

**THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL
WORKERS RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH
SEXUAL MINORITIES**

by

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THIS IS ME

I am not a stranger to the dark
Hide away, they say
'Cause we don't want your broken parts
I've learned to be ashamed of all my scars
Run away, they say
No one'll love you as you are

But I won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us
For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

Another round of bullets hits my skin
Well, fire away 'cause today, I won't let the shame sink in
We are bursting through the barricades and
Reaching for the sun (we are warriors)
Yeah, that's what we've become (yeah, that's what we've become)

I won't let them break me down to dust
I know that there's a place for us
For we are glorious

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out
I am brave, I am bruised
I am who I'm meant to be, this is me
Look out 'cause here I come
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

This is me
and I know that I deserve your love
(Oh-oh-oh-oh) there's nothing I'm not worthy of
(Oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh-oh-oh, oh, oh)
When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out
This is brave, this is bruised
This is who I'm meant to be, this is me!
Look out 'cause here I come (look out 'cause here I come)
And I'm marching on to the beat I drum (marching on, marching, marching on)
I'm not scared to be seen
I make no apologies, this is me

When the sharpest words wanna cut me down
I'm gonna send a flood, gonna drown 'em out
I'm gonna send a flood
Gonna drown 'em out
Oh
This is ME!!

DECLARATION

I, Nicolaas Jacobus Marais (Student number: 35981849), declare that,

THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL BASED SOCIAL WORKERS RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

Is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

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.



December 2023

Nicolaas Jacobus Marais

Date



Orcid.org no.: 0009-0005-2149-7217

DEDICATION

To the Bright Souls Lost

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of all LGBTQIP2SAI+ individuals who, in the face of the complexities and challenges of life, found themselves struggling and feeling lost. Their stories remain an indelible reminder of the importance of fostering understanding, acceptance and love within our communities.

May their journeys inspire us to create a world where every person, regardless of their identity, is embraced with empathy, supported without condition and celebrated for who they are. In their memory, let us commit ourselves to advocate for mental health, foster inclusivity and build a society where no one feels alone.

May the light of these souls continue to shine in our hearts, guiding us toward a more compassionate and just world.

"In loving memory of my Mother, Meisie Marais, whose support and boundless love continue to inspire my journey through the fields of knowledge. This dissertation is dedicated to her enduring memory. You live forever in my heart."

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I will always remember.... the milkshake!

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically engages with the transformation occurring within the South African Department of Basic Education, marked by a departure from an exclusive education model towards a more inclusive paradigm that integrates the services of school-based social workers. Despite this commendable shift, persisting challenges of discernment, marginalization and high levels of prejudice against youth sexual minorities continue to mar the school environment. Establishing a foundation of acceptance, belonging and connectedness is deemed fundamental for the educational success of all learners. However, a considerably high number of youth sexual minorities still contends with feelings of misunderstanding, non-acceptance lack of support in their school situations.

The theoretical framework underpinning this research is anchored in the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory. The primary research objective is to attain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences and challenges confronted by school-based social workers as they navigate the terrain of providing intervention services to LGBTQI2SAA youth sexual minorities. Methodologically, a qualitative research approach is employed, encompassing phenomenological, contextual, descriptive and explorative research designs. The research sample comprises 38 school-based social workers drawn from the province of Gauteng. Data are collected through a purposive sampling technique using semi-structured face-to-face and MS Teams interviews.

Thematic analysis of the rich dataset reveals an array of emergent themes and sub-themes that encapsulates the multifaceted challenges and experiences encountered by school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Sub-themes include the imperative of providing equal services to all learners, the role of offering counselling and support to learners identifying as sexual minorities, considerations based on the learner's needs and age and the necessity to develop protective measures for youth sexual minorities. Challenges faced by these school-based social workers encompass experiences of lack of acceptance, understanding and

support, along with instances of victimization, rejection, bullying and psycho-social health implications for youth sexual minorities.

The study embeds its findings within the global and African contexts of sexual minority rights, instructive legal frameworks impacting same-sex behaviours, the complex issue of criminalization in certain regions and the enduring social stigmatization faced even where same-sex acts are legal. Zooming in on the South African context, the research highlights disparities among over 800,000 self-identified LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals, advocating for increased funding, filling of school-based social worker vacancies and enhancing working conditions to meet constitutional and legislative obligations.

Themes that have emerged from the research underscore the pressing need for measures to support school going youth sexual minorities, addressing critical issues such as confidentiality, training, resources and the personal sexual orientation of school-based social workers. Recommendations drawn from these themes advocate for widespread training initiatives, strategic awareness campaigns and the development of inclusive policies, all meticulously aligned with the constitutional and human rights principles applicable on school going youth sexual minorities. The study, therefore, emphasises not only the significance of a supportive system for school-based social workers but also the necessity of adequate funding and the implementation of practical measures informed by rigorous research findings.

In conclusion, the dissertation urges for the creation of awareness, educational initiatives and the establishment of support groups for youth sexual minorities in schools. It advocates for policy development and implementation within schools to ensure alignment of youth sexual minorities with their constitutional rights. Additionally, the study emphasises the need for targeted messaging, heightened social media presence and community training to foster widespread acceptance and understanding of all learners. By contributing to the ongoing discourse surrounding inclusivity and support for youth sexual minorities in South African schools, this research offers critical insights for policymakers, educators and school-based social workers, contributing to the broader

goal of fostering an environment of acceptance and equality within educational institutions.

Key words/ Concepts:

Youth sexual minorities; Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-spirit, A-sexual, Ally and Non-binary individuals; Experiences; Challenges; School-based social workers; Intervention services; Youth Sexual Minorities.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AI	Amnesty International
ASJI	Action for Justice International
CAB	Children's Amendment Bill
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICSW	International Council on Social Workers
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
ISDM	Integrated Service Delivery Model
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LGBTQQIP2SAA	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Pansexual, Two-spirit, Asexual and Ally
LRC	Learner Representative Council
NDP	National Planning Commission
NSSF	National School Safety Framework
PSS	Psycho-Social Services
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SEAP	Support Empower Advocate Promote
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SGB	School Governing Bodies
SIAS	Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support #
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WCED	Western Cape Education Department

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.2 INTRODUCTION

In introducing and providing and providing an orientation to this research, the necessary background information on the topic chosen for investigation is provided. The phrasing of the research problem is underlined, as is the rationale for commencing this research. The theoretical framework for the investigation is presented. Notable important topics central to the study are explained and a chapter outline for this dissertation is supplied.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The issue of LGBTQQIP2SAA is introduced and narrowed down as it relates to school-based social workers delivering intervention services to youth sexual minority groups at schools as a foundation for this study.

Sexual minorities are regarded as among the most vulnerable people around the world, facing social ills such as prejudice, discrimination and sexual, physical and emotional abuse as a result of their sexual identity and can thus benefit from the intervention and support of school-based social workers (Conner, Okamura, 2021; Day, Ioverno, & Russell, 2019:29; Hatzenbuehler, 2017:322; Radde, 2018:231; Russell & Fish, 2016:465). According to Demery and Pipkin (2021), Eisenberg, Gower and McMorris (2018:521), Porta, Gower, Brown, Wood and Eisenberg (2020:82) and Watson, Wheldon and Puhl (2019:431), the idea of LGBTQQIP2SAA has grown into a global reference for gender and sexual orientation minorities. Some academics are of the view that a common understanding exists within African societies, including that of South Africa, that homosexuality, bisexuality and any other deviation from heterosexuality is “not African” or “un-African” (Gallagher, 2019). Open-minded advances in recognition of the rights of sexual minorities have been made, however there has been a drastic increase in the number of attacks, verbal abuse, with limiting and constricting legislation imposed against sexual minorities (Alempijevic, Beriashvili, Beynon, Birmanns, Brasholt, Cohen, Duque, Duterte, Van Es, Fernando & Fincanci 2020:66; Day *et al.*, 2019:29; Green, Price-Feeney, Dorison, Pick, 2020:1222; Hatzenbuehler, 2017:322; Przeworski, Peterson, Piedra, 2021:82; Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, Russell, 2020:159).

Individuals who are drawn to or engaged in sexual activities or intimate relationships with people of the same gender, whose gender identity differs in some way from their biological sex, or who otherwise identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, intersexual, or other gender (grouped under the acronym LGBTQQIP2SAA) are considered sexual minorities (AECF, 2023). The elderly, children and youth sexual minorities are among the voiceless and vulnerable populations in the field of social work. Sexual minority groups are defined as individuals whose gender identity, sexual orientation or sexual attributes differ from the assumed majority of the population, which is heterosexual male or female (Hartney, 2018; Suen, Lunn, Katuzny, Finn, Duncan, Sevelius, Flentje, Capriotti, Lubensky, Hunt, Weber, Bibbins-Domingo & Obedin-Maliver, 2020:2301). Table 1.1 below describes the terms used for the many sexual orientations with which people can identify, where these groups are collectively referred to as persons with LGBTQQIP2SAA sexual orientation.

TABLE 1-1 DESCRIPTION OF LGBTQQIP2SAA SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Lesbian	Women who are sexually involved with other women and not men.
Gay	Men who are sexually involved with men and not women.
Bisexual	Individuals who are sexually involved with both male and female individuals.
Transgender	A neutral description of people whose identity or gender expression differs from what is commonly connected with their birth sex.
Queer	People whose gender and sexual positioning does not follow the prevailing outlooks of a society.
Questioning	Individuals exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.
Intersex	A natural occurrence of developing sexual characteristics that do not fit the common definition of male and female.
Pansexual	An individual who may have a physical, emotional, or romantic attraction to people of any gender. Individuals might not experience these feelings or emotions at the same time or in the same level or way.
2S (Two-spirit)	A person who is female, male or intersexual and has both a female and male spirit within. This is sometimes viewed as a third gender.
Asexual	A person not feeling or having sexual attraction or a desire for partnered sexuality.
Ally	A person who actively supports the LGBTQ community. It includes individuals who are heterosexuals or cisgender and those within the LGBTQ community.

(LGBTQIA Resource Centre, 2017)

In the vibrant tapestry of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community, the spectrum of identities is expressed through a diverse array of pride flags, each representing unique facets of self-expression and unity (LACDMH Blog, 2022). Many organisations within the LGBTQQIP2SAA community proudly display their unique pride flags, each symbolizing their distinct identities, cultural heritage and

interconnections (LACDMH Blog, 2022). Among these flags are those that pay homage to the pansexual, asexual, bisexual, lesbian, transgender and various other communities. Notably, the rainbow-striped flag has remained a cherished and enduring symbol for the broader LGBTQQIP2SAA collective (LACDMH Blog, 2022). Visual representations of these pride flags are presented in Figure 1.1 below (LACDMH Blog, 2022):



LACDMH Blog (2022)

FIGURE: 1-1 INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PRIDE FLAGS

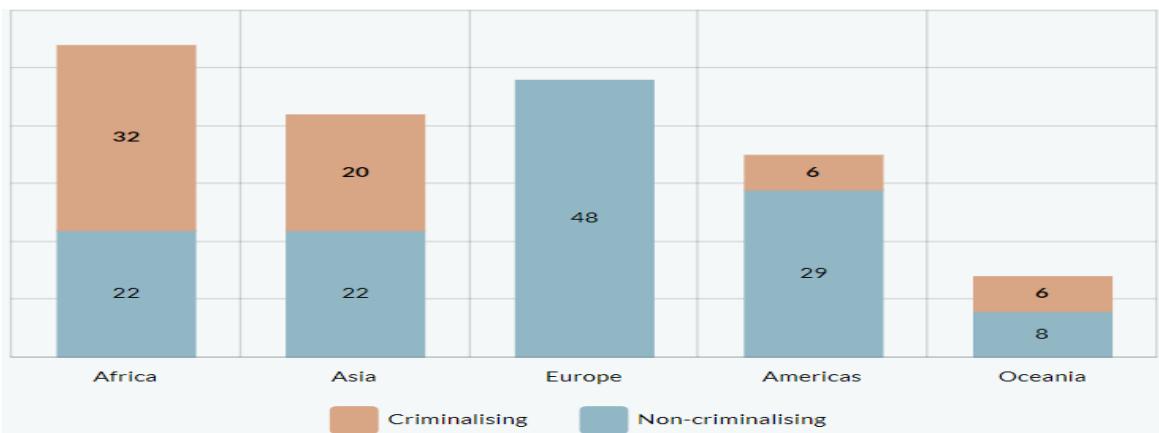


LACDMH Blog (2022)

FIGURE: 1-2 INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTED INTERSEX INCLUSIVE PRIDE FLAG

The tapestry of pride flags represents various identities within the LGBTQQIP2SAA community, like the inclusive intersex pride flag, designed by Valentino Vecchietti in 2021 (in LACDMH Blog, 2022) (Figure 1.2 above). This flag, along with others, serves as a testament to the ongoing evolution and diversification of the community's visual symbols and narratives. Intersex people, like African people, Indigenous people and people of colour (BIPOC) and transgender people, have historically been underrepresented - or outright ignored - within larger LGBTQQIP2SAA communities (Cultural Traditions and Connections - LACDMH Blog, 2022).

As the prevalence of legal frameworks surrounding same-sex behaviours worldwide is explored, it becomes evident that the landscape remains diverse and in many regions, deeply challenging (LACDMH Blog, 2022). According to The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) one-third of United Nations (UN) member countries continue to outlaw this sexual behaviour, with the majority of these countries being in Africa (ILGA World, 2023). Fifty-nine percent of UN African members consider same-sex conduct to be a criminal offense. In stark contrast, Europe stands as the sole continent where same-sex actions are not subject to legal prohibition. For a comprehensive overview of the global criminalization status of UN countries, refer to Figure 1.3 below.



(ILGA World - The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, 2023; Statista, 2023a)

FIGURE 1-3 WORLD VIEW OF CRIMINALIZATION STATUS OF SAME SEX ACTS

It is critical to note that acceptance of same-sex sexual behaviour does not imply that people of different sexual orientations, gender expressions, or gender identities live in a more secure environment. Even in countries where consenting same-sex sexual acts are legal, social stigmatization of persons perceived to be non-heterosexual or non-cisgender remains alarmingly common. Indeed, early legalization dates in many of them can be explained by historical causes unrelated to advocacy or a lack of prejudice against non-heterosexual sexual orientation (ILGA World, 2023).

According to Van Heerden (2017:1) LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals account for over 800 000 members of the South African population who identify as being LGBTQQIP2SAA persons, albeit this figure is significantly lower than what could be the reality. The reason for the latter being that in light of the cultural and religious stigma linked to people who identify as being LGBTQQIP2SAA, very few LGBTQQIP2SAA people are entirely open about their sexual orientation. Many individuals within the LGBTQQIP2SAA community opt to live in urbanized regions like the Western Cape and Gauteng provinces, where the environment may offer a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for them. (Van Heerden, 2017:1). According to Van Heerden (2017:1) 40% of South Africans who identify as LGBTQQIP2SAA people have either first-hand or indirect exposure to individuals who have been victims of violence due to their identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

According to Van Heerden (2017:1) individuals who identify as African South African LGBTQQIP2SAA people, face a higher likelihood of experiencing violence compared to other demographic groups. This heightened risk further contributes to people's hesitancy to openly

disclose their sexual orientation. According to the data, a significant portion of individuals tend to keep their sexuality private. Specifically, the statistics show that 55% of Africans, 66% of Coloured individuals, 52% of Indian/Asian individuals and 74% of Whites do not openly discuss their sexuality (Van Heerden, 2017:13). Looking at the African continent, the Republic of Cape Verde placed as being most tolerant with a 74% tolerance level, followed by South Africa with 67% and Mozambique with 56% tolerance level in welcoming LGBTQQIP2SAA persons (Van Heerden, 2017:13). Senegal has the lowest tolerance level in Africa (3%), owing to its predominantly Muslim population, which is known for its strict spiritual and religious intolerance, as well as enforcing oppressive anti-gay laws that criminalize "unnatural acts", according to international bodies such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International (AI) (Van Heerden, 2017:13).

Presently, there is a lack of comprehensive statistics concerning young individuals reporting incidents related to their sexuality. During an exploratory telephonic enquiry, Botha (2022) from the South African Police Service (SAPS) stated to the researcher that crimes involving LGBTQQIP2SAA sexual minority groups are reported and treated as "crimen injuria" or as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases. Minnaar (2022), a school social worker, said via an exploratory telephonic inquiry that situations involving or being reported relating to LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities are treated as bullying at the school level.

In a Guardian Newsletter article Rahman (2015) asserted that there is a schism in broader society regarding whether individuals are born being LGBTQQIP2SAA or whether there is reason to believe that the nature/nurture debate could be used to understand the contributing factor(s) to individuals being LGBTQQIP2SAA. Biological factors may contribute to the development of sexual orientation, which may begin before the child's birth and may be understood as a possible cause why an individual may be lesbian, gay, straight, or bisexual, but this is not entirely known or proven (Olson, Durwood, Horton, Gallagher & Devor, 2022; Rahman, 2015). Individuals do not choose who they are sexually attracted to or where they will receive treatment or inducement to change their sexual orientation. It is also believed that you cannot persuade or convert someone to homosexuality (Rahman, 2015; Turban, Dolotina, Freitag, King & Keuroghlian, 2023). Permitting a boy to engage with toys typically associated with girls, like dolls, will not exert any influence on his sexual orientation towards homosexuality.

From a young age, individuals begin to recognize their attraction to others. This does not indicate that the individual is sexually attracted to those persons; rather, the individual can recognize people he or she finds attractive or likes. Numerous individuals were conscious of their sexual

orientation prior to reaching adolescence. (Hässler, Glazier & Olson, 2022:2184; Rahman, 2015; Xu, Norton & Rahman, 2021:557). According to Copland (2015), "although sexual orientation is typically established early in life, it is not uncommon for desires and attractions to shift throughout an individual's life," which is referred to as "fluidity". Wilson and Meyer (2021) believe that academics and scientists' views on sexual orientation or preference are like a spectrum, with the individual being completely gay on one end of the spectrum and completely heterosexual on the other. In this distribution, the majority of individuals would be located closer to the centre of the spectrum rather than at the extreme ends (Copland, 2015; Gülgöz, Edwards & Olson, 2022:916; Taylor, Zalewska, Gates & Millon, 2019:195).

In social work practice, vulnerable groups include the elderly, children and sexual minorities. Sexual minorities are viewed as vulnerable individuals in societies who face prejudice, discrimination, sexual trauma, physical trauma and other social evils as a result of their sexual identity. Consequently, social work intervention is deemed necessary for addressing the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities (Green, DeChants, Price & Davis, 2021; Poteat, Marx & Calzo, 2020; Subhrajit, 2014:322; Toomey, McGuire, Olson, Baams & Fish, 2022). Social workers should be at the forefront of advocating for and advancing the rights of these vulnerable and minority populations. School-based social workers are described as the first of these professionals to give intervention services to adolescent sexual minorities, in which youth identify with a specific sexuality, sense of self and self-experimentation with various roles, activities and behaviours (Green *et al.*, 2021; Poteat *et al.*, 2020; Subhrajit, 2014:322; Toomey *et al.*, 2022). This is associated with the stage of puberty or adolescence, during which many individuals discover their sexual identity. This developmental milestone emphasises identity achievement rather than identity confusion, as outlined in Erik Erikson's human developmental model (McLeod, 2023:1). The inability or reluctance of society, especially the school environment, to embrace, understand and accommodate juvenile sexual diversity can have an influence on the learner's physical, social, emotional and psychological well-being.

According to Freud (2022:1), there are numerous multifaceted risk factors that impact LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities in schools, which contribute to the excessively high levels of mental health difficulties and obstacles that these learners encounter. Freud (2022:1) lists and describes a range of risk factors that young sexual minorities encounter at school, as illustrated in Figure 1.4 below.

Multifaceted Risk Factors / Minority Stressors



(Freud, 2022:1)

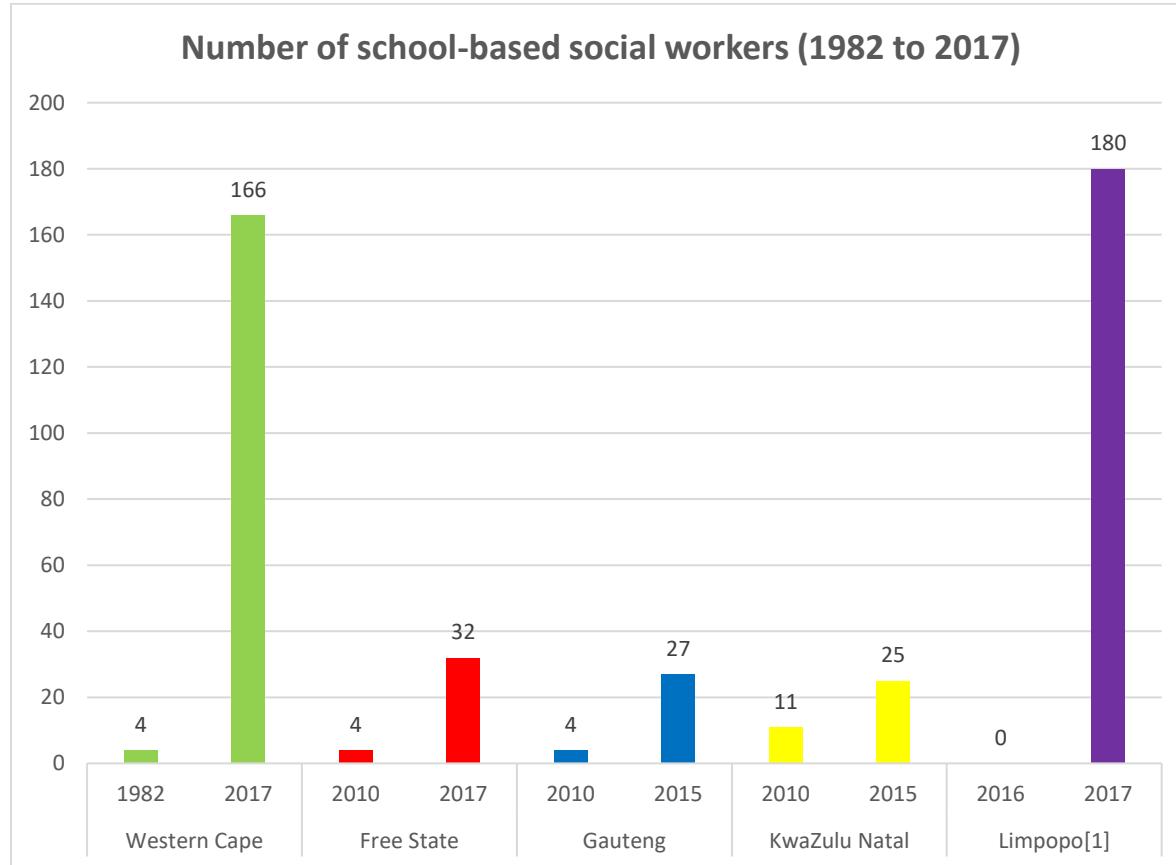
FIGURE 1-4 MULTIFACETED RISK FACTORS / MINORITY STRESSORS FACED BY LGBTQQIP2SAA PERSONS

Given these risk factors, the necessity of school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities cannot be overstated. Many South African teenagers have significant levels of personal uncertainty when declaring their sexual orientation, which is exacerbated by a high level of public hostility towards youth sexual minorities (Freud, 2022:2). According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) school-based social workers have a specific obligation to create an atmosphere in schools that is not only focused on education but also advocates for and protects the rights of youth sexual minorities (UNICEF, 2022:22). The level of intervention services provided to young sexual minorities is primarily determined by how effectively social workers are equipped to face LGBTQQIP2SAA issues. As a result, the goal of this study is to investigate the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers who provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities, as well as to investigate what remedial strategies can be used to support the provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Social workers are not commonly employed in South African schools (Reyneke, 2018: 80). Court rulings, policy documents and stakeholders all speak to the urgent need for social work services for learners in schools, either explicitly or indirectly. Educators are not equipped to provide this service due to insufficient skills and training in this regard. Moreover, time constraints prevent educators from fostering the psychosocial development of learners. This is detrimental to the pursuit of high-quality education. Reyneke (2018:88) discovered that intervention services in schools are a high priority, despite the fact that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) employs a limited number of social workers.

The shortage of social workers employed by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), as discovered by Reyneke (2018:88), not only hampers the pursuit of high-quality education but also has significant implications in light of constitutional and legislative obligations. Section 28(1)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act, 108 of 1996) (South Africa, 1996) states that children have a right to social services, while section 8(5)(b) of the Schools Act (Act, 84 of 1996) (South Africa, 1996) states that School Governing Bodies (SGB) must ensure that support services in the form of counselling are available to all learners. School-based social workers and psychologists are qualified and equipped to provide such counselling services. Unfortunately, there are not enough social workers engaged by the DBE to ensure that the need for intervention services in schools is met. The DBE employed roughly 148 social workers in 2015 (Kemp, Kemp, Pretorius & Avenant, 2015).

Nevertheless, starting from 2015, there has been a rise in the count of social workers stationed within South African schools. Vergottini and Weyers (2020:125) reported an increase in the number of appointed social workers employed in five provinces, as depicted in Figure 1.5 below.



^[1] Appointments are only on a temporary contract basis as learner support advisors.

(Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125)

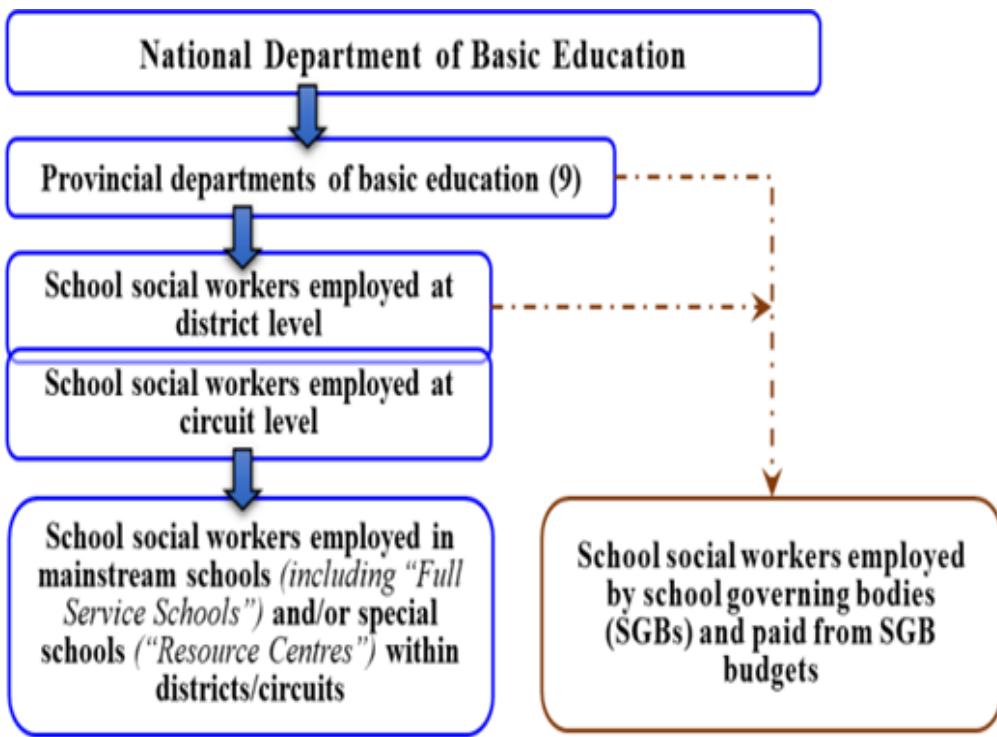
FIGURE 1-5 NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED BY THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

In a recent newspaper article, Willemse (2023:2) underscored the critical funding challenges hindering the employment of additional social workers in schools. As per Willemse (2023:2), South Africa currently deploys 857 social workers to address the needs of more than 23 000 schools. Despite a collaborative initiative between the Department of Social Development and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to offer intervention services as required, the insufficient financial allocation from the National Treasury hampers the appointment of social workers in every school.

In accordance with Vergottini and Weyers (2020:125), a majority of school-based social workers operate in special schools, with some also serving in provincial offices. As per the findings of Colditz's (2018) South Africa had a total of 23 719 schools in South Africa in 2016. This data implies that, even when integrated into district-based support teams, each social worker would be responsible for overseeing 160 schools. With the current statistics indicating a total of 25,912 schools in South Africa, an increase of 2,193 schools since 2016 (DBE, 2023), it becomes evident that expecting a single individual to provide intervention services to such a vast number of schools would be impractical.

Several SGBs have begun to obtain the services of school-based social workers, expanding the number of these necessary experts. It is unclear how many social workers these SGB employ, but it is a step in the right direction in bringing the regulatory obligations for ensuring the availability and provision of intervention services for learners to life. Day and Kearney (2016), as well as Kosciw, Clark, Truong and Zongrone (2020), agree that while youth face social barriers, they choose not to exhibit excessive behavioural problems due to their taught ability to repress these challenges. All youth at school have the right to social services and the school social worker plays an important role in ensuring that this right is upheld by working to reduce risk factors in the school and wider social environment of the learners (Day & Kearney, 2016; Green, Price-Feeney & Dorison, 2021:26; Gibson, Glazier & Olson, 2021; Ryan *et al.*, 2020:159).

