Offender 3 had some of her privileges taken away by her parents and she had to do community service in the school. Offender 4 received detention and also had to write an apology note to the victim. Offender 5 had received punishment in the form of detention (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.5).

Offender 6 received 5 demerits and 6 hours of community service and she was also asked to write a letter of apology to the victim and the school as a whole. It is evident that the requirements as per the school's Code of conduct for learners was met with regard to the matter of physical abuse being handled by holding disciplinary hearings (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.3).

#### **4.5.2.3 The learners' responses/views on management (by SMT) of physical abuse at school**

Offender 1 described the SMT as "very effective as they help sort the situations." Offender 2 confirmed that she fought a lot since grade 8 (she did not give a reason as to why she started to fight in grade 8), but that the fighting has decreased as a result of the SMT's help. Offender 3 is of the opinion that fights have increased in the school as she alludes "...when discipline was strong fighting wasn't as often." Offender 4 feels that the measures put into place by the SMT are helpful: "Detention gives you time to think and to reflect and the hearings give you time to voice your opinions." Offender 5 is of the opinion that giving certain punishments such as detentions, community service or isolation (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4) do not stop them from engaging in future fights as these punishments are not harsh enough. Offender 6 asserted that the SMT is successful in the manner in which it is handling the cases of physical abuse as she sees no repeat offenders. To Offender 6 this means that learners refrain from fighting (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.3).

In order for the SMT to discourage learners from engaging in physical altercations at school, Offender 2 proposed that the SMT be stricter about fights and give harsher punishment such as like suspension because main detention "doesn't really do much". Offender 3 suggested suspension as appropriate sanction. School A's Code of conduct for learners provides for suspension, both as a precautionary measure and a sanction. In both instances suspension follows on a disciplinary hearing conducted by the governing body. Offender 1 feels that if the SMT speaks on a daily basis to the learners and find out what's troubling them then this would help avoid incidents of physical abuse. The SMT addresses issues such as bullying in the general school assembly or in their respective HoG assemblies. As insider researcher I have observed the members of the SMT speaking on a one-on-one basis to specific troubled learners, counselling them and advising them (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.3).

Offender 3 also identified suspension as a good sanction. She further proposed that the police is invited to become involved because that may discourage future fights. The principal of School A has a very close working relationship with the local police. The school liaison officer from the SAPS often addresses the school assembly on various topics of concern (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.6).

Offender 4 singled out counselling as the most appropriate measures for learners who physically abused other learners. School A has an on-site counsellor to whom the SMT can refer learners when it regards it as an appropriate measure. The school counsellor deals with general counselling of learners, however, should a learner require specific help, e.g. anger management, then such a recommendation is made to the parent for an external counsellor (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.3).

Offender 5 contended that stricter rules are required: "... lay a charge on them or expel them." This is a power that the SMT does not have as decisions concerning expulsion lay with the DoE. However, recommendations for expulsions on repeat offenders can be made to the DoE by the school governing body. Members of the SMT cannot charge learners, however, in cases of physical assault the parents have a right to lay a criminal charge against the offending learner (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.2).

Offender 6 argued for less severe and more positive measures than criminal charges or expulsion. Her suggestions included that the SMT promote a sisterhood among learners and "ensure that learners are occupied during all hours of the school day as physical altercations normally arise from learners that are not occupied." The members of the SMT of School A have indicated in their focus group that a great deal of pastoral care is given and that positive remediation is instituted with learners who have engaged in physical abuse to prevent future fights (cf. chapter 4, section 4.2.4).

#### **4.5.3 The principal's perspective on the management of physical abuse**

The principal mentioned that the SMT handle cases of physical abuse by adhering to the guidelines as per the school's Code of conduct for learners and other relevant Acts like the Schools Act, National Education Policy Act and the Children's Act. The principal indicated that the usual procedure that is followed is that after a fight an investigation is conducted with all parties concerned to determine the facts. An internal disciplinary

hearing may be held with the members of the SMT (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4). As an outcome of the hearing, the principal says that punitive measures may be imposed. In some cases counselling are suggested for remediation purposes. Some of the sanctions imposed during these hearings were letters of warning, detentions, community service, counselling sessions with external therapists and/or a psychological assessment to assist the learner to overcome her problem.

The principal also reiterates that there are very clear guidelines in Schools Act that a school's Code of conduct for learners must address inappropriate behaviours. Physical abuse is a serious form of misconduct and is addressed in Section 1.28 of the school's Disciplinary Policy which states

...[c]ourteous and respectful behaviour and language is expected at all times. Aggressively argumentative behaviour, bullying, intimidation, victimisation, fighting, abusive or foul language and lying are unacceptable behaviours and will be strictly punished. No breach of our Code of conduct of learners will be tolerated.

The principal stressed the fact that all learners are made aware that they have the right to be safe and that any learner who infringes on another learner's right to be safe has to be punished. Section 2 of the school's Disciplinary Policy with regards to Disciplinary Procedures for Contraventions states

...that procedures and regulations support and sustain the Code of conduct and the core value of discipline in our school. Containing the provision of due process, punishment is administered fairly and, where possible, through positive reinforcement

The human relations theory as discussed (cf. chapter 2, section 2.4.1) emphasises that there is a correlation between the individual and group relationships and that group interaction can sometimes become violent. In the event of violent interaction in the group, positive intervention is advised. This ties in with the due process being followed by School A when learners engage in fights which may result in a punitive outcome or a positive reinforcement (counselling) as discussed by the school principal. The behaviourists (cf. chapter 2, section 2.4.2) believe that through a system of rewards and reinforcement human behaviour can be regulated and controlled. The school's Disciplinary Policy as well as the school's Code of conduct for learners reiterates behaviour modification techniques aimed at behaviour enhancement procedures and or behaviour reduction procedures which are aimed at the removal of the occurrence of

inappropriate behaviour. The Non-directive intervention theory (cf. chapter 2, section 2.4.3) affirms that learners can conform to modelled behaviour aimed at them. This is where the SMT of School A plays a vital role in having positive, constructive modelled behaviour aimed at the learners. Learners need to be guided to this end. The school's Code of conduct for learners has a well-defined vision which links with Van Niekerk's leadership model (cf. chapter 2, section 2.4.4). In terms of this model the establishment of an inspiring vision ensures that learners know precisely what is expected from them and they should be guided deliberately to achieve that. The core values underlying the Code of conduct for learners as shown in table 3 also serve to give guidance to the learners as well as at School A further guidance will be given to the learner victims and the learner offenders by the SMT.

The principal explained that physical abuse can have a disruptive effect in the classroom as the aggressive learner threatens other learners who are then unsettled for the lesson. The educator then loses teaching time as he is focussed on settling the class. This has the ripple effect of affecting teaching and learning in School A.

The principal emphasised the importance of treating physical abuse with the utmost seriousness. If physical abuse was left unchecked then the tone and discipline of the school was in great danger of being affected negatively. The principal has made it clear that all of the stakeholders in education, i.e. the learner, parent, educators, SMT members, school governing body members and DoBE officials have to communicate with each other as they deemed necessary about the situations that arise at school.

#### **4.5.4 The SMT's perspective on the management of physical abuse**

The participant SMT members have handled four physical abuse cases in 2014. SMT members 1, 2 and 4 indicated that the number of physical abuse cases is on the increase. However SMT member 3 disagreed and indicated that the number of physical abuse cases is on the decline. She further adds that the facts need to be established, before dealing with the level of misbehaviour.

The SMT needs to know what exactly took place and the reason behind the misbehaviour as SMT member 4 emphasised "... it is no use punishing the action if the issue or cause behind it is not solved or resolved."



SMT member 2 mentioned that “... there is verbal abuse, incidences of drug taking and peddling as well as absconding school.” Each of the above offences is placed in different categories. Each category has disciplinary procedures. SMT member 1 agreed with SMT member 2 and referred to the fact that the school’s Discipline Policy distinguishes between different categories of misconduct. The document analysis of the school Discipline Policy indicates that there are strict school rules in place to ensure the smooth running of an effective organisation which maintains the safety of the girls. SMT member 3 referred to the school’s Code of conduct for learners and the eight core values it contains. SMT member 3 explained that there are different categories of offences (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4) ranging from 1-5, with assault being a category 5 offence.

The ethos of the school is affected by learners engaging in physical abuse as SMT member 2 stressed: “It creates negativity and it is very unsettling for the girls.” She also emphasised that incidents of physical abuse influence the opinion of the community about the school as some parents do not want to bring their children to the school. SMT member 1 agreed with the above. As insider researcher I have found that certain parents tend to badmouth School A either using social media or via word of mouth because they are unhappy with certain decisions that the school has taken with regards to their daughters’ behaviour. The negative publicity exacerbates the situation and casts the school in a negative light in the community.

SMT member 3 contended that the impact of girls fighting is felt immediately and usually filters to other grades, resulting in girls trying to push boundaries.

With regards to support from outside services such as the SAPS and any other psychological government services SMT member 1 expressed that School A is fortunate in that it has a school liaison officer with the local police authority and she added “... they are supportive and active. They do come in at the beginning of every year and address the entire school on violent behaviour.” With regards to girls fighting with each other, she commented “... there has not been a need yet for them to come into school.”

SMT members 2, 3 and 4 concurred with SMT member 1 on the above role of the SAPS. SMT members 3 and 4 mentioned that because psychological services are not normally operational in public schools, School A employs its own counsellor.

With regards to how the SMT handle incidents of physical abuse all four members agreed on the process that is followed in cases of physical abuse. SMT member 3 stated that “Tying in with the school’s Code of conduct for learners, physical assault leads directly to a hearing.” SMT members 1, 2 and 4 have confirmed this. SMT members 1-4 further stated that as soon as an incident of physical abuse occurs, the learners involved are isolated and asked to write a statement of what has happened. If there are witnesses to the incident then they are also asked to write a statement of what they saw.

The HoG then contacts the parents and informs the parent of the incident at school, a letter is then sent home to the parent informing them of the internal disciplinary hearing that will take place.

SMT member 2 revealed that “A lot of pastoral care is given to the learners.” SMT member 1 indicated that learners are counselled and positive remediation is instituted. SMT member 3 referred to attempts made by the SMT at reconciliation and the bringing on board of the school counsellor, especially if there are underlying home issues involved with the learners concerned. Parents are sometimes called to school and are kept informed of how the matter is progressing. As an outcome to the hearing learners may be given detention and or community service, learners may also be asked to write reflective essays in an attempt to prevent such behaviour from recurring.

#### **4.5.5 Effectiveness of disciplinary measures**

All six offenders stated that the manner in which they were disciplined discouraged them from engaging in any future fights. Offender 3 maintained that “[t]he disciplinary hearing was the highest form of discipline at school. This has prevented future fights because of the punishment given to me. I had to do community service and this was very humiliating to me.” Offenders 2 and 4 have not been in a fight again. Offender 5 was embarrassed that her parents had to attend a school hearing and has not fought since. Offender 6 commented that the punishment that she received “ensured that I never physically abuse another learner.”

The offenders all indicated that they have learnt a lesson as a result of how their cases were handled. Offender 1 said that she will think before reacting and explained that she learned: “I must try to be calm or I must walk away or I must just not say or do anything.” Offender 2 will first speak to someone about her feelings or address the other person herself before taking any further action. Offender 3 will not allow herself to be influenced by a group

and she will stop at a verbal level in future. Offender 4 indicates that she has learnt to calm down and to walk away before it becomes violent. She would also not take rumours to heart and avoid losing control. Offender 5 has taken from her discipline measures that it is not worth fighting and that there are better things that she could do with her life than waste it on fighting. Offender 6 has learnt to control her temper and the counselling sessions she has attended have helped her to manage her impulsive behaviour.