Due to large caseloads and under-implementation of the State's intervention services, the unavailability of social workers leads to inevitable neglect. Recommendations to these challenges include funding and filling all social worker vacancies, increasing the number of social auxiliary workers, improving general working conditions, increasing student social workers' enrolment in the social work field and improving the image, salaries and status of the social work profession. If this is not accomplished, the government would never be able to fulfil its welfare commitments to the poor and vulnerable without the essential social workers. Although school-based social workers are primarily employed by provincial education departments, self-governing school governing bodies (SGB) of "mainstream" and "special schools" now have the authority to employ social workers in non-subsidized posts and are remunerating them from their own budgets (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125). Vergottini (2019:35) illustrates this structure in Figure 1.6 below, as explained.



Vergottini (2019:35)

FIGURE 1-6 THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

Employing more school-based social workers who can give psychosocial and support services to learners does not appear to be high on the DBE's priority list (Department of Basic Education, 2016 & 2017). However, as stated in various departmental documents, student social workers can access the Department to gain practical experience in schools during their years of study (Department of Basic Education 2015, 2016 & 2017; National Planning Commission, 2012:303; South African Human Rights Commission, 2012). However, this does not address the demand for educated and certified social workers in schools. The National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012:367) emphasises the importance of nutrition, health care, education, social care and security services. It proposes that the government should play a more active role in providing intervention services to vulnerable population groups like children, including youth sexual minorities in schools. When reviewing DBE educational plans and yearly reports, the main focus is on poverty eradication, safety issues and educational quality, to name a few (Department of Basic Education, 2016; Department of Basic Education, 2001; UNCRC, 1989; UNICEF South Africa, 2006).

As a result, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Social Development (DSD) must work together to secure intervention services for learners (Department of Basic Education, 2001; Department of Social Development, 2013). However, the number of social workers employed in schools mentioned above does not reflect this need or issue. Although an application to the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) for the registration of school social work as a social work field of specialty was submitted in 2015, it is still not recognized as a specialized field in social work (Kemp *et al.*, 2015). Considering the situation described above, it is evident that school-based social workers are essential in facilitating advocacy, education and the creation of a conducive environment for embracing and respecting LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since its primary purpose is to define a research problem, a problem statement can be seen as the fundamental thesis of any study, (Kumar, 2019:46; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:45). The problem statement refers to the research problem or concern that needs to be addressed by the intended investigation (Creswell, 2016:88; McCombes & George, 2023). The research challenge is also known as the research narrative hook (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:108). In applied social science research, practical concerns and current practices are the underlying causes of research issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:109). In general, the research problem should provide an answer to the following question: What is the study's goal and objectives and why was it necessary to conduct it? The research goal, research objectives, research question and topic of a research study are all developed from the issue statement (Creswell, 2016:88). The research problem must be significant and investigable (McCombes & George, 2023).

The Republic of South Africa's Constitution (Act 108, 1996) (South Africa, 1996) provides for the protection of children's rights, including education, care, social services and protection (against abuse, mistreatment, or degradation). It further stipulates that the best interests of children come first in all situations (South Africa, 1996a: Section 28). The Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 gives effect to children's constitutional rights, such as care, protection, well-being and physical, intellectual, psychological and social development (Section 2(b-i)) (South Africa, 2005). Furthermore, Section 8(1) of the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) supports a disciplined, purposeful and supportive school environment to provide quality education for learners. The emphasis in schools should thus not only be on providing great education but also

on protecting the human rights of learners, in the context of this research, specifically the human rights of youth sexual minorities, in order to promote all-inclusive child development.

The use or employing of school-based social workers has been observed in a number of nations around the world. However, significant shortcomings are evident in the Republic of South African Department of Basic Education's (DBE) Psycho-Social Support Services Strategic Plan (2020:13-14). DBE (2020:13-14) has acknowledged that there is a lack of uniform strategies regarding psycho-social services; children's programmes are not well synchronized; social work services are not formalized; inter-sectoral collaboration between role-players is poor; referral and follow-up systems are inadequate to deal with the high caseload on hand; and social work services are not always available or the capacity thereof is inadequate to deal with the high caseload on hand. In terms of capability, South African Council for Educators (SACE) (2020:47) states that one social worker is anticipated to service the entire area. Similarly, Reyneke (2020:165) states that on average, one social worker covers roughly 160 schools, which is untenable. Reyneke (2018:79, 83, 85 & 88) suggests that the DBE does not seem to prioritize the expansion of social worker numbers. In simpler terms, the DBE seems to place a higher emphasis on ensuring an adequate supply of teachers and safety infrastructure rather than employing social workers with the necessary skills to address learner psychosocial welfare issues. Willemse (2023) provides more support for this, stating that while the DBE is cognizant of the predicament faced by schools in need of school-based social workers, there is little to no financing available for employing more of these specialized workers. According to Willemse (2023), the department contacts the department of social development and other organisations for assistance when social work services are required in schools.

According to Zastrow (2017:90), social workers have knowledge in human behaviour, social environment, person-in-environment and other multi-disciplinary ideas. Social workers examine clients' problems at the micro, meso and macro levels during their intervention. Kirst-Ashman (2017:9) concurs that social workers have a strong knowledge base in several techniques of human behaviour and the interface of people with their environment. They are also capable of critically evaluating, using and combining the afore mentioned approaches to achieve client objectives.

The tasks of social workers, however, are not as clearly defined in the DBE's initiatives as they are in the National School Safety Framework (NSSF) (DBE, 2015:27). The NSSF, for example, recognizes that the DSD can provide assistance in the form of early childhood development,

parental work, substance misuse programs and learners' home conditions (DBE, 2015:27). Similarly, the function of social workers is generally acknowledged in the DBE's Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) policy (DBE, 2015:27). This policy, however, does not provide clear guidelines because it only mentions psychosocial support, applying for social grants, placing children in safe places, victim support and empowerment programmes (DBE, 2014:32). As a result, it is clear that youth sexual minorities can benefit from intervention services provided by school-based social workers, which aids in the development of a sense of inclusion, acceptance and accommodation. School-based social workers could help foster an environment in which LGBTQQIP2SAA problems are raised and discrimination is eliminated. This, however, cannot be accomplished if there is a lack of services and the availability of social workers to provide these services.

Another issue identified by Van Sittert and Wilson (2018:7) is that social workers within the DBE are not provided with professional supervision in some provinces, which can have a negative impact on their aptitude and level of preparedness to provide services to youth sexual minorities. Furthermore, Van Sittert and Wilson (2018:17) discovered that DBE social workers do not have access to standardised guidelines and that there is no national management framework to govern activities, strategies and plans linked to young sexual diversity. Vergottini and Weyers (2020:125,130,134) discovered significant differences in the appointment and utilisation of social workers among provinces, despite the fact that legislation is the same in all nine provinces. Some provinces, for example, solely employ social workers at the provincial level, whereas others do so at the district level. Titles such as "senior education specialists" and "socio-pedagogues" are used to select and employ social workers in some regions. All of this therefore contributes to the amount of intervention services provided by school-based social workers to youth sexual minorities. These shortcomings may have a negative impact on the availability of school-based social workers to deliver the necessary intervention services to youth sexual minorities who are entitled to such services.

There has been a scarcity of localized studies on the provision of intervention services to young sexual minorities under the scope of school social workers. The relevant studies that have been included and are relevant to the chosen research topic are listed in Table 1.2. All these studies indicate the necessity for additional research on school-based social workers' intervention services provided to young sexual minorities in schools.

TABLE 1-2 RESEARCH PAPERS ABOUT INTERVENTION SERVICES RENDERED TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SCHOOLS

Author and year of publication	Title of paper	Country in which the research was conducted	Type of research
Bullard (2020)	“School Social Workers and perceived barriers when providing services to LGBTQ Children”.	United States of America (Walden University)	Qualitative approach
Ngabaza and Shefer (2019)	“Sexuality education in South African Schools: Deconstructing the dominant response to young people’s sexualities in contemporary schooling contexts”.	South Africa (University of Western Cape)	Qualitative approach
Bhana, Crewe and Aggleton (2019)	“Sex, sexuality and education in South Africa”.	South Africa / Australia	Literature review
Nyembezi (2020)	“Perceptions of social workers on their role to advocate for social justice of sexual minorities”.	South Africa (University of Stellenbosch)	Qualitative approach
Francis (2021)	“Oh my word: for us African gays it’s another story. Revealing the intersections between same sex-sexuality and schooling in South Africa”.	South Africa (University of Stellenbosch)	Qualitative approach
Jones (2019)	“South African contributions to LGBTQI education issues”.	Australia (Macquarie University)	Qualitative approach
Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher and Astbury (2003)	“Gay and Lesbian Youth Experiences of Homophobia in South African Secondary Education”.	United Kingdom / South Africa	Qualitative approach

Francis (2017)	“Homophobia and sexuality diversity in South African schools: A review”.	South Africa (University of Stellenbosch)	Qualitative approach
Msibi (2012)	‘I’m used to it now: experiences of homophobia among queer youth in South African township schools’.	South Africa (University of KwaZulu-Natal)	Qualitative approach
Wells, Asakura, Hoppe, Balsam, Morrison and Beadnell (2012)	“Social Services for Sexual Minority Youth: Preferences for what, where and how services are delivered”.	United States of America	Qualitative approach
Vergottini and Weyers (2020)	“The foundations and nature of South African school social work: an overview”.	South Africa (Grey College Primary, Bloemfontein / North-West University, Potchefstroom)	Literature Review
Reyneke (2018)	“The role of school social workers in giving effect to children’s right to education: A legal perspective”.	South Africa (University of Free State)	Literature Review

The gaps in knowledge discerned whilst reviewing the literature for the problem statement of this study indicate that there is a need to:

- conduct a qualitative study to explore, describe and contextualise the experiences and difficulties faced by school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities (LGBTQQIP2SAA); and
- use that understanding to develop and propose improved service delivery strategies for school social work practice in light of the shortcomings and difficulties mentioned above.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale of any study justifies the study's importance (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2018:34). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018:113), the rationale of a study connects the motivation for conducting the study as well as the researcher's justification for selecting a specific research challenge, which might be based on awareness gaps and specific benefits.

The availability of school-based social workers is described as an indigenous problem that is complex and multi-dimensional, with distressing consequences (Colditz, 2018; Huxtable, 2016:1; Opperman, 2022; Reyneke, 2018:79; Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125). This could have a negative impact on the availability of intervention services for all youth in schools, but especially for youth sexual minorities in schools, who experience numerous negative scenarios and problematic situations because of their sexuality. It is a well-known reality that school violence remains a major issue in our schools, with high rates of bullying directed primarily at teenage sexual minorities De Barros (2022a) revealed in an internet article (Mamba online) about an 18-year-old Rustenburg High School matric learner who was ostracized and stripped of her dignity by classmates and educators after teachers discovered a social media video of her attending a gay drag event. She was also told that she had been found guilty of "immorality", however the situation was later reversed after the tale went public on social media. This is just one example of how youth sexual minorities face rejection and other social challenges. This can and should be prevented if there are available services to learners but more so when the environment (the school) is involved with or educated about youth sexual minorities and this can be done through the services of school-based social workers. The affected learner later indicated that the school needs to do more to educate teacher and pupils "about sexuality, the threats the queer community faces, coming out and pronouns.... The list is extensive. The most crucial thing is to accept and not hate others for being true and unique to themselves" (De Barros, 2022a).

In the Mamba Online story from 21 October 2022 (De Barros, 2022b), incidences are highlighted involving prejudice against LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools as detailed below:

- Fourteen-year-old Lukhanyo Jongqo from Kubusie Combined School in Stutterheim, Eastern Cape committed suicide following alleged homophobic bullying by teachers.
- Fifteen-year-old Tiro Moalusi, from PJ Simelane Secondary School in Soweto also committed suicide following alleged homophobic bullying by teachers; and

- Fourteen-year-old Mpho Falithenjwa, from Orange Farm in Johannesburg alleged incidents of discrimination and bullying for his sexuality. He also committed suicide in June 2022.

De Barros (2022b) cited multiple additional cases of LGBTQQIP2SAA discrimination at schools over the years that were tied to strict uniform requirements that conflicted with learners' gender identity or expression. According to De Barros (2022b), despite several civil society pleas, there is still no national policy in place addressing LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusion in schools. Only the Western Cape Education Department has made any headway toward publishing a set of proposed rules (De Barros, 2022b).

Action for Social Justice International (ASJI) has also been seen becoming involved in cases involving discrimination of learners in schools based on their sexual identity or orientation, as there is a clear violation of the basic rights of individuals as enshrined in the Republic of South Africa's Constitution (De Barros, 2022b). As a result, in order to effectively address this issue and raise awareness about the social injustices experienced by LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities, it is clear that youth sexual minorities require services that can only be provided by professionals on the ground, in this case school-based social workers. Local responses to this requirement have been insufficient so far (Reyneke, 2018:79; Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125; Colditz, 2018; Opperman, 2022). With the number of school-based social workers appointed thus far, youth sexual minorities at risk cannot be effectively assisted (Colditz, 2018; Opperman, 2022; Reyneke, 2018:79; Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125). Although approaches for promoting the production and delivery of such services are already in place, these policies must be substantive. When the shortage of school-based social workers is filled, all learners, including those who identify as youth sexual minority, will benefit from more comprehensive and responsive psychosocial welfare services. It has been discovered that youth sexual minorities face high rates of school drop-out, victimization, bullying, discrimination, prejudice and tragically, suicide, as well as other societal problems as a result of a culture of exclusion, judgment and rejection (Freud, 2022:1).

This 45-year-old researcher had negative consequences on his academic years due to his struggle with coming to grips with being gay and the lack of intervention programmes available throughout his adolescence. I was subjected to a variety of social challenges, such as physical assault by other learners, rejection and condemnation on a daily basis. However, educators were either unavailable, it was outside the scope of their responsibilities, or they just chose to turn a blind eye to it, claiming they had no idea how to "do" or "handle this situation" or did not want to

get "involved". I can still clearly remember one teacher saying to my late mother, "Get your child some help from a psychologist or someone, because your child does not fit in with the other learners in this school and we (the teachers) don't know how to "handle him".

In the researchers adult life, after obtaining my registration as a social worker, working with 4th level social work students and advocating for the rights of youth sexual minorities, I have made it a priority to inspire students by working with youth sexual minorities. For all members of sexual minority groups to feel welcomed, liberated and understood, a long road must be travelled. It has been clear from my professional interactions with school-based social workers that this is a "taboo" subject to discuss because of the values and beliefs upheld by the school and larger society. For the exploration of the experiences and difficulties faced by school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to LGBTQQIP2SAA, it is important to emphasise the context of the educational setting. The researcher holds the opinion that all social workers are sufficiently qualified to deal with all societal issues, including the difficulties and challenges experienced by LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities, but it is still unclear whether school-based social workers are capable, willing and available to do so.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS EMPLOYED

A theoretical framework in research, according to Fouché and Geyer (2021:165), serves three purposes: it determines which theoretical approach is most relevant to the research topic, it recognizes the relationship between the study and the theoretical approaches and it establishes the researcher's comprehension of the theory or theories chosen. The theoretical framework is the process of establishing conceptual links in order to lead and illuminate the study (Fouché & Geyer, 2021:166; Vos, De Beer & Niemczyk, 2019:2). According to Vinz (2023), a theoretical framework is a basic study of other theories that serves as a guide for developing the arguments used in the research process. Theories are developed by researchers to explain phenomena, identify connections and forecast the future. The present theories supporting the research in a theoretical framework demonstrate the relevance and foundation of the dissertation's issue.

A theoretical framework, according to Vos, De Beer and Niemczyk (2019:2), is made up of concepts and theories, definitions and references to academic publications and theories that have been proposed previously and are applicable to the research. The theoretical framework must demonstrate understanding of the ideas and concepts connected to the subject of the research article as well as the more general areas of knowledge being studied.

A conceptual framework, also known as a theoretical framework, provides a foundation for understanding and evaluating a research topic. It is a collection of ideas, assumptions and statements that comprise a system of thinking about and comprehending a given world (Rashid, 2023). The theoretical framework of the research study serves as its foundation, guiding the research questions, hypotheses and research procedures. In order to construct the theoretical framework, the existing literature, which contains theories, concepts and empirical studies relevant to the study subject, is studied. Its purpose is to provide readers with a complete understanding of the research topic, including its context, relevant variables and relationships between those variables. A single theoretical perspective may be utilised to build the theoretical framework, or it may combine several theoretical perspectives to provide a more detailed explanation of the research subject. Collins and Stockton (2018) describe a theoretical framework as a conceptual tool that aids in thinking organisation, drives research and increases comprehension of the subject under study. It guides the research endeavour and ensures that it is rigorous, relevant and founded on prior knowledge (Rashid, 2023).

According to Kivunja (2018:45) "theory" is "a structure based on a set of interrelated concepts and ideas intended to capture or model something about the world." Kivunja (2018:45) metaphorically describes theory as the use of an existing theory in qualitative research that serves as a "coat closet" with concepts of the existing theory serving as "coat hooks" in the coat closet in that they provide places to "hang" the data on, demonstrating its relationship to other data (Kivunja, 2018:45). As a result, using an existing theory enables researchers to "understand what they see by looking at specific fragments of data that may appear irrelevant or unconnected to one another or by positioning the answers to the research questions into a fitting theory" (Kivunja, 2018:46). As a result, a useful theory can be viewed as an unfolding tale about a specific event, what one believes is happening and why it is happening, with this process resulting in an expanded understanding of and fresh insight into the phenomenon (Kivunja, 2018:46).

When studying a phenomenon from a qualitative perspective, Thomas (2017:53) emphasises the need of elasticity and avoiding too much rigidity in terms of the application of a specific theoretical framework, as this can strengthen or weaken the study. Excessive rigidity in the application of a specific theoretical framework may lead to the researcher imposing questions or research methodologies (Turale, 2020:290). It is deduced that good theory in the social sciences is of considerable importance since it fulfils the objective of explaining the meaning, nature and challenges associated with the (often experienced but unexplained) phenomenon being

examined. This allows the researcher to "use the knowledge and understanding to act in more informed and effective ways" (Kivunja, 2018:47). According to Thomas (2017:99), a theory can be utilised as a tool to help explain what is currently being explored.

Creswell and Creswell (2018:72) state that a theoretical framework can be used to explain, anticipate and forecast the social environment. These frameworks provide a knowledge of the questions that the study wants to address as well as practical methods for finding solutions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:72).

The advocacy theory and the ecological systems theory which will be discussed next, are the theoretical frameworks employed for this study.

1.5.1 ADVOCACY THEORY

Advocacy is a crucial aspect of social work, as it aims to promote social justice and ethical obligations for social workers (Clark, 2020; Dewees & Hanley, 2018:235). This study investigates how school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities view their role as social justice advocates for youth sexual minorities in the school context. Furthermore, Chereni (2017:508) asserts that the advocacy theory aims to oppose organised persecution and promote social harmony by representing underprivileged, oppressed and vulnerable groups in decision-making processes. The goal is to improve the standing of those perceived as weak or oppressed in a particular social system.

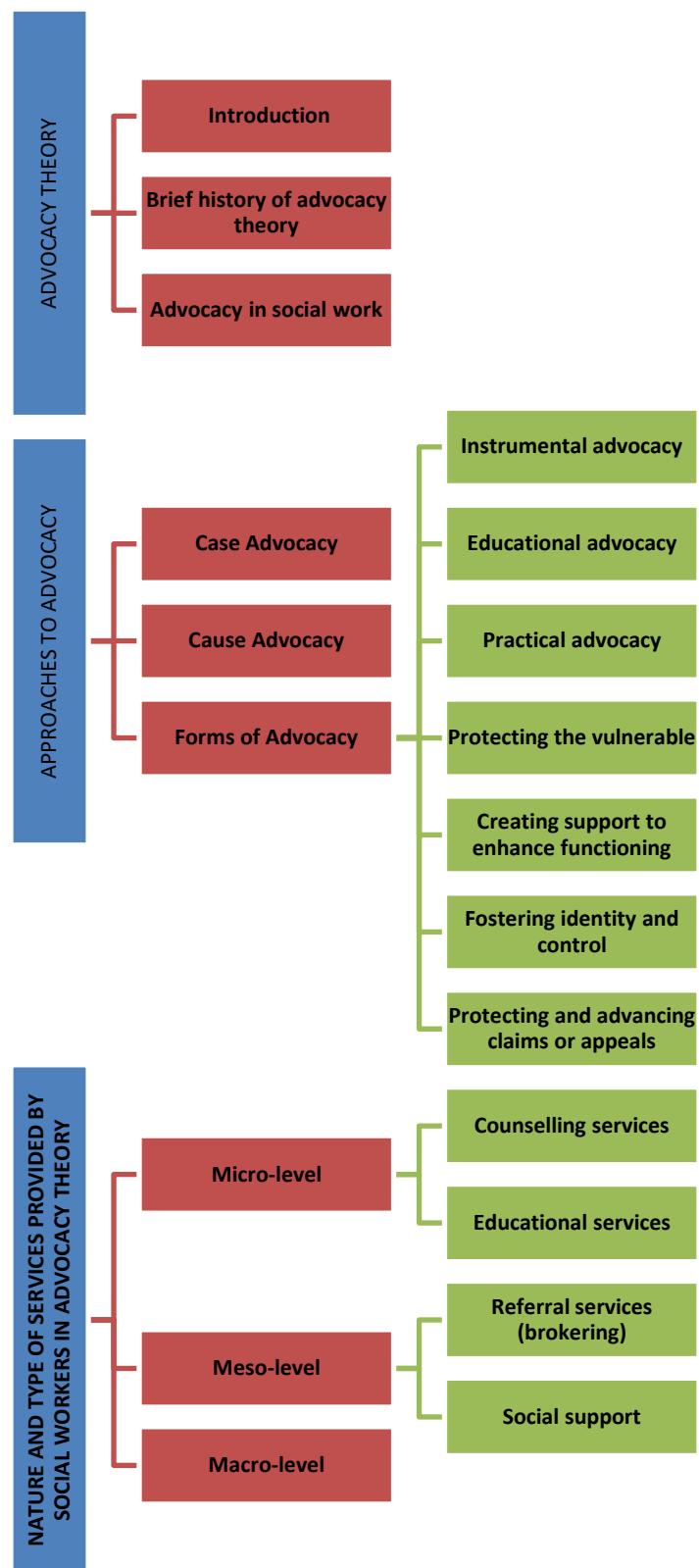
The following as proposed by Adams, Dominelli and Payne (2019:163) is to illustrate examples of advocacy in social work:

- system level (such as situation or class advocacy),
- type of service (including family service or case management),
- form of advocacy (e.g., legislative advocacy, whistle blowing or rights representation),
- social reaction to recipients (for example people who are experiencing oppression and people who are considered vulnerable) and
- diagnostic category of recipients (for instance people with a mental illness or people coping with HIV/AIDS) (Stokes, 2023:21).

Stokes (2023:21) and Karger and Stoesz (2018:150) emphasise the importance of service system configuration in advocacy. Some organisations specialize in direct advocacy, while others

integrate it into their activities. Social workers are required by professional ethics to participate in all forms of advocacy.

There is no clear model for a comprehensive framework for directing advocacy delivery in social work settings. Advocacy is not a consistent practice role and understanding diverse styles requires focusing on advocacy theory development before exploring various conceptualizations and methods. (Stokes, 2023:22; Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 2017:160). Figure 1.7 below provides an illustration of the three main aspects related to advocacy theory in social work intervention with youth sexual minorities, which are discussed below. Firstly, reference is made to the overall concept of advocacy theory, secondly, the various approaches to advocacy theory are explored and lastly, the nature and types of services provided by social workers in advocacy theory are described.



(Stokes, 2023:22; Netting, Kettner & McMurtry, 2017:160)

FIGURE 1-7 OUTLINE OF ADVOCACY THEORY

Advocacy in social work entails the following:

1.5.1.1 Brief history of advocacy theory

The American National Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1887 introduced the term "advocacy" in social work, focusing on social laws, children, migration, jails, courts and impoverished working conditions. Social workers campaigned for fundamental human rights and social justice for oppressed, weak and displaced individuals from the late 1800s to 1914. (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018:15). According to Schneider, Lester and Ochieng (2013:16) social workers like Jane Adams and Adith Bott faced challenges during and after World War I, focusing on world peace and humanitarianism. The integration of psychology in social casework negatively impacted advocacy, focusing on individual deficiencies and attributed poverty and hardship to individuals. In 1969, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) established the Ad Hoc Committee on Advocacy, defining advocacy as lawyer's advocacy and political advocacy practice, emphasising the role of advocates. (Schneider *et al.*, 2013:19).

1.5.1.2 Conceptualisation of advocacy in social work

It has always been a key responsibility of social workers to advocate or argue on behalf of people, organisations and communities (Chereni, 2017:509; Stokes, 2023:21). Advocacy in social work is a complex concept with discrepancies in definitions. It involves arguing for or pleading for something, empowering people to express opinions, obtain information, defend rights and consider options. Advocacy ensures that vulnerable communities can speak out on significant matters, stand up for their rights and have their opinions considered in decision-making. The term "advocacy" encompasses more than only promoting, championing or campaigning for a particular cause or point of view. The concept, according to Jansson (2018:59) denotes a concerted attempt by players to pursue a certain policy objective.

Stokes (2023:21) maintain that advocacy is a social action involving vulnerable individuals or groups advocating for change, aiming to increase power, confidence, assertiveness and choices, ensuring social justice and representing, defending, intervening, supporting, or recommending actions which in this case would fit with youth sexual minorities.

Similarly, Jansson (2018:60) proposes that social work advocacy represents clients or causes in forums, influencing decision-making in unjust systems. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2018:59) provide

definitions for each of the key words. Given the centrality of the concept of 'social work advocacy' to the study reported in this dissertation, the key word definitions are summarised as follows:

- “**Exclusive**” - means that a client-advocate relationship is singular, unique, prioritised, responsible and focused on client needs.
- “**Mutual**” - means that the relationship between clients and advocates is shared, interdependent, joint and equal, promoting empowerment, motivation and environmental interaction skills.
- “**Representation**” - An advocate represents another by speaking, writing, acting on behalf, communicating client concerns, standing up for others and serving as an agent.
- “**Client**” - Clients may be individuals, groups, communities, ethnic populations, or organisations not limited to specific sizes or numbers of people.
- “**Cause**” - A condition affecting a group of individuals with similar concerns, advocating for the same remedy for all domestic abuse victims, rather than just for one client.
- “**Forum**” - An assembly for resolving disputes, discussing issues, regulations and public matters, typically featuring public hearings and committees. Two features are usually present:
 - a set of specific procedures to guide the conduct of the participants and
 - a decision-making mechanism.
- “**Systematically**” – An advocate uses knowledge and skills in a planned, orderly manner, considering circumstances and conditions.
- “**Influence**” – Advocates attempt to modify decisions of others with authority or power, involving influential activities like organising client groups, forming coalitions, educating the public and appealing to review boards (Jansson, 2018:60). Jansson (2018:60) assert that the following are actions that need to be taken to ensure influence:
 - identify the issues and set goals,
 - get the facts,
 - plan strategies and tactics,
 - supply leadership,
 - get to know decision makers and their staff,
 - broaden the base of support,
 - be persistent and
 - evaluate your advocacy effort.

- “**Decision-making**” - Allocation of resources, benefits, eligibility, grievances, appeals and policy decisions are the inferences, judgments, or actions of authorized officials.
- “**Unjust**” - A non-conformist action or decision lacking fairness, equity, lawfulness, justice and righteousness, indicating a lack of justice.
- “**Unresponsive**” - When institutions fail to respond timely to inquiries, requests, petitions, demands, letters and appointments.
- “**System(s)**” - Organised agencies provide services, enforce laws and allocate resources in various systems, such as criminal justice, mental health, legislative, welfare, healthcare and transportation (Jansson, 2018:60).

Both the definitions provided by Clark (2020:149) and Adams *et al.* (2019:163) are applicable to the study; however, for the purpose of this dissertation the definition of Chibonore and Chikadzi (2017:4) is the most relevant as they define advocacy as the practice of fighting for social justice and universal well-being of vulnerable communities, connecting social workers' efforts to the profession's aim (Clark, 2020:150; Pardeck, 2017:422). In addition, the importance of Lundy and Lundy's (2018:416) definition for the purpose of this dissertation lies in (1) providing an explicit view of how social workers advocate for vulnerable groups like youth sexual minorities and (2) unpacking the type of relationship a social work advocate has with the client, group or community for which they are advocating which in this case would be youth sexual minorities.

1.5.1.4 APPROACHES TO ADVOCACY

Scholars concur that in social work, there are two main approaches of advocacy, namely, case advocacy and cause advocacy (Lundy & Lundy, 2018:416; Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:2; Stokes, 2023:107). This section discusses these two approaches in some detail.

(1) Case Advocacy

According to Lundy and Lundy (2018:418), case advocacy is a micro-level effort that represents clients on a case-by-case basis, rather than advocating for a large population. It is a participatory and empowering process, involving social workers and clients in the change process. This micro-level approach benefits individuals and organisations directly associated with them (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:5). Social workers aim to strengthen clients' voices, enabling them to take the initiative and fight for themselves without their involvement, depending on the context. A similar viewpoint is adopted by Chereni (2017:511), when the author notes that case advocacy ensures sustained benefits for individuals, families and small groups, especially when perceived as

inaccessible. Furthermore, Adams *et al.* (2019:163) notes that the cause advocacy approach focuses on individuals or small groups, task-centred and likely part of social workers' everyday practices. Therefore, LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities require a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses the unique challenges and needs of these individuals while advocating for broader societal change to create a more accepting and equitable environment through the function of social workers.