## **4.6 The response of peers and parents to physical abuse**

Peers seem mostly to adopt an observing capacity whereby they do not become involved in ending the fight. This type of apathy is contrary to the Code of conduct for learners. The Code of conduct for learners enlightens learners on how to correct offenders in a polite and constructive manner. Parents' responses have been quite varied according to the learners, from action being taken by some to just verbal advice by others.

### **4.6.1 Response of peers to physical abuse**

Victim 1 recalled that the other learners thought it was a joke and they laughed and ridiculed her, but her peers on the prefect team stood by her and they were very supportive. The manner in which the above learners behaved with regard to Victim 1 was contrary to the shared core values that the learners were supposed to abide and live by. The value of respect whereby a learner is supposed to treat others as they wish to be treated was ignored. Victim 2 did not get peer support as she remembered how the learners just stood and looked on. This passive non-involvement by other learners with regard to Victim 2 goes against the value of discipline in the Code of conduct for learners which emphasises that learners should correct offenders around them in a polite and constructive manner. However, she did get help from an acting prefect. Victims 3 and 5 were supported by their peers as their classmates pulled them away and tried to stop the fight. In so doing the learners who supported Victims 3 and 5 tried to protect the good name and image of School A, thus upholding the shared core value of pride. Victims 4 and 6 had the experience of their peers just standing and watching and cheering the fight on. Five out of the six victims received no assistance from their peers

and other learners did not try to stop the fight. Two of the victims received help from the prefect team.

#### **4.6.2 Response of parents**

By listening to the various learner offenders' accounts of their parents' reaction to them fighting at school, I was left puzzled by the varied reactions of parents. Two out of the six learner offenders had home privileges taken away or some form of monitoring or adjustment of home rules took place. The other four learner offenders were only spoken to by their parents. The principal feels that if the parents work with the school and reinforce the appropriate behaviours, then there can be both a behavioural and an academic improvement.

Offender 1 had her mother's support for getting into a fight as she mentions "My mother understood where I was coming from because the fight I got into wasn't the first time this person made me upset." It is evident that with Offender 1 this kind of behaviour has been condoned at home.

Offender 2 had a different reaction from her parents. They were angry and disappointed, but did not punish her. Offender 2 was reprimanded by her parents and told to get her act together or she would end up like her brother. Offender 3 disappointed her parents by getting into a fight. Her mum used this incident against her and her dad just lectured her on values. The reaction of Offender 4's parents was similar to that of Offender 3's parents in that her parents were also shocked and angry. Offender 4 admitted to having anger issues but contended that she is not a violent person. Her parents were disappointed because she inflicted pain on another person and she says "... more home rules were put into place and my use of social media was monitored."

The parents of Offender 5 were shocked but they didn't do much. She recalled: "They gave me a talk and told me to stay out of trouble." Offender 6 had her cell phone taken away and she could not go to the mall because her parents were disappointed with her behaviour.

The principal is relatively satisfied with regards to parental support for learners who have violated the school's Code of conduct for learners. She ascribed that to the fact that her school's SMT has a reputation for seeking remedial action for the learners

involved in physical abuse. In School A an internal hearing is preferred as the focus is on keeping learners at school rather than to suspend or expel them. She mentioned that “[p]arents are also guided to seek external assistance like anger management, family therapy in an attempt to provide supportive homes.” In her experience “... parents who accept or admit that there is a problem are usually more successful as they implement removal of privileges, seek remedial programmes or external counsellors to address problems.”

The members of the SMT have encountered different attitudes from parents regarding their support of the school. SMT member 1 noted that very few parents are supportive and in her general experience parents of repeat offenders show no support to the school. SMT member 3, the deputy principal, felt that she mostly has the support of the parents that she has contacted as the parents do respond positively when called to school. She regards these parents as supportive of the school’s Code of conduct for learners and willing to work with the school regarding remediation of violent behaviour. SMT member 2 had diverse responses from parents of learners that have been in fights: “I have had some parents who are very supportive and they agree with the punishment administered, while others become abusive and hold the school accountable. Some parents also report the school to the circuit manager.” SMT member 4 experienced parents mostly as supportive of the school’s attempt to instil discipline.

The responses from the parents were varied and only two learners had some privileges withdrawn while the other four learners were merely spoken to by their parents. In their interaction with the school, most parents are supportive of the school’s attempt of managing their daughter’s behaviour. The SMT have diverse views on the parent involvement regarding learners fighting.

#### **4.7 Findings on objectives 3 and 4**

- All six of the learner offenders agreed that the manner in which their cases were handled involving the disciplinary hearing was successful as it discouraged them from future fights.
- Communicating with one another, remaining calm and not being influenced by others were the lessons learnt by the learner offenders after they carried out their punishment. This is indicative of effective management by the SMT.

- The response of peers and parents are important for the SMT of School A to gauge its effectiveness in its management of learners who have engaged in physical abuse (objective 3).

#### **4.8 Role of the school in promoting non-violent behaviour**

The six offenders felt that the school can also help promote non-violent behaviour. They made the following suggestions, some of which are already implemented by the school:

- The educator should be informed of problem situations that could become volatile and the educator can then deal with the situation instead of the learner.
- The school could engage in assembly talks.
- The school should bring in outsiders to do motivational speeches.
- There ought to be constant reminders of the consequences of fighting, i.e. that learners may have to do community service, detention, work in isolation (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4) under the watchful eye of a SMT member and repeat offenders may even be suspended or expelled.
- Discipline measures should be harsher.
- Counselling should be increased.
- Learners may be addressed by outside people who have experienced violence.
- The school could promote talks and discussions on non-violence.

#### **4.9 Perspectives on laws and policies governing the management of physical abuse at school**

The principal of School A has identified the following laws and policies which govern the management of physical abuse at schools viz. the Schools Act, the Code of conduct for learners, Safety and security policy of School A and the Children's Act. The principal feels that it is for the school to follow policy as the DoBE plays a minor role in preventing incidents of physical abuse. SMT member 1 mentioned in addition to the above laws and policies that the SMT also consults the Constitution, the National Education Policy Act, the Policy Handbook for educators and the school's Discipline Policy aid in governing the management of physical abuse at School A.

The principal of School A acknowledged that though there is an awareness of the school's policy and what is considered acceptable behaviour at the school, the implementation of policy is problematic. She commented that it is critical to address abuse and to ensure the implementation of the respective policies by all staff, prefects and parents. She emphasised that "consistency of implementation is critical".

SMT member 2 mentions that in terms of the Constitution,

... South African citizens enjoy certain rights, with specific rights of children being highlighted ... they must learn and be taught in a safe environment and must be free from intimidation and interference.

With regard to the legal perspective about reporting incidents of physical abuse to the police SMT member 3 speaks of the right of a learner who has been assaulted by another learner to report the incident to the police and to open an assault case against the perpetrator. SMT member 4 talks of learners being minors in the eyes of the law and that these learners are the responsibility of their parents and should the victim's family wish to press charges they can do so without the school being involved.

The learner victims who were interviewed were asked what they thought about the success of the school's Discipline Policy in minimising incidents of girls fighting. Four of the six victims agreed that the school's Discipline Policy was successful in minimising incidents of physical abuse. According to Victim 1 prefects look out for abuse on school grounds during breaks and in the morning and afternoon and this is an adequate measure to curb violence. She says that her case of physical abuse was handled in a serious manner because of the school's Discipline Policy. Victims 4 and 5 stated that due to the school's Discipline Policy, grades are separated during breaks. However, this does not necessarily prevent learners from fighting as learners do cross over into areas that they are not supposed to be in and the learners know that if they fight there will be consequences. This makes the school's Discipline Policy ineffective as some of the learners violate the rule as to where they should be during the breaks. The other two victims felt that the school's Discipline Policy was ineffective in minimising incidents of physical abuse. Victim 6 feels that the school's Discipline Policy is not effective because although it has consequences, it does not prevent girls from fighting, as she says "...some girls choose to disobey the rules, yet knowing very well there will be consequences."

#### **4. 10 Conclusion**

In this chapter the research findings in conjunction with the research questions formulated in chapter 1 were discussed. The research findings were based on the documents that were analysed, perceptions that were identified and formulated from the individual interviews conducted with the learner victims, learner offenders and the school principal of School A and the focus group with members of the SMT of School A.

The final chapter encompasses the findings, summary and conclusions of the research. It contains recommendations for the SMT of the participant school to implement positive behaviour management strategies among its learners in order to curb the trend of girls engaging in physical abuse as a dispute resolution method. Suggestions regarding further study and investigations were made.



## **CHAPTER 5: Main findings, conclusions and recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In chapter 4 I reported on the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The research findings in respect of the research sub-questions formulated are offered (cf. chapter 1, section 1.4). These research findings are based on an analysis of the documents and the information extracted from the interviews with the school principal, six learner offenders and six learner victims as well as the focus group with four members of the SMT.

This concluding chapter focuses on the main findings, summary and conclusions of the research. It also contains recommendations for the SMT on the management of learners who engage in physical abuse in order to resolve conflict issues, as well as suggestions for further study and investigations.

### **5.2 Summary of the research**

This study dealt with the question of how the SMT of School A managed physical abuse among learners and to make recommendations to ensure more constructive and proactive management.

Chapter 1 contains the introduction to the research. A background of violence in schools was given, emphasising the changing role of learners in school from being non-aggressive, peaceful, passive learners to becoming assertive, aggressive and having violent tendencies (cf. chapter 1, section 1.2). My motivation for the study as explained in this chapter was that my interest in matters of learner discipline had increased due to the role that I play in School A's disciplinary committee. My observation of an escalation of violence among learners and the resounding negative effects thereof led me to engage in this study (cf. chapter 1, section 1.3).

In Chapter 1 offered a discussion of the statement of the research problem (cf. chapter 1, section 1.4). The acceptance of abnormal situations, such as use of physical abuse to solve problems as normal by learners, place SMTs in a quandary as how to manage physical abuse if learners perceive it as normal and acceptable. This then made the case even stronger for positive discipline, whereby management is to be proactive and

constructive and thus reduce the situations of constant acceptance by learners that they have to either be victims of violence, or perpetrators of random acts of physical abuse as a common way to resolve problems among themselves.

In Chapter 1 also discussed the aims and objectives of the study (cf. chapter 1, section 1.5), which comprised an explanation into the way in which the SMT of School A established and maintained discipline among learners who engaged in physical abuse. Significance of the study (cf. chapter 1, section 1.6) was explained whereby possible impact of relevant policy, scholarly contributions and legislation on the school's discipline and the SMT's role in discipline management was discussed. The management of learners involved in physical abuse at School A tended to be more constructive in nature and took the form of an internal disciplinary hearing which could not attract suspension or expulsion. This study was noteworthy as it introduced positive discipline measures to the selected school on how to deal with physical abuse among learners.