(2) Cause Advocacy

Cause advocacy involves collective action for policy changes affecting youth sexual minorities, specific groups or classes (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:6; Lundy & Lundy, 2018:419). Social advocacy involves pressure groups of stakeholders promoting change for a broader society benefit (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:9). Macro-level effort aims to advance group causes, establishing entitlement to resources, such as healthcare access for children under 18. It is noteworthy that cause advocacy to the LGBTQQIP2SAA community requires ongoing commitment, collaboration and a commitment to justice, equality and human rights for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (Lundy & Lundy, 2018:419).

1.5.1.4 Forms of advocacy

Lundy and Lundy (2018:419) identify three primary forms of advocacy: instrumental advocacy, educational advocacy and practical advocacy. In addition, Pardeck (2017:423) indicates that social workers can use four secondary forms of advocacy as well to achieve social justice, namely protecting the vulnerable, supporting functioning, fostering identity and protecting claims or appeals. The primary and secondary forms of advocacy are described below.

(1) Instrumental advocacy

Instrumental advocacy involves social workers taking specific actions on behalf of clients, addressing marginalized status or challenges and collaborating with other systems to secure rights and resources (Popple & Leighninger, 2018:365; Stokes, 2023:23).

(2) Educational advocacy

Educational advocacy aims to raise awareness of social justice issues, rights, needs and opportunities for clients, colleagues and the public, influencing others towards social justice (Pardeck, 2017:424). Social workers can advocate for youth sexual minorities by educating stakeholders and the community about their sexual orientation. This can be achieved through

intervention methods, such as groupwork and community work, focusing on human understanding of individuals and their specific needs, enhancing social justice (Adams *et al.*, 2019:170). Educational advocacy teaches youth sexual minorities about their rights, enabling better access to systems and institutions, promoting empowerment and informed decision-making through knowledge and empowerment.

(3) Practical advocacy

Clinical social work involves practical advocacy, assisting clients with funding applications, lodging appeals and conducting interviews (Clark, 2020:152). Clinical social workers assist patients with mental illness and youth sexual minorities during interviews to ensure proper hearing and understanding. They rephrase questions and help them present themselves accurately, especially when they lack confidence. Additionally, social workers can accompany youth sexual minorities to appeal or speak on their behalf, thereby ensuring justice for victims of victimization. Secondary forms of advocacy are discussed below.

(4) Protecting the vulnerable

Deweese and Hanley (2018:238) assert that advocacy in social work aims to protect vulnerable populations and advance them. Vulnerability is conceptualized as a combination of environmental and personal resources. People with fewer resources are highly vulnerable and benefit from advocacy (Stokes, 2023:26). Reduced self-care and support can lead to negative outcomes and physical damage in individuals exposed to these conditions. Social workers advocate for youth sexual minorities, gathering resources to protect and improve their safety and well-being (Karger & Stoesz, 2018:152). This study highlights the importance of social support for youth sexual minorities, as social workers must establish it to improve their emotional safety and well-being. Advocacy in guardianship, rights protection and case management is crucial. Social workers advocate for protecting youth sexual minorities from abuse and depersonalization systems (Lundy & Lundy, 2018:418).

(5) Creating support to enhance functioning

Advocacy focuses on developing effective support systems in partnership with clients, recognizing the connection between support systems and functioning (Stokes, 2023:27). The profession of social work advocates the impact of support systems on individuals' functioning and the vulnerability of those without them. They aim to reduce vulnerability by increasing support and ensuring a clear link between needs and relevant resources (Schön, 2017:55). Advocacy now emphasises environmental intervention, focusing on innovative service development and support

for youth sexual minorities (Popple & Leighninger, 2018:372). Social workers advocate for service improvement and investment in supporting individuals or groups, aiming to improve environmental support, facilitate community mobility and support decision-making. They also seek to strengthen clients' voices in service systems that often prioritize professional opinions over client perspectives (Pardeck, 2017:422).

(6) Fostering identity and control

Oscillation targets individuals with social, physical, or biological attributes society does not value or devalue (Jansson, 2018:59). Devaluation can lead to stigma, discrimination and dehumanization that are currently experienced by youth sexual minorities. To foster identity and control, individuals seek control over their lives and social workers support youth sexual minorities. One way is through positive segregation and withdrawal from society, allowing individuals or groups to find their own way and establish their community life (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018:79). Social workers advocate for youth sexual minorities to recognize and celebrate their cultural strengths, fostering meaningful relationships. Pardeck (2017:425) explains that the disability rights movement advocates, seek self-identity and control, similar to war veterans and gay/lesbian movements. This may lead to indigenous organisations representing oppressed members, forming a bond under their own values.

(7) Protecting and advancing claims or appeals

Advocacy in this legal and bureaucratic form protects and advances claims, granting liberated citizens substantive and procedural rights (Popple & Leighninger, 2018:368). South Africa's constitutional rights for youth sexual minorities face challenges and restrictions, making exercising them difficult and challenging to enforce. The section below discusses the nature and types of services that are provided to sexual minorities based on the advocacy theory.

1.5.1.5 Advocacy services provided by social workers

Social services refer to public and private services aimed at enhancing well-being for disadvantaged individuals or groups including youth sexual minorities (Pinker, 2019). Youth sexual minorities are entitled to social services, guided by policy documents rooted in South Africa's Constitution, as vulnerable groups (South Africa, 1996). Youth sexual minorities have equal human rights, as recognized in the Integrated Service Delivery Model (ISDM) (South Africa, 2006). The ISDM and the Constitution establish a national framework for youth sexual minorities' services, aiming to establish norms and standards for service delivery (South Africa, 1995 &

2006). In addition, the ISDM emphasises a developmental approach to service rendering, emphasising empowerment of vulnerable individuals, groups and communities, including youth sexual minorities and improved services (South Africa, 2006).

Social workers must focus on social justice for youth sexual minorities, emphasising self-reliance and connecting individuals within their environment. This promotes effective leadership, decision-making and planning, enhancing functioning and advocating for the connection between people and their environment (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:2; Lundy & Lundy, 2018:416; Stokes, 2023:107). Therefore, advocacy theory emphasises creating supportive environments for self-reliance and educating clients about human rights. Social workers should educate clients on accepting sexual minorities to enhance connections between people and their environments (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:2; Lundy & Lundy, 2018:416; Stokes, 2023:107). To this end, the ISDM (South Africa, 2006) highlights that, social work plays a crucial role in South African society, addressing developmental needs and providing holistic services to youth sexual minorities and the client system. Furthermore, the ISDM (South Africa, 2006) emphasises that the developmental paradigm emphasises social processes, promoting change in relationships and empowering vulnerable individuals to gain control and resources. This concurs with the definition of advocacy provided by SEAP (Support Empower Advocate Promote, 2019) as empowering people to express views, access information, defend rights and explore choices.

The ISDM (Republic of South Africa, 2006) makes provision for the development of social welfare services which are aimed at Social workers to enhance clients' social functioning at various levels, including individuals, groups and communities, enhancing optimal functioning. Consequently, social workers provide services on three levels of intervention with individuals, groups and communities namely, at the micro-, meso- and macro-level (Ebue, Uche & Agha, 2017:84). The following section discusses the nature and types of services provided to sexual minorities at each level of intervention in social work practice.

(1) Micro-level

At the micro-level of intervention, social workers provide direct services to individual members of sexual minority groups, couples and families of youth sexual minorities (Lundy & Lundy, 2018:420; Ebue *et al.*, 2017:85). Social workers engage with individuals, couples and families to solve problems, facilitating change in behaviour or relationships for youth sexual minorities (Ebue *et al.*, 2017:86). In advocacy theory, this claim is consistent with the case advocacy approach, which Chibonore and Chikadzi (2017:11) characterised as a micro-level effort that benefits a

person and a few people who are directly involved in the individual's life. Social workers advocating for youth sexual minorities focus on enhancing individual, familial and interpersonal functioning, addressing social and physical environment changes to improve social functioning within families (Ebue *et al.*, 2017:87). Social workers applying advocacy theory educate families on accepting their sexual orientation, offering therapeutic services through counselling and educational methods. These micro-level and meso-level services are discussed briefly.

(i) Counselling services

Lundy and Lundy (2018:421) assert that family support services, like counselling, should be accessible to families facing stability issues, promoting healing, comfort, clarification and reconciliation over time (Karger & Stoesz, 2018:152). Social workers may use instrumental advocacy when clients cannot speak for themselves due to marginalized status, as youth sexual minorities may experience extreme emotions and suicidal thoughts. This experience may create identity confusion and feelings of worthlessness in some LGBTQQIP2SAA clients. Consistent with this assertion, Roe (2017:56) notes that it is concerning that many LGBTQQIP2SAA youth are not raised in supportive home environments, as coming out at a younger age has been associated with such youth being more comfortable with their sexual identity. Social workers use instrumental advocacy in counselling to help clients cope with distress and confusion from family rejection and promoting healing. Roe (2017:57) reveals that family members react with anger and disappointment, sometimes ignoring youth sexual minority group disclosure (Kuper, Lindley & Lopez, 2019:218; Restar, Jin & Breslow, 2019:163). Therefore, it is important that social workers offer counselling services to youth sexual minorities, helping them become more acceptive of themselves and to their families.

(ii) Educational services

One of the roles that social workers play in their service rendering to clients across different practice settings, involves the provision of educational services. According to Adelson, Walker-Cornetta and Kalish (2019:652), this role involves developing systems skills through information, advice, modelling behaviour, problem-solving techniques and clarification of perceptions. To this end, Kosciw, Clark, Truong and Zongrone (2020) assert that educating is an advocacy intervention for social workers to improve client well-being. Educational advocacy aims to raise awareness of social justice issues, rights, needs and opportunities for youth sexual minorities and the public. Social workers can educate parents and family members about different sexual orientations, teach clients about their rights and teach families communication skills to express shock, anger, or disappointment towards their gay, lesbian or transgendered members without

rejecting them (Pardeck, 2017:424). Social workers could teach the family to identify and model alternative ways in which to react to their family member's disclosure of their sexual orientation.

(2) Meso-level

The nature of services at the meso-level is concerned with small to medium sized groups and the focus is on connectedness between the micro-level and the client's environment (Ebue *et al.*, 2017:89). It thus involves a set of micro-systems in association with one another (Ebue *et al.*, 2017:89). If there is congruence between how the family and the community view homosexuality and same-sex relations (such as both the family and the community having a positive view), optimal functioning can be achieved for youth sexual minorities. If the level of stigma can be decreased, this will, in turn, impact the level of marginalisation and violence that youth sexual minorities are confronted with in society. Social workers advocate for social justice for youth sexual minorities through referral and social support services in communities (Ebue *et al.*, 2017:89).

(i) Referral services (brokering)

According to Clark (2020:161) brokering is an advocacy intervention for sexual minorities, assisting in locating resources and promoting mutual interests within communities (Adams *et al.*, 2019:171). Jansson (2018:100) affirms that social workers must be knowledgeable about community resources for referrals, ensuring fair access to services for youth sexual minorities. Clients may require services not provided by specific agencies and may lack knowledge or proficiency in using available resources (Jansson, 2018:100). Social workers can assist youth sexual minorities by linking them with resources or referring them to professionals. For example, they can refer clients to police stations for sexual abuse cases and if they do not receive fair treatment, they use advocacy theory to represent them.

(ii) Social support

Ebue *et al.* (2017:90) state that social support includes emotional, instrumental and informational support for individuals. Rios and Eaton (2016:1098) define social support as assistance that people receive from family, friends, neighbours and others and state that it may include social embeddedness, enacted support and perceived support. Social workers can assist youth sexual minorities through advocacy theory, focusing on instrumental advocacy. They help secure rights and resources, ensure social embeddedness and facilitate connections for emotional support. This form of advocacy, known as protecting the vulnerable, focuses on individual functioning and prevents depersonalisation by facilitating groups with youth sexual minorities, social workers

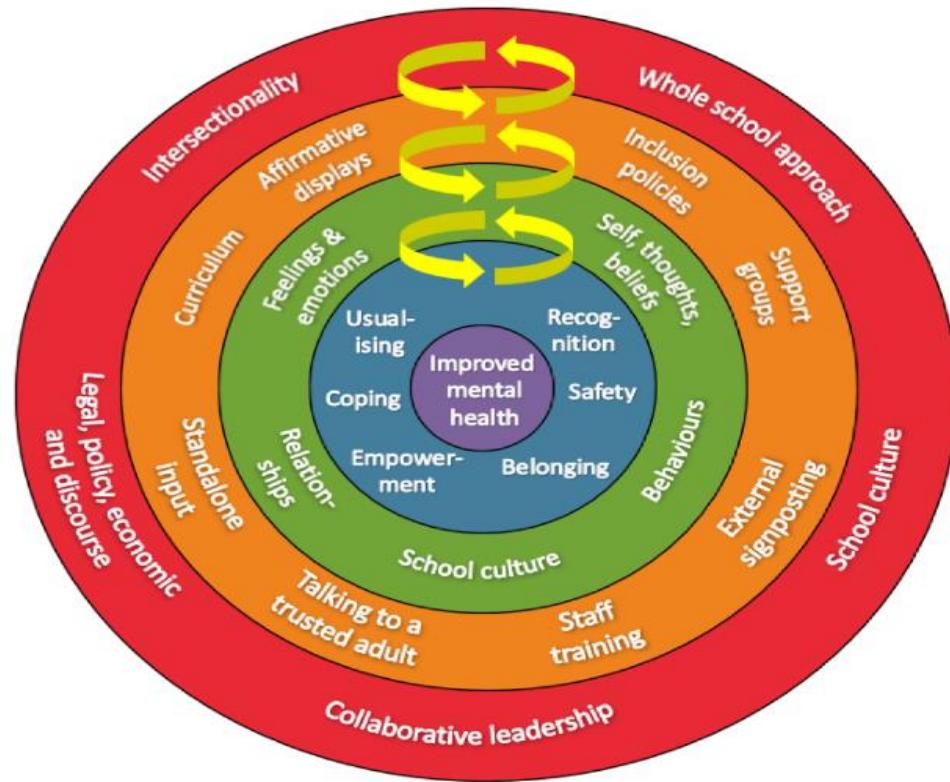
could establish social support for these groups (Rios & Eaton, 2016:1099). Social workers can empower youth sexual minorities by teaching communication skills, enhancing their functioning in society and understanding their preferences for treatment within families.

(3) Macro-level

The macro-level of social services involves service rendering in a larger society, which sexual minorities are part of and is influenced by on a larger scale. Social workers use cause advocacy to influence policies and strengthen rights for youth sexual minorities, mobilizing people and stakeholders to influence change. Lundy and Lundy (2018:422) assert that cause advocacy at macro-level involves interventions aimed at changing the environment for clients in similar conditions, involving political domain activities and policy reforms to combat societal discrimination against youth sexual minorities. Macro-level practice in social work includes the process of social planning and community organisation that is aimed at bringing about change in communities and in policy arenas (Ebue *et al.*, 2017:91). Therefore, it is at this level of practice that social workers advocate for vulnerable groups in societies, because macro-level practices include advocacy practices (Lundy & Lundy, 2018:422). Netting, Kettner, McMurtry and Thomas (2017:66) argue that social workers play a crucial role in policy discussions, as they directly interact with communities and understand policy's impact on everyday lives, advocating for social justice for youth sexual minorities. The nature of services provided to youth sexual minorities at this level of service rendering in social work, recognises how complex issues affect diverse communities differently (Reisch, 2016:259). For this reason, social workers collaborate to create change for sexual minorities through cause advocacy, forming social action groups to strengthen rights and legal protection against violence and discrimination.

In concluding the advocacy theory, McDermott, Kaley, Kaner, Limmer, McGovern, McNulty, Nelson, Geijer-Simpson and Spencer (2023) advance that advocacy in social work requires value orientation, ethics, knowledge, skill and passion in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities at a micro, meso and macro level. The "Practice and Policy Model for Social Workers' Advocacy Efforts" encapsulates a comprehensive framework that empowers social workers to effectively engage in advocacy endeavours (McDermott *et al.*, 2023). By synergizing the realms of direct practice and policy change, the model equips social workers with the tools to navigate intricate social challenges, bridge systemic gaps and advance equitable and just outcomes for vulnerable populations. It underscores the significance of integrating micro-level interventions with macro-level systemic transformations, emphasising the role of social workers as catalysts for

change at individual, community and societal levels. Through its holistic approach, the model stands as a beacon for social workers, enabling them to navigate the intricate interplay between practice and policy and ultimately fostering positive societal shifts through informed and impactful advocacy efforts. The practice and policy model provide conceptual orientations for social workers' advocacy efforts and this model provides guidance on social welfare issues, ensuring collaborative, client-centred and ethical advocacy to help those in need which is presented in Figure 1.8 below (McDermott *et al.*, 2023):



McDermott *et al.* (2023)

FIGURE 1-8 PRACTICE AND POLICY MODEL FOR SOCIAL WORKERS' ADVOCACY EFFORTS

1.5.2 ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

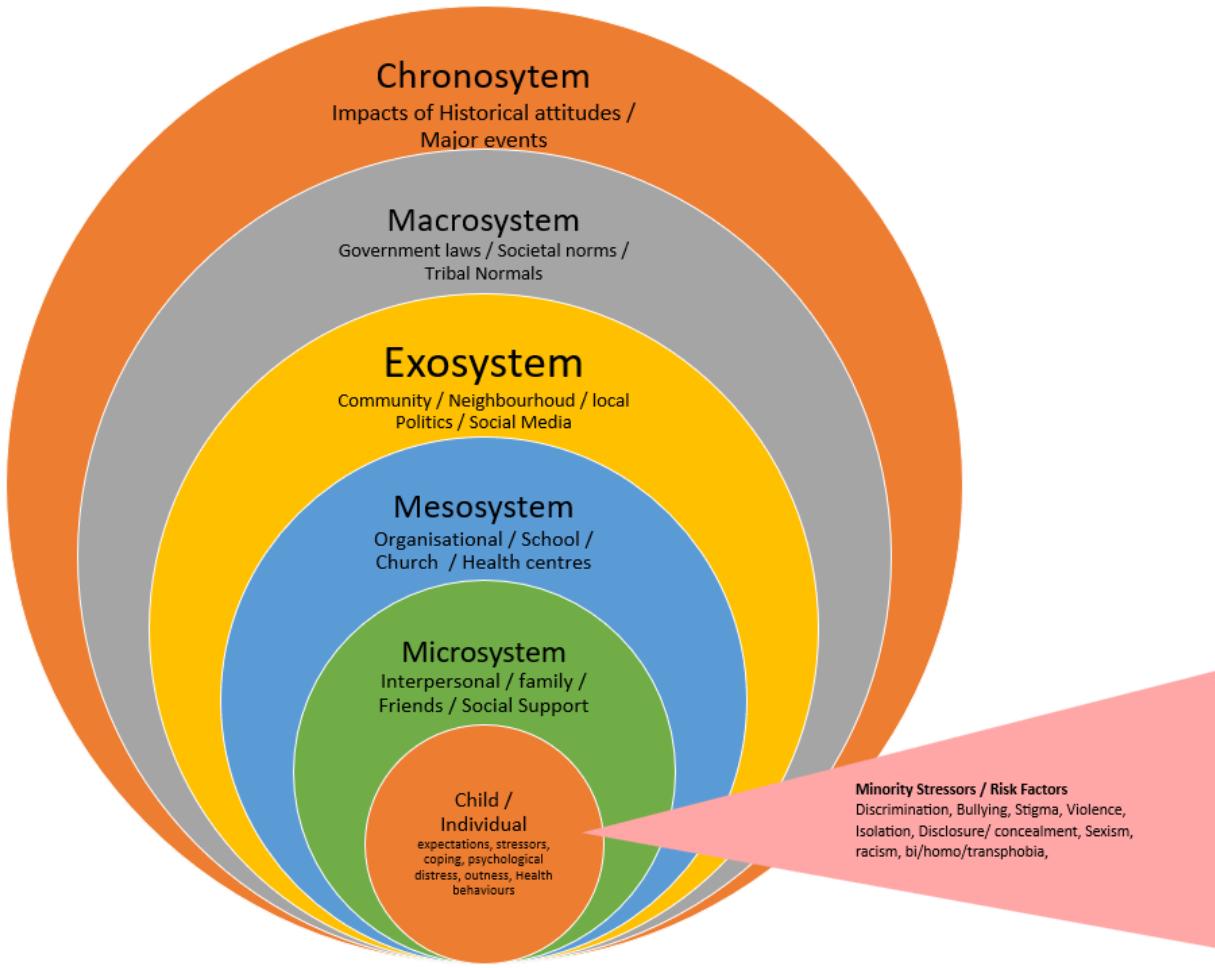
Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), an American psychologist, established the Ecological systems theory. This notion holds that everything in a person's surroundings influences their growth. Bronfenbrenner classified an individual's surroundings into five systems namely micro systems, meso systems, exo-systems, macro systems and chrono systems (Leung, Kassel-Gomez, Sullivan, Murahara & Flanagan, 2022:2).

Ecological systems theory stresses individuals' interactions with their social contexts, which influence and modify their behaviour (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:239). Beck, Rausch, Wikoff and Gallo (2018:45) agree that this theory provides expressive viewpoints on situations that may have a harmful impact on the development of youth. The theory is useful for social work interventions because it exposes social problems caused by a variety of factors that affect youth's overall functioning, well-being and behaviour (Leung *et al.*, 2022:2).

Using this paradigm, social workers recognize how individuals are influenced by diverse systems and how they influence these systems (Laff & Ruiz, 2019:7). This idea is thus crucial when considering the different systems/context that influence and affect the youth sexual minorities as well as their responses to these environments. Stigma and stresses have been found to harm LGBTQQIP2SAA people at all levels, from structural to interpersonal (Hatzenbuehler, 2017:466; Pachankis & Bränström, 2018:403). Individual wellness can be influenced by family, friends, communities, organisations and sociopolitical developments (Reczek, 2016:2189; Umberson & Kroeger, 2016:189).

Veldhuis (2022:1) suggests adapting this model to the specific experiences of youth sexual minorities in order to illustrate how stigma and marginalization can happen at all levels. Minority stressors or risk factors are also covered by the approach. By emphasising that experiences of chronic minority stressors or risk factors are motivated by victimization, violence and discrimination, minority stressors or risk factors also include mental health disparities (Myers, Turanovic, Lloyd & Pratt, 2020:1). Youth sexual minorities are more likely to experience mental health issues since these stressors or risk factors tend to be long-lasting (Johns, Lowry, Rasberry, Dunville, Robin & Pampati, 2018:1211). Goldbach, Rhoades, Mamey, Senese, Karys and Marsiglia (2021:1) cite incidents of violent victimization, homophobic bullying, family rejection of young sexual minorities, sexual identity status and depression, PTSD and suicidality as evidence for this relationship between minority stress and behavioural health (Baams, Dubas, Russell, Buikema & van Aken, 2018:9; Pollitt, Mallory & Fish, 2018:412).

Figure 1.9 below, presents the different levels of the ecological system and minority stressors as applicable to LGBTQQIP2SAA, as described by Veldhuis (2022) followed by a short discussion explaining it.



Leung et al. (2022:21)

FIGURE 1-9 BRONFENBRENNER'S ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

As illustrated in Figure 1.9 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory entails the following systems:

1.5.2.1 Microsystems

The term "microsystems" refers to the immediate structures or interpersonal connections (parents, friends and teachers) that young people frequently have contact with in order to experience life and shape their everyday reality (Laff & Ruiz, 2019:7). Therefore, youth sexual minorities interact within these systems and develop perspectives, world views and responses depending on their interactions. The environment improves as these encounters and connections become more loving and helpful.

1.5.2.2 Mesosystems

Schools, churches and neighbourhoods are examples of the next-level systems that fall under the category of mesosystems (Kalinowski, 2017:295). Mesosystems are made up of the links between a person's home and their place of employment or school. They can also include interactions and processes that occur between two or more settings that house developing persons. In other terms, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems. For instance, the ecology between a family and a school is important (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:240). Youth sexual minorities engage in activities at their schools, churches and communities that have a direct impact on how responsive they are to being accepted or rejected for their sexual identity dependent on how they interact within these systems.

1.5.2.3 Exosystems

Exosystems are systems that indirectly affect children's behaviour and development and can have either positive or bad consequences (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:239; Laff & Ruiz, 2019:8). Examples of exosystems include the media, extended relatives and the work environments of parents. Youth sexual minorities interact frequently with the media, their extended families and their parents' workplaces. The topics discussed in these systems and the manner in which they are discussed have a direct impact on the worldviews held by youth sexual minorities. These discussions may encourage feelings of acceptance or rejection in the youth's sexuality and help the youth come to terms with his or her identity.

1.5.2.4 Macrosystems

According to Analisa and Indartono (2019:242), macrosystems are social contexts that have a direct impact on and control societal structures and activities. Psychosocial, religious and cultural conventions are some of these systems (Kalinowski, 2017:295). One can presume that frequent contact with these institutions influences how teenage sexual minorities feel about being accepted or rejected. As a result, groups who are accepted as youth sexual minorities will develop differently than those that are rejected.

1.5.2.5 Chronosystems

Chronosystems describe life events, such as climatic and historical occurrences (Kalinowski, 2017:295). Cultural norms are altered when these experiences take place; in the context of a school system, adjustments may be made to governance or policy (Laff & Ruiz, 2019:8). Young

people who identify as sexual minorities will either react favourably or unfavourably to the stimuli or experiences that arise in these settings. A sense of openness and freedom may be felt when an atmosphere is welcoming of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, but if this environment is not welcoming of these individuals, the response may be negative in that youth sexual minorities may decide in good faith not to disclose their sexual orientation.

In conclusion, the study's use of the advocacy theory helps to better understand the extent to which school-based social workers are able and willing to speak up for LGBTQQIP2SAA or other youth sexual minorities, intervene on their behalf and support them, or suggest a course of action. The goal in combining the ecological systems theory with the advocacy theory is to gain a thorough understanding of the experiences and difficulties social workers face when dealing with LGBTQQIP2SAA issues and to develop recommendations on how current knowledge for social work intervention can be improved by combining the ecological systems theory and advocacy theory when providing welfare services to youth sexual minorities.

1.6 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The key concepts central to the study are defined and their meaning contextualised as follows.

1.6.1 Experiences

According to Jordaan and Jordaan (2019:279–283), the process of an experience relates to the way in which a specific experiential content is available or present in a person's consciousness. Experiences exists as an unbreakable thing or a whole that is founded on recognizing, discriminating, knowledge, feeling, desire and determining (Jordaan & Jordaan, 2019:279–283). Experiences are not discrete happenings. Therefore, it is important to adopt linguistic standards and categories of experienced processes that are known to others when communicating experiences (Jordaan & Jordaan, 2019:279–283). The study focuses on the perceptual (sensory stimuli), cognitive (thoughts and thinking process), emotive (emotional responses), dispositional (responsive output) and the self-process (personal image or impression) experiences, understandings and knowledge of school-based social workers about providing intervention services to young people who identify as youth sexual minorities.

1.6.2 Challenges

According to Collins English Dictionary (2013), challenges are situations or experiences that are unique or novel to a person or individual and "require effort and determination" to be dealt with. According to Gonzalez and Congress (2015:63), social workers face difficulties in adapting to diverse organisational structures while also appreciating the complexity and interconnectedness of those aspects' origins. When school-based social workers discover that their knowledge, abilities and resources are inadequate to fulfil the demands of the circumstances, they are faced with challenging scenarios, which cause them to react in the context of their lived experiences.

1.6.3 School-based social worker

In the profession social work, school social work is a specialization that focuses on the psycho-social functioning of learners in order to promote and maintain their health and well-being. The School Social Work Association of America (2022) describes school-based social workers as a licensed and trained professional who can help with mental health issues, behavioural issues, maintaining positive behaviour, learning and classroom support, working with teachers and parents, as well as providing individual and group therapeutic / counselling support in the school context. Note that in south Africa and as explained below, to be described as a social worker, a person must be registered as a social worker in terms of the Social Service Professions Act, Act 110 of 1978.

1.6.4 Social worker

In South Africa, the Social Service Professions Act 110 of 1978, specifies that a person is legally considered only to be a social worker and use the title of 'social worker' when the person is registered as a social worker with the South African Council for Social Service Professions (South Africa 1978: Section 1(17)) due to having the prescribed social work qualifications. The South African Council for Social Service Professions regulates social work practice, requiring registration and prescribes the minimum academic and practical training standards for registration. In their practice, social workers must follow the Council's code of conduct (South Africa 1978: Section 1(17)). Non-compliance with it and unprofessional conduct may result in disciplinary action by the Council and termination of the person's registration.

1.6.5 Social work

On an international level, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) developed the following global definition of social work in 2014, that still applies:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (IFSW 2014).

Against this background, according to Zastrow (2017:49), social work is a profession that improves the welfare of individuals and communities using theories based on scientific research. The profession works to advance social and economic justice, intervene in situations that restrict human rights, alleviate poverty and improve the standard of living for everyone. Allgurin, Anand, Gubrium, Svenlin and Thoresen (2023:1) add that social work is a profession with specialist knowledge of helping people as individuals, groups, or communities to better their social functioning by creating favourable social circumstances towards this objective. It is pointed out that specialized knowledge is the foundation and backbone of the profession of social work (Langer & Lietz, 2014:11).

In the context of this study, the focus is on school-based social work that seeks to understand LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities behaviour and how social workers promote their holistic well-being. Social work combines practice and academic disciplines to promote social change, development and individual empowerment. Grounded in principles of social justice and human rights, it integrates theories from social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge.

1.6.6 Youth

Statistics SA (2021) offers a comparative meaning of the term "youth." According to the United Nations, "youth" refers to those between the ages of 15 and 24. However, the UN acknowledges that each nation may have its own definition of youth. In South Africa the concept "youth" refers to those persons between the ages of 15 and 34 years (Statistics SA, 2021). Exactly why children between the ages of 15 and 18 years who are supposed to be in school are counted in terms of

this description, among persons of working age is a common question. Identifying the age group of 15 to 18 years is based on South Africa's mandated and mandatory school attendance age. Therefore, "youth" will be considered for the purposes of this study as learners who are between the ages of 15 and 18 who are enrolled in formal education.

1.6.7 Sexual minorities

People who are not seen as heterosexual or cisgender are considered to be members of the "sexual minority" (Suen *et al.*, 2020:2301). Sexual minorities are defined as a collective of people whose sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual characteristics are different from the population's presumptive prevailing belief (Hartney, 2018). Further sexual minority groups exist under the universal acronym referred to as "LGBTQIA+", however an extended version of the acronym has been observed which include LGBTQQIP2SAA (LGBTQIA Resource Centre, 2017). In their comprehensive study, Suen *et al.* (2020:2302) present a significant contribution to the understanding of gender and sexual diversity as depicted in Table 1.3 below. It is clear from Table 1.3 that their work transcends traditional boundaries by offering an extensive supplement of definitions that encompass all genders and sexual minorities. This endeavour not only sheds light on the complexities of human sexuality but also promotes inclusivity and awareness, making it an invaluable resource for scholars and individuals seeking a more nuanced understanding of these crucial facets of human identity.

TABLE 1-3 TYPOLOGY OF ALL GENDERS AND SEXUAL MINORITIES

Asexual	A sexual identity describing people who do not experience sexual attraction to people of any gender but may still have romantic attractions to other people.
Aromantic	A romantic identity describing people who do not experience romantic attraction to people of any gender but may still have sexual attraction to other people.
Bisexual	A sexual identity where sexual attractions and/or behaviours are focused on members of both sexes (usually female and male) or gender identities (women and men). Increasingly this is used to describe people whose sexual attractions and/or behaviours are with people of the same and/or another gender.
Cisgender	A person with a gender identity the same as that commonly associated with their sex assigned at birth.
Gay	A sexual identity where sexual attractions and/or behaviours are focused mainly on members of the same gender identity.

Gender expression	Characteristics in a person's appearance, personality and behaviour that are culturally and temporally defined as masculine, feminine, or outside of the masculine or feminine binary.
Gender identity	A person's deeply-felt, self-conceptualization of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or another gender (such as genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender neutral) that may or may not correspond to that commonly associated with a person's sex assigned at birth or to a person's primary or secondary sex characteristics.
Gender minority	A person with a gender identity that differs from that commonly associated with their sex assigned at birth.
Gender non-binary	A person whose gender identity does not fully fall along the gender binary of being a girl/woman or boy/man.
Gender non-conforming	A person whose gender identity or expression does not fully conform to sex-linked social expectations (such as masculine girls/women, feminine boys/men).
Genderqueer	A gender identity usually used in one of two ways: (1) as an umbrella term that includes all people whose gender identity varies from the traditional cultural notions of gender; or (2) to describe a person whose gender identity does not fully fall along the gender binary of being girl/woman or boy/man, similar to gender non-binary.
Graysexual/demisexual	A sexual identity where sexual attractions occur only occasionally and under specific circumstances, usually after developing a very strong bond.
Heterosexual/straight	A sexual identity where attractions and/or behaviours are focused mainly on members of another gender identity.
Intersex	A person who is born with any of a range of sex characteristics that may not fit typical notions of binary "male" or "female" bodies. Sometimes used to describe people who have differences of sex development.
Lesbian	A sexual identity where attractions and/or behaviours are focused mainly on members of the same gender identity, usually referencing those who identify as women.
Pansexual	A sexual identity where sexual attractions can occur toward individuals of all gender identities or expressions.

Sex assigned at birth	The sex assigned to each person at time of birth or shortly thereafter usually based on external genitalia, also referred to as natal sex or biologic sex. This describes anatomic and/or physiologic characteristics.
Sexual minority	A person with a sexual identity that is not strictly straight or heterosexual.
Sexual orientation	An enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions; a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.
Transgender /trans	A person with a gender identity that differs from that commonly associated with their sex assigned at birth.
Transgender man	A person who identifies as a man and was assigned female sex at birth.
Transgender woman	A person who identifies as a woman and was assigned male sex at birth.

Suen *et al.* (2020:2302)

1.7 OUTLINE OF RESEARCH REPORT

The research report consists of eight chapters as presented below.

A broad overview of the research investigation, as well as a justification for this research endeavour, are given in Chapter One. It introduces the theoretical framework used for the study. Clarification of the study's core ideas is provided, along with a breakdown of the report's substance.

The study's research questions, objectives and research plan are covered in Chapter Two, along with the study's aims and objectives. The ethical considerations observed during the study are described in the research plan together with the research approach, design and research methodologies applied.

Before moving on to a historical history of South African laws governing same-sex partnerships, Chapter Three gives an overview of the global, African and South African perspectives on policies and laws intended to safeguard sexual minorities in the form of a literature study. In addition, this chapter contains a discussion of issues that sexual minorities in South Africa face, paying particular attention to the family structure, social environment and institutional settings.

The details of the use and execution of the qualitative research process in the research is described in Chapter Four, with particular emphasis on the use of the proper research methodology.

The research findings are presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. The findings relate to the experiences and difficulties faced by school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities as well as what remedial strategies can be used to support these services.

In Chapter Eight, the final section of this research report, we present the achieved results, suggestions and recommendations pertaining to the research findings and the practices of school-based social workers who provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities. These insights aim to guide potential future studies on the topic.

1.8 DISSEMINATION

The findings of the research will be shared following the conclusion and thorough examination of the study. This would include dissemination through a dissertation, publication in accredited professional journals, compilation of a report for the educational sector, hosting seminars and conducting information sessions with stakeholders.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter One aimed to create an awareness of the introduction and background orientation to the study. A theoretical background, consisting of a presentation of the prevalence of, increase in and consequences of LGBTQIP2SAA lifestyles of youth sexual minorities are provided extending to the involvement of school-based social workers in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

The research problem formulation and rationale for the study are explained. The theoretical framework selected for this study, namely Advocacy Theory and Ecological Systems Theory, the latter as developed by the American psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner are discussed and braced by a motivation for its selection and adoption in this study.

The last part to this chapter considered the clarification of the terminology and key concepts used in this research report. The chapter is concluded with a brief overview of a chapter outline of the research report.

In the next chapter, the research plan for investigating the identified research problem is described, with an emphasis on the research questions coming from the recognized research problem, as well as aims and objectives developed to outline the course of answering the stated questions.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RESEARCH PLAN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter One, comprehensively addressed the research topic's introduction and historical context. It clarified the problem that the research aims to address, highlighted the motivations driving this research project and outlined the theoretical frameworks serving as the basis for this study.

This chapter introduces the research plan and outlines the research questions formulated to tackle the research problem. It also explains the research goals and objectives devised to address the research questions posed in this investigation. The research methodology employed and the research methods employed are thoroughly discussed. Additionally, the ethical considerations pertaining to the study are given due emphasis. The application of the research plan is described in Chapter Four.

2.2 RESEARCH PLAN

The research proposal containing the research plan described in this chapter was initially submitted for review and ethical approval to the Research and Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa (UNISA). This submission occurred while the researcher was pursuing his Master's degree programme in Social Work at UNISA.

In accordance with Punch (2016:2) researchers are advised to consider the "four Ps" (phase, process, product and plan) when crafting a research plan while examining a study proposal or plan. The research plan, which represents the initial phase of the research process, marks the inception of the research endeavour. Whether presented as a formal research proposal submitted for review and ethical approval or as a chapter within a research report (such as this one), the research plan serves as an action plan for conducting the study, comprising the study's research questions, aim and objectives.

2.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions provide a critical framework that compels researchers to thoughtfully consider what they aim to uncover and simultaneously provides a clearer definition of the study's objectives (O'Leary, 2018:5–15). As suggested by Hamilton and Finley (2019:4), research questions typically pinpoint the primary issue requiring investigation. In alignment with O'Leary (2018:5–15), research questions not only describe what warrants examination but also chart the course for the entire study. They offer guidance on which theories to explore, what literature to scrutinize, which data to collect and which methodologies to employ. Consequently, research questions are perceived as the fundamental and indispensable facets that shape the foundation of a research endeavour, serving as a compass for the researcher's journey. In the context of this study, the research questions served as the guiding inquiries to investigate the social issue surrounding the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities (Fouché & Geyer, 2021:82).

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

- What experiences and challenges do school-based social workers encounter while providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities within the school environment?
- How can the existing strategies for school-based social work intervention be improved to better assist and support school-based social workers in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?

These research questions inform the subsequent presentation of the study's research goal and objectives.

2.4 RESEARCH GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The paramount sentence that captures the overarching aim of a study is the research goal (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:117;198). Setting a research goal, as Creswell and Poth (2018:199) suggest, provides a clear navigational path for the investigation. Typically, research goals are articulated in a broad and abstract manner, describing the ultimate objective of the research (Thomas, 2023). As posited by Ryan (2023), a research goal outlines the core subject matter upon which the study will centre, thus conveying what the researcher aspires to achieve throughout the research journey.

In line with this perspective, the research goal devised for this study are as follows:

- To gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges encountered by school-based social workers when delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- To formulate recommendations aimed at enhancing existing school social work interventions to facilitate the effective and efficient provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Flowing from the research questions and goals, the subsequent step involved the formulation of research objectives designed to address the research questions and actualize the set research goal. Specific actions researchers can undertake in their research endeavours are outlined in the study objectives (Rubin & Babbie, 2017:557). These authors further elaborate and define research objectives as explicit statements intended to describe the study's focal point. To investigate the experiences and challenges faced by social workers when offering intervention services to young individuals identifying as sexual minorities, the following research objectives were developed:

- To explore the experiences and challenges encountered by school-based social workers in delivering social intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- To describe the primary findings pertaining to the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- To draw comprehensive conclusions and provide recommendations regarding how existing school social work interventions can be enhanced to facilitate social workers in delivering effective and efficient intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

In the subsequent section, the research methodology, specifically focusing on the research approach and research design, is introduced.

2.5 RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Research models, also known as paradigms, serve as interpretive frameworks that provide structure and organisation to the research process (Cresswell & Poth, 2018:22). These paradigms are essential guiding frameworks for shaping critical reasoning within research projects (Babbie, 2016:32–33). Researchers often employ logical philosophies to justify their selection of research methodologies, as noted by Creswell and Creswell (2018:5). There are five main paradigms in research, namely positive theory, constructivism or interpretivism, critical theory, transformational theory and pragmatism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:5; Creswell & Poth, 2018:22–23).

In the context of this study, a qualitative research approach was adopted, aligned with the constructivism or interpretivism paradigms. This paradigm is recommended by Pervin and Mokhtar (2022:421) and Berryman (2019:273) for enhancing the understanding of human social life scenarios. Consequently, this study focuses on the perspectives and experiences of participants, as well as how these are perceived and responded to within the specific context under investigation. As highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018:24) and Creswell and Creswell (2018:8), social constructivists believe that individuals actively seek to interpret their experiences and construct meaning from them. In the realm of empirical research, this approach aligns with Ryan's (2018:9) notion that "truth and knowledge are subjective," owing to the variations in culture and life experiences among individuals. Embracing the interpretive approach advocated by Berryman (2019:273), which underscores the importance of "social construction, language, shared consciousness and other social interactions," interpretive researchers aim to construct facts.

To accomplish this objective, Berryman (2019:273) asserts that interpretive researchers structure their research questions in a manner that delves into the "how and why" aspects, thus relying on participants' perceptions and understandings. This approach involves employing open-ended research questions that empower participants to co-create meaning from their circumstances, facilitating researchers in comprehending the diverse perspectives and experiences of individuals.

The focus now falls on the research approach and the research design applied in the research.

2.5.1 Research approach

As outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018:86), a research approach encompasses any method employed within the research process, ranging from broad hypotheses to specific procedures for data collection, analysis and interpretation. In the realm of research, three primary approaches are available, namely mixed methods, qualitative and quantitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:3; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:562). Mixed methods research involves the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, under the premise that this synthesis yields deeper insights than either method used in isolation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:3–4). The quantitative approach, on the other hand, is employed to test theories by analysing the relationships between measurable variables using statistical tools and techniques (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:55).

In this research, the researcher opted for a qualitative research approach, for the purpose of gaining an in-depth understanding of intervention services to sexual minority groups based on participants' experiences. As indicated by Creswell and Creswell (2018:59), the qualitative approach is well-suited for exploring the significance that participants attribute to social issues. Merriam and Tisdell (2016:24) suggest that qualitative research seeks to comprehend the subjective reality attributed by individuals to their experiential world. The characteristics of the qualitative research approach and its use can be summarised as follows, whilst a detailed description of the characteristics and their role in this research is presented in Chapter Four (section 4.2):

- **Participants' Meaning:** Qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning that participants ascribe to the research problem, rather than imposing the researcher's interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:182). It seeks to explore the research issue from an insider's perspective, capturing the viewpoints of those directly involved (Pulla & Carter 2018:10). In this study, participants were encouraged to share their experiences and challenges in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities within a school setting.
- **Nature of the Research Problem:** Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating complex study issues that cannot be easily quantified. Complex human situations, as noted by Denzin and Lincoln (2018:779), are often the focus of qualitative

research. Given that intervention services provided to youth sexual minorities are inherently multifaceted and situated within a complex social context, a qualitative study is well-suited to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation.

- **Holistic Account:** Qualitative research allows researchers to recognize the multidimensional and multifaceted nature of study problems, presenting information from various perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:182). Complex research issues are seen as multi-layered and multi-dimensional (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:425). Within the context of this study, school-based social workers, who are directly involved in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, can offer diverse viewpoints on the research topic.
- **Natural Setting:** Qualitative research keeps individuals connected to their everyday lives and emphasises a naturalistic environment. Instead of conducting research in a controlled laboratory setting or relying solely on postal questionnaires, qualitative researchers engage in direct interviews with participants and observe their behaviour within their natural contexts (Cropley, 2022:40; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:43; Kapoor, Mahamuni, Bhowmick & Qureshi, 2022:43;). In this study, the researcher intended to conduct in-person, semi-structured interviews with participants in settings comfortable to or preferred by them.
- **Researcher as a Key Instrument:** In qualitative research, researchers collect data by examining records, observing behaviour, or engaging in conversations with individuals. While data can be recorded using instruments, the interpretation of data relies on researchers' insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:181). In this study, the researcher developed an interview guide, conducted interviews and enlisted an external coder to assist in analysing the data.
- **Inductive Data Analysis:** Qualitative researchers employ an inductive approach to data analysis, organising collected data into more abstract categories, patterns and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:181; Kapoor *et al.*, 2022:9). To fully comprehend participants' perspectives on the research problem in the proposed study, an inductive analysis technique was employed. When there is little to no literature on a subject, it is typical to employ the inductive research approach because there is no theory to test. The three stages of the indicative approach are observation, pattern-spotting and formulating a hypothesis or broad (preliminary) conclusion (Kapoor *et al.*, 2022:10).
- **Emergent Flexible Design:** Qualitative research offers flexibility in research strategy, allowing for adjustments or updates to research questions while data are collected

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018:182). Researchers approach the study process with an open mind, ready to explore participants' viewpoints (Kapoor *et al.*, 2022:39; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:99). In the study, interviews commenced with a limited number of open-ended questions, followed by clarification questions, providing flexibility.

- **Reflexivity:** Qualitative researchers must consider how their background and experiences might influence data interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:181). Rather than asserting objectivity, researchers should openly acknowledge any personal beliefs or biases that may impact their interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:972; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:99). In the study, potential effects of the researcher's social work training and personal identity as a gay adult man on data interpretations are noted in the research report.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of intervention services provided by school-based social workers to youth sexual minorities, the researcher opted for the qualitative research paradigm. This aligns with the qualitative research approach, which emphasises exploring participants' experiences and perceptions within their natural context.

The subsequent section attends to the research design employed in the proposed study.

2.5.2 Research design

The research design plays a crucial role as a guiding framework for the inquiry process, providing direction and structure to the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:11). As Lune and Berg (2017:33) point out, the concept of a research design represents the overarching strategy that imparts structure and guidance to the research endeavour. In essence, the research design serves as a blueprint for the collection and analysis of data (Lune & Berg, 2017:36).

In the case of this study, the research design embodies a phenomenological quality, supported by the explorative, descriptive and contextual design elements.

2.5.2.1 Phenomenological design

The phenomenological design is geared towards investigating research questions by delving into the lived experiences of study participants (Cropley, 2022:71). Researchers employing this approach often inquire, "What is it like to experience such and such?" in order to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of an event, considering their impressions and the meanings they attach to the situation (Cropley, 2022:162). In the study, the researcher invited

school-based social workers to share their direct, lived experiences of delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. They were encouraged to discuss their perceptions, emotions and sensations about rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in the course of their work, shedding light on what it is like for them to provide such services and how they navigated these experiences. Additionally, participants were invited to express their views on the effectiveness and efficiency of current intervention services and offer insights into potential improvements. In conducting the research the researcher firmly believed that school-based social workers with first-hand experience of providing intervention services to young individuals who identify as sexual minorities, would yield valuable and insightful data in the study.

2.5.2.2 Explorative design

The exploratory research design is characterized by its comprehensive, purposeful and systematically organised approach, with the primary goal of maximizing the discovery of general patterns and facilitating the description and understanding of a specific aspect of social or psychological life (Hunter, McCullum & Howes, 2019:2). The specific focus and methodological approach adopted in exploratory research are determined by the researcher's perspective and objectives (Hunter *et al.*, 2019:2). This type of design is particularly valuable when examining areas of study that have not been extensively investigated (Cropley, 2022:40; Howitt, 2016:93; Kapoor *et al.*, 2022:134). Applying an exploratory design aims to highlight the significance or extent of a particular issue and can generate initial insights into it (Mishra & Alok, 2017:4). It primarily addresses the "what" question (Berryman, 2019:273) and assists in conceptualizing a problem, including its manifestations and associated dimensions. Additionally, it can be instrumental in developing theories or hypotheses for further investigation (Howitt, 2016:179).

In the context of understanding the experiences and challenges faced by participants when delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, the researcher opted for an exploratory study approach. The researcher intended to solicit participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of current services for adolescent sexual minorities in need of intervention and to collect suggestions for potential modifications or enhancements to these services. The overarching goal of the research is to propose social work intervention strategies for serving young individuals who identify as sexual minorities. While prior studies have addressed services for youth sexual minorities, they have often focused on the viewpoints of educational stakeholders, with less attention paid to other crucial parties, such as school-based social

workers. Hence, the exploratory research design was chosen to fill this gap in knowledge and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

2.5.2.3 Descriptive design

The descriptive study design, as described by Lune and Berg (2017:176), involves the thorough recording of the phenomenon under investigation as conveyed by the participants. This research design serves to elucidate and articulate the lived experiences of participants, a perspective also highlighted by Makri and Neely (2021:3) and Mishra and Alok (2017:2). It accomplishes this by enlightening readers about the contextualised experiences without overly imposing the researcher's interpretative judgments. The fundamental objective of a descriptive research design is to comprehensively document and depict the phenomena of interest, presenting a detailed narrative of the experiences in a language that is easily digestible for readers (Bradshaw, Atkinson & Doody, 2017:5).

In the context of this study, the researcher aimed to provide precise verbatim quotes from participants to corroborate the research findings. This approach enhances the transparency and credibility of the study, enabling readers to draw their own conclusions based on the rich, first-hand accounts of the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

2.5.2.4 Contextual design

Contextual research design, as emphasised by Hamilton and Finley (2019:3), underscores the critical role of qualitative research in uncovering and documenting the context in which implementation occurs. This includes an examination of the environments where implementation takes place, the processes involved in these implementations and an evaluation of their effectiveness. Contextual research is particularly valuable during the discovery phase of studies (Duda, Warburton & Black, 2020:5).

In the context of the proposed study, the researcher recognizes the importance of considering the broader conditions and background (milieu) within which intervention services are provided to youth sexual minorities. By taking into account the contextual factors and the unique environment in which school-based social workers operate, the study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the complexities and challenges associated with these services.

The section that follows delves into the research method employed.

2.6 RESEARCH METHOD

The concept of a "research method" serves as a guiding framework that directs the researcher towards the tasks that need to be accomplished, the structuring of the research process and the allocation of resources for participant recruitment (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:3). As Cropley (2022:24) explains, research procedures encompass a detailed account of the specific tactics and techniques employed in a study to identify the target population, select a sample and gather data. Kapoor *et al.* (2022:23) elaborate on research procedures, defining them as "the techniques used to organise a study, systematically collect and analyse information related to a specific research question." Essentially, research methodologies encompass the "how" in terms of securing individuals for the study and the "how" related to the collection and analysis of data from these individuals. In this section, how these actions were planned and executed, are dealt with, covering the aspects of the population under investigation, sampling procedures, participant recruitment, pilot testing, data collection methods, data analysis, along with the trustworthiness of the study and data verification.

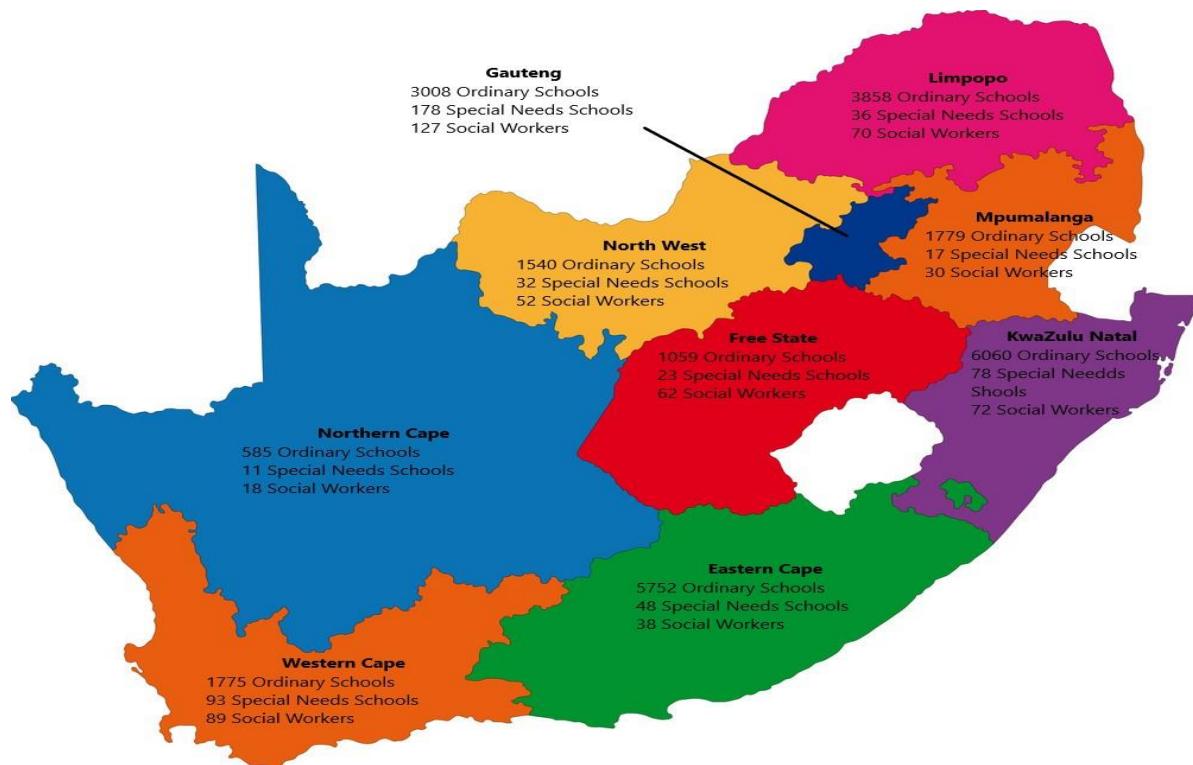
2.6.1 Population, sample and sampling techniques

In the realm of qualitative research, the term "population" refers to the overarching group of individuals or entities under scrutiny, whereas a "sample" denotes a thoughtfully selected subset of this larger population, considered representative of the entire group (Tshabangu & Madondo, 2021:132). The research population comprises all the entities, whether individuals, organisations, events or documented records, that fall within the scope of the sampling process (Strydom, 2021:228).

Several authors have contributed to the researcher's understanding of the concept of a research population. Chivanga and Monyai (2021:11) define the target population in research as the "totality of people, sampling units, or elements with which a particular research problem is concerned." Practical considerations often make it neither feasible nor wise to investigate the entire population due to factors such as time and budget constraints. Therefore, researchers commonly employ a sample in their investigations. It is imperative for researchers to clearly define their study sample and provide a rationale for its selection (Babbie, 2016:116; Drisko, 2018:589). A sample, as articulated by Pascoe (2015:135), represents a subset of the specified population or specific instances thoughtfully chosen for examination within a given study. This sample serves

as a scaled-down yet representative fraction of the broader target population (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021:13). Bradshaw *et al.* (2017:3-4) stress that sampling is an integral component of the qualitative research paradigm, noting that, in comparison to the detailed discussions of data collection and analysis, the complexities of the sampling process often receive relatively less attention.

This research comprises a target population consisting of social workers based within school settings, specifically tasked with providing assistance to adolescents who self-identify as sexual minorities within the Gauteng region. The distribution of social workers across South Africa's nine provinces is depicted in Figure 2.1, along with information regarding their work locations. Table 2.1 presents details regarding the employment status of social workers working in schools across South Africa's nine provinces.



Self-developed (2023), Information sourced from DBE, (2023)

FIGURE 2-1 DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

TABLE 2-1 EMPLOYMENT DESIGNATION OF SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS

PROVINCE	SOCIAL WORK MANAGER	SOCIAL WORK POLICY DEVELOPED	SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISOR	SOCIAL WORKER	Grand Total *
EASTERN CAPE	2	0	6	30	38
FREE STATE	0	1	3	58	62
GAUTENG	2	0	13	112	127
KWAZULU/NATAL	0	0	3	69	72
LIMPOPO	0	0	2	68	70
MPUMALANGA	1	0	5	24	30
NORTH-WEST	2	2	11	37	52
NORTHERN CAPE	0	2	6	10	18
WESTERN CAPE	1	9	8	71	89
Grand Total	8	14	57	479	558

The focus of the study was directed toward a population comprising social workers employed within educational institutions, tasked with delivering intervention services to adolescents self-identifying as sexual minorities. This focus was guided by the mandates of the DBE (2020) Psycho-social Services and School Governing Bodies.

In the realm of sampling techniques applied in compiling samples, two broad categories exist, namely probability and non-probability sampling techniques (Mishra & Alok, 2017:8). Probability sampling, a component of which is random selection, entails that every member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample (Cropley, 2022:78). This approach is more reliable compared to non-probability sampling, which does not provide a way to ensure or calculate the likelihood of any specific member of the population being included in the sample (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:177). Non-probability sampling techniques are often used by researchers adopting a qualitative approach (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:3). In this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique (Babbie, 2016:186–189; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:553). Purposive sampling, as described by Chivanga and Monyai (2021:13), involves the careful selection of participants to ensure that they meet the inclusion criteria and provide multiple perspectives on the research question. This non-probability sampling strategy, known as purposeful sampling, allows the researcher to select a

sample based on important characteristics of the population (Strydom, 2021:382). In qualitative research, purposive sampling provides the researcher with the authority to select individuals (or venues) for inclusion in the study, along with specifying the sampling procedure and sample size to be examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018:157).

Purposive sampling entails selecting study subjects based on a specific need or goal (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017:20). It involves the researcher's assessment of which participants are the most competent or informed about the research issue (Aidley & Fearon, 2021:70; Mishra & Alok, 2017:9). Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate for selecting participants with the requisite background knowledge for in-depth research (Howitt, 2016:94, 323). This method is commonly used in qualitative research, where a member of the sample is chosen to represent a phenomenon, group, incident, location or a type of relationship to a key criterion (Creswell, 2016:85; Creswell & Poth, 2018:158). Unlike probability sampling, purposive sampling does not encompass everyone available; it includes individuals who meet specific defined criteria (Palinkas, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015:533). Purposive sampling was employed in this study to select research participants who were most likely to provide insightful information on the subject of providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

The inclusion criteria for school-based social workers as research participants in this research, required participants to be -

- registered as social workers with the South African Council for Social Service Professions;
- employed by the Department of Basic Education or School Governing Bodies and servicing schools in the Gauteng province as a school-based social worker;
- accessible and willing to participate in the study; and
- proficient in communicating in English.

In terms of the exclusion criteria, persons did not qualify as participants in the research if they were not :-

- registered as social workers with the South African Council for Social Service Professions;
- employed as school-based social workers by the Department of Basic Education or School Governing Bodies;
- servicing schools in the Gauteng Province;

- accessible or unwilling to participate in the study; and
- proficient in communicating in English.

The Department of Basic Education's Psycho-social Services Department and School Governing Bodies provided support in connecting the researcher with school-based social workers (see Addendum C). Gatekeepers, including school principals, were also contacted to gain access to potential research participants. Purposive sampling facilitated the identification, selection and recruitment of research participants for this study (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017:20).