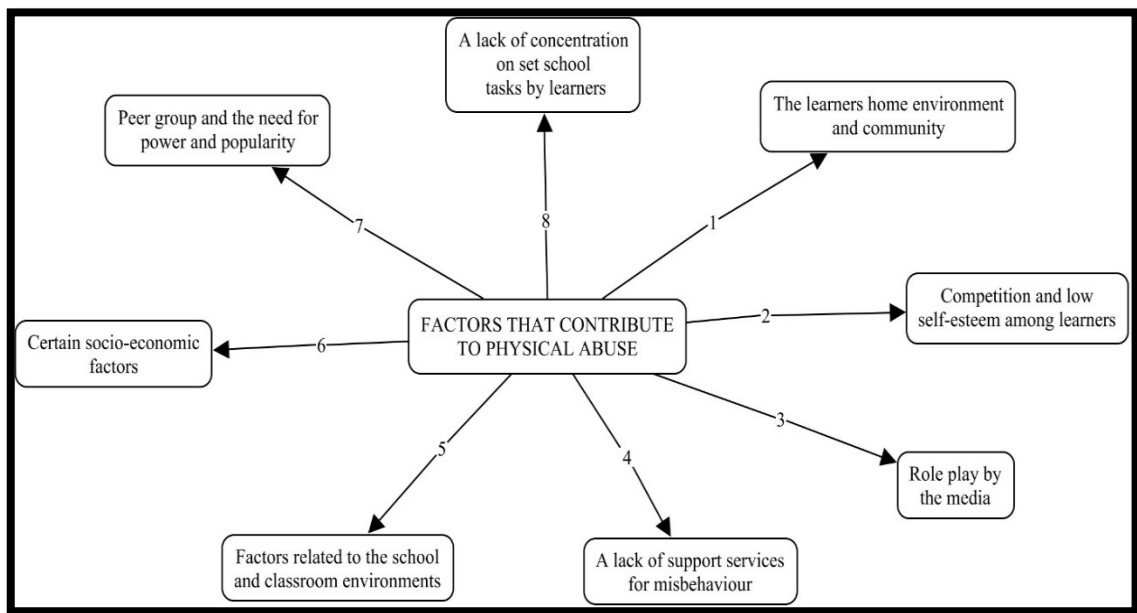
The conceptual analysis which entailed the clarification of a number of relevant concepts (cf. chapter 1, sections 1.7.1.1-1.7.1.5) helped to determine what is relevant to the field of study and what not, a conceptual analysis was done with regard to the following concepts: **School Management Team, management, Code of conduct for learners, discipline** and **physical abuse**. The scope of the study was discussed (cf. chapter 1, section 1.7.2) and this focussed on girls who have contravened the school rules by engaging in physical abuse of co-learners or girls who were victims of physical abuse. The chapter division was laid out (cf. chapter 1, section 1.7.3).

Another important aspect discussed in Chapter 1 was the methodological account in which I described, explained and justified the methodology that I used to obtain data for this particular study, which encompassed the research approach, research design and the methods used for data collection and analysis (cf. chapter 1, sections 1.8.1-1.8.3.4).

Finally, ethical considerations (cf. chapter 1, section 1.9) were reflected on as I conducted an investigation on a very sensitive issue and thus needed to take the utmost care to be ethically and morally correct and to protect the participants from possible harm. Limitations of the study (cf. chapter 1, section 1.10) were also considered and a brief summary (cf. chapter 1, section 1.11) concluded chapter 1.

In Chapter 2 the literature in respect of managing physical abuse among learners was reviewed. An overview of learner behaviour which had a bearing on the manner in which the SMT manages physical abuse was discussed (cf. chapter 2, section 2.2). The literature review further included a discussion of the factors that contribute to physical abuse as listed below in figure 1:

**FIGURE 5.1: Factors that contribute to physical abuse**



The participant learner offenders were given these factors and they had to rate from 1-9, with 1 being the most applicable and 9 being the least applicable to them.

There were four leadership theories which were reviewed to give me a background on the various types of leadership theories (cf. chapter 2, sections 2.4.1-2.4.4). This was followed by a discussion of management styles (cf. chapter 2, sections 2.5.1-2.5.3), disciplinary models (cf. chapter 2, sections 2.6.1-2.6.2) and approaches to discipline (cf. chapter 2, sections 2.7.1-2.7.2).

The qualitative research method employed is discussed in detail in Chapter 3. This study entailed a single case study design (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.1). A multicultural girls school in an area south of Durban was chosen. The participants were carefully selected so that they were information-rich and could contribute to the objectives of the study (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.2). The twelve learner participants were involved in incidents of physical abuse at school and were therefore suitable for the study. The four

SMT members who were interviewed were information-rich because they are involved in the disciplining of learners who were in fights as part of their discipline management function. The principal played a crucial role in this study by giving her perspective on physical abuse at School A as well as the DoBE perspective with regards to law and policies and including her personal experiences of managing learners who fight.

For the purpose of this study I elected to make use of individual interviews with the learner offenders, the learner victims (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.5) as well as the school principal (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.3). A focus group was held with the members of the SMT (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.4). The combination of these data collection methods provided comprehensive results.

An analysis of the following documents viz. the school's Code of conduct for learners and the school's Discipline Policy took place to determine whether the SMT at the participant school handled physical abuse in a manner that complied with the legal prescripts. A literature study ensued (cf. chapter 3, section 3.2.3.1), which was followed by a discussion on the trustworthiness of the research (cf. chapter 3, section 3.3). Further in Chapter 3 there was an exposition of qualitative data analysis and this chapter was concluded with a discussion on ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4 the data was analysed and interpreted and findings formulated. These research findings were based on analysis of documents and the information gathered from the learner victims and the learner offender's interviews as well as the interview with the school principal and the focus group with members of the SMT.

Finally, Chapter 5 consists of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the research.

### **5.3 Main research findings**

The purpose of this research was to review the effectiveness of the SMT in the management of physical abuse among learners with a view to providing guidelines on how to deal with this form of misconduct in a proactive and constructive manner. This study assumed that there was an increase in incidents of learners fighting at school and that the SMT of the participant school needed to be more proactive and constructive in order to offset the negative effects of this kind of physical abuse.

The following research sub-questions as indicated in Table 4 guided the research and led to the research findings.

**TABLE 5.2: The main research findings**

Research sub-question	Research findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the legal prescripts regulating the management of physical abuse among learners?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The following legal prescripts regulating the management of physical abuse among learners were applicable:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools Act.</li> <li>• Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners.</li> <li>• Children’s Act.</li> <li>• National Education Policy Act.</li> <li>• Regulations for safety measures in public schools and circulars and relevant policy issued by the DoBE.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the contributory factors that prompt girls to fight with each other physically?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family background and poor parenting.</li> <li>• Dysfunctional home environment.</li> <li>• Boys and the effects of social media and revenge.</li> <li>• Gossiping, name calling, use of vulgar language, jealousy between girls, need for dominance and anger.</li> <li>• Misunderstanding between learners.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do the SMT of the participant school manage physical abuse among learners?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal disciplinary hearings are held which cannot attract suspension or expulsion.</li> <li>• Community service for learners.</li> <li>• Detention.</li> <li>• Counselling sessions for offenders and/or victims.</li> <li>• Learner writing letter of apology.</li> <li>• Learner writing reflective essay.</li> <li>• Assembly talks.</li> <li>• Working together with the SAPS.</li> <li>• Engage learners in an anger management programme by counsellors out of school.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are these management practices effective and in line with legal prescripts for managing physical abuse?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes. Reflected in School A’s Code of conduct for learners and School A’s Discipline Policy.</li> </ul>

<b>TABLE 4 (continued)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How could physical abuse be handled in a constructive and proactive manner in a girls school environment?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of greater sisterhood among learners.</li> <li>• Learners to be kept constructively occupied throughout the school day.</li> <li>• Learners are made part of the decision making process regarding the consequences to their behaviour.</li> <li>• Adoption of a Whole School Approach.</li> <li>• Parent involvement in the management of learners involved in fights.</li> <li>• Knowledge of family background by SMT member.</li> <li>• Relevant stakeholders setting examples of good role models.</li> <li>• Conducive school environment to enhance culture of learning and teaching.</li> </ul>

Although the participant learners were able to identify the reasons for learners engaging in physical abuse they did not appear to have the necessary skills to cope with this behaviour or the consequences associated with displays of such violent behaviour (cf. Chapter 2, section 2.3). Another reason offered by learner offenders for the use of physical violence is that the offender felt either disempowered or disrespected and then responded in a manner that they believed would empower them or force the other learner to treat them with respect.

The research found that the family background of learners and poor parenting or sometimes absent parenting is a factor contributing to learners engaging in fist cuffs (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1). A dysfunctional home environment usually is accompanied by a lack of a solid parent-child relationships with the result that the children do not receive the necessary life skills to deal with conflict in a non-violent manner (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3). The learner participants interviewed agreed that a learner's family background has a bearing on the learners' behaviour at school and the poor example set by parents in not setting boundaries and not giving guidance to their children on how to tackle problems in a non-aggressive manner, leads to girls opting to resolve disputes by physically attacking co-learners (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1).

Boys and the effects of social media and revenge by learners on other learners have been cited by the learner participants as reasons for prompting fighting. The role of media portraying violence and the effect this has on learner behaviour has been discussed in detail during the literature review (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3). Learner

participants in School A have spoken of their misuse of social media which exacerbated issues at school and has led to incidents of physical abuse (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3).

The learner participants, school principal as well as members of the SMT have named the following reasons leading to physical abuse among learners viz. gossiping, name calling, use of vulgar language, jealousy between girls, need for dominance and anger as well as misunderstanding between learners (cf. chapter 4, sections 4.3.1.2-4.3.1.5). The literature review for this study did highlight some of the above mentioned reasons as factors leading to physical abuse (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3).

Data analysis brought to light that the following factors viz. boys, revenge, gossiping, name calling, use of vulgar language, jealousy between girls, need for dominance and anger as well as misunderstanding between learners (cf. chapter 4, sections 4.3.1.2-4.3.1.5) which did not come to the fore in the literature review were factors that contribute to physical abuse. It is evident that the learner participants at School A do not have the necessary skills to cope with the above factors which occur daily in their lives. The research found that the participant learners need to be taught greater coping skills regarding the above challenges that they face and the need for more open conversations among learners in order to prevent misunderstanding which lead them to act out their anger in an aggressive manner.

#### **5.4 School A's management of learners engaging in physical abuse**

The research highlighted a number of ways in which the SMT of School A could handle physical abuse among learners in a manner that is proactive and constructive. All six of the learner offenders who were interviewed agreed that being taken to the level of an internal school disciplinary hearing for fighting was of benefit to them, as it prevented them from getting into future fights. It seems that sanctions that learners experienced as humiliating or embarrassing are regarded as the best deterrent. Four of the six offenders who were questioned on the effectiveness of the SMT in handling cases of physical abuse agreed that the SMT was effective in its approach. This is so, as these offenders feel that due to them attending disciplinary hearings their incidents of fighting have decreased, detention that was given to them as an outcome to the hearing gave them time to think and reflect on their behaviour and they had an opportunity to voice their opinions in the hearings. However, two of the six offenders did not believe that the

SMT was effective as they felt that overall fights were increasing in School A and that the enforcement of punishment at school for the offending learners was not helpful. The SMT members and principal of School A felt that the disciplinary hearings held at School A were effective in decreasing fighting at school.