Sample size refers to the quantifiable estimation of the quantity of subjects or units incorporated into a study (Kaur, 2017:4836). Essentially, the sample size summarises the number of participants designated for research engagement. In qualitative research, the researcher will abstain from predefining a specific sample size, with emphasis instead placed upon the attainment of data saturation determining the sample size. Data saturation according to the literature means a point at which no new theme or categories emerge from the data (Saunders, Sim, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Burroughs & Jinks, 2018:1893) and at which the researcher stops collecting data (Saunders *et al.*, 2018). Upon reaching the threshold of saturation when the data collected become repetitive, the collection of data are curtailed, given that novel or noteworthy insights cease to emerge from the investigative process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:186; Creswell & Poth, 2018:318; Howitt, 2016:323). Hence in this study, the determination of the sample size hinged upon the criterion of achieving a state of data saturation, with the sample eventually consisting of 38 participants.

2.6.2 Recruitment, screening, selection of participants and preparation for data collection

Data collection is a critical phase in any research project, as it involves the techniques used to gather research data. The quality of these methodologies is paramount for effective research (Lune & Berg, 2017:96). Collecting data without adequate planning can result in the collection of unnecessary or unrelated data (Mishra & Alok, 2017:8). When planning and undertaking their research, researchers must consider the availability of necessary data and the feasibility of data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:93–94).

In preparation for data collection, it is essential to plan and create research tools in advance (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:4). Additionally, ethical considerations, such as voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, must be taken into account when conducting research involving human subjects (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:120; Creswell & Poth, 2018:95). It is

qualitative emphasised that institutional review boards should approve the study to mitigate potential risks for research participants (Yegidis, Weinbach & Myers, 2018:24; Rubin & Babbie, 2017:84).

To undertake the study, preliminary approval was granted by UNISA's College of Human Sciences Research and Ethics Committee (CREC) and Scientific Review Committee (SRC). Subsequently, secondary authorization was obtained from the National Department of Basic Education, given the comprehensive scope of the study across all schools within the Gauteng province (see the attached letter in Addendum C). School social workers who met the inclusion criteria and provided informed consent during initial contact making sessions were tactfully informed about the prospective study (letter attached as Addendum D). This information included details on how ethical concerns would be addressed and the researcher's commitment to upholding the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (South Africa 2013: Section 2(1)), ensuring the protection and confidentiality of their personal information. To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, the researcher ensured that participants' identification information was securely stored and removed from the research data they supplied, which consisted of their experiences and challenges in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. To confirm their voluntary participation, all participants were asked to sign informed consent forms (see Addendum E).

2.6.3 Pilot study

Before initiating the actual data collection process, the researcher conducted a pilot study of the interview guide with two social workers. The purpose of the pilot study was to identify any uncertainties or potential issues with the interview questions, allowing the necessary adjustments. A pilot study is essentially a small-scale research project conducted prior to the final full-scale study (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards 2018:1). According to Silverman and Patterson (2021:67), pilot study is a method used to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the research instrument. Conducting pilot study with semi-structured interviews provides the researcher with the opportunity to observe verbal and non-verbal cues that may indicate whether the questions are unclear, vague, or not applicable (Rubin & Babbie, 2016:133).

As suggested by Yegidis *et al.*, (2018:288–291), participants in the pilot study phase should be asked to provide feedback on the interview questions. In the study, the pilot study involved two individuals from the research population participating in face-to-face semi-structured interviews using the concept interview guide. These individuals were not included in the primary

investigation. Participants in the pilot study were requested to offer feedback on the interview questions, aiming to enhance their quality and select the most appropriate questions to include in the interview guide for the main study. This process ensured that the final interview guide used in the study was well-structured and effective to collect the necessary data.

2.6.4 Data collection

In qualitative research, various data gathering techniques are used, including conducting interviews, making observations, analysing of documents, scrutinising audio-visual material and examining digital resources (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:186–187; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:277). Interviews, in particular, are a common and widely used method. An interview, as described by Lune and Berg (2017:65), essentially is a conversation where the researcher asks questions and the interviewee responds. It is a two-way dialogue aimed at gathering information, where the researcher seeks to understand the interviewee's ideas, beliefs, perspectives, opinions and behaviour. There are three main types of interviews, namely unstructured (in-depth), semi-structured and structured interviews, with face-to-face and focus group interviews being the most common formats (Cropley, 2022:86; Lune & Berg, 2017:65).

In the study, the researcher chose to conduct face to face semi-structured interviews with each participant, whenever possible, rather than using other methods like online video conferencing platforms. These interviews were conducted in locations preferred by the participants, ensuring their comfort and convenience. It is important to note that participants voluntarily participated in the interviews.

While online video conferencing tools like Zoom (Video Communication Inc. 2016) or Microsoft's Teams recording facility offer features for conducting interviews, such as secure recording, the researcher opted for personal face-to-face interviews when feasible. According to Archibald, Ambagatsheer, Casey and Lawless (2019:2), one of Zoom's main advantages as a research tool is its ability to securely record and maintain sessions without the usage of third-party software. When protecting sensitive data is required for study, this capability is important. Therefore, this approach offered protected recordings of the interviews.

Face-to-face interviews allow for richer interactions and more nuanced communication, which can be particularly valuable in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:312). However, in cases where circumstances necessitate remote interviews, the researcher is prepared to conduct interviews via telephone or online platforms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:312).

The researcher employed semi-structured interviews, using an interview guide containing a set of open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews provide a degree of flexibility that allows participants to express themselves in their own words and at their own pace (Pennbrant, 2017). The focus during data collection was on the questions outlined in Addendum A, rather than strictly following a predetermined list of highly detailed and sequential questions. Open-ended questions are preferred in qualitative research because they encourage participants to provide detailed and narrative responses, rather than simple "yes" or "no" answers (Patton, 2015:55). These questions were designed to elicit in-depth responses about participants' experiences, perceptions, feelings and knowledge, which align with the goal of the study.

The open-ended questions asked to and discussed with study participants during the interviews are listed in the interview guide and in Chapter Four (section 4.2.6).

2.6.5 Data analysis

Data analysis is a critical step in qualitative research, involving the systematic organisation and interpretation of the collected data to derive meaningful insights and patterns about the matter being researched (Skovdal & Cornish, 2015:204). The primary goal of qualitative data analysis is to transform a large volume of textual information into organised and summarised results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). It is about making sense of the data and expressing concepts that represent the analyst's interpretation of the intended meaning of the participants (Corbin & Strauss, 2015:195).

In the study, the researcher employed a data analysis process that followed the following well-known steps, as outlined by Tesch (cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198).

- **Step 1: Preliminary Review** - The researcher thoroughly read through the interview transcripts to gain an initial understanding of the data. During this stage, the researcher noted down any ideas or thoughts that came to his mind while reading.
- **Step 2: Select a Transcript** - The most interesting or relevant interview transcript was selected for in-depth analysis. This involved a closer examination of the transcript to uncover its underlying meaning.
- **Step 3: Identify Emerging Themes** - After completing the in-depth analysis of several transcripts (as in Step 2), the researcher identified emerging topics or themes. These themes were then categorized into major, unique and residual topics or themes.

- **Step 4: Coding** - The researcher converted the categorized topics or themes into codes and captured these codes next to the relevant segments of text in the data.
- **Step 5: Category Development** - The researcher further refined the topics and where applicable subdivided them into sub-themes and categories. This involved finding the most expressive wording for the topics and examining the relationships between themes, sub-themes and categories.
- **Step 6: Abbreviations and Alphabetical Coding** - The researcher finalized abbreviations for all themes, sub-themes and categories and organised the codes alphabetically.
- **Step 7: Group Data** - Data belonging to each theme, sub-theme and category was grouped together and a preliminary analysis was conducted to explore the content and meaning within each category.
- **Step 8: Recoding (if necessary)** - where required, the researcher revisited the data and adjusted the coding or categories based on the evolving analysis.

These steps provide a structured framework for analysing qualitative data, allowing the researcher to identify patterns, themes and insights within the collected information. The iterative nature of qualitative data analysis means that it often involves revisiting and refining the analysis as more data are gathered and as the researcher gains a deeper understanding of the research topic.

2.6.6 Ensuring the trustworthiness of the study and data verification

The importance of data verification in qualitative research projects has been stressed by several academics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017:1397; Kakarash, 2023:1; Lune & Berg, 2017:41). From the perspectives of the researcher, the study's participants and the research report's reader(s), this procedure focuses on assessing the accuracy and dependability of the research findings (Krefting, 1991:214-215; Nunes, Barroso & Santos, 2019:1).

Thus, two phrases are employed to define data verification: the validity of a study and the extent to which research findings relate to and accurately portray the phenomenon researched (Copley, 2022:55; Yates & Leggett, 2016:227). Qualitative researchers must first acknowledge that the data may be subject to subjectivity in order to ensure that the conclusions reached from the data after analysis are consistent with the lived experiences of the participants (Kozleski, 2017:28). Concepts like "reliability" and "validity" are seen as "relative" in qualitative research (Krefting, 1991:215). This author recommends that a different vocabulary should be used to define the

concepts of data verification in qualitative research. Guba developed a model of this kind to assess the dependability of qualitative data (Krefting, 1991:215). The validity of qualitative research is frequently questioned (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:5). Hence frameworks for ensuring trustworthiness have been around for a while.

Using the four-part Guba model, the researcher assessed the effectiveness of this qualitative inquiry and verified the data (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:3; Krefting, 1991:215-217). An overview follows of the four factors that determine the trustworthiness utilised to confirm the data.

2.6.6.1 Credibility (truth-value)

Credibility is defined as internal validity, therefore the study's results must "make sense" or be obvious to be true (Cropley 2022:36). If the findings are a reflection of the reality, It is the question the researcher should be asking oneself (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:6). Credible research is in keeping with the planned research aim and credibility has its origins in the intended research goal. According to Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman (2016), credibility also shows that the researcher applied critical thinking to the research. Williams and Kimmons (2023:3) and Johnson, Adkins and Chauvin (2020:145), list the following typical aspects of qualitative research that assisted the researcher to ensure the validity of the results:

- **Description of the Research Context:** Providing a thorough description of the study's context helps readers understand the setting in which the research was conducted. It allows them to assess the relevance and applicability of the findings to similar contexts.
- **Description of the Sample and Sampling Method:** A detailed description of the sample and the methods used for sampling is crucial. This includes specifying the criteria for selecting participants, ensuring transparency in participant recruitment and explaining how the sample represents the target population.
- **Concurrent Data Collection and Analysis:** Conducting data collection and analysis concurrently can help identify emerging themes and patterns during the research process. This real-time analysis allows researchers to adapt their data collection strategies as needed.
- **Triangulation:** Triangulation involves using multiple data sources or methods to validate findings. By collecting data through various means (such as interviews, observations, documents), researchers aim to ensure that the results are consistent and not dependent on a single method.

- **Methodological Verification/ Peer Scrutiny:** Seeking input and feedback from other researchers or experts in the field can provide additional perspectives and validation of the research process and findings. This peer scrutiny helps identify potential biases and enhances the credibility of the research.
- **Data Saturation:** Data saturation is reached when no new information or themes emerge from additional data collection. Ensuring data saturation is important to capture the full depth of the data and demonstrate that the study has thoroughly explored the phenomenon.
- **Participant Validation or Member Checking:** Presenting the research findings to participants and allowing them to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the results is a valuable step in enhancing credibility. It confirms that the findings align with participants' experiences.
- **Use of Verbatim Quotations:** Incorporating direct quotations from participants in the research report provides concrete evidence and allows readers to directly connect with the participants' voices and perspectives.

By incorporating these aspects, the researcher aimed to establish trustworthiness in exploring, describing and understanding the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. These steps contribute to the credibility of the study's findings, ensuring that it authentically represent the research participants' lived experiences.

2.6.6.2 Applicability/transferability

Transferability is the degree to which a study's findings can be used in other situations or by a larger community. Johnson *et al.*, (2020:144) advises providing a thorough context to the study so that limitations and applicability can be emphasised. In order to assess whether the results are generalizable to other studies, transferability entails knowing the context in which the study was conducted (Riazi, Rezvani & Ghanbar, 2023:3). This demonstrates how broadly applicable the research's conclusions are in various situations. For the purpose of performing a transferability audit to assess the applicability of the research findings to various contexts, Johnson *et al.* (2020:143) advise making the following data accessible:

- **Contextual Information:** Providing a thorough description of the research context is essential. This should include details about the setting, population and any unique characteristics that may influence the findings. Readers need to understand the specific context in which the research took place.

- **Participant Characteristics:** Describe any restrictions or criteria applied when selecting participants. This includes information about the demographic characteristics of participants and any relevant background information that might affect the findings.
- **Data Collection Methods:** Explain the methods and techniques used for data collection. This should include a clear description of how data were gathered, whether through interviews, observations, or other means. Transparency in data collection methods is essential for assessing the transferability of the research.
- **Data Collection Sessions:** Provide information about the number and length of data collection sessions conducted. Understanding the duration and frequency of interactions with participants can help readers gauge the depth and richness of the data.
- **Data Collection Period:** Specify the period over which data were collected. This can be important, especially if the research context or phenomena being studied are subject to changes over time.

In summary by offering this information, researchers enable readers to conduct what is often referred to as a "transferability audit." This audit allows others to evaluate the extent to which the findings can be applied to their own contexts or situations. It helps readers determine whether the research results are relevant and applicable beyond the immediate study setting (Johnson *et al.*, 2020:143). Overall, providing comprehensive contextual details and data collection information is essential for enhancing the transferability of qualitative research findings and ensuring that they have broader relevance to other situations or communities.

2.6.6.6 Consistency/dependability

Consistency in research requires that each step of the study process be completed completely and that researchers adhere to a specific and understandable plan (Lune & Berg, 2017:48). As the coherence of internal processes, it fits this description. Internal consistency describes the reliability of data in the context of what is known about the circumstance and the study participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018:324), dependability and credibility are intertwined and evaluations of one factor also consider the other. As a result, "rich descriptions" of information are relevant to both. Qualitative research involves a deep complexity of descriptions and explanations (Tracy & Hinrich, 2017:4). By paying close attention to the little things, being thorough with their technique and doing accurate evaluations, researchers ensure consistency which is based on the following recommendations of Tracy and Hinrich (2017:4-6):

- **Detailed Research Plan:** Clearly outline and document the research plan, including the study's goal, objectives, research questions and methods. Having a well-defined plan from the outset provides a roadmap for conducting the research consistently.
- **Thorough Data Collection:** Ensure that data collection is carried out systematically and consistently. This includes using standardized data collection tools, following a structured interview protocol and documenting observations and interactions with participants in a detailed manner.
- **Transparent Sampling:** Describe the sampling procedures in detail, including the criteria for participant selection. Transparency in sampling allows others to assess the representativeness of the sample and the potential for bias.
- **Transcription Protocols:** If interviews or interactions with participants are recorded, establish clear protocols for transcription. Consistency in transcription practices, such as verbatim transcription of interviews, helps ensure that the data accurately reflect participants' responses.
- **Data Coding and Analysis:** Use a consistent and well-defined coding system to analyse the data. If multiple researchers are involved, establish inter-coder reliability to ensure that interpretations are consistent across team members.
- **Rich Descriptions:** Provide rich and detailed descriptions of the research process, including participant characteristics, data collection procedures and data analysis methods. This transparency allows readers to assess the dependability of the study.
- **External Auditing:** Consider involving an independent auditor or reviewer to assess the research process and findings. External audits can help identify any inconsistencies or potential biases in the research.
- **Quotations and Evidence:** Throughout the research report, include relevant quotations and evidence from the data to support the findings. Quotations add credibility and transparency to the research, allowing readers to assess the dependability of the interpretations.
- **Documentation:** Maintain thorough records of all research activities, including field notes, interview transcripts, coding notes and any changes made during the research process. This documentation can serve as an audit trail to demonstrate the research's dependability.

By adhering to these practices and emphasising consistency and dependability throughout the research process, qualitative researchers can enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of their findings, making them more valuable to both the research community and the broader audience. The researcher also used these guidelines, as explained in Chapter Four (section 4.8.3).

2.6.6.7 Neutrality/confirmability

The ability of the facts and findings of the study to be supported by the work of other unbiased researchers is known as confirmability. It must be demonstrated that the study's findings and conclusions are related in such a way that the same procedures may be followed to produce the same results in other studies (Moon *et al.*, 2016:4). So, if a different researcher chose the same participants and subject and repeated the research process, the results should be the same (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). According to Johnson *et al.* (2020:143), confirmability also refers to the potential for identifying internal "agreement" between the research findings and the supporting evidence. The degree to which the study is "shaped" by the participants as opposed to the researcher's bias has also been used to describe confirmability (Amankwaa, 2016:121).

Given the aforementioned, it was necessary to apply the principle of trustworthiness in a way that avoided the researcher placing any personal or prejudiced expectations on the participants and allowed the data collected from them to determine the study's conclusion (Olmos-Vega, Stalmeijer, Varpio & Kahlke, 2023:241).

2.6.6.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is frequently addressed just briefly or totally ignored during the research process, despite the fact that reflexivity is necessary for qualitative research because it relies on nuanced judgments. Researchers use reflexivity as a collection of ongoing, multidimensional procedures to continuously assess, appraise and evaluate how their subjectivity and circumstances affect the research processes. In order to develop understanding, reflexivity has been recognized as a critical strategy (Dodgson, 2019:220; Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023:242; Riazi *et al.*, 2023:3). Dodgson (2019:220) refers to it as a process whereby the researcher determines the contextual interactions that overlap between the participants and the researcher. The explanation and consideration of the linkages lends the findings greater credibility and a deeper understanding of the work. Thus, the researcher used reflexivity as a strategy to account for and limit researcher bias.

2.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics, according to Yegidis *et al.*, (2018:25), refers to social norms that represent what the society as a whole sees as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour. The moral principles known as ethics serve as a guide for the conduct that is usually seen as appropriate when conducting research. Flick (2018:18) argues that when you want individuals to engage in your research, ethics becomes practically important. The following ethical considerations were adhered to during the research process.

2.7.1 Obtaining informed consent

The ethical principle of obtaining participants' informed consent to participate in the discloses participants' voluntary participation in the research as well as any potential risks and benefits (Lune & Berg, 2017:46). It is predicated on the notion that subjects need to learn enough about the study being conducted and that they have a right to object, should they find it necessary (Howit, 2016:459). It also explains the steps used to guarantee anonymity and confidentiality (Lune & Berg, 2017:46). According to Kang and Hwang (2023:3), informed consent is based on the principles that participation in research should not have any negative consequences for participants, respect for their fundamental rights and adherence to agreements and commitments. To ensure that study participants are protected, a number of requirements and arrangements have been put in place. These procedures take the form of a contract with an active, informed participant who accepts the terms. When obtaining their informed consent, the researcher informed the participants of the following contractual issues about their participation in the research (Bos, 2020:154):

- The researcher(s)' name(s) and affiliation(s)
- The purpose or aim of the study (in clear terms)
- The methods or procedures used in the research to which the participant is subjected
- The risks associated (if any)
- Time investment estimation
- Agreement on payment (if applicable)
- Confidentiality requirements (anonymization or use of a pseudonym)
- Data usage, storage and access
- Complaint processes (including the phone number of an impartial commission or officer)
- The participant's rights to -
 - withdraw from participating in the research at any time

- to review/correct erroneous data (if possible)
- to receive/be informed about the results of the research (if interested)

Procedures for informed consent are required in social scientific research. To help them get ready for data collection, prospective study participants were given the pertinent information (attached as Addendum D). Those who met the criteria to participate in the research and agreed to participate, were given the forms for signing informed consent, as (Addendum E). The researcher then arranged individual meetings with each participant to make sure they were all informed about the objectives, potential benefits, risks and mitigating circumstances of the study. It was made clear that participation was completely optional and that anyone can stop at any time if they don't feel comfortable in continuing with it.

2.7.2 Avoidance of harm and Beneficence

One of the core ethical principles of kindness must be upheld by researchers to protect human subjects (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018:211). Participants must be handled ethically correctly and compassionately in compliance with this concept by making sure their wellbeing is protected (Yegidis *et al.*, 2018:48). Researchers should focus on minimizing hazards and maximizing potential benefits for participants (Cilliers & Viljoen, 2021:4). Payment of money as a reward for their participation in the study should always be avoided as it may be insulting to some participants. Participants should be provided with an explanation for the basis of receiving payment if an offer is to be extended to them (Mirza, Bellalem & Mirza, 2023:444). Mirza *et al.*, (2023:444) recommend that participants be made aware of the eventual research findings since doing so could help them feel proud of their contribution to society's common knowledge. Participants should be informed if the report can be shared with them (Patton, 2015:530) and why if not. In this instance the researcher has more in mind than simply disseminating research findings to study participants. In this case, the researcher undertook to inform the necessary parties, such as the schools from which the participants were selected and the applicable government agencies, of the study's outcome in the form of its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

2.7.3 Right to privacy, confidentiality of data and anonymity

Confidentiality in research refers to the commitment of the researcher to safeguard and maintain the privacy of participants' names and personal data (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018:211). The researcher must ensure that there are no identifying details in the final report since they can make

it easy for people to identify participants (Kang & Hwang, 2023:2; Lune & Berg, 2017:46). The researcher has an ethical obligation to protect participant data, claim Yegidis *et al.*, (2018:37). Any pressure to reveal the confidential information of study participants must be resisted by the researcher (Mirza *et al.*, 2023:444).

In this study, the researcher adopted a variety of safety measures to ensure the confidentiality of the data received from participants. Recorded interview transcripts are always stored in a safe place (Mirza *et al.*, 2023:444). All the participants, the language editor and coder signed a confidentiality agreement. Access to the data stored on the researcher's laptop was secured by using access passwords. Confidentiality was increased by taking the safety measures that ensure anonymity described below. The researcher also complies with Section 2(1) of the Protection of Personal Information Act No. 4 of 2013 (South Africa, 2013) in order to safeguard the participants' personal information.

The objective of this legislation is to:

Uphold the constitutional right to privacy by ensuring the protection of personal information when handled by a responsible entity, within reasonable constraints designed to

- Harmonize the right to privacy with other rights, notably the right to access information; and
- Safeguard crucial interests, such as the unrestricted exchange of information within the country and beyond its borders.

In the context of qualitative research the realization of participants' right to privacy and safeguarding their personal information when handled by responsible researchers, with due consideration for reasonable constraints that balances the right to privacy with other aspects, particularly the right to access information within the qualitative research context and protect essential interests, such as the unhindered exchange of information within the research community.

Participants' identities are safeguarded by keeping their contribution anonymous (Lune & Berg, 2017:48). According to Yegidis *et al.* (2018:37), anonymity provides the best environment for participants to give data. To preserve anonymity, data should be distributed in a way that makes it difficult to link participants to their responses (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018:211). This is accomplished by removing the names of the participants and any other identifying information

from the research data that could identify them (Taquette & Borges da Matta Souza, 2022:3; Lune & Berg, 2017:48). Each participant can be given a pseudonym or a unique code number, which the researcher can use to refer to their contribution in any written material. According to Badampudi, Fotrousi, Cartaxo and Usman (2022:3); Leedy and Ormrod (2015:123), a person should be given an alias if the study includes a lot of information about the person's conduct. For the study, the researcher assigned codes to each participants' name before transcribing the interviews. The list of participants was maintained separate from the interview transcripts and hidden from the public. The researcher also adhered to the preventative guidance offered by Bos (2020:158). The researcher utilised email and encrypted files to provide data to the study supervisor.

2.7.4 Management of information

Study data management, according to Bos (2020:262), is the process of organising data from entry through the study cycle and includes the dissemination and preservation of the findings. To establish a solid foundation for analysis and potential long-term uses of the data in qualitative research, it is crucial to handle the data carefully (Kang & Hwang, 2023:3). The researcher ensured that the audio recordings of the sessions were recorded appropriately into a password-secured laptop both for subsequent transcription, analysis and usage in order to secure the data for accurate analysis and future use. Additionally, the data were protected to prevent access by unauthorized parties. Bos (2020:262) goes on to state that the researcher's approach to data management includes -

- obtaining and thereby “creating” data,
- organising and coding data,
- making it safe, by providing access, storage and back-up and
- sharing with collaborators and more broadly, publishes the results/data.

Data management therefore comprises the backing up of data, limiting access to data, storing data and portfolios in a secure area and deleting or erasing data that are no longer required (Bos, 2020:269). In managing the information obtained in this research, the researcher set out to implement the ideas of information management captured in the guidelines of Bos (2020:269) by –

- putting information and the study report in a document that requires a password for access.

- making back-ups of the information through storing it on a password-protected USB disc.
- storing files/portfolios with transcripts in a locked cupboard in my office.
- limiting access to information to the researcher's supervisor, the ethics committee, the transcriber and the independent coder.
- making the final research report available in hard copy and soft copy format, with the final soft copy saved in PDF format so that the information would not get lost; and
- with all editable MS Word documents to be destroyed after the finalisation of the examination of the dissertation.

2.7.5 Debriefing of participants

After taking part in the study, participants should be provided with a suitable form of debriefing (Bos, 2020:258), especially in studies that may have psychological effects on participants (Copley, 2022:84). The researcher has an obligation to leave participants in the same or, at the absolute least, no worse condition than when they arrived, according to Yegidis *et al.* (2018). Debriefing may involve discussing problems that participants experienced while participating in the study, in order to come up with solutions (Babbie, 2016:68). Lune and Berg (2017:61) state that debriefing can assist the researcher in determining whether participants require any professional assistance. If issues arise during debriefing that indicate a participant has been psychologically affected, the researcher needs to be ready to act appropriately (Howitt, 2016:471). Debriefing was made available to participants who thought they required the service. The services of a social worker were obtained to provide participants with a debriefing. The letter from the social worker who would conduct the debriefing is annexed to the consent form for research participation (Addendum F). The letter includes a brief resume of the social worker contracted to conduct the debriefing.

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Two explained the research plan for tackling the specified research question and its execution. The research project's goals and objectives and the study subjects it covered are outlined. The research methodology—more precisely, the research approach and design(s) selected for this investigation—are announced and in this regard, it is specified that a qualitative research approach is employed. The research designs, or techniques of inquiry, integral to the qualitative research methodology as used in the study, with the research designs used, being a phenomenological design in addition to explorative, descriptive and contextual inquiry

approaches are described. The introduction to the research methodology with reference to participant recruitment, described the research population for the study and the methods for choosing a sample of participants from them. Explained are the strategies used for data collection, analysis and verification. The researcher also made clear the ethical standards he anticipated the study to uphold.

Whilst the application of the research plan is described in Chapter Four, the following (Chapter Three) focuses on the issues that sexual minorities face in relation to International, African and South African policy and legislation, by means of a literature study.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERNATIONAL, AFRICAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON SEXUAL MINORITIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study's aim is to investigate the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers who provide intervention services to young people who identify as sexual minorities (LGBTQQIP2SAA). Current legislation, policy and the challenges that sexual minority groups encounter globally (International), regionally (African) and locally (South African) are evaluated in this chapter by means of a literature study, to accomplish this. This serves to illustrate the responsibilities, roles and functions that social workers have, play and fulfil in these particular environments. Specific challenges faced by members of sexual minorities in South Africa are also discussed.

3.2 POLICY AND LEGISLATION

In this section the commitment and legal foundations, both at the international, African and South African levels, that safeguard the rights of sexual minorities are demonstrated. The goal is to highlight the dedication and legal frameworks that support the rights of sexual minorities on the different levels.

3.2.1 International legislation and current state of the rights of sexual minorities

Across the globe, sexual minority groups fight for protection against social prejudice (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019:3). It is vital to evaluate the position of sexual minorities in international law from the standpoint of human rights in order to fully understand it. After World War II, as Rahman (2020:4) and Singh (2018:3) point out, the United Nations (UN) has functioned as an instrument for safeguarding international human rights. The clear applicability of international human rights agreements and instruments, along with the safeguarding of all individuals irrespective of their status, is evident (McNeilly, 2023:4; Singh, 2018:3).

Human rights are stated to be due to all people inalienably, meaning that no one can be denied their rights because everyone has them by virtue of being human beings (Howard-Hassmann, 2022:444). In support of this argument, Sener (2021:17) makes the observation that depriving any group of people of their human rights also deprives them of their humanity. The safeguarding provided to sexual minorities is evident in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), stemming from the recognition of their inherent humanity. Discussions of this policy document follows.

3.2.1.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

On December 10th, 1948, at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris, the UN General Assembly adopted The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (Rahman, 2020:3). This declaration was made in an effort to promote world peace in light of the lessons acquired from previous major battles (Singh, 2018:4). According to Article 1 of the UDHR, everyone is entitled to equal treatment and is born free and with inherent dignity. Article 2 assures everyone the rights and freedoms enshrined in this declaration, regardless of race, colour, sexual orientation, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other circumstances. This statement argues that because sexual minorities are considered to be members of the human race, they should be granted the same basic freedoms and rights as everyone else.

According to Sener (2021:15), the UDHR is not a treaty and is therefore not enforceable in court. Therefore, the proclamation cannot impose a direct legal responsibility on countries to establish policies or legislation that safeguard sexual minorities in those countries. It could be argued that this is one of the reasons why some countries do not have laws protecting sexual minorities from discrimination. It is also regrettable to note that while the statement was issued to promote peace throughout the world, in some countries same-sex relationships are still criminalized. The declaration serves as an expression of the fundamental principles held by all members of the world community, even if countries are not legally required to act in line with it (Sener, 2021:17).

Additionally, it is asserted that the UDHR resulted in agreements that were binding on the countries who signed them. These agreements include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), all of which are covered in the paragraphs that follow.

3.2.1.2 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The UN enacted the ICCPR (United Nations, 2023), an international human rights framework, in 1966. This is one of the two treaties, the other being the ICESCR (United Nations, 2023), that give the UDHR legal standing. The ICCPR requires the nations that have ratified it to uphold and defend the civil and political rights of all people. The freedom from torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment is just one of many human rights that people can enjoy thanks to the protections provided by this constitution.

According to ICCPR Article 2.1: "*Each state party to the present covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure to all individuals within his territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognised in the present covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status*". Articles 7 and 16 of this document further provide that "*no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment*" and "*everyone shall have a right to be recognized everywhere as a person before the law*," respectively. Both provisions imply that sexual minorities are covered by the protection offered by these laws because they use the words "everyone" and "all." However, academics believe that there is still much to be done to guarantee the rights of sexual minorities (UN, 1966:171-212).

3.2.1.3 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (United Nations, 2023), is the other key international human rights treaties adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It was adopted on December 16, 1966 and entered into force on January 3, 1976. The ICESCR, along with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), forms part of the International Bill of Human Rights. The ICESCR focuses on the protection and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights. These rights include, but are not limited to:

- The right to work: Everyone has the right to work, which includes the right to gain a living by work freely chosen.
- The right to just and favourable conditions of work: This encompasses fair wages, safe working conditions and reasonable working hours.
- The right to social security: Everyone has the right to social security, including social insurance.
- The right to an adequate standard of living: This includes the right to food, clothing and housing and the continuous improvement of living conditions.

- The right to health: Everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- The right to education: Education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and the right to education should be accessible to all.
- The right to participate in cultural life: This includes the right to participate in the cultural, artistic and scientific life of the community.

States parties to the ICESCR are required to take steps, both individually and through international assistance and cooperation, to progressively realize these rights to the maximum extent of their available resources. The ICESCR also establishes a committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to monitor and review the implementation of the Covenant by the States parties. States parties are required to submit periodic reports to the committee on the measures they have taken to fulfil their obligations under the Covenant (United Nations, 2023).

Pichon and Kourchoudian (2019:3) and Nomani (2021:3) indicate that sexual minorities' rights are weak in developing countries. Sexual minorities face discrimination, abuse, torture and occasionally state-sponsored execution in several of these countries (Flores, 2021:2; Sansal, 2021:3; Shaw & Verghese, 2022:8; UNDP PGA, 2022:76). It is clear from this that more needs to be done in this area.

Amnesty International (AI) (2018:78) indicate that injustices committed against sexual minorities are not considered to be violations of human rights in nations like Iran and Saudi Arabia. In these nations, it is legal to execute people who are in same-sex partnerships. These include the laws governing the practice of civil law and Sharia¹, or Islamic law. The repercussions of being a lesbian or homosexual person in some of these countries frequently include public humiliation, hard labour, detention, torture, harassment, extortion, bogus trials with no right of appeal and even death (Amnesty International (AI), 2018:78).

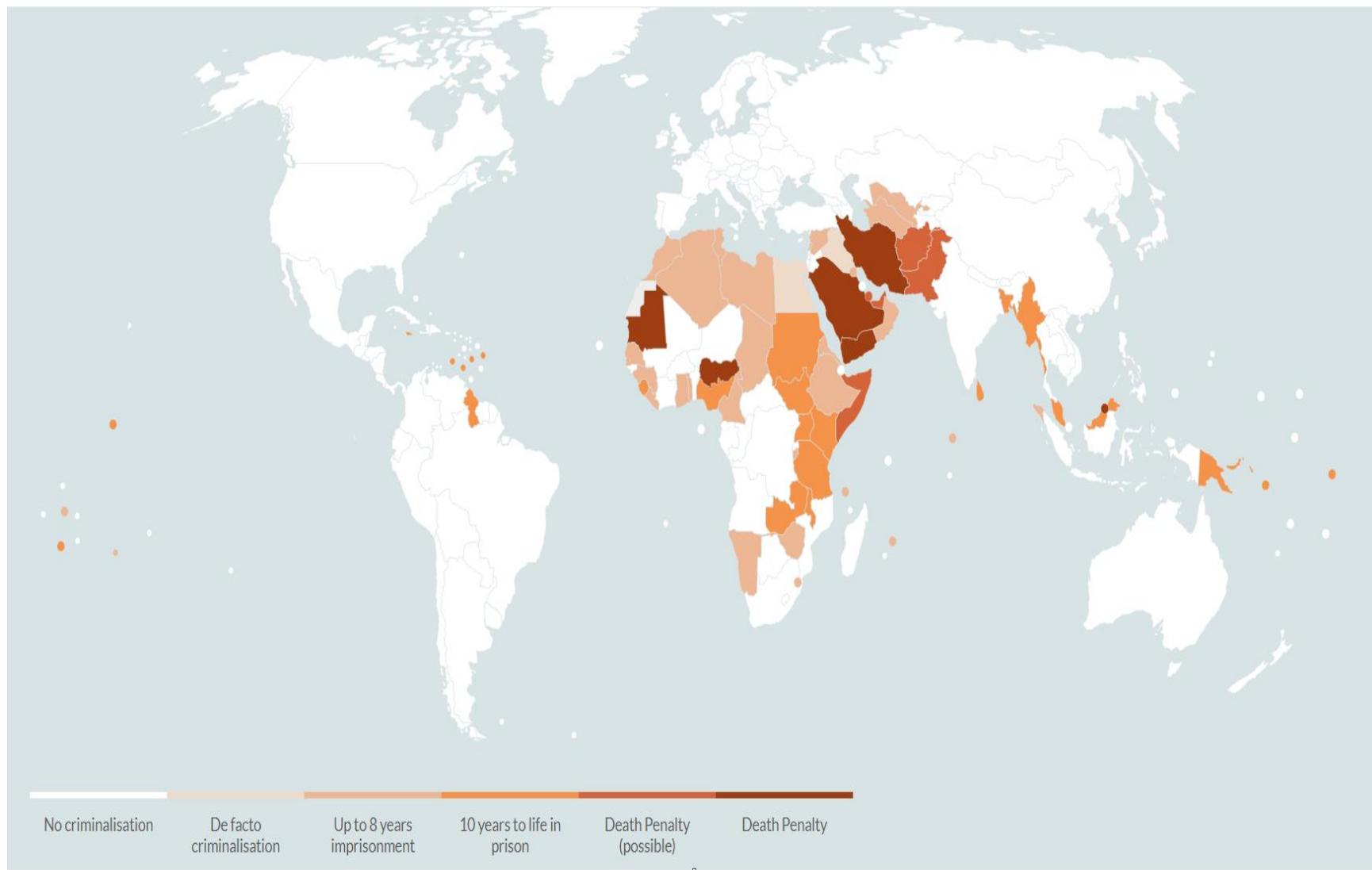
Worldwide, 68 countries criminalize homosexuality as of 2022. Most of them are located in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. In 11 countries, the death penalty is imposed or at least a possibility for private, consensual same-sex sexual activity. These countries are Iran, Northern Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen, Afghanistan, Brunei, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (Statista, 2023b; UNAIDS, 2023). Amnesty International (AI) (2018:82) highlights

¹ Sharia means “the correct path” in Arabic. In Islam, it refers to the divine counsel that Muslims follow to live moral lives and grow close to God. Sharia is derived from two main sources: the Quran, which is considered the direct word of God, and hadith—thousands of sayings and practices attributed to the Prophet Mohammed that collectively form the Sunna.

that a limited number of laws targeting the rights of sexual minorities offer explicit definitions of the prohibited conduct. This absence of precise description affords the state a significant level of discretion in the implementation of these laws Amnesty International (AI) (2018:82). Although many nations continue to refuse sexual minorities' basic human rights, it is asserted that significant progress has been made in securing the protection of these rights in countries like Australia, some regions of Latin America, North America and Western Europe (Dicklitch-Nelson, Buckland, Yost & Draguljić, 2019:1,15; Floris, 2021:18-21; UNDP, 2022:31).

The international stance on the criminalization of consensual same-sex actions is illustrated in Figure 3.1 below, depicting a range of penalties from imprisonment to the death penalty. Notably, 129 nations do not criminalize same-sex conduct, while 62 countries have made such acts illegal. Two additional countries have implemented de facto² actions, where unauthorized actions gain validity based on existence and tradition (ILGA World, 2023).

² De facto action is legal, unauthorized action recognized based on existence and tradition, gaining validity.



ILGA World – The international Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (2023)

FIGURE 3-1 GLOBAL VIEW OF CRIMINALISATION OF CONSENSUAL SAME-SEX ACTS

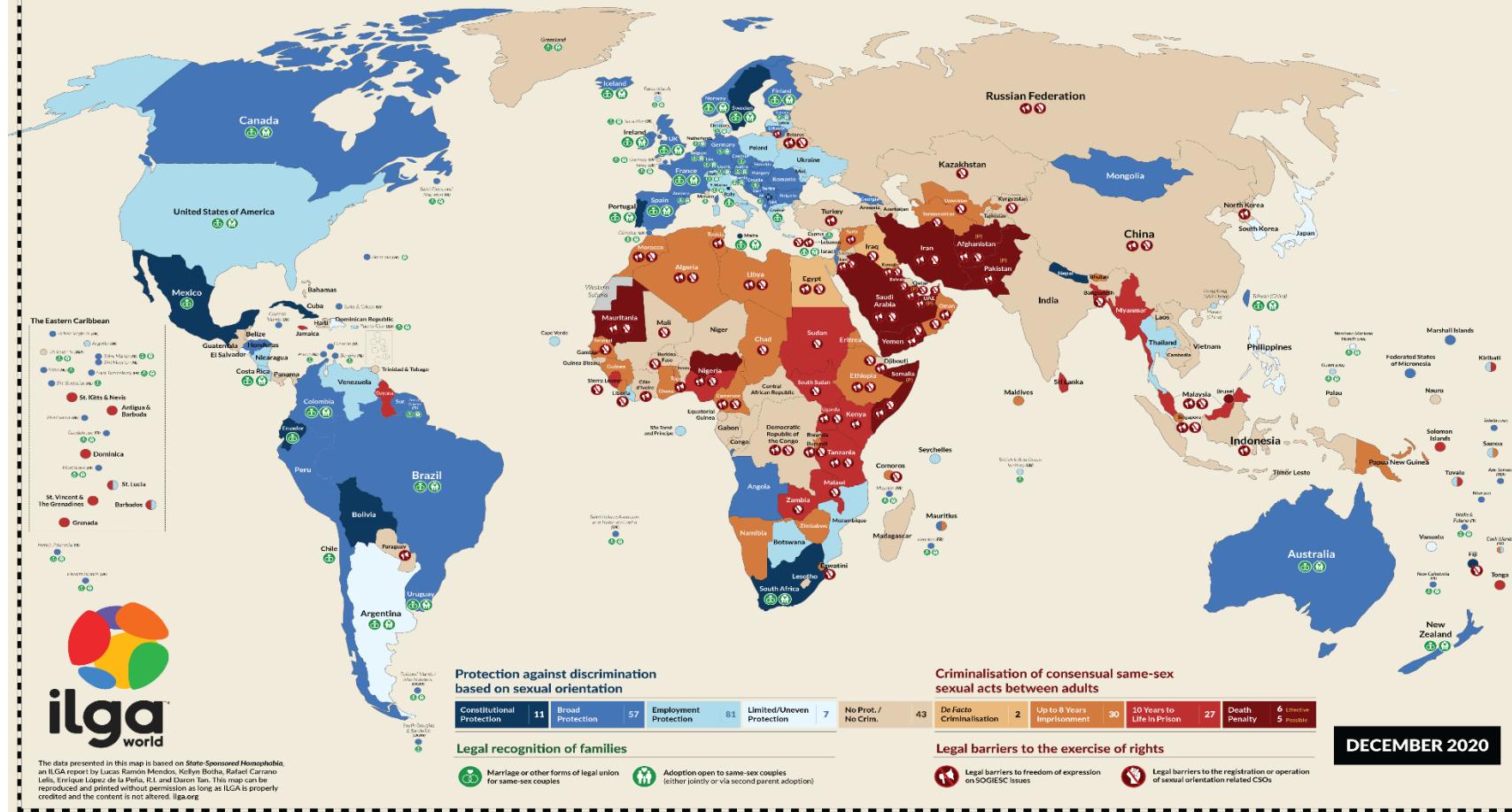
In the wake of evolving societal attitudes towards sexual orientation and gender identity, Figure 3.1 presents a comprehensive overview of the global legal landscape affecting individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation as of 2023. Drawing from the research and analysis provided by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association (ILGA)(2023), this visual representation offers a snapshot of the status of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights around the world.

From progressive and inclusive legislation to regressive and discriminatory laws, this figure highlights the complex tapestry of legal frameworks that shape the lived experiences of LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals on a global scale. Through a nuanced examination of key legal indicators, this figure illuminates the progress made and challenges yet to be overcome in the pursuit of equal rights and social acceptance for all.

Figure 3.2 below displays global laws affecting people based on sexual orientation. Transitioning from the broader context of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights around the world, Figure 3.2 provides an overview of the specifics of global laws affecting individuals based on their sexual orientation.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION LAWS IN THE WORLD

From criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts between adults to protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation



ILGA World – The international Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (2023)

FIGURE 3-2 SEXUAL ORIENTATION LAWS IN THE WORLD

Depicting the distribution of different sexual orientation laws in the world, Figure 3.2 provides a more detailed and focused perspective on the varying degrees of legal acceptance and criminalization, particularly highlighting the international stance on the criminalization of consensual same-sex actions, as depicted in Figure 3.1. It is within this nuanced examination that the intricacies of legal landscapes and the ongoing efforts to advance equality and human rights for LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals globally, can be better appreciated.

The following section provides a discussion on the complexities of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights and identities in Africa.

3.2.2 African legislation and current state of the rights of sexual minorities

The unique challenges and opportunities faced by the diverse spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities are explored here. This examination sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics at play within these communities, including the impact of colonial-era laws, cultural diversity and the ongoing struggles for legal recognition and social acceptance. By focusing on the Sub-Saharan African countries, valuable insights are gained into the evolving landscape of LGBTQ+ rights in a region marked by both progress and persistent obstacles on the path to equality and inclusivity.

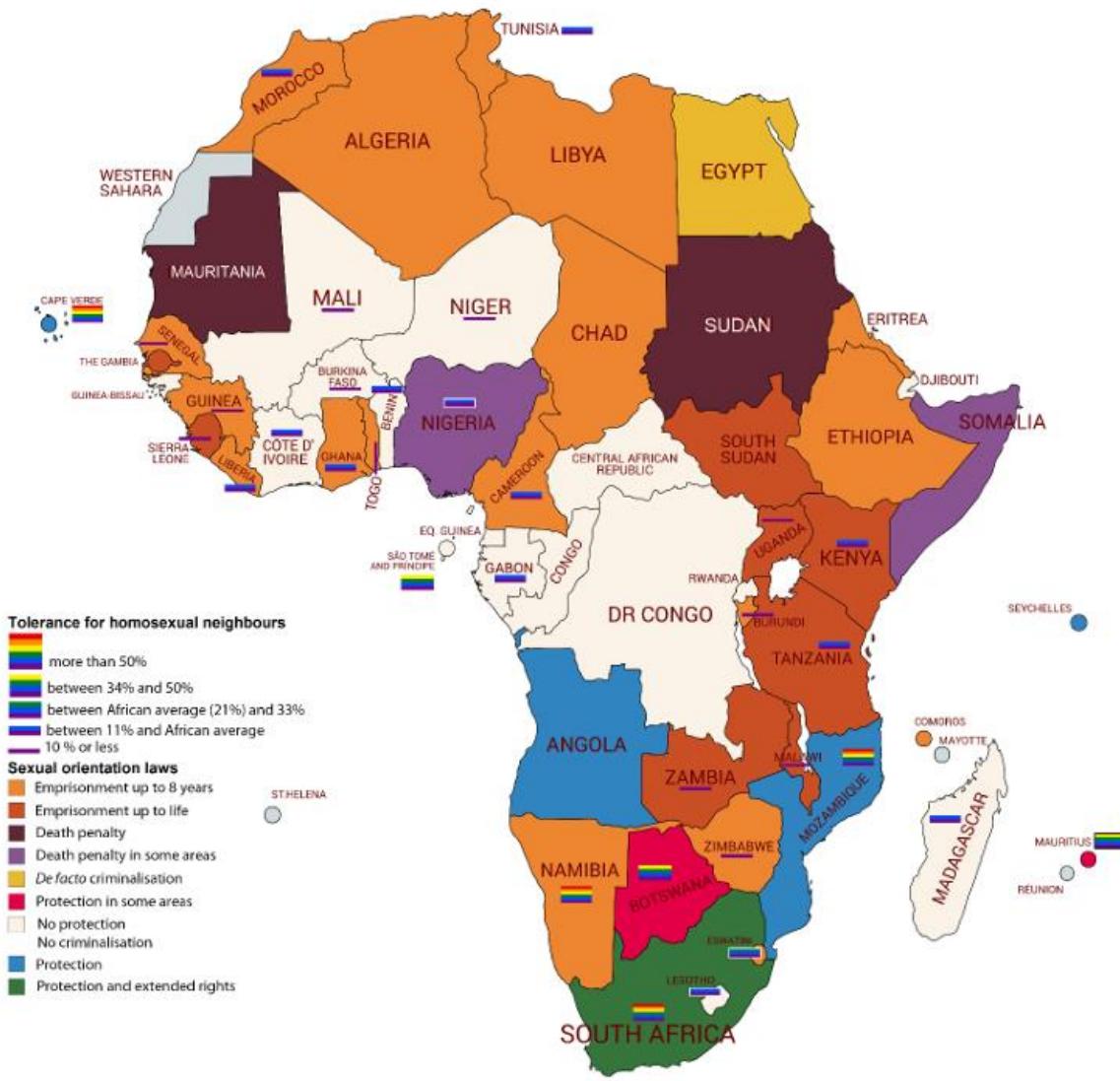
Sexual minority rights in Africa have drawn a lot of attention from national and international media outlets due to the ongoing prejudice against LGBTQQIP2SAA and the hate crimes committed against them in many societies (Matolino, 2017:59; Namwase, Jjuuko & Nyarango, 2017:3; Statista, 2023c; Van Heerden, 2019:2). The United Nations (2019) indicated that numerous countries across the globe, particularly in Africa, have voiced concerns regarding the rights of sexual minorities. However, certain nations have exhibited hesitance towards incorporating these rights into their legal treaties (United Nations, 2019).

In African nations, same-sex relationships are frequently connected to homosexual behaviour, which is illegal under sodomy laws that were imposed by colonial forces (Buckle, 2020; DeBarros, 2017; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019:5; Reid, 2022). Many of the laws criminalising the grounds that it is illegal and un-African, homosexuality is likewise forbidden in several countries (Mutunga, 2021:1; Vernet & Pichon, 2019; Jaji, 2017:2; ILGA, 2016:29). Due to these beliefs, sexual minorities continue to be targets of violent assaults, hate crimes and discrimination throughout Africa (Abaver & Cishe, 2018:60; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019:3).

In Africa, there are still many LGBTQQIP2SAA related offenses that are committed, with forced anal examinations being one of the most heinous examples. These inspections cause their victims severe psychological harm that frequently veers toward sexual assault. According to Human Rights Watch (2016), it constitutes a type of sexual assault. Medical professionals conduct these exams with a blatant disrespect for international medical ethical standards, in clear violation of the ban on their participation in torture and other cruel or inhumane treatment. Forced anal examinations have been documented by Human Rights Watch (2016) in eight countries, namely Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Lebanon, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uganda and Zambia, of which six are in Africa. Unconfirmed allegations also suggest that Syrian police have used forced anal exams. Along with consultations with medical professionals and forensic specialists from all across the world, the 2016 investigation revealed that 32 males and transgender women had been exposed to these horrible ordeals (Human Rights Watch, 2016). This practice begs for a worldwide ban on forced anal examinations. The urgent need to protect the rights and dignity of LGBTQQIP2SAA people in these areas is emphasised and it implores local and international human rights and health agencies to strongly condemn their usage (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

In recent years, Africa has witnessed significant shifts in its legislative landscape regarding the rights of sexual minorities. While many African countries still uphold conservative laws that criminalize homosexuality, there has been a growing global awareness of the need for equal rights and protection for individuals of diverse sexual orientations (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019:5). As the continent grapples with this evolving social and legal landscape, it is essential to examine the current state of sexual orientation laws and the level of tolerance for homosexuals across African countries.

To gain a clearer understanding of this complex issue, Figure 3.3 below, highlights the varying degrees of acceptance and legal frameworks related to LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals in Africa.



ILGA (2019)

FIGURE 3-3 SEXUAL ORIENTATION LAWS AND TOLERANCE FOR HOMOSEXUALS IN AFRICA

As seen in Figure 3.3 above, according to ILGA World (2019), prejudice against sexual minorities is pervasive in the majority of African countries. This implies that bias against sexual minorities remains prevalent in numerous African countries, indicating that discriminatory laws enacted in these nations have not led to any significant change. In statistical terms, according to ILGA World (2023), out of 54 sovereign African countries 32 (59%) countries in Africa criminalize same-sex behaviour as opposed to 22 (41%) which have a status of non-criminalising.

Table 3.1 below provides a summary of current LGBTQQIP2SAA rights in Sub-Saharan Africa, where those rights are being actively suppressed. In recent years, as indicated, several nations have taken the lead in aggressively persecuting their LGBTQQIP2SAA people.

TABLE 3-1 STATUS OF LGBTQQIP2SAA RIGHTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES SUPPRESSING THOSE RIGHTS

Country	Current status
Uganda	Section 145 of Uganda's penal code states: "Any person who permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature commits an offence and is liable to imprisonment for life" (ILGA, 2019:383), with 53% of Ugandans strongly agreeing. The country's Minister of Ethics and Integrity, Simon Lokodo blocked an LGBTQ NGO, Sexual Minorities, from organising an International Day Against Homophobia and the Health Ministry's annual conference on Key and Priority Populations, fearing it may encourage homosexuality (ILGA, 2019:383).
Nigeria	The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act in Nigeria imposes 14-year prison terms for entering a same-sex marriage contract or civil union, 10 years for operating gay clubs, societies, or organisations and 10 years for supporting such organisations (ILGA, 2019:359). Some Northern Nigerians enforce Islamic Sharia laws, with death as the maximum penalty (ILGA, 2019:359). Because homosexuality is frequently perceived as a foreign phenomenon, politicians can condemn minorities and divert attention from the government's attempts to reduce poverty in Nigeria (ILGA, 2016:52). In June 2018, over 100 people were arrested and prosecuted for being gay or different gender identities at a party in Asaba. Lesbian Equality and Empowerment Initiative had a lawsuit challenging nonregistration dismissed by the Federal High Court (ILGA, 2019:361).
Kenya	Kenya's High Court upheld the Penal Code, which makes consensual same-sex acts illegal, following a 2016 case challenging its discriminatory nature towards the LGBTQ community by the Kenyan National Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (NGLHRC). The court found the code not unconstitutional or a violation of privacy and human dignity. Kenya's court ordered a seven-day suspension on a ban of Rafiki, an internationally renowned LGBTQ film, in October 2018(ILGA, 2019:366).
Tanzania	Tanzania's penal code for 'carnal knowledge against the order of nature' has led to life imprisonment for those guilty (ILGA, 2019: 199). Regional Commissioner Paul Makonda set up a task team in 2018 to target and arrest LGBTQ people. The government has since distanced itself from Makonda's views. Since 2016, the government has intensified efforts to crack down on the LGBTQ community which include hostile public statements from state representatives, widespread arrests and forced anal examinations (ILGA, 2019: 374). Tanzania government banned the import and sale of lubricants (which the government believes encourages same-sex activity) and limiting access to HIV/AIDS prevention, testing and treatment (ILGA, 2019:374).

Van Heerden (2019)

In the following section, South African legislation pertaining to LGBTQQIP2SAA rights and the current state of these rights within the country is examined.

3.2.3 South African legislation and current state of the rights of sexual minorities

Given the above discussion looking at the dire situation in Africa, it is also key to explore the unique landscape of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights in South Africa, a country that has taken significant strides towards advancing the rights of sexual minorities within the continent. In contrast to many African countries, South Africa has been at the forefront of legislative progress and social change regarding LGBTQQIP2SAA rights. The journey of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights in South Africa is a story of remarkable transformation, reflecting both the country's progressive legal framework and the challenges that persist in the quest for full equality and acceptance.

South Africa adopted homosexual and lesbian rights into its Constitution in May 1996, making it the first nation in Africa to do so (Moreno, Ardila, Zervoulis, Nel, Light & Chamberland, 2020:17; South African History Online, 2020; UNDP PGA, 2022:82; Westman, 2023:4). South Africa receives acclaim from around the world for its progressive legal system. Human dignity, the realization of equality and the growth of human rights and freedom are listed as the fundamental principles of the state in the Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution (South Africa, 1996).

Accordingly, human rights form the cornerstone of South Africa's democratic society (Mahomed & Trangos, 2016:140; UNDP PGA, 2022:82; Moreno et al., 2020:17). As stated in Section 9(3) of the Constitution:

"The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth" (South Africa, 1996)

The Constitution forbids discrimination of any kind against anyone, including sexual minority groups (South Africa, 1996). The right to dignity in section 10 and the right to privacy in section 14 of the Constitution, according to De Greef (2019), offer further constitutional protection for sexual minorities. This is in addition to the ban on discrimination against sexual minorities established in section 9(3) of the Constitution (South Africa, 1996). According to De Vos (2015:40) and Baird (2022:382), the Constitutional Court has rendered significant rulings affirming the legal equality of all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation, since South Africa became a democratic country in 1994 and added the prohibition of unfair discrimination based on sexual orientation to its constitution (Baird, 2022:382; De Vos, 2015:40).

The South African Parliament's adoption of the Civil Union Act (Act 17 of 2006) is one significant illustration. Same-sex couples who enter a civil union marriage are granted the same rights and status as heterosexual couples under this act, which makes provision for the recognition of same-sex marriage (De Vos, 2015:41; Resane, 2020:2). Despite the fact that South Africa has one of the most progressive legal systems in the world for defending the rights of sexual minorities, many academics claim that discrimination and violence against these groups still pose significant problems (De Vos, 2015:42; Luleki Sizwe, 2023; Mahomed & Trangos, 2016:142; Rudman, 2015:251; Van Heerden, 2019:3). This shows that there is a disconnect between the progressive legal system and the experiences of sexual minorities in practice (Arcus, 2019:6; Resane, 2020:2).

Consequently, members of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community started to express concerns that their constitutional protections were merely superficial, given the substantial hostility they encountered from various quarters, including the very police entrusted with their safety (Abever & Cishe, 2018:60). While there have been significant wins in strengthening the identity of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community, they have not been able to eliminate the deeply rooted homophobia and its associated violence in the general community (De Greef, 2019; Westman, 2023:2).

Reports indicate that the individuals identifying as homosexual or lesbian in townships and rural areas are disproportionately affected, often suffering not only from community and familial prejudice and discrimination, but also from physical assaults (Westman, 2023:6). The majority of these incidents go unreported, as victims fear backlash from their communities and families. Notably, the victims of such homophobic crimes are primarily black and coloured individuals (Westman, 2023:6).

The findings of these studies are corroborated by the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) conducted between 2003 and 2007 (Westman, 2023:2). This survey spanning five years underscores that numerous individuals, particularly the elderly living in rural zones, continue to hold negative views on homosexuality. Such individuals perceive homosexuality as non-African and colonial imported solely to undermine African values and culture (Moruipisi, 2015:253; Mutunga, 2021:1; Westman, 2023:2).

Pillay (2018) and Statista (2023) indicate that approximately 51% of South Africans believe that sexual minorities should have the same human rights as heteronormative individuals, but a staggering 72% feel that same-sex activity is morally wrong. Meer, Lunau, Oberth, Daskilewicz

and Müller (2017:27) mention that low levels of education, awareness, urban-rural divide, age and religion could all contribute to unfavourable impressions of sexual minorities. According to other academics, homophobia should be taught as a form of discrimination in primary schools in order to combat this intolerance (Meer *et al.*, 2017:53). Even in South Africa, with its progressive legislation, sexual minorities nevertheless face many difficulties because of people's prejudicial beliefs about sexual orientation (Commission for Gender Equality, 2021:1; SAIIA, 2021).

In 2021, there were 16 murders of LGBTQQIP2SAA people in South Africa. This was primarily directed at transgender people and black lesbians. This in a country with a Constitution that guarantees everyone's equality and protection from discrimination, regardless of sex or gender (Amato, 2022).

SA News (2021) reported that despite constitutional and statutory protections for the rights of people with diverse sexual orientations, violence against LGBTQQIP2SAA people have increased recently in South Africa. While Pride Month, which is observed every June by the International community in many countries around the world, according to John Jeffery, current Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, South Africa is currently experiencing a spike in attacks against LGBTQQIP2SAA people in South Africa.

These attacks are very alarming and pose a serious threat to the safety, dignity and well-being of all South Africans, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation or expression. Sexual minorities often are the targets of hate crimes and gender-based violence (GBV). In addition, there have been reports of bigotry and bullying of LGBTQI+ learners in our country's schools and other educational institutions, according to the Deputy Minister. Speaking to the media, he discussed his department's initiatives to combat hate crimes against LGBTQQIP2SAA people (SA News, 2021).