The following suggestions were made by the learner participants on how learners could be discouraged from engaging in acts of physical abuse:

- The SMT could speak to learners more often and learners who were troubled should try and speak to the SMT and thus seek advice on their problems rather than engaging in physical altercations.
- The SMT should institute harsher punishment such as suspensions as it was felt that detentions were not adequate in preventing future fights. This will mean that the disciplinary hearing should be done by the governing body.
- Having the police present at school to carry out searches and to be present in disciplinary hearings was also suggested. To have the police present in disciplinary hearings is unlawful as internal disciplinary hearings are confidential and may only be attended by the parties involved.
- Greater support offered by the school before fights break out.
- Counselling must continue being offered.
- In serious cases learners SMT should advise parents to lay a charge with the SAPS for physical abuse and if need be a recommendation for expulsion to the DoBE should be made.
- The SMT to help promote greater sisterhood among learners.
- The SMT to ensure that learners are kept occupied fully throughout the school day which will prevent boredom setting in leading to physical fights.
- Learner involvement in the decision making process on what the consequences to them engaging in physical fights should be.

The SMT in School A plays a very active role in behaviour management. It is evident in this study that the SMT is very involved in the management of learner misbehaviour as they are the first to be called in to begin the investigative process when a fight takes place. The SMT communicates with the learners and the learners parents. I have discovered that the SMT's role of knowing the family background of the learners in



their care is crucial and constant channels of communication are to be kept open between the school and the parents or guardians. In instances where the learners family background affects her behaviour, then the SMT has to seek counselling for the learner or help from social services (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1).

In the event of a disciplinary hearing taking place, it is the SMT member who presents the information at the hearing. The school governing body is not part of this hearing as it is not an external tribunal (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4). The governing body does not play a role in the internal disciplinary hearings at School A, unless the principal deems that the nature of the offence is such that a full governing body disciplinary hearing is to be held.

The school governing body at School A is actively involved in general matters of governance discussed at scheduled monthly meetings with the SMT. With regards to disciplinary matters, a special disciplinary committee of the school governing body works in conjunction with the SMT as per the principal's request. However, availability of members of the school governing body due to their personal commitments sometimes poses a problem to discipline matters needing immediate attention.

The SMT should ensure that learners are made aware of the school's Discipline Policy and the contents of the school's Code of conduct for learners so that if learners break these rules they must be made aware of the consequences thereof and that good behaviour should be rewarded.

## **5.5 Whole school approach in the management of learner behaviour**

A number of school-wide related aspects of managing learner behaviour have been identified in this research. These school-wide related aspects include hands on parents who engage positively with the school in both academic and non-academic spheres as explained by the learner participants in their interview (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3.1.1). A home environment where there is warmth, love, sensitivity and supportive discipline by parents is conducive to developing develops a disciplined child who does not exhibit violent tendencies (cf. chapter 2, section 2.3).

The research also indicated that learners found the disciplinary hearings that were held at School A successful in deterring future fights. The outcomes of these hearings sought to remediate the learners' misbehaviour in a positive and constructive manner as deemed by the school's Code of conduct for learners (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4).

Members of the SMT were of the opinion that if appropriate discipline was maintained at home by the parents, then the learners would be reminded of these teachings when the parents were called at school to discuss the learners' violent behaviour (cf. chapter 4, section 4.9.4).

In this research it was found that the application of the Code of conduct for learners of School A was very successful in curbing learner physical assault as stated by the participants. The categorising of physical assault as a category 5 offence deemed this misbehaviour as very serious with equally serious consequences. In terms of the Guidelines for a Code of Conduct for Learners (RSA 1998, item 7.6), corrective measures or disciplinary action should be commensurate with the offence or infraction concerned, and must be consistent (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4). The Code of conduct for learners of School A adequately dealt with the learners who were involved in incidents of physical assault as this was reaffirmed by learner participants, the school principal and the members of the SMT.

The general aim of the study was to evaluate the SMT's management of physical abuse among learners in School A and for me to make recommendations on constructive and proactive discipline management techniques.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

It has been an immense learning curve for me to conduct this research as I became aware of the various reasons why learners engage in physical altercations. Further to this, the recommendations from the participants on how this kind of misbehaviour is to be handled by the school and the relevant stakeholders has been an eye-opener to me as an insider researcher on alternative measures in handling learners who have engaged in physical abuse. The research has shown that with the SMT being proactive and remedial in its discipline management, the school can become successful in its

management of learners who have engaged in physical abuse and School A can by means of learner awareness reduce future incidents of physical abuse among learners.

I have found that parents play an essential role in learner behaviour management and that the participants' parents failed to fulfil their roles effectively. The home environment that parents create, the type of relationships they have with their children and the behaviour they model were identified as factors that put learners at risk to allude to physical abuse. The manner in which parents respond to their children being involved in physical abuse also hampered the management and outcome of physical abuse incidents.

These above problems could be addressed by learners who hold leadership positions in school (e.g. prefects, peer counsellors), who can make a presentation to a parent's meeting, appealing for a more hands-on approach by parents in their daughters' holistic education. Learners could be invited to write a piece on how important their parents are in their lives and the effect they have on how they behave. Further to this learners could be asked to write a short letter of appreciation to their parents thanking them for all their input and sacrifices that the parents make in trying to provide for them. This type of positive reinforcement may succeed in getting parents to become more active in their child's life at school. The winning piece or pieces can be published in the school newsletter or the local newspaper or can even be attached to the learner's term report. The learner could choose if they wanted the writing pieces to be done anonymously or not.

Counselling can, in terms of the school's Code of conduct for learners, be recommended as an outcome of a disciplinary hearing as has been the case with a few of the learner participants. The Code of conduct for learners does not make provision for counselling to be offered as a remedial measure however, it is used successfully in School A. It is important that in order to promote positive and constructive remediation of the learners who have contravened the Code of conduct for learners that counselling be added as a measure.

The police plays a very active role in School A as we have a school liaison officer from the SAPS who often addresses the school assembly on various topics of concern. Further interaction with the police can be extended whereby the SAPS assists learners

in an advisory capacity on behaviour issues. This can be done after School A gains parental consent for the learner to be spoken to by a member of the SAPS. The school counsellor, the parent and the relevant SMT member can also be present in such an intervention measure. This action may assist in discouraging future fights. The Code of conduct for the learners at School A could make a provision that a learner could be sanctioned as an outcome to a disciplinary hearing to speak to a specific police officer in the same manner as in the case with the school counsellor.

I have furthermore established that policies, rules and procedures, as guidelines, have been essential in addressing physical abuse and learner misbehaviour (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4). It is evident from the above study that certain members of the SMT, as well as certain learner offenders and learner victims have indicated their lack of knowledge of the school rules and the relevant law and policies pertaining to physical abuse amongst learners and the consequences thereof. This is a great cause for concern as physical abuse amongst learners will not be adequately remediated if the SMT members themselves are unaware of relevant policy documents and law. Parents, learners, educators and members of the SMT need to be fully aware of the school rules and the school's Code of conduct for learners and relevant policies so that when there is a contravention of school rules by girls engaging in physical abuse, then the applicable consequences can be applied. It is further recommended that amendments to the Code of conduct for learners at School A take place, making provision for counselling with the school counsellor or an outside child counsellor to take place and to allow for individual learner verbal communication with a specific member of the SAPS to ensue.

School A's positive attitude and support regarding internal disciplinary hearings for learners engaging in physical abuse, should be commended. However the Schools Act takes precedence and should be adhered to. This is further reiterated by the learner offenders and learner victims support that the school should consider suspension as an outcome in physical abuse cases. For this to materialise external hearings involving the school governing body should take place and can lead to stricter outcomes such as suspension or expulsion.

The disciplinary procedures of the school regarding disciplinary hearings are not in line with the Schools Act, as School A holds internal disciplinary hearings (cf. chapter 4,

section 4.4). This concern can be explained in that School A seeks a timeous, effective and hands-on resolution for the fights. This method of holding internal disciplinary hearings seems to be working for School A, as it is less cumbersome and less time consuming in trying to set up an entire governing body disciplinary intervention. In practice School A feels that holding its own internal disciplinary hearing is practical and successfully resolves the issue at hand. It is recommended that the Schools Act should make allowance for internal disciplinary hearings to be held at schools, should the school not wish to follow the route of a full external disciplinary hearing (including members of the governing body).

I have recognised that a Whole School Approach involving all the stakeholders would be a most appropriate manner in addressing the issue of learners fighting (cf. chapter 5, section 5.5). It is imperative that we have the learners, their parents, the school governing body, the educators, the SMT, the school principal as well as support services on board with us in ensuring that incidents of physical abuse are kept to a minimal. Learners could also be involved in the decision making process on the consequences for girls fighting.

I found that that certain forms of punishment such as detentions, written punishment, a warning letter and community service are being used effectively in helping deter aggressive, violent behaviour. I have observed that the SMT in School A plays a major role in behaviour management and in the carrying out of the disciplinary processes at school which impact on learner behaviour. It is the SMT which is involved in the management of daily disciplinary issues that range from minor infringements to more serious matters like girls engaging in violent behaviour.

The school should have a “hurt free” environment based on its values of respect, discipline, unity in diversity and pride as indicated in its Code of conduct for learners and also by communicating the rights and responsibilities of the learners, themes could be used to drive certain issues (in this case awareness of physical abuse among its learners). Staff, learners and parents need to be taught about hurtful behaviour, and an annual survey could be conducted to monitor and assess the degree of the problem at school (in this case I refer to physical abuse among learners), tutor/peer groups could be

developed were discussion of physical abuse can take place, management could promote better bystander behaviour so that learners could act in a positive way when they witnessed hurtful behaviour (physical abuse). Life Orientation which is a compulsory school subject could include lessons devoted to dealing with physical abuse and thus empowering potential victims and bystanders, general talks about physical abuse could take place in school assemblies, provide an outside listener for learners who want to talk about their issues.

Learners could be taught to treat each other in a dignified manner by ascribing to and taking ownership of the values of respect, discipline, honesty and pride as indicated in the Code of conduct for learners.

Finally I found that school environments conducive to teaching and learning should be created with the help of the SMT and other stakeholders, which lead to learners being gainfully occupied at school and thus relieve boredom which lead to idle minds resorting to misbehaviour. All school policies must be in place and consistently enforced in order to make the school environment a safe teaching and learning domain. The SMT, educators, parents and other relevant stakeholders should model good behaviour by being exemplary in their conduct at all times.

### **5.7 Suggestions for future research**

This study confirms that there are prospects for further research regarding the management of physical abuse among learners. The role of the SMT in school discipline needs to be researched in depth. The impact of positive discipline which can aid in reducing the incidents of physical abuse needs further study. Creating a school Discipline Policy Framework in which the focus should fall on what is required from schools in terms of law (for example learners should receive copies of the school rules at the beginning of each school year) and then investigating whether schools comply.