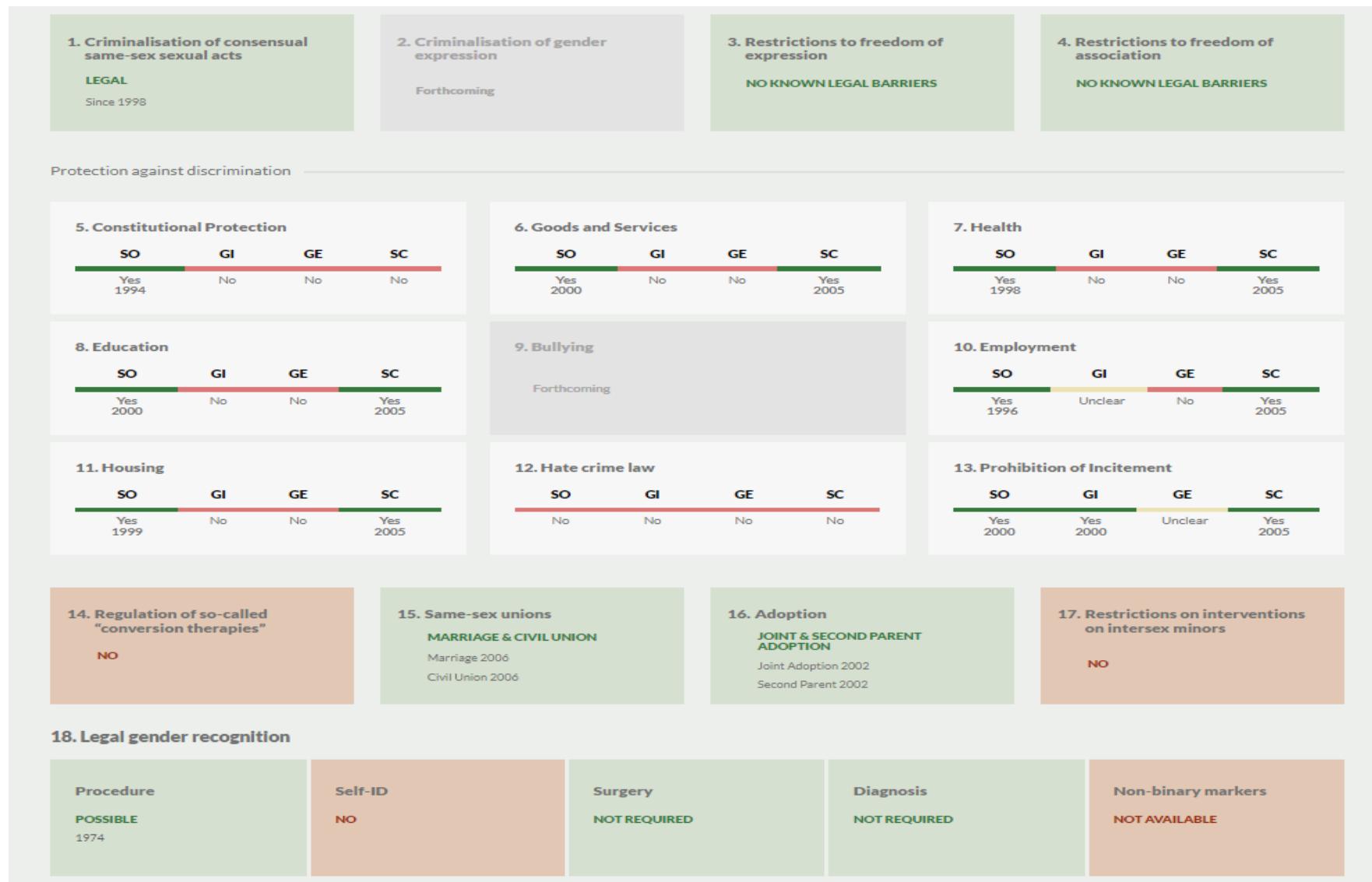
The National Task Team on the Rights of LGBTQQIP2SAA Persons (SA News, 2021) revealed that as of 29 June 2021, 42 hate crimes against that community were still outstanding, of the 42 cases still outstanding in 2021, 12 were rape cases and 30 were murder charges. Around 29 hate crime cases were recorded from 2020 to 2021 out of the 42 outstanding hate crime cases. Of the 29 hate crime cases, 16 had court dates for remand and the other 13 were currently being investigated. Eight cases had been resolved, several with hefty terms, including life in prison for rape in Daveyton, 25 years in jail in Ikageng, 25 years in prison in Umlazi for murder and 14 years

in prison in Greystown for rape. Due to a lack of evidence, 14 cases had been closed as undetected due to a lack of evidence (SA News, 2021).

According to Deputy Minister Jeffery, government agencies were closely watching the ongoing investigations and collaborating with the SAPS, the National Prosecuting Authority and civil society to ensure that they were fully investigated, that arrests were made and that prosecutions followed. The Deputy Minister emphasised that law enforcement officials must be aware of the crimes committed against LGBTQQIP2SAA people in order to take action (SA News, 2021).

The subsequent section delves into the legal framework focusing on the current situation of sexual minorities in South Africa. Figure 3.4 below provides an overview of the existing South African legal framework focussing on aspects pertaining to the criminalization of consensual same-sex acts, protection against discrimination regarding goods and services, housing, health, education, employment and employment laws, hate crime laws, prohibitions against inciting hatred, same-sex unions, adoption and legal gender recognition³ (ILGA World, 2023). This legal framework of the situation of sexual minorities in South Africa depicted in Figure 3.4 is summarised in Table 3.2.

³ SO – Sexual Orientation; GI – Gender Identity; GE – Gender Expression; SC – Sexual Characteristics



ILGA World (2023), SOGI/ESC Database: Constitutional protection against discrimination

FIGURE 3-4 CURRENT LEGISLATION AND RIGHTS OF SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Table 3.2 below, offers a summative description linked to Figure 3.3 of the legal framework focussing on various aspects mentioned above (ILGA World, 2023).

TABLE 3-2 SOUTH AFRICAN LEGAL FRAMEWORK PERTAINING TO LGBTQQIP2SAA

NO.	FOCUS AREA
1	Criminalisation of consensual same-sex sexual acts Legal since 1998. The Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that the common-law offense of sodomy is invalid and inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The court also declared sections 20A of the Sexual Offences Act, Schedule 1 of the Criminal Procedure Act and Schedule 1 of the Security Officers Act invalid.
2	Criminalisation of gender expression Information is expected to be available or published in the near future but is not yet provided in the current context.
3	Legal barriers to freedom of expression No South African laws targeting freedom of expression for SOGIESC issues, but local communities can still access information on sexual, gender and bodily diversity due to various factors. information available, there are currently no established legal restrictions or limitations on freedom of expression in the context being discussed.
4	Legal barriers to freedom of association No specific laws or regulations limiting the registration and operation of civil society organisations in South Africa. However, local communities may face limitations due to various factors.
5	Constitutional protection against discrimination Protection against sexual orientation discrimination was established in 1994 under Section 8 of the Interim Constitution and further reinforced in 1996 with Section 9(3) of the South African Constitution. However, there are currently no specific legal protections for gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics in South African law. Nevertheless, the Constitutional Court has interpreted the existing protections against sexual orientation discrimination generously, as evidenced in the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality v Minister of Justice and Others (1998) case.
6	Protection against discrimination in the provision of goods and services Protection against sexual orientation discrimination has been in place since 1994 through the Interim Constitution and the 1996 South African Constitution. However, there are no explicit legal safeguards for gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics. Nevertheless, the Constitutional Court has interpreted the existing protections against sexual orientation discrimination broadly, as seen in the 1998 case of National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality v Minister of Justice and Others.

7	<p>Protection against discrimination in health</p> <p>Sexual orientation is protected through legislative measures, such as the Medical Schemes Act of 1998, which prohibits medical schemes from discriminating based on sexual orientation. The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (Act No. 4) also covers discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and extends to the domain of health.</p> <p>However, there are currently no specific legal protections for gender identity or gender expression. In the case of sex characteristics, legislation was amended in 2005 to include intersex as a prohibited ground of discrimination under Act No. 4, but universal protection against discrimination based on sex characteristics is lacking.</p>
8	<p>Protection against discrimination in education</p> <p>Protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation were established in 2000 through the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act. This Act covers various areas, including education, where it includes measures such as the use of gender-specific pronouns, curriculum adaptations and the provision of unisex bathrooms to create a more inclusive environment. However, the Department of Basic Education's draft policy for SOGIESC inclusion in schools (2022) has faced criticism for not yet being implemented.</p> <p>On the other hand, there are currently no specific legal protections for gender identity or gender expression and the proposed inclusive education policy by the Department of Basic Education has drawn public criticism but has not been put into practice as of November 2022.</p> <p>Regarding sex characteristics, legislation was amended in 2005 to include intersex as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act. This Act also establishes a general prohibition of unfair discrimination and covers education. However, universal protection against discrimination based on sex characteristics is not yet guaranteed as of November 2022.</p>
9	<p>Protection against school bullying</p> <p>Information is expected to be available or published in the near future but is not yet provided in the current context.</p>
10	<p>Protection against discrimination in employment</p> <p>There are comprehensive legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Labour Relations Act of 1995 defines a dismissal motivated by an employee's sexual orientation as "automatically unfair." Additionally, the Employment Equity Act of 1998 prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, both directly and indirectly. The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000 lists sexual orientation as a forbidden basis of discrimination and establishes a general</p>

	<p>prohibition of unfair discrimination. A new Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace (2022) further reinforces protections against harassment and bullying related to sexual orientation.</p> <p>Regarding gender identity, South African labour law doesn't explicitly outlaw discrimination based on gender identity. However, local law has historically interpreted "sex" and "gender" protections broadly to include this group. The Johannesburg Labour Court's decision in Ehlers v. Bohler Uddeholm Africa (Pty) Ltd. (2010) serves as an example of this broad interpretation, where the court deemed a trans woman's dismissal as "automatically unfair." The 2022 Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace addresses harassment and bullying but does not specifically mention gender identity.</p> <p>Gender expression is not explicitly protected by South African law.</p> <p>In the case of sex characteristics, legislation was amended in 2005 to include intersex as a prohibited ground of discrimination, ensuring protections under the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act. However, universal protection against discrimination based on sex characteristics is not yet guaranteed as of 2022. The revised Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace does not specifically mention sex characteristics but does address harassment based on both sex and gender. Additionally, it prohibits bullying involving "LGBTQQIP2SAAQIA+ phobic language," which includes intersex individuals.</p>
11	<p>Protection against discrimination in housing</p> <p>There are legal protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Rental Housing Act of 1999 prohibits landowners from discriminating against tenants based on sexual orientation. Additionally, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000 lists sexual orientation as a forbidden basis of discrimination and establishes a general prohibition of unfair discrimination. Housing is included as a subject matter under this Act. However, there are currently no specific legal protections for gender identity or gender expression in South African housing law.</p> <p>In the case of sex characteristics, legislation was amended in 2005 to include intersex as a prohibited ground of discrimination under the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act. This Act also establishes a general prohibition of unfair discrimination in housing. However, universal protection against discrimination based on sex characteristics is not yet guaranteed by law as of the given date.</p>
12	<p>Hate crime law</p> <p>South African legislation does not specifically classify crimes based on "sexual orientation," "gender identity," "gender expression," or "sex characteristics" as "hate crimes" or impose harsher punishments for those crimes.</p>

13	<p>Prohibition of incitement to violence, hatred or discrimination</p> <p>There are legal protections against discrimination and hate speech based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.</p> <p>For sexual orientation, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000 explicitly lists "sexual orientation" as a prohibited ground of discrimination. The Act also prohibits harassment based on sexual orientation. In a significant legal case, the Constitutional Court upheld the provision criminalizing hate speech on the basis of sexual orientation in Qwelane v. South African Human Rights Commission (2021).</p> <p>For gender identity, while the Act doesn't expressly forbid discrimination, it designates "gender" as a protected ground separate from "sex" and does not permit harassment, hate speech, or incitement based on gender identification. Court decisions have interpreted "gender" to include gender identity and individuals who faced discrimination based on their gender identity have received legal protection in various cases, such as Lallu v. Van Staden (2011) and Mphela v. Manamela (2017).</p> <p>Regarding gender expression, the legal framework is less clear. The Act lists "gender" as a protected ground but doesn't explicitly address discrimination, harassment, hate speech, or incitement based on "gender expression." However, in one case, September v. Subramoney NO and Others (2019), a transgender inmate's right to express their gender in a "feminine" manner was recognized as protected under the Act.</p> <p>For sex characteristics, the Act, as revised in 2005, explicitly prohibits hate speech and unfair discrimination. It defines "intersex" as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination and also forbids harassment based on "sex." Overall, South African law provides significant protections against discrimination and hate speech based on sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, although the clarity of protections for gender expression may need further legal clarification.</p>
14	<p>Regulation of so-called "conversion therapies"</p> <p>South African legislation are not in place to regulate or prohibit activities to modify a person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (SOGIECE), also referred to as "conversion therapies".</p>
15	<p>Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Unions</p> <p>There are two types of unions that provide legal recognition for same-sex couples:</p> <p>Marriage: Same-sex marriage has been legal in South Africa since 2006 when the Civil Union Act was enacted. Despite its name, this act allows people of the same sex to get married. The Civil Union Amendment Act (2020) repealed Section 6 of the Civil Union Act, which previously allowed marriage officers to refuse to solemnize a civil union between same-sex couples based on their conscience, religion or beliefs.</p>

	<p>Civil Union: The Civil Union Act of 2006 provides for same-sex civil unions, which are legally recognized in South Africa. This act essentially offers an alternative to marriage for same-sex couples to formalize their relationship legally.</p> <p>It's worth noting that in a legal case (Gory v. Kolver NO and Others), the Constitutional Court of South Africa ruled that it was unconstitutional to require a same-sex couple to be married in order for a surviving partner to inherit the estate of the deceased. This decision highlights the legal recognition and protection of same-sex relationships in the country, regardless of whether they choose marriage or civil union.</p>
16	<p>Adoption by same-sex couples</p> <p>There are mechanisms in place to allow for joint adoption and second-parent adoption for same-sex couples;</p> <p>Joint Adoption: Same-sex couples have the legal right to joint adoption. The Constitutional Court's order in Du Toit & Or (2002) played a pivotal role in achieving this. The court directed the addition of the phrase "or by a person whose permanent same-sex life partner is the parent of the child" to Section 17(c) of the Child Care Act (1983). Subsequently, Article 231(1)(a) of the Children's Act of 2005 explicitly permits "partners in a permanent domestic life-partnership" to adopt children jointly.</p> <p>Second-Parent Adoption: Same-sex couples, whether they are married or in a civil union, have the legal right to second-parent adoption. Section 231(1)(c) of the Children's Act (2005) allows people who are married or in life partnerships to adopt and the Civil Union Act (2006) extends the same adoption rights to people in civil unions. This means that a person in a same-sex marriage or civil union can legally adopt their partner's child, becoming a second legal parent to the child.</p> <p>These legal provisions ensure that same-sex couples in South Africa have equal opportunities for adopting children and establishing legal parent-child relationships, whether through joint adoption or second-parent adoption.</p>
17	<p>Restrictions of non-vital medical interventions aimed at modifying the sex characteristics of intersex minors without their free, prior and full informed consent.</p> <p>Medically unnecessary procedures intended to change the sex characteristics of intersex minors without their free, prior and full informed consent are not prohibited by legislation now in effect in South Africa</p>
18 (1 & 2)	<p>Legal Gender Recognition</p> <p>There are mechanisms in place for individuals to change their name and gender marker on official documents:</p> <p>18.1 Name Change</p> <p>Individuals can request a change of their forename that was registered when they were born in accordance with section 24 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act (Act No. 51)</p>

(1992). The previous legislation, the Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act (Act No. 81) (1963), allowed for forename changes but was replaced by the 1992 Act. Some applicants have reported administrative challenges when simultaneously requesting gender marker and name changes, but these appear to be related to administrative issues rather than legislation or policy.

18.2 Gender Marker Change

Section 7B was added to the Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act (1963) by the Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Amendment Act (Act No. 51) (1974). This section allowed the Secretary for Health to approve requests to modify a person's gender marker if they had "undergone a change in sex" (genital surgery). However, this law was not accessible to many people in practice. After it was repealed and replaced by the Births and Deaths Registration Act (Act No. 51) (1992), South Africa had no legal framework for changing one's gender marker until the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act (Act No. 49) (2003) was passed.

Under Section 2(1) of the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act, any individual who has changed their sexual characteristics through surgery, medical treatment, evolution leading to gender reassignment, or who is intersex, may apply to change their gender marker. This clause is typically interpreted as allowing candidates to be considered eligible for hormone replacement treatment instead of surgery.

This information outlines the legal mechanisms and requirements for changing one's name and gender marker in South Africa, with a focus on gender marker changes being accessible to individuals who have undergone gender-affirming medical treatment or are intersex. It also indicates that South Africa does not currently provide for a self-identification process or a non-binary gender marker.

ILGA World (2023)

In South Africa, legislative strides have been made to protect and advance the rights of LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals, reflecting the country's commitment to inclusivity and equality (Moreno *et al.*, 2019:17). However, it is crucial for social workers as case and cause advocates to be well-informed about the law and legislative prescripts to effectively uphold the rights of marginalized groups. While progressive legislation is a significant step forward, the impact largely depends on the individuals and professionals who implement and advocate for these laws (Mtetwa & Muchacha, 2020:98). Social workers play a pivotal role in ensuring that LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals are aware of their rights, can access the legal remedies available to them and are supported in their pursuit of justice and equality (Amadasun, 2020:2; Russel, Sirota & Ahmed, 2019:7). By staying knowledgeable about the law and actively working to address social

and systemic challenges, social workers can contribute significantly to the continued progress of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights in South Africa. (Chereni, 2017:508; Nyembezi, 2020:15).

As the timeline of LGBTQQIP2SAA equality in South Africa is explored, it becomes apparent that legislative milestones represent just one factor of the journey towards full inclusion and recognition of LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals. To truly understand the context and implications of these legal developments, it is essential to explore the broader historical, social and cultural factors that have shaped the path toward equality in this diverse and vibrant nation. In the next section a closer look is taken at the significant events and key moments in South Africa's ongoing quest for LGBTQQIP2SAA rights and recognition, considering how it has unfolded over time.

3.3 A TIMELINE OF LGBTQQIP2SAA EQUALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 2006, South Africa became the first country on the African continent and the fifth country overall to legalize gay marriages. The local LGBTQQIP2SAA community marked the passage of the significant bill with celebrations, yet it is easy to disregard the preceding years of challenges (Gallagher, 2019). According to Gallagher (2019) and Dreier, Long and Winkler (2020:274), although gay behaviour and relationships are often labelled as "un-African", they have a longstanding presence on the African continent, mirroring their existence elsewhere across the globe. Within the native language of the Khoisan, South Africa's First People, terms like "soregus" depicted a friendship involving same-sex masturbation and "koetsire" described men who displayed receptiveness to other men sexually (Gallagher, 2019). Between the celebrations that followed South Africa's historic move to legalize gay marriages in 2006 and the rich history of non-heterosexual relationships in African cultures, it is essential to recognize that traditional African healing practices also play a role in shaping perspectives on alternative sexual orientations and gender expressions (Gallagher, 2019).

In the context of traditional African healing practices, ancestral spirits hold great significance and they are associated with an approach to understanding and accommodating alternative sexual orientations and gender expressions. However, it is important to note that not all traditional healers adhere to non-heterosexual sexual orientations or have gender identities that differ from their assigned gender at birth. Traditional African healing practices encompass a rich tapestry of beliefs and practices and one intriguing aspect of this tapestry involves the role of Izangoma⁴,

⁴ The term Isangoma (singular) or Izangoma (plural), refers to a highly respected healer among the Zulu people of South Africa who diagnoses, prescribes and often performs the rituals to heal a person physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. The sangoma may address all of these realms in the healing process, which usually

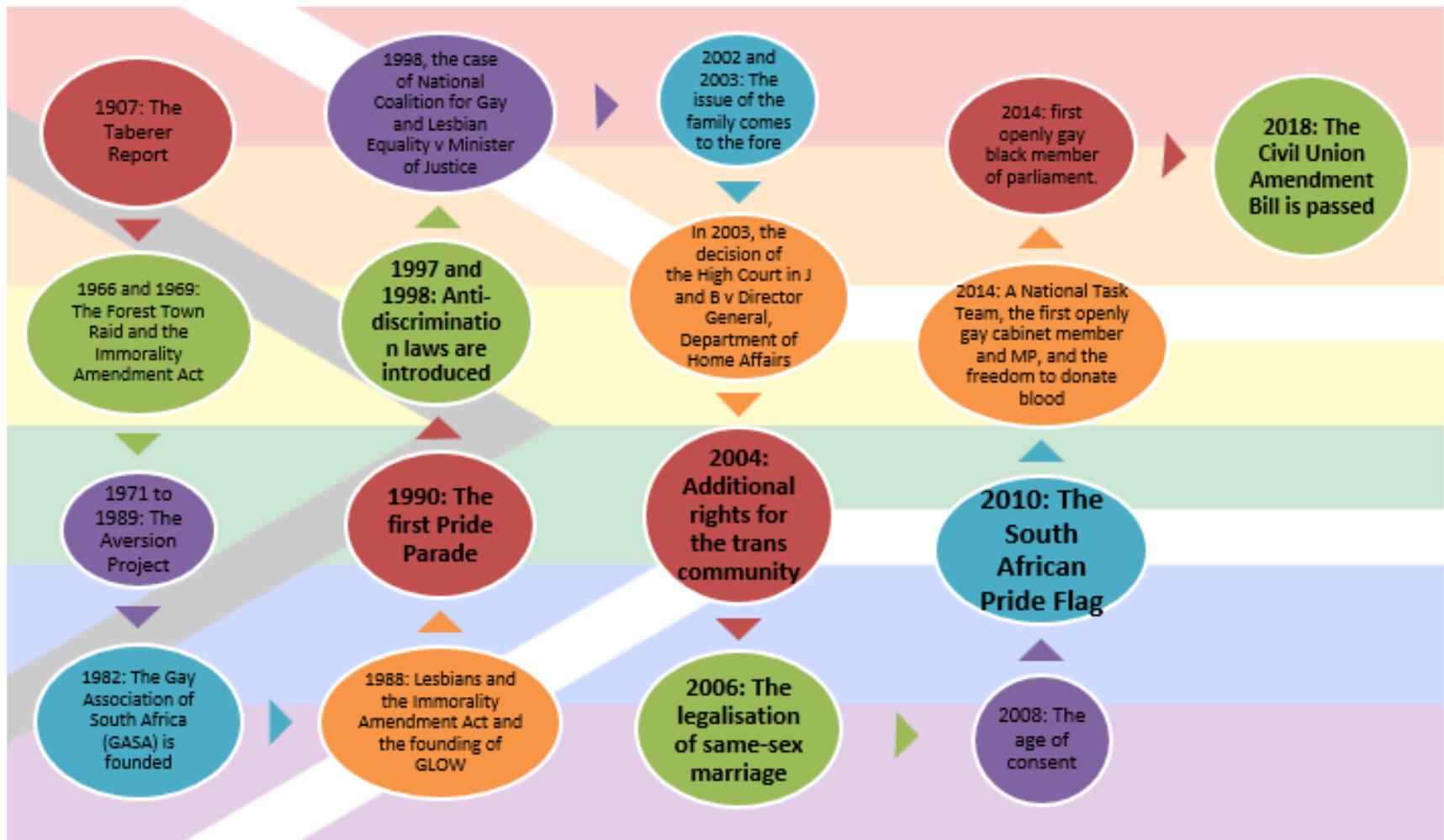
traditional healers. According to traditional beliefs, an Izangoma can be possessed by ancestral spirits in five different ways (Gallagher, 2019), namely as a -

- female ancestral spirit possessing a female Izangoma.
- male and female ancestral spirit possessing a female Izangoma.
- male ancestral spirit possessing a female Izangoma.
- authoritative male ancestral spirit possessing a female Izangoma.
- female spirit possessing a male Izangoma.

The characteristics of what is known as the Native American two spirit people in culture, are similar to this viewpoint. This general word two spirit includes a wide range of gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations and enables people to view the world from the viewpoint of either gender (Gallagher, 2019). There is evidence that homosexual behaviour existed among many indigenous cultural groups in South Africa, albeit it was typically not viewed as being directly opposed to heterosexuality but rather as an additional freedom to which everyone in the group was entitled (Gallagher, 2019). Sodomy remained a common-law offense in South Africa until 1998. The backlash against homosexual behaviour in South Africa began with the establishment of Roman-Dutch Law when Dutch settlers created the Cape Colony the year 1652 (Gallagher, 2019).

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the progression of LGBTQQIP2SAA equality in South Africa, it is essential to examine both visual and textual representations of key events. The progress made in South Africa toward LGBTQQIP2SAA equality from 1907 to 2018 is summarised in Figure 3.5 below, giving a graphical timeline that offers a brief visual overview of the milestones and legislative changes that have shaped the journey towards equality, as described in Table 3.3, in a detailed narrative of these events, offering insights into the broader societal and legal context within which these advancements have taken place.

involves divination, herbal medicine and specific customized rituals to cure illness and restore well-being (Brittanica, 2023).



Gallagher (2019)

FIGURE 3-5 PROGRESS IN SOUTH AFRICA TOWARD LGBTQI+ EQUALITY

TABLE 3-3 KEY TIMELINE POSITIONS TOWARDS

1907: The Taberer Report
The Taberer Report, written in 1907 by magistrate J. Glenn Leary and Native Affairs Department employee Henry M. Taberer, provides proof of same-sex partnerships among men working in the goldmines close to Johannesburg. This behaviour is called "loathsome" and "disgusting" in the report.
1966 and 1969: The Forest Town Raid and the Immorality Amendment Act
The Immorality Amendment Act is passed three years after police raid a party in Forest Town, a Johannesburg suburb, primarily attended by gay people. In 1969, the "men at a party" provision, also known as Section 20A, was introduced, making it illegal for a man to have intercourse with another man while they are at a party (a "party" is defined as a gathering of more than two individuals). Additionally, the amendment raises the legal age of consent for male homosexual conduct from 16 to 19 while keeping sodomy as a criminal offense.
1971 to 1989: The Aversion Project
The South African Defence Force subjected homosexual and transgender personnel to aversion therapy between 1971 and 1989, which included chemical castration and electric shock therapy, due to the perception that homosexuality was observed as "undermining", this action was taken.
1982: The Gay Association of South Africa (GASA) is founded
The first significant gay organisation is established in 1982; but, because it refused to denounce Apartheid, GASA was removed from the International Gay and Lesbian Association in 1987. GASA was a white organisation that favoured a non-political reputation.
1988: Lesbians and the Immorality Amendment Act and the founding of GLOW
The Immorality Amendment Act of 1988 established a legal age of consent for lesbian sex, which was previously unrestricted by law (19, as opposed to the age of consent for heterosexual sex, which was 16). Additionally established in 1988 was the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW). GLOW is overtly ethnically and politically inclusive and has ties to anti-apartheid organisations like the ANC and the UDF, unlike its predecessor (GASA) which was a white organisation that favoured a non-political reputation which was removed from the International Gay and Lesbian Association in 1987.
1990: The first Pride Parade
Johannesburg hosted the country's first pride parade on October 13th, 1990, where around 800 people marched to demand their human rights against apartheid. The event, organised by GLOW, featured speakers like Simon Nkoli, Beverley Ditsie, Hendrik Pretorius and Edwin Cameron. The march emphasised the oppression of both black and gay individuals in South Africa. Today, Pride Month in South Africa is celebrated in October. Despite the advent of democracy and inclusive Constitution, LGBTQQIP2SAA South Africans still face hate, prejudice and violence. Despite progress, LGBTQI+ South Africans continue to face hate, prejudice and violence. This is why Pride remains important today not just for a month but as an ongoing and affirming feeling about identity, acceptance and inclusion. Pride is a way to come together and identify with each other, celebrate our successes as a community, mourn those we have lost and continue the struggle for full liberation and inclusion.
1997 and 1998: Anti-discrimination laws are introduced
The South African Constitution, which was ratified on 4 February 1994, is praised internationally for being tolerant of LGBT people. With a provision that expressly forbids any type of discrimination based on sexual orientation, the LGBT population receives legal protection for the first time. Section 20A of the Sexual Offences Act was declared unlawful in the court case National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality v. Minister of Justice in 1998, effectively decriminalizing gay behaviour. It is also prohibited by the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1988 to discriminate against a person on the basis of their sexual orientation when they apply for employment.

2002 and 2003: The issue of the family comes to the fore

Numerous legal proceedings in 2002 laid the foundation for marital equality a few years later. In the cases of Du Toit v. Minister of Welfare and Population Development and Satchwell v. President of the Republic of South Africa, both decided in 2001, same-sex partners of judges are given the same rights and privileges as partners of a different sex and are permitted to adopt children and adopt each other's children jointly. The legal foundation for marital equality was laid in 2002 by several court cases.

In both the cases of Satchwell v. President of the Republic of South Africa and Du Toit v. Minister of Welfare and Population Development, both of which were determined in 2001, equal rights and privileges are granted to the same-sex life partners of judges, analogous to life partners of the opposite gender. These cases also allow for same-sex partners to engage in child adoption and jointly adopt each other's children.