The role played by the SMT in disciplinary hearings and in discipline management need to be further investigated especially where their disciplinary hearings do not fit into the prescribed procedures and hearings that must be conducted by the governing body. Greater insight is needed on proactive and constructive management of learners who engage in physical abuse of another learner during conflict resolution. Such research

could provide guidance and recommendations for schools to be violence free zones where the emphasis is on achieving an environment conducive to academic excellence.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

There is no easy solution to problems faced by learners, however, understanding what leads up to girls losing control and engaging in fistcuffs is a start to tackle this problem. Depending on their personal circumstances, learners face a myriad of challenges daily, which may result in physical abuse becoming an outlet to channel the pent up anger and aggression that they feel. The development of the learners self-esteem, her open relationship with her parents, the emphasis at school on academic focus, her socialisation with her peers and her having being taught life skills on coping with the daily stresses of life will aid the learner to achieve a non-violent solution to life's challenges. The school must be governed by relevant law and policy, ensuring that a disciplined learning and teaching environment exists. It must be the intention of the school to be proactive and constructive in its management of learners who have acted contrary to the school's Code of conduct for learners. If harsher discipline measures need to be applied to remediate the situation with repeat offenders, then this must be done. It must be the continued aim of the school to ensure that its vision of developing a self-respecting, law abiding socially adjusted adolescent learner is achieved. Further research is required on a larger scale in order to identify the intensity and occurrence of incidents of physical abuse among learners in South African public schools and in independent schools. Aggressive, violent behaviour displayed by adolescent learners affects the social development of these girls and therefore needs to be studied further so that future problems can be solved in a non-aggressive manner.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Letter to the Head of Department: Education: KwaZulu-Natal requesting permission

P.O. Box 40234

Redhill

4071

29 July 2014

Office of the Head of Department: Education: KwaZulu-Natal

Head of Department

Dr SNP Sishi

Head Office

247 Burger Street

Pietermaritzburg

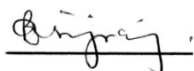
3200

Dear Sir

#### **Re: Request to conduct research**

I am a Master of Education student at the University of South Africa. My research topic is **Managing physical abuse among learners in a girls high school in KwaZulu-Natal: A case study**. I humbly request your permission to carry out this study at one of the schools under your jurisdiction. The study will entail conducting an interview with the school principal and engaging in a focus group discussion with four members of the School Management Team as well as interviewing twelve learners from Grade 9-12 who were either offenders or victims to physical abuse. I will also access six recorded disciplinary hearings on cases of physical abuse. Relevant policy documents as well as the school Code of Conduct and disciplinary and safety policies will be analysed. I ensure anonymity and confidentiality of all the participants and reiterate that participation is voluntary and withdrawal without reprisal is accepted.

I kindly await your response.



A. BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Persal No. 60316888

## APPENDIX 2

### Permission letter from the Head of Department: Education; KwaZulu-Natal granting permission



education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Nomangisi Ngubane

Tel: 033 392 1004

Ref.:2/4/8/220

Ms A Brijraj  
P O Box 40234  
Redhill  
4071

Dear Ms Brijraj

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"Managing Physical Abuse amongst Learners in a Girls' High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study"**, 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 01 August 2014 to 30 June 2015.
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 Mr. Alwar at the contact numbers below.
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 Director-Resources Planning, 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.

Grosvenor Girls High School.

**Nkosinathi S.P. Sishi, PhD**  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 15 August 2014

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

POSTAL: Private Bag X 9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa  
PHYSICAL: 247 Burger Street, Anton Lembede House, Pietermaritzburg, 3201. Tel. 033 392 1004  
EMAIL ADDRESS: [kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za](mailto:kehologile.connie@kzndoe.gov.za) CALL CENTRE: 0860 596 363  
WEBSITE: [www.kzmeducation.gov.za](http://www.kzmeducation.gov.za)

dedicated to service and performance  
Empowering the future

### APPENDIX 3

#### Letter requesting permission from the Principal to conduct research at the school

PO Box 40234

Redhill

4071

22 July 2014

To: The Principal

Dear Madam

**Re: Request to conduct research**

I humbly request your permission to conduct a research study at your school. My research topic is **Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study**. This research will involve an interview with you as principal, a focus group with four members of the School Management Team and individual interviews with twelve learners in total ranging from grade 9-12 who were either offenders or victims to physical abuse. I wish to engage in observation of both the offenders and the victims by accessing six recorded disciplinary hearings on cases of physical abuse at your school. Relevant policy documents as well as the school Code of conduct will be analysed.

I have also sought permission from the relevant District Office to carry out this research study. It is hoped that input from this study will aid in the adoption of more progressive methods of discipline management. Please note that as this research is on a very sensitive topic, you will be asked to agree to a confidentiality clause to protect the rights of the learners.

I would appreciate it if you could sign below, thus indicating that you have granted permission for the research to take place at your school.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

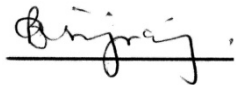
Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please further indicate by signing below that you as Principal give consent to participating in the said research.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I humbly await your response.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "A. Brijaraj", is written above a horizontal line.

A.BRIJARAJ (MEd Student)

**APPENDIX 4**

**Permission Form from the Principal that research may be conducted at the school**

**PERMISSION FORM FOR THE PRINCIPAL THAT RESEARCH MAY BE CONDUCTED AT THE SCHOOL**

**Managing Physical Abuse amongst learners in a Girls' High School in Kwa-Zulu Natal: A Case Study**

Researcher: A BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof Susanna A. Coetzee

I LINDA MAY JORGENSEN agree that the school can participate in the project named above. The details of the research and its purpose have been explained to me. An information letter has been given to me to keep.

I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

Participation of school:

Yes  No

The possible future use of the findings to inform government:

Yes  No

Publication and/or dissemination of findings:

Yes  No

Jorgensen  
Signature of participant

22/7/2014  
Date

Brijraj  
Signature of researcher

22/7/2014  
Date

## APPENDIX 5

### Letter requesting participation and consent from the Principal

PO Box 40234

Redhill

4071

29 January 2014

To: The Principal

Dear Madam

#### **Re: Request to participation and consent**

My name is Arthie Brijraj. I am presently studying towards a Master of Education (MEd) degree in the subject Education Management at the University of South Africa. My research topic is **Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls' High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study**.

I have obtained permission from the District Director (and also requested your permission) to conduct this research project at your school. I hereby invite you to participate in the research project. Should you agree to participate in an interview, I would like to inform you that the following applies:

- Your participation in this study is purely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are also free to withdraw from this research at any time.

I will protect your identity and your responses will be kept confidential. Your name and contact details will be kept in a separate file from any data that you supply. In any publication emerging from this research, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. I will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to identify you. I undertake not to divulge the information from these documents to anyone outside the school, or anybody in the school who may not be entitled to insight therein. Once the research has been completed, the findings will be presented in published

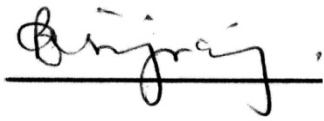


dissertation. Further to the above I attach the Confidentiality disclaimer, the intention of which is to indicate to you that strict confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and return it to me.

Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

I kindly await your response.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brijaraj', is written over a solid horizontal line.

A BRIJARAJ (MEd Student)

[arthiep@mweb.co.za](mailto:arthiep@mweb.co.za)

(0837839864) – cell no

## APPENDIX 6

### Example of the consent form for the Principal

#### Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study

Researcher: A BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof. Susanna A. Coetzee

I ..... am aware of the details of the research, its purpose and my involvement. An information letter has been given to me to keep.

I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

Being interviewed at some point during the study

Yes                      or                      No

The tape recording of my interview with the researcher

Yes                      or                      No

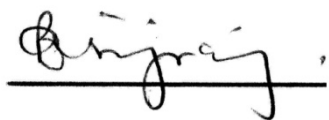
I agree to keep all identifying information about the participants and their names and study sites as completely confidential. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

.....

.....

Signature of participant

Date



Signature of researcher

.....  
Date

## **APPENDIX 7**

### **Letter requesting participation and consent from SMT members and Confidentiality Disclaimer**

**Dear SMT members**

My name is A. Brijraj. I am presently studying towards a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Education Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa. My study focuses on the management of physical abuse among girl learners.

I have obtained permission from the Head of Department of Education: KwaZulu-Natal and the Principal of the school to send this letter to you informing you of this research project. Should you agree to participate in a focus group, I would like to inform you of your following rights:

- Your participation in this study is purely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are also free to withdraw from this research at any time.

I kindly request that you sign below thus indicating that you consent to participating in the above study.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Further to the above I include the Confidentiality Disclaimer below, the intention of which is to indicate to you the participant that strict confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY DISCLAIMER**

**Title of Research Project: Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study**

**Researcher: A. BRIJRAJ**

As a researcher I understand that I may have access to confidential information about participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.

I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

I understand that all information about study sites or participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons any of this information, unless specifically authorised to do so by approved protocol or by acting in response to applicable law or court order, or public health or clinical need.

I understand that I am not to read information about study sites or participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.

I agree to notify my supervisor immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

Printed name

## APPENDIX 8

### Example of the Consent Form for the SMT members

#### Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study

Researcher: A BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof. Susanna A. Coetzee

I ..... am aware of the details of the research, its purpose and my involvement. An information letter has been given to me to keep.

I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

Being part of a focus group at some point during the study

Yes                      or                      No

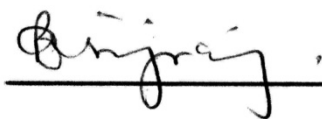
The tape recording of the focus group discussions

Yes                      or                      No

I agree to keep all identifying information about the participants and their names and study sites as completely confidential. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

.....

Signature of participant



Signature of researcher

.....

Date

.....

Date

## **APPENDIX 9**

### **Letter requesting learner participation and consent from parents of underage learners**

#### **Dear Parent**

My name is A. Brijraj. I am presently studying towards a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Education Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa. My study focuses on the management of physical abuse among girl learners.

I have obtained permission from the Acting District Director and the Principal of the school to send this letter to you informing you of this research project. With regards to this study, your daughter has the following rights:

- Her participation in this study is purely voluntary.
- She is free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- She may also withdraw from this research at any time.
- Her responses will be kept in the strictest of confidences.
- Her name or any identifying characteristics will not be divulged in the report.
- She is free to consult with the school counsellor and or the peer counsellors as and when she sees fit.

I will protect her identity. In any publication emerging from this research, she will be referred to as participant A, B, C, etc. Before she participates in this research, she will be provided with counselling by the school counsellor, to ensure that she is ready. If she needs further counselling after she has participated in the study, it will be arranged for her. I would appreciate it if you, the parent could sign this consent form as an indication that you have read and understood its contents.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thanking you kindly

A.BRIJRAJ

[arthiep@mweb.co.za](mailto:arthiep@mweb.co.za)

(0837839864) – cell no.

## APPENDIX 10

### Example of the Consent form for the parents

#### Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls' High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study

Researcher: A BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof. Susanna A. Coetzee

I ..... am aware of the details of the research, its purpose and my child's involvement. An information letter has been given to me to keep.

I consent to the following: (Tick to indicate your selection)

My child to be interviewed by the counsellor to determine whether there is any reason why she should rather not participate in the research

Yes                      or                      No

My child be interviewed by the researcher on a one-on-one basis.

Yes                      or                      No

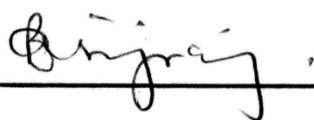
My child's interview to be recorded

Yes                      or                      No

I agree to keep all identifying information about the participants and their names and study sites as completely confidential. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

.....  
Signature of parent

.....  
Date

  
.....

Signature of researcher

.....  
Date

## APPENDIX 11

### Letter requesting learner participation and assent from underage learners

#### Dear Participant

My name is A. Brijraj. I am presently studying towards a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Education Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa. My study focuses on the management of physical abuse among girl learners' at your school. I have obtained permission from the Acting District Director and the Principal of your school to send this letter to you to participate in this research project. On reading this letter you can decide whether you wish to participate or not. Should you agree to participate, I would like to inform you of your following rights:

- Your participation in this study is purely voluntary.
- You are free to refuse to answer any question at any time.
- You are also free to withdraw from this research at any time.
- Your responses will be kept in the strictest of confidences.
- Your name or any identifying characteristics will not be divulged in the report.
- You are free to consult with the school counsellor and or the peer counsellors as and when you see fit.

I will protect your identity. In any publication emerging from this research, you will be referred to as participant A, B, C, etc. Before you participate in this research, you will be provided with counselling by the school counsellor, to ensure that you are ready. If you need further counselling after you have participated in the study, it will be arranged for you.

I would appreciate it if you the learner could sign this consent form as an indication that you have read and understood its contents.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thanking you kindly

A.BRIJRAJ

[arthiep@mweb.co.za](mailto:arthiep@mweb.co.za)

(0837839864) – cell no.



**APPENDIX 12**

**Example of the Assent form for the learners**

**Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study**

Researcher: A BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof. Susanna A. Coetzee

I ..... am aware of the details of the research, its purpose and my expected involvement. An information letter has been given to me to keep.

I assent to be interviewed by the researcher:

(Tick to indicate your selection)

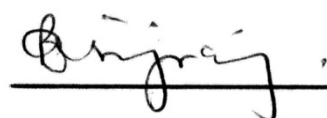
Yes                    or                    No

I agree for the interview to be recorded:

Yes                    or                    No

I agree to keep all identifying information about the participants and their names and study sites as completely confidential. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

.....  
Signature of participant



Signature of researcher

.....  
Date

.....  
Date

## **APPENDIX 13**

### **Letter requesting participation of the school counsellor**

PO Box 40234

Redhill

4071

29 January 2014

#### **Dear Counsellor**

My name is A. Brijraj. I am presently studying towards a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Education Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa. My study focuses on the management of physical abuse among girl learners' at your school.

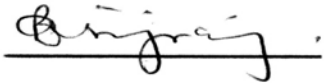
I have obtained permission from the District Director and the Principal of your school and the parents of the prospective learner participants have consented to their children's participation. The learners themselves have assented to participate.

After you have read this letter you can decide whether you wish to participate or not. Should you agree to participate, I will require you to interview the prospective learner participants, who will be either victims or offenders to physical abuse, to determine whether any harm will come to a learner as a result of participating in this research and also to be available to council learners during and after the research should it be necessary. To assist you in making such determination I attach the interview guide to this letter.

Your reports will be kept confidential and only be used for the purpose to establish the readiness of a prospective learner participant so as to avoid possible harm to a participant. Please find my signed Confidentiality Disclaimer attached.

If you agree to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form and return it to me. Should you require any further information, do not hesitate to contact me.

Thanking you kindly

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Brijaraj', is written over a solid horizontal line.

A.BRIJARAJ

[arthiep@mweb.co.za](mailto:arthiep@mweb.co.za)

(0837839864) – cell no.

## APPENDIX 14

### Example of the Consent form for the school counsellor

#### Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study

Researcher: A BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

Supervisor: Prof. Susanna A. Coetzee

I ..... am aware of the details of the research, its purpose and my expected involvement. An information letter has been given to me to keep.

I consent to participate in this research by interviewing prospective learner participants and declare my willingness to counsel any learner participant who may require counselling:

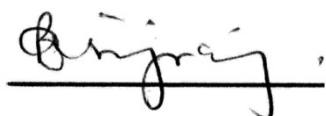
(Tick to indicate your selection)

Yes                      or                      No

I agree to keep all identifying information about the participants and their names and study sites as completely confidential. I further agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

.....

Signature of counsellor



Signature of researcher

.....

Date

.....

Date

## APPENDIX 15

### **Letter requesting permission from the Disciplinary Committee to have access to six recorded disciplinary hearings dealing with physical abuse cases**

**Dear Disciplinary Committee members**

My name is A. Brijraj. I am presently studying towards a Master of Education (MEd) degree in Education Management and Leadership at the University of South Africa. My research topic is **Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study**. I humbly request your permission to have access to six recorded disciplinary hearings on cases of physical abuse between learners at your school. It is hoped that input from this study will aid in the adoption of more progressive methods of discipline management. I ensure anonymity and confidentiality of all the participants.

I kindly request that you sign below thus indicating that you agree to the accessing of the required recordings of the two disciplinary hearings on cases of physical abuse.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Print name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

I kindly await your response.

A.BRIJRAJ (MEd Student)

[arthiep@mweb.co.za](mailto:arthiep@mweb.co.za) (0837839864) – cell no.

## **APPENDIX 16**

### **Researcher's signed Confidentiality Disclaimer**

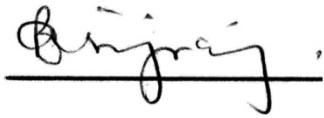
**Title of Research Project: Managing Physical Abuse among learners in a Girls High School in KwaZulu-Natal: A Case Study**

**RESEARCHER: A. BRIJRAJ**

As a researcher I understand that I may have access to confidential information about participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my responsibilities to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.
- I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.
- I understand that all information about study sites or participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorised persons any of this information, unless specifically authorized to do so by approved protocol or by acting in response to applicable law or court order, or public health or clinical need.
- I understand that I am not to read information about study sites or participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.

- I agree to notify my supervisor immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or a situation which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.



Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

\_\_\_\_\_ A. BRIJARAJ \_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

## APPENDIX 17

### Research Ethics Clearance Certificate



### Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

**A Brijraj [7236948]**

for a M Ed study entitled

**Managing physical abuse amongst learners in a Girl's High School in KwaZulu  
Natal: A case study**

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa  
College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two  
years from the date of issue.



Prof KP Dzvimbob  
Executive Dean : CEDU



Dr M Claassens  
CEDU REC (Chairperson)  
[mcdtc@netactive.co.za](mailto:mcdtc@netactive.co.za)

Reference number: 2014 JULY /7236948/MC

16 JULY 2014



## APPENDIX 18

### Turn-it-in Originality Report



#### Confirmation that report was run through Turn-it-in and Originality Report

Candidate: Miss A Brijraj (723 694 8)

To whom it may concern

I hereby confirm that Miss A Brijraj's (723 694 8) dissertation was run through the Turn-it-in programme to determine the originality percentage of the report. She received an overall positive report. Only a few instances of possible unoriginal content were indicated and she addressed those. Below the summary report:

Turnitin Originality Report  
dissertation by Arthie Brijraj  
From Submission 1 (M students)

- Processed on 08-Jul-2015 06:00 SAST
- ID: 554590338
- Word Count: 55910

Similarity Index  
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Student Papers:  
4%

Prof SA Coetzee

Department Educational Leadership and Management

012 361 0392 (office)

[Coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Coetzsa1@unisa.ac.za)

Open Rubric

## **An example of an interview transcript with the Principal**

**Interviewer:** Good day. Can we begin with this interview, Mam? How do the school's Code of conduct and disciplinary policy regulate physical abuse at school?

**Principal:** There are very clear guidelines in SASA that a school's Code of conduct must address inappropriate behaviours. Physical abuse is a serious contravention and is addressed in the Disciplinary Policy and the Safety Policy. All learners are made aware they have the right to be safe and, err, that any person who infringes on their right must be punished.

**Interviewer:** How common are physical altercations between learners at the school?

**Principal:** Well, err, the prevalence of physical altercations has dropped dramatically over the past few years.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think learners engage in physical altercations?

**Principal:** Hmm, many learners have not had the life skills of appropriate conflict management taught to them especially at home. The influence of TV, electronic media and games, poor adult role models, peer pressure have played an enormous role. Hmm, also learners who are very frustrated have poor interpersonal relationships resort to physical assault to address their feelings of anger.

**Interviewer:** How does this type of learner misbehaviour affect the teaching and learning milieu at the school?

**Principal:** I think that unfortunately this type of misbehaviour can have a disruptive effect in the classroom. The aggressive learner threatens other learners who are then unsettled for the lesson. The teacher, instead of teaching focuses on trying to settle the class.

**Interviewer:** Do the learners who resort to physical fights have any risk factors in common?

**Principal:** Unfortunately yes, often their poor behaviour is linked to poor or absent parenting. Grandparents or other relatives are unable to teach appropriate interpersonal skills. Many resort to abuse and gossip via electronic social media, lose perspective of the truth, fail to test the facts and they act out their frustrations and/or anger.

**Interviewer:** How do the SMT handle cases of physical abuse?

**Principal:** Err, yes, the SMT adhere to the guidelines as per the Code of conduct and other policies. An investigation is conducted with all parties to determine the facts. A disciplinary hearing with HoDs and maybe even school governing body follows. Punitive measures may be imposed but counselling is always given for remediation.

**Interviewer:** What role does the DoBE play in preventing incidents of girl learners engaging in physical fights?

**Principal:** Well, they play a very minor role in the prevention of incidents. The onus is left for the school to follow policy. The school must embark on programmes to raise awareness i.e. Life Orientation lessons, HoG, Head leaders and main assemblies.

**Interviewer:** What role does the school governing body play in preventing incidents of girl learners engaging in physical fights?

**Principal:** Hmm, the school governing body they play a more supportive role of the school's programmes. They approve the programmes, assist with disciplinary hearings whenever necessary. Grant budget allocation to send HoD and other staff on workshops to improve skills to deal with the problem.

**Interviewer:** Do you have parental support with regard to learners who have violated the school Code of conduct by engaging in fisticuffs?

**Principal:** We have been relatively successful. The reputation of the school's SMT to seek remedial action for the involved learners is important. Parents are

also guided to seek external assistance, like anger management, family therapy, etc.in an attempt to provide supportive homes.

**Interviewer:** If so, explain the role played by the affected parents.

**Principal:** Well, yes, parents who accept or admit that there is a problem are usually more successful. They implement removal of privileges, seek remedial programmes or external counsellors to address problems. If they work with the school and reinforce the appropriate behaviours, then their daughters usually improve behaviourally and academically.

**Interviewer:** What role, if any, does the South African Police play at your school?

**Principal:** Yes, our local SAPS has played a very positive role. The liaison officer in particular has made a huge difference. She has developed awareness procedures. Her talks to the girls have emphasised the legal aspects of their behaviour. Her willingness to be part of remedial processes has been important.

**Interviewer:** What are the consequences for the learners who engage in physical abuse?

**Principal:** Well, learners are investigated as to their role and the circumstances leading to the abuse. Also, err, round table mediations are conducted to raise awareness and improve communication between the parties. Counselling is the basis of this exercise. A disciplinary hearing with HoDs and sometimes school governing body is conducted. The consequences involved, include letters of warning, detentions, community services, therapy with school counsellor, external therapists, assessments, etc. to seek assistance to improve the learners areas of concern.

**Interviewer:** Which laws and policies govern the management of physical abuse at schools?

**Principal:** There is the SASA, the Code of Conduct, Safety and Security Policy and the Children's Protection Act.

**Interviewer:** Do these laws and policies aid in curbing learner physical abuse?

**Principal:** There is awareness of acceptable behaviour... raise awareness. Implementation of policy to address abuse immediately is critical. Laws and policy can only guide the school to the actions taken. The implementation of the policy by all staff, prefects and parents is critical. Consistency of implementation is critical. The visible change in troubled learners attitudes and behaviour is the best advert for curbing future incidents of physical abuse.

## **An example of an interview transcript with the Learner Offenders**

**Interviewer:** Tell me about the instance or instances where you have been accused of physically abusing another learner?

**Offender 1:** Mostly in school, everybody knows me outside of school, but in school girls are always testing me.

**Offender 2:** It was because of name calling. I was called a female dog by another learner.

**Offender 3:** There was a personality conflict with me and another girl. We were saying things about each other. She provoked me. My friends told me to fight her. Because of pride, I had to prove myself by fighting.

**Offender 4:** It was because of social media and boys. I acted out in violence. It was cattish, girlish behaviour, I know but I wanted revenge.

**Offender 5:** It was a misunderstanding between me and the victim, where she said a comment that I wasn't so comfortable with and one thing led to another. I was at fault and I admit I shouldn't have responded to anything that was said but I was young and immature so physically abusing her was my way of responding, if that makes sense.

**Offender 6:** The situation started off as nothing more than a game. Our grade was singing and dancing during break and the prefect came to quieten us down as the matrics were writing their trial exams. The situation quickly escalated and I hit her on the back of her head for disturbing our game.

**Interviewer:** How were you disciplined for physically abusing another learner?

**Offender 1:** I was sent to the principal's office and the fight was discussed with only the people who were involved.

**Offender 2:** I had to attend a disciplinary hearing and I had two main detentions (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school). I also had to attend anger management course which was out of school for three or four sessions with a child counsellor.

**Offender 3:** At school there was a disciplinary hearing and at home I had privileges taken away. The fight was separated by a teacher. The HoG was called in and statements were written. The school phoned my parents and I had to take a letter home telling them of the hearing.

**Offender 4:** There was a disciplinary hearing and I had detention and I also had to write an apology note.

**Offender 5:** Well, at home nothing much was done, I was just told to control my feelings and walk away if I happen to get angry by what is said by other people. At school, however, I was given a hearing and punishment was given.

**Offender 6:** My actions led to a disciplinary hearing where both sides of the story was heard. The people involved in the hearing decided to issue me with 5 demerits and 6 hours of community service. I was also asked to write a letter of apology to both the victim and the school as a whole.

**Interviewer:** Did the manner in which you were disciplined discourage you from physically abusing another learner thereafter and if not why not?

**Offender 1:** Yes, I am not a violent person and I do feel bad after I have already done what I done.

**Offender 2:** Yes, it did. I have not been in a fight since then.

**Offender 3:** Yes, it did discourage me. The disciplinary hearing was the highest form of discipline at school. This has prevented future fights because of the punishment given to me. I had to do community service and this was very humiliating to me.

**Offender 4:** Yes. I was very scared to fight again.

**Offender 5:** It did scare me in a way because my parents going to the school hearing was a bit embarrassing and something that was very shameful.

**Offender 6:** Yes. The punishment that I received ensured that I never physically abuse another learner.

**Interviewer:** Below is a list of factors that are usually regarded as factors which place learners at the risk of accepting physical violence as a solution to resolving a disagreement. Please place the factors in order from the one that you regard as most applicable to you personally to the factor least applicable to you:

**Offender 1:**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RATING (1-9)</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home	8
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community	3
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	1
4. The need for power and popularity	2
5. Competition among learners.	9
6. A low self-esteem.	4
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	5
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	7
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	6

**Offender 2:**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RATING (1-9)</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home	1
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community	3
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	9
4. The need for power and popularity	8
5. Competition among learners.	6
6. A low self-esteem.	4
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	7
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	5
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	2



**Offender 3:**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RATING (1-9)</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home	7
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community	4
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	3
4. The need for power and popularity.	1
5. Competition among learners.	2
6. A low self-esteem.	8
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	5
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	6
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	9

**Offender 4:**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RATING (1-9)</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home.	8
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community.	4
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	7
4. The need for power and popularity.	9
5. Competition among learners.	6
6. A low self-esteem.	1
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	5
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	3
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	2

**Offender 5:**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RATING (1-9)</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home.	4
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community.	9
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	8
4. The need for power and popularity.	1
5. Competition among learners.	3
6. A low self-esteem.	2
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	7
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	5
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	6

**Offender 6:**

<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RATING (1-9)</b>
1. Violence and physical abuse at home.	9
2. Violence and physical abuse in the community.	3
3. Peer group pressure (using physical violence is accepted among your friends and you will not fit into the group if you disapprove).	8
4. The need for power and popularity	7
5. Competition among learners.	6
6. A low self-esteem.	5
7. Violence exhibited as accepted in the media.	2
8. A lack of support services for misbehaviour at schools.	4
9. Learners struggling to concentrate on set school tasks.	1

**Interviewer:** Do you think the SMT is effective in the manner in which it handles girl learners who have engaged in physical altercations?

**Offender 1:** Yes, they help sort the situations.

**Offender 2:** Yes, it did. I used to fight a lot since grade 8 and now it has decreased.

**Offender 3:** At the time when discipline was strong fighting wasn't as often. Fights have increased.

**Offender 4:** Yes. I think that measures put into place helps us in future, e.g. detention gives you time to think and to reflect and the hearings give you time to voice your opinion.

**Offender 5:** No, I honestly believe they do not handle it properly, because giving certain punishments to learners doesn't stop them from doing it again.

**Offender 6:** Yes, like myself girls who have physically abused other learners have refrained from doing it again. I know no repeat offenders at my school.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, what could the SMT do to discourage learners from engaging in physical altercations at school?

**Offender 1:** Speak to them on a daily basis and making sure learners talk to them about what's troubling them.

**Offender 2:** They can be stricter about fights. Harsher punishment maybe suspension. Main detention (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school) doesn't really do much.

**Offender 3:** Suspension and having the police at school.

**Offender 4:** Counselling measures put in by the school and the teachers. They can also be more supportive before the fight breaks out.

**Offender 5:** They could maybe make strict rules like for example say if a learner assaults another learner, they will lay a charge against them or expel them. I

say this because no school girl wants a bad record or wants to be expelled because once your reputation becomes bad... and a good reputation for girls is everything.

**Offender 6:** Promote more sisterhood among learners. Ensure that learners are occupied during all hours of the school day as physical altercations normally arise from learners that are not occupied.

**Interviewer:** What was your parents' response to you being in a fight?

**Offender 1:** My mother understood where I was coming from because the fight I got into wasn't the first time this person made me upset.

**Offender 2:** They were angry and disappointed. There was no punishment at home. They shouted at me and told me to get my act together or I'll end up like my brother.

**Offender 3:** They were disappointed. My mum used this against me. My dad just lectured me on values.

**Offender 4:** They were angry and shocked. I am not a violent person but I have anger management issues. They were disappointed because I inflicted pain on another person. More home rules were put into place and my use of social media was monitored.

**Offender 5:** They were shocked, but they really didn't do much. They gave me a talk and told me to stay out of trouble.

**Offender 6:** More than anything they were disappointed as they did not raise me that way and they do not condone such behaviour. Privileges such as cell phones and going to the mall were taken away from me as they thought I was undeserving of it.

**Interviewer:** What are the steps that you will take to help avoid the occurrence of an aggressive dispute in the future?

**Offender 1:** Think before I react. I must try to be calm or I must walk away or I must just not say or do anything.

**Offender 2:** I must speak to someone about it before I take any further action or I would speak to that person.

**Offender 3:** I would stop at verbal level. I won't be influenced by group.

**Offender 4:** Calm down. Walk away before it becomes violent. Avoid losing control. Avoid listening to rumours.

**Offender 5:** I will ignore any occurrence of such and walk away because fighting will not get you anywhere and besides it's not worth it. I have better things to do in life than to waste it fighting.

**Offender 6:** Since the incident occurred I have learned to control my temper and have attended counselling sessions to help me manage my impulsive behaviour.

**Interviewer:** What could the school do to promote non-violent learner behaviour?

**Offender 1:** If there is a problem between learners, one learner should go to a teacher and speak to him or her about how upset or hurt they are and the teacher can deal with the situation instead of the learners.

**Offender 2:** The school can do assembly talks if they will listen. They can also bring in outsiders to give motivational speeches.

**Offender 3:** There must be constant reminders. Community service, detention or even isolation (cf. chapter 4, section 4.4).

**Offender 4:** Discipline measures should be harsher. They must increase counselling. Girls should be exposed to more talks by outsiders who have experienced violence.

**Offender 5:** They could promote talks about non-violence in the school. They could have harsh outcomes when a learner attacks another learner.

**Offender 6:** Same as I discussed in question 6.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that the schools' code of conduct effectively deals with girls who physically attack another learner?

**Offender 1:** No, but there is certain things that are in the Code of conduct that tell us to respect one another.

**Offender 2:** No, I don't think so. If it was there won't be fights.

**Offender 3:** Yes, it is effective. The Code of conduct has lots of rules.

**Offender 4:** Yes, the disciplinary hearing is effective.

**Offender 5:** You could say so, but there is no exact punishment for physical abuse in school, because they give different punishments to similar cases, which I personally think is inconsistent.

**Offender 6:** Yes, the school's Code of conduct doesn't focus on punishing learners. It helps us to make things right with the victim.

## **An example of an interview transcript with the Learner Victims**

**Interviewer:** What would you say are the main reasons for girls engaging in physical abuse?

**Victim 1:** The backgrounds of the learner. If they come from aggressive or abusive homes. They don't have attention and love at home. Sometimes they come from [an] aggressive society. At home there could be abusive or alcoholic parents.

**Victim 2:** Maybe boys or social media.

**Victim 3:** Talking about each other e.g. gossiping, calling each other names, using vulgar language, fighting for a topic that is not theirs and getting involved in stories that do not concern them.

**Victim 4:** For dominance, over boys, jealousy, gossip, rumours spread on social media.

**Victim 5:** The main reason for girls engaging in physical abuse would be that the problem was not solved in the right manner and there was a build-up of anger in the bully.

**Victim 6:** Because some girls have short tempers and can't control their anger.

**Interviewer:** How has the incident/s of physical abuse affected you?

**Victim 1:** It lowered my self-esteem. I started doubting myself as a leader as I am a prefect. I questioned my capabilities as a leader. It brought the prefect team together, the prefect girls united with this. I am an orphan and live in a children's home and in the disciplinary hearing I was educated about the way that parents deal with their child's misbehaviour because the parent was in denial of the offender's behaviour.

**Victim 2:** It made me aware of cyber bullying.

**Victim 3:** Physically, it has left me with bruises on my body. Emotionally, it has made me cry and I am usually not my normal self where I don't interact with others. I would just be in my room crying.

**Victim 4:** Emotionally, it made me feel weak and vulnerable. I also became more aware of the school's Discipline Policy.

**Victim 5:** It has not affected me in any negative way. It has taught me that solving things physically won't solve the problem.

**Victim 6:** Yes, it did, because I got demerits and I couldn't participate in some occasions at school.

**Interviewer:** How did the SMT deal with your physical abuse?

**Victim 1:** They were very supportive. The HoG heard all sides of the story and counselled me and she addressed the offender. The principal was notified of the incident and a disciplinary hearing was set up.

**Victim 2:** They phoned my parents and said there was going to be a disciplinary hearing.

**Victim 3:** I got two main detentions (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school) from my HoG and the principal requested that I get counselling sessions for one hour.

**Victim 4:** I had to write a statement and the matter was investigated. There was a disciplinary hearing and counselling was given to me.

**Victim 5:** The school staff member offered counselling, however, I did not feel the need to go.

**Victim 6:** We went to a disciplinary hearing and were asked questions about the fight. Thereafter we were told we will do community service as a punishment.

**Interviewer:** Do you think the school's Discipline Policy is successful in minimising incidents of girls fighting at your school?

**Victim 1:** Yes. Incidents of physical abuse on school property are always a serious issue and prefects look out for this during breaks and in the morning and afternoon duties. The school handled the matter in a very serious way.



- Victim 2:** No, they prolonged the problem.
- Victim 3:** Yes.
- Victim 4:** Yes, grades are separated during breaks. This is part of keeping discipline. The girls know if they fight there will be consequences.
- Victim 5:** Yes, because the girls are now aware that if you engage in physical abuse, there are consequences.
- Victim 6:** Not really, because some girls choose to disobey the rules, yet knowing very well that there will be consequences. We all follow the rules at a choice to those who don't. They also do it as a choice, because their actions show.
- Interviewer:** When you were attacked, what was the reaction of your peers? For example, did anybody help you?
- Victim 1:** Learners thought it was a joke. They laughed and ridiculed me, but the prefect team stood by me and they were very supportive.
- Victim 2:** Learners just stood and looked, but one of the acting prefects helped.
- Victim 3:** Yes, I had teachers as well as my classmates helping me. They were pulling me away and tried to stop the fight.
- Victim 4:** No, everyone just stands and watches. They want to see more.
- Victim 5:** My peers helped me by splitting up the fight.
- Victim 6:** The peers were active, as a result many were cheering instead of one being a bigger person and help. It made me see that small things amuse small minds.
- Interviewer:** Did you receive or was counselling offered to you after the incident? If you received counselling did it help you?
- Victim 1:** Yes, counselling was given to me. It was successful because it helped me to overcome it.

**Victim 2:** Yes and it did help me.

**Victim 3:** Yes, I have received counselling and it has helped me to not stoop to anybody's level and what people say should not bother me. I must not be defined by what people say. I must just be myself and remain who I am.

**Victim 4:** Yes, counselling by the HoG and the school counsellor. It helped me overcome the incident.

**Victim 5:** Counselling was offered but I did not go.

**Victim 6:** Yes, it did help because the offender and I have made peace about the incident and we are now friends.

## **An example of a transcript with a Focus Group of members of the SMT**

**Interviewer:** Good day colleagues. I want to thank you from the outset for your time and participation. May we begin? How many cases, dealing with physical abuse, do you decide on during a year?

**SMT 1:** I have had to deal with only one case this year, due to fact they are in grade 11 and are more mature now so less physical abuse occurs. There was no disciplinary hearing, the learner was counselled and given detention.

**SMT 2:** As Head of grade 10, there were no incidences of physical abuse this year.

**SMT 3:** One only. Yes only one.

**SMT 4:** On average two cases per year. 2014 - grade 9 only one...only one

**Interviewer:** Would you say, the incidents of physical abuse among the learners are on the increase?

**SMT 1:** Yes, physical abuse is on the increase in particular with the junior learners.

**SMT 2:** Yes, among other grades also.

**SMT 3:** No, I think that there is a decided decrease in incidents.

**SMT 4:** In recent years I feel it has become more frequent.

**Interviewer:** How do you differentiate between the different levels of misbehaviour?

**SMT 4:** Different levels of misbehaviour are clearly set out in the...the school's Code of conduct. Before dealing with the level of misbehaviour one needs to establish firstly the facts, i.e. what actually took place, secondly the reason behind the misbehaviour, i.e. it is no use punishing the action if the issue or cause behind it is not solved or resolved.

**SMT 2:** Also, there is verbal abuse, incidences of drug taking and peddling as well as absconding school. Each offence is placed in different categories. Each category has disciplinary procedures.

**SMT 1:** Yes.... Yes, I also differentiate between the different levels of misbehaviour based on the school's Code of conduct, which has the different levels of misbehaviour categorised. I also use the Discipline Policy of the school.

**SMT 3:** Me, as well. The main tool used is the school's code of conduct. There are 8 core values on which we focus. In the Code of conduct there are different categories of offences, ranging from 1 to 5, with assault being a category 5.

**Interviewer:** How does the SMT handle incidents of physical abuse?

**SMT 2:** Heads of Grades are informed, learners are asked to write a report, parents are informed, incident is reported to upper management, learners are given main detentions (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school) or a tribunal is held and learners may be suspended or expelled. Parents are called to school and informed. A lot of pastoral care is given to learners.

**SMT 1:** I think that it is treated seriously. I agree with the previous speaker... learners are isolated, statements are written by learners involved in physical abuse as well as witnesses. Learners are counselled. Parents are informed telephonically and letters are sent home to parents as well. Hearings are set up and conducted. Positive remediation is then instituted.

**SMT 4:** I agree as well and think that this is a serious matter, as it is a category 5 offence. I handle such incidents very much in the same way as you just explained now (SMT 1). Investigation is done and statements sought from both witnesses and offenders. Interviews take place and internal tribunal held, depending on the seriousness of the incident.

**SMT 3:** Tying in with the school code of conduct, physical assault leads directly to a hearing. However, as soon as this incident occurs, the learners involved are brought to the foyer and isolated from each other. Each person involved in

the incident then writes a detailed report of what happened. Should there be witnesses, they are also asked to write reports. Parents are contacted by the Head of Grade and they are informed of the incident. There is also an attempt at reconciliation and the school counsellor is brought on board for this step of the process, particularly if there are underlying home issues. Notice of the disciplinary hearing is then sent to parents. More often than not parents are called in as well and are kept informed of how the matter is progressing. Often the learner is given detention and community service. Learners may also be asked to write reflective essays, in an attempt to prevent such behaviour from recurring.

**Interviewer:** What kind of parental support does the school receive with regard to learners who have exhibited violent behaviour?

**SMT 1:** I feel that very few parents are supportive. I have found that learners who are repeat offenders, their parents show no support.

**SMT 3:** Well, as for me, I feel that most parents do come in when asked to do so. The one problem encountered is if we do not have updated contact details. By and large parents are supportive of the school's code of conduct and are willing to work with school regarding remediation of violent behaviour.

**SMT 2:** I have had some parents who are very supportive and they agree with the punishment administered, while others become abusive and hold the school accountable. Some parents also report the school to the circuit manager.

**SMT 4:** I have encountered parents who are often supportive of the schools attempts to instil discipline. What is concerning is that learners who come from homes where violent behaviour is the norm often exhibit this kind of behaviour at school.

**Interviewer:** Is there adequate policy directive from the DoBE with regard to the procedure to be followed when such abuse occurs?

**SMT 2:** To me the learners' Code of conduct clearly outlines the various category offences and the punishment for each offence. The Code of conduct also includes the different policies and parents are requested to sign that they have read the Code of conduct and will abide by these codes.

**SMT 3:** I think. No. There is very little in the way of policy or directive. When schools seek expulsion or suspension, the DoBE is very reluctant to approve. This is the reason why the method of suspension at our school is actually isolation (cf. chapter 4, section 4.3).

**SMT 1:** I feel that although the DoBE does have procedures in place, it is very limited. If learners need to be suspended or transferred in extremely violent cases, the process through the department takes a very long time.

**SMT 4:** There must be a directive in the school's handbook on which our school's Code of conduct is based. The Code of conduct states that expulsion could be sought; this, however, is not done as we know that the DoBE will not uphold such decision or recommendation from the school.

**Interviewer:** What support does the school get from outside services, like the South African Police Services or any other psychological government services with regard to physical girl on girl attacks at school?

**SMT 1:** Our school is fortunate in that we have a school liaison officer with the local police authority. They are very supportive and active. They do come in at the beginning of every year and address the entire school on violent behaviour. There has not been a need yet for them to come into school when girls have fought with each other.

**SMT 3:** I agree with you and think that we are very lucky as the local SAPS have worked very well with us and we have a good relationship, as you have mentioned with them. As for services such as psychological services, they are not operational in "normal" schools. This is the reason that our school employs a counsellor.

- SMT 4:** I agree with what is being said as we have not had any reason to call on the SAPS for such offences. The SAPS have been very supportive with other issues. With regards to psychological services the DoBE social worker is overlooked, so unless it is a very serious offence issues are dealt with by our own social worker.
- SMT 2:** With regard to the role played by our local SAPS, I agree that they are very supportive to us and that they work very closely with the school principal.
- Interviewer:** Is the school's Code of conduct and disciplinary policy adequate in regulating this type of learner misbehaviour?
- SMT 4:** For me the only loophole, if you want to call it that, is that should a learner bring a weapon to school with the intention of using it, we would not know until it had been used.
- SMT 1:** My experience is that our school has a Code of conduct and Discipline Policy in place. This is very limiting when it comes to very serious cases. Punishment is therefore not always adequate. Punishment is constructive, learners are given main detention (this is a two-hour after school detention on a Friday where the learners are tasked with community service in the school) or they have to write reflective essays and counselling. Learners are also "suspended" by means of isolation in the school foyer.
- SMT 3:** I believe that we have greatly cut down on the number of incidents of violent behaviour in our school. This could be a result of learners realising that there are serious consequences should they be involved in any kind of violent behaviour.
- SMT 2:** Serious assault is a category 5 offence according to the Code of conduct. This will lead to a disciplinary hearing, which will establish whether suspension should be applied. Serious assault should be explained or defined more clearly.

**Interviewer:** How does this kind of behaviour affect the ethos of your school?

**SMT 2:** It creates negativity and it is very unsettling for the girls. Also influences the opinion of the community about the school. Some parents do not want to bring their children to this school.

**SMT 3:** The impact is immediately felt and often filters down to other grades. Learners then begin to push boundaries.

**SMT 1:** I think that learners know that they can take advantage as the punishment is not so severe. This kind of behaviour has had a negative impact on the ethos of our school. It has painted a very negative picture of our school in the community. Hence the good learners do not want to attend, the calibre of learners we are now inheriting are poorly behaved or they come from homes where violence is the norm. This kind of behaviour also disrupts learning as other learners in particular their friends get involved and become unsettled.

**SMT 4:** Yes, I think that it degrades the ethos as the girls are then not living up to the Code of conduct and core values. Outsiders hear of the incidents but not of the measures taken to correct the behaviour and of how the incident has been handled.

**Interviewer:** What legal prescripts are you aware of in the management of physical abuse among learners?

**SMT 3:** I am aware that a learner who has been assaulted by another learner has the right to report the incident to the SAPS and to open up a case against the perpetrator.

**SMT 4:** As most learners are minors in the eyes of the law, they are the responsibility of their parents and should the victim's family wish to press charges they would need to do so outside of school.

**SMT 1:** I know that there are quite a few laws and policies. I know of The Constitution of the RSA, the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, National Education Policy Act, Policy Handbook for Educators, the school's Discipline Policy and Code of conduct.



**SMT 2:** In terms of the constitution, South African citizens enjoy certain rights, with specific rights of children being highlighted. According to the rights of learners I know that they must learn and be taught in a safe environment and must be free from intimidation and interference.

**Interviewer:** Which laws and policies govern the management of physical abuse at schools?

**SMT 1:** I know that the South African School Act has a chapter 2 on schools' Discipline Policy.

**SMT 3:** We are governed by the SASA in the management of physical abuse.

**SMT 4:** I am actually not sure of the laws.

**SMT 2:** I am actually not sure of the laws as well.

**Interviewer:** Ok ladies, we are almost at the end, my last question is, do these laws and policies aid in curbing learner physical abuse?

**SMT 2:** Sorry, but I am not sure.

**SMT 4:** I personally feel that no law or policy will ever curb any unlawful behaviour.

**SMT 3:** I don't think they do since the SASA and its contents are not common knowledge. The deterrent would rather be the school's Code of conduct.

**SMT 1:** Not completely. It does curb it to a certain degree, as most learners are aware of consequences and don't want to be in that situation. However, there is a minority who show total disregard as they know they can get away with minor punishment.

**Interviewer:** I once again thank you, my colleagues, for your time and invaluable input.