2004: Additional rights for the transgender community

Adoption of the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act makes gender transformation for intersex and transgender people legally possible.

According to the Alteration of Sex Description and Sex Status Act, 2003 (Act No. 49 of 2003), three categories of people—those who have had surgical or medical sex reassignment, those whose sexual characteristics have naturally developed and intersex people—may submit an application to the Department of Home Affairs for a change of the sex description in their birth record. The applicant must provide medical records outlining their circumstances and in the case of intersex individuals, they must additionally provide a psychological report attesting to their two-year residence in their preferred gender identification.

2006: The legalisation of same-sex marriage

On November 29, 2006, acting president Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka signs the Civil Union Act of 2006 into law. This follows the case of Fourie v. Minister of Home Affairs in 2002, which determined that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry. Vernon Gibbs-Halls and Tony Halls-Gibbs became South Africa's first openly gay couple to be granted legal wedlock on December 1st, 2006.

2008: The age of consent

When the Constitutional Court upholds the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 2007, the legal age of consent for homosexual sexual activity will be 16 years old, making it equivalent to that of heterosexual sexual behaviour.

2010: The South African Pride Flag

At the Mother City Queer Project, the South African Gay Pride Flag was flown over Cape Town for the first time. Eugene Brockman created the flag, which has been registered as the heraldic banner of the GLBTI Association of South Africa. The National Intervention Strategy for the LGBTI Sector was introduced by Jeff Radebe, who was the minister of justice at the time, in response to a wave of hate crimes and the creation of a National Task Team to combat crimes against the LGBTQIA population in South Africa.

2014: First Parliament and Cabinet member

The first openly gay cabinet member and member of parliament, as well as the freedom to donate blood, were all achieved in 2014. Zakele Mbhele of the Democratic Alliance (DA) becomes **the first openly gay black member of Parliament** and Lynne Brown an openly gay person is promoted to a cabinet position. A restriction on homosexual men donating blood is lifted by the South African National Blood Service.

2018: The Civil Union Amendment Bill is passed

The Civil Union Amendment Bill, which seeks to repeal section 6 of the Civil Union Act and make it unlawful for Home Affairs officials to refuse to marry same-sex couples on the basis of conscience, religion, or belief, is approved by the National Assembly of Parliament.

Gallagher (2019)

3.4 CHALLENGES OF SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Kasa and Kang'ethe (2023:38) contend that even with South Africa's progressive Constitution and inclusive policies, individuals belonging to sexual minorities encounter discrimination across diverse societal contexts. These contexts encompass the family, community and institutional settings. This matter is further expounded upon in the subsequent discussion.

3.4.1 Family Setting

Within the experiences of sexual minority communities, families assume significant roles. As outlined by Ryan, Toomey, Diaz and Russell (2020:160), a sexual minority individual's family can adopt one of three roles, they might be a catalyst for criticism, a barrier to their contentment or a wellspring of support to individuals that bolsters their overall welfare. Among all settings, the family sphere becomes a primary arena where personal challenges confront sexual minorities. Additionally, families can present challenges for sexual minorities, including the possibilities of rejection and the apprehension associated with revealing one's sexual orientation (Pariseau, Chevalier, Long, Clapham, Edwards-Leeper, & Tishelman, 2019:268; Richter, Lindahl & Malik, 2017:245).

Members of sexual minorities experience various challenges in their family settings, including fear of coming out/disclosure; emotional distress and suicidal thoughts; rejection; and lack of social support.

3.4.1.1 Fear of coming out/disclosure

According to van Bergen, Wilson, Russell, Gordon and Rothblum, (2021:1117), 'coming out' is the process by which LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals decide to disclose their sexual orientation status to others (including friends and family), it plays a crucial role in the identity development and mental health of sexual minorities. Due to their concern about their families' reactions, sexual minorities find it difficult to disclose their sexual orientation status to them (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:58; Watson, Grossman & Russel, 2019:33). Sexual minorities often grapple with apprehension prior to disclosing their sexual orientation or "coming out," fearing potential rejection or ill-treatment from their families in the event that they identify as LGBTQQIP2SAA (Van Bergen *et al.*, 2021:1117). It is well accepted that upon coming out, sexual minorities may experience anxieties about acceptance, harassment, bullying, safety and persecution (Ali & Barden, 2015:502; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2018:2; Gower, Rider, McMorris & Eisenberg, 2018:2).

The emotional responses that arise when sexual minorities reveal their identities to their families can lead to feelings of tension such as isolation, alienation, bewilderment, sadness, humiliation, anger, fear, vulnerability and depression, which can then culminate in suicide ideation (Ali & Barden, 2015:506; Emetu & Rivera; 2018:58). Additionally, when some family members do not accept a person's sexual orientation, sexual minorities bear the emotional weight of being blamed for severing the family. Sexual minorities are frequently abused, expelled from their homes and abandoned in so-called traditional families as a result of differences in beliefs and the ensuing disputes (Ali & Barden, 2015:507; Gower *et al.*, 2018:4; Pistella, Salvati, Ioverno, Laghi & Baiocco, 2016:3695).

In addition, living in a homophobic atmosphere might cause members of sexual minorities to hate themselves (Van Bergen *et al.*, 2021:1120). This may be connected to the internal oppression they experience as they come out. When a person consistently hears signals of devaluation, van Bergen *et al.*, (2021:1120) highlight that these messages end up being internalized. Sexual minority youth may hear messages about being LGBTQQIP2SAA being terrible, a sin, filthy, perverted, wrong, sick, diseased or odd during the coming out process. These messages are frequently spread through and by the media, religion, parents, teachers and friends. A person may find it difficult to resist associating being LGBTQQIP2SAA with bad things after repeatedly hearing these messages. The message changes to "You are terrible, a sinner, sickening, perverted, wrong, sick and odd" as teenagers begin to see themselves as maybe strange. Internalized homophobia is the term used to describe the phenomena whereby LGBTQQIP2SAA people turn self-hatred into an internalized form of hatred (Emtu & Rivera, 2022:48; Lennon-Dearing & Delavega, 2016:1171).

3.4.1.2 Emotional distress and suicidal thoughts

Green *et al.* (2021:27) argue that sexual minorities undergo significant degrees of emotional turmoil. Kaoma (2018:1) and Emetu and Rivera (2018:47) suggests that individuals identifying as LGBTQQIP2SAA encounter frequent and pronounced levels of stigmatization, discrimination and harassment as part of their daily lives. Many persons within this community develop adaptive strategies to navigate these challenges, particularly when they have the backing of family and friends and are engaged with social circles and LGBTQQIP2SAA advocacy groups. Nevertheless, a considerable segment of LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals, particularly younger ones, are compelled to confront stigmatization, discrimination and harassment unaided (Green *et al.*, 2021:27).

This can be as a result of the lack of acceptance from their family. It could have adverse effects on their mental well-being, resulting in high levels of psychological anguish, self-harm and suicide thoughts (SAMHSA, 2020:6). Given that many will be experimenting with their sexual orientation or gender identity without any assistance, LGBTQQIP2SAA youth can feel particularly alone. They can be especially vulnerable as they navigate their path to adulthood, which is a crucial time for their social and emotional growth.

Additionally, coming out can be more challenging for LGBTQQIP2SAA people within rural communities. Cities are better suited to letting LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals choose whatever aspects of their lives, such as employment, relationships with friends, family and neighbours, access to medical services and social activities, they want to be out in and to whom they want to be out (Haltom & Ratcliff, 2021:1108). This becomes notably demanding in rural settings due to the strong likelihood that if individuals are open about their identities in one sphere, such as their workplace, it becomes widely known within their communities, among family and friends that they identify as LGBTQQIP2SAA. In contrast to the general populace, LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals in rural areas might exhibit a higher tendency to relocate from their place of birth and upbringing (Ivey-Stephenson, Demissie & Crosby, 2020:47).

Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, gay and bisexual men and women are more prone to suffer from depression and anxiety. Extreme melancholy, anxiety, loneliness, difficulty in social settings and a sense of overwhelming may be among these feelings. This is not just because of their gender identity; it is because being gender variant in a patriarchal society is extremely distressing. In fact, it can be so distressing that it qualifies as a mental disease (American Psychological Association (APA), 2021:23). This could be caused by a variety of reasons, including living in a homophobic society, experiencing family rejection, or being openly gay in some or all elements of one's life. Mental health issues are more often signs of prejudice and a fear of discrimination than of sexual orientation. The LGBTQQIP2SAA population has greater incidence of anxiety, mood and substance use problems, as well as suicidal thoughts among those between the ages of 15 and 54, most likely as a result of violence, social rejection and isolation (Rankin, Garvey & Duran, 2019:436).

3.4.1.3 Rejection

Sexual minorities frequently face rejection from their families after coming out to them (Ream & Peters, 2021:43). Although the exact definition of rejection is ambiguous (Carastathis, Cohen, Kaczmarek & Chang, 2017:289), it may entail acting in a physically and mentally destructive way,

as well as withdrawing emotional warmth, sympathy, care, love and support (Moagi, Van der Wath, Jiyane & Rikhotso, 2021:8). Several family-related factors could contribute to this, including cultural beliefs. Research by Mamba (2020:42) and Gallagher (2019) reveals that some families accompany their homosexual or lesbian family members to Izangomas who are thought to have the ability to "cure" them of being gay or lesbian, due to shock and incredulity at the news. The LGBTQQIP2SAA person is ostracized by their family when this procedure fails because they are not cured.

3.4.1.4 Lack of social support

Sexual minorities are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience mental health issues (McConnell, Birkett, & Mustanski, 2016:676). The authors contend that victimization may be to blame. They recognized in their research that social support, particularly that of families, was crucial in the lives of sexual minorities. Rios and Eaton (2016:1093) suggest that social support comprises various elements such as social connectedness, tangible assistance and perceived assistance. It also encompasses diverse types of help offered by sources like family, friends and neighbours. Additionally, McConnell *et al.* (2016:677) contend that families offer a crucial background for the formation of sexual minorities, particularly young people. According to these academics, stigma against sexual and gender minorities may be reflected in families as well as in society.

3.4.2 Community Setting

The communities in which sexual minorities dwell cause sexual minorities face a variety of difficulties. This includes homophobia, violent assaults and hate crimes, corrective rape crimes, verbal and physical abuse and harassment and substance misuse (Moagi *et al.*, 2021:9).

3.4.2.1 Homophobia

Despite changes to South Africa's legislation governing same-sex relationships, prejudice continues to be a daily reality for gay and lesbian individuals (Gower *et al.*, 2018:3; Reyan & Lynette, 2014:708). According to Ventriglio, Castaldelli-Maia, Torales, De Berardis and Bhurga, (2021:1), the original definition of homophobia was an unreasonable dread of homosexual people. The meaning of this term though has transformed over the years to encompass feelings of disgust, fear and anger. Furthermore, according to these authors, the phrase is now used to describe not only the responses of heterosexuals but also the internalization of unpleasant feelings by homosexual men and women.

Additionally, Ventriglio *et al.* (2021:2) describe homophobia as the dread and hatred of same-sex sexual partners. Ventriglio *et al.* (2021:2) and Emetu and Rivera (2018:46) argues the point that homophobia can be brought on by socio-cultural reasons, notably in black cultures, traditions and faiths that have stigmatized homosexuality as being outside of African culture and, more so since decolonization, as a disease imported by white colonizers (Westman, 2023:2). Naturally, such viewpoints persistently perpetuate discrimination against gay individuals (Ventriglio *et al.*, 2021:1). Data presented by Human Rights Watch (2011) and Resane (2020:2) indicate that homophobia is more prevalent within African communities compared to white communities, lending support to this assertion.

According to a Times Live news story by Keeton (2017), among the nine provinces in South Africa, the Eastern Cape experiences the most homophobic violence, followed by KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo (the second worst provinces), the Western Cape and Gauteng. Even though most South African societies are homophobic, some regions exhibit a disproportionately high percentage of people who are more outspoken about their sexual orientation and gender identity. With 57% of LGBTQQIP2SAA people in the Western Cape and Gauteng being open about their sexual orientation status, this is clear (Keeton, 2017; Van Heerden, 2017:1). This does not, however, imply that homophobia is any less pervasive in these areas. The same opinions are held by Van Heerden (2017:1), who are of the opinion that increased visibility of those who identify as homosexual or lesbian and better degrees of openness and integration within lesbian and gay communities, unavoidably result in higher incidences of homophobic victimization.

3.4.2.2 Violent attacks and hate crimes

According to Schweppe (2021:1), a hate crime is any incident involving a criminal offense that is thought to be motivated by prejudice. These crimes are acts of prejudice that are done against individuals, things, organisations, or society because of the group they identify with or belong to. Schweppe (2021:1-3,11) offers a more thorough definition of hate crimes, arguing that hate crimes are any words or deeds used to threaten or intimidate a person because of his or her membership of a minority group. As noted by Schweppe, (2021:11) and Haynes and Schweppe, (2017:130), hate crimes encompass acts like physical attacks, homicide, sexual assault and biased-driven property offenses, along with instances of violence or menacing threats. Additionally, it is claimed that those who commit hate crimes intend to dehumanize, devalue and diminish the dignity of the victims they attack, based on their actual or imagined race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, state of health, nationality, social origin, religious beliefs, culture, language or other characteristics.

Paterson, Walters, Brown and Fearn (2018:5) are of the opinion that hate crimes against sexual minorities are a significant national issue. Walters, Paterson, McDonnell and Brown (2020:145-146) mention that hate crimes targeting sexual minorities frequently aim to convince the victim or survivor that their sexual orientation or gender identity is unacceptable and must be altered. A variety of openly lesbian, gay and bisexual people have reported experiencing victimization in many forms, including verbal abuse, threats, being chased or followed, or being spit on (Moagi *et al.*, 2021:8). Many lesbians and gay men have experienced some form of victimization in their lives, whether it was non-physical, such as verbal harassment (hate speech), or physical, such as violence (Mongelli *et al.*, 2019:28).

In South Africa, many sexual minorities who face hate crimes choose not to report it. As a result, there is no statistical proof that sexual minorities in South Africa have been victims of hate crimes. According to a study by the OUT, the LGBTQQIP2SAA community well-being in South Africa has a problem with its members not reporting criminal incidences that results in a limited understanding about the extent of hate crimes directed at the LGBTQQIP2SAA community (OUT, 2016/17:2; OUT, 2021/22:6).

Certain specific elements attest to this. To begin with, individuals who have experienced assault and hate crimes often exhibit hesitance in contacting law enforcement. Additionally, various countries utilise distinct classifications for hate crimes and incidents driven by prejudice (Nyembezi, 2020:48). However, South Africa does not possess a distinct record dedicated to tracking hate crime data. Consequently, information about hate crimes rooted in sexual orientation do not appear within the comprehensive crime statistics (Koraan & Geduld, 2015:1932). This makes it harder to note the experiences of sexual minorities and the scale of homophobic attacks in South Africa is still mostly unclear (SA News, 2021). It is important to recognize that when communities remain silent, take no action, or fail to assist hate crime victims, such inaction is perceived as endorsement of what happened (SA News, 2021).

3.4.2.3 Corrective rape crimes

As stated by Koraan and Geduld (2015:1933) and Mulaudzi (2018:10), the term "corrective rape" pertains to instances where a woman is subjected to rape with the intention of attempting to "heal" her from her lesbian identity. Mulaudzi (2018:5) argues that corrective rape is a form of violence used against lesbian women in an effort to "cure" them of their nonconforming sexuality. Authors assert that corrective rape, which is intended to treat or punish nonconforming sexual orientation, is not exclusive to lesbians (Gaitho, 2022:338; Westman, 2023:4). Additionally, it is said that those

who conduct corrective rape crimes do so because they think homosexuality is an imported "white" sickness (Westman, 2023:6). Sometimes the cultural ideas and perceptions of what the society expects from people of a particular gender are the driving forces behind these violent crimes.

Koraan and Geduld (2015:1933), indicated that there have been at least 31 deaths in South Africa over the previous 15 years that have been linked to lesbianism and 10 lesbians are raped on average every week to "correct" their sexual inclination (Luleki Sizwe, 2023). The SA News (2021) article elaborated that 42 cases were reported. Twelve of these relate to rape and 30 cases for murder directed to LGBTQQIP2SAAQIA individuals. Mulaudzi (2018:9) indicated that between 1998 and 2009, only 31 cases of rape were reported by lesbian women. The impression is gained that this is not a celebratory number at all but a mere indication of the lack of trust and faith that victims have in the legal system in South Africa considering the various social factors that contribute to reporting or not reporting of these cases like secondary victimization and a lack of empathy, lack of training and skills to work with the survivors.

Perpetrators of corrective rape often include family members, close associates, or neighbours of the victims. They commit these acts under the guise of imparting a lesson to lesbian women and illustrating their distorted notion of a "true woman" by subjecting them to rape (Mulaudzi, 2018:17). This illustrates the notion of cultural ideas and views around what society considers to be suitable behaviour for a particular gender. According to Mulaudzi (2018:9), who supports this viewpoint, lesbians defy gender norms in their demonstrations of masculinity and sexuality, leading to increased exposure in their communities. In addition, South African lesbians pursue strong and emotionally charged sexual relationships with "straight" women, especially those who live outside metropolitan centres in the country's former townships. These associations foster an environment where lesbians are empowered to exhibit masculine traits and cultivate emotional closeness. Nevertheless, due to the perception that they appear intimidating and inaccessible to men within their communities, lesbians are unexpectedly exposed to severe physical risks as a consequence of their growing visibility and partnerships. Male-targeting violent assaults and rapes frequently result from same-sex partnerships and lesbians expressing their masculinity (Mulaudzi, 2018:9).

3.4.2.4 Verbal and physical abuse and harassment

SAMHSA (2023:47) and Mayeza (2021:294), indicate that LGBTQQIP2SAAQIA individuals encountered instances of verbal insults, ridicule or mistreatment at some juncture in their lives. In fact, for a significant number of individuals, this kind of treatment persisted throughout their lives

due to their gender expression and either assumed or acknowledged sexual orientation. Lesbians and transgender males experience fear and caution due to the ongoing occurrence of verbal abuse and harassment. These actions consistently communicate an underlying dislike from individuals within their communities. If not addressed, this opposition can further propagate and reinforce stereotypes within and between communities (Westman, 2023:5).

Verbal abuse and harassment that people experience as a result of their sexual orientation can negatively affect their self-image, influence the public's perception of them, instil fear and humiliation in them and make it difficult for them to access public areas and pursue redress or justice. Additionally, it fosters and maintains an environment of impunity where, as the report demonstrates, violence can progress from verbal harassment and abuse to physical and sexual assaults SAMHSA (2023:47). Virtually all the individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch reported that they often faced verbal abuse and various forms of non-physical harassment from male strangers and acquaintances, often with little recourse (Kelly, Davis & Schlesinger, 2015:358). Family rejection, a lack of acceptability and other difficulties that sexual minorities encounter are additional causes. Therefore, because of these additional, enabling variables, substance misuse becomes a problem that sexual minorities face (Kelly *et al.*, 2015:358).

3.4.3 Institutional Setting

SAMHSA (2023:55) and Van Heerden (2019:9) notes that sexual minorities face prejudice and discrimination at institutional level as well; for example, in health and educational institutions.

3.4.3.1 Heath issues

Victor and Nel (2016:352) claim that South Africa's current healthcare practices frequently presuppose heterosexuality when providing services, which has a negative impact on the type of assistance or support provided to LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals and makes it more difficult for sexual minorities to get healthcare services. As a result of this, it could prove challenging for sexual minorities to attain quality medical services. In support of this Victor and Nel (2016:354), are of the opinion that a lot of healthcare professionals in South Africa either do not understand the concerns related to sexual orientation or have trouble delivering sufficient care. Their inadequate knowledge of sexual minority concerns in healthcare is partly a result of a lack of training in those topics (Victor & Nel 2016). It is furthermore mentioned by Victor and Nel (2016:355) that the current healthcare system in South Africa often operates under the assumption of heterosexuality, which consequently has adverse effects on the kind of assistance

extended to LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals and adds complexities to their access to healthcare services. As a result, it can be a challenge for sexual minorities to access adequate healthcare.

3.4.3.2 Educational institutions

In addition to teaching academic subjects, schools and other educational institutions are also places where learners and their teachers work hard to construct their identities in a variety of ways, especially when it comes to sexuality-related issues, which are closely related to gender-related struggles (Van Heerden, 2019:18). According to Jones (2019:458), education has historically discriminated against minority groups and is only now going through a profound shift. According to SAMHSA (2023:55), homophobia and transphobia are pervasive among young people in educational settings and schools. This can be because of the educators hailing from cultures that view homosexuality as un-African and illegal (Westman, 2023:2).

3.5 Responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers within educational institutions.

In an era marked by significant advancements in human rights and social justice, the role of social workers has become increasingly critical in advocating for and supporting marginalized communities (Mecklenburg, 2020:35). One such community that has faced enduring discrimination and marginalization is that of sexual minority individuals, encompassing a diverse spectrum of sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. This discussion looks at the multifaceted responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers within the international, African and South African legislative frameworks concerning sexual minority rights. While the journey towards equality and inclusivity is ongoing, social workers serve as indispensable agents of change, working tirelessly to address the unique challenges and foster the empowerment of sexual minority individuals within these distinct legal contexts (Winkler, 2018:10). This discussion explores how social workers navigate the intricate connections of legislation, challenges and human rights to promote social justice and improve the well-being of sexual minority individuals across these diverse geographical landscapes.

3.5.1 Responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers regarding international legislation and the rights of sexual minorities

The responsibility, role and function of social workers in advocating for the rights of sexual minorities on an international level, within the framework of human rights, are essential in addressing social prejudice, discrimination and violence due to their sexual orientation (Mehrotra, Hudson & Hess, 2023:2). To fully grasp their position in an international law and human rights

discussion, it is crucial to examine the role of international organisations, particularly the United Nations (UN), in safeguarding the rights of sexual minorities.

Social workers, in their responsibility and role as advocates for marginalized populations, including sexual minorities, must engage with these international human rights principles and agreements. Their function extends to ensuring that the rights of sexual minorities are protected and that they are treated with dignity and respect in all contexts. This entails addressing discriminatory laws and practices, providing support and advocacy for individuals facing discrimination and contributing to the broader global effort to promote inclusivity and equal rights for sexual minorities (Redcay, McMahon, Hollinger, Mabry-Kourt & Cook, 2019:272).

The responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers within the international human rights framework are crucial in advancing the rights and well-being of sexual minorities. By recognizing the applicability of international human rights agreements, acknowledging the absolute nature of human rights and actively advocating for the rights of sexual minorities, social workers contribute to a more just and inclusive world where all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can live free from prejudice and discrimination (Mecklenburg, 2020:56).

3.5.2 Responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers regarding African legislation and the rights of sexual minorities

Social workers can serve as advocates for change and a heightened level of acceptance by engaging with local communities, governments and international organisations to challenge discriminatory laws and practices (Nomani, 2021:488). They can provide support and counselling to individuals facing discrimination, violence and psychological trauma due to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Nomani, 2021:489). Additionally, social workers can collaborate with human rights and health agencies, both locally and internationally, to condemn practices such as forced anal examinations and advocate for the protection of the rights and dignity of sexual minority individuals in African nations.

The responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers in Africa regarding the rights and well-being of sexual minorities are critical. While challenges persist due to historical and cultural factors, the evolving legislative landscape and growing global awareness offer opportunities for positive change. Social workers can play a vital role in advocating for equal rights and protections, supporting those who face discrimination and working towards the elimination of harmful

practices, such as forced anal examinations, that violate human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Westman, 2023:6).

3.5.3 Responsibilities roles and functions of social workers regarding the challenges faced by sexual minorities in South Africa

The responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers in addressing discrimination faced by individuals belonging to sexual minorities in South Africa are of paramount importance, despite the country's progressive Constitution and inclusive policies. Kasa and Kang'ethe (2023:38) assert that discrimination against sexual minorities persists across various societal contexts, including family, community and institutional settings. This discussion explored the multifaceted responsibilities and roles of social workers in combating discrimination against sexual minorities in South Africa.

South Africa's Constitution is renowned for its inclusive stance on human rights and the protection of the rights of all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. However, the lived experiences of sexual minorities often differ from the legal framework in place. Discrimination remains a pervasive issue and social workers play the following crucial roles in addressing these disparities:

- Advocacy and Awareness: Social workers are instrumental in advocating for the rights of sexual minorities within various societal contexts. They can raise awareness about the legal protections in place, emphasising the importance of inclusivity and respect for diversity. This involves working with communities, families and institutions to challenge prejudiced beliefs and practices (Mecklenburg, 2020:35).
- Support and Counselling: Discrimination can have profound psychological and emotional effects on individuals belonging to sexual minorities. Social workers provide a safe and supportive environment for them to seek counselling and emotional assistance. This support can help individuals navigate the challenges they face in their families, communities or workplaces (South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), 2017/2022:19).
- Education and Training: Social workers can engage in educational initiatives aimed at reducing discrimination. This includes providing training on LGBTQ+ issues to schools, healthcare providers and other institutions. By fostering understanding and empathy, social workers contribute to a more inclusive society (Redcay *et al.*, 2019:273; Daly, 2022:15).

- Policy Advocacy: While South Africa has progressive policies, their implementation can be uneven. Social workers can actively engage in policy advocacy to ensure that these policies are effectively enforced and that any gaps or challenges are addressed (Mtetwa & Muchacha, 2020:98).
- Creating Safe Spaces: Social workers can establish safe spaces and support groups for sexual minorities. These spaces provide a sense of belonging and can be vital in combating isolation and discrimination (Gallagher, 2019).
- Crisis Intervention: In cases of violence or discrimination, social workers can provide immediate crisis intervention and support. This includes assisting victims in accessing legal remedies and healthcare services (South African National AIDS Council (SANAC), 2017/2022:15)
- Community Building: Social workers can help build and strengthen LGBTQ+ communities. These communities can provide mutual support and serve as platforms for advocacy (Nyembezi, 2020:16).

Despite South Africa's progressive legal framework, discrimination against sexual minorities persists in various societal contexts. Social workers play a pivotal role in addressing these issues by advocating for equality, providing support, raising awareness and working towards the full realization of human rights for all. Kasa and Kang'ethe's (2023:38) observation underscores the ongoing need for the active involvement of social workers in promoting inclusivity and combating discrimination within South African society.

Within a school setting, school-based social workers serve as crucial agents of change in this regard. They work closely with learners, teachers and parents to create inclusive and supportive environments that embrace diversity and respect the rights of every individual. Their responsibilities encompass not only providing counselling and emotional support to learners who may be experiencing discrimination or bullying due to their sexual orientation but also delivering educational programmes to promote tolerance and acceptance among the learners in line with the case and cause advocacy theory. By doing so, school-based social workers contribute significantly to the broader mission of eradicating discrimination and fostering inclusivity in South African schools.

3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Before moving on to a historical analysis of South African laws governing same-sex relationships, this chapter provides a worldwide and an African perspective on legislation and policies that try to safeguard sexual minorities. It is stated that the United Nations is a crucial tool for safeguarding human rights internationally and that this body is quite clear in ensuring the protection of everyone, regardless of status. However, LGBTQQIP2SAA persons continue to suffer difficulties because of their sexual orientation even though some countries have regulations in place to safeguard sexual minorities. In addition, homosexuality is illegal in many African nations because to the belief that it is not African in origin. This chapter also discussed issues that LGBTQQIP2SAA in South Africa face in their families, communities and institutional contexts.

The application of the research plan developed in Chapter Two to undertake this study about the experiences and challenges that school-based social workers face in providing intervention services to sexual minority groups, is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPLICATION OF THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter One of this dissertation provided a background to the research and the plan compiled for conducting the research was discussed in Chapter Two. This Chapter presents the application of the process as set out in the plan to conduct the study. Described are the way of seeking answers to the research questions by collecting and analysing the data to make findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations in achieving the research goal emanating from the research question (Thomas, 2023). From the research problem (section 2.5.1) and the research goal (section 2.4) the following research questions (section 2.3) was developed (Ratan, Anand & Ratan, 2019:15; Mattick, Johnston & de la Croix, 2018:105; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:117,198).

- What are the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers regarding the provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities within the school environment?
- How can current strategies for school-based social work intervention be enhanced to assist and support school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?

This chapter provides an audit trail and chronological narrative which entail detailed, varied and rich descriptions of the steps taken during the research process, making it transparent to outsiders (Butina, 2015:195; Creswell, 2017:103; Carcary, 2020:169-170). This process includes describing how the theoretical framework was applied, how the qualitative research approach was followed and how the research methodology unfolded (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021:15). Also described are the application of the ethical considerations and data verification. The objective herewith is to enable the reader to follow the research process undertaken and decide whether credibility, reliability and transferability of the study were reached (Isla, 2022:1-3). Where relevant, cross references are made to sections in Chapter Two.

4.2 THE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH APPLIED

As indicated in Chapter Two (2.5), a qualitative approach was applied as it allowed the researcher to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of and obtain insight into the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in a systematic, interactive and subjective way (Creswell & Creswell 2018:13; Patel & Patel, 2019:52; Rahman, 2018:103). The qualitative researcher is aware of the socially constructed reality and engages intimately with the study (Yates & Leggett, 2016:225). Applying the qualitative approach furnished the researcher with information of and insight into the “what” and “how” of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019:232).

The qualitative research approach is distinguished by its unique set of characteristics, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018:180). The qualitative research approach is described as - *“...an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world”* (Lanka, Lanka, Rostro & Singh, 2020).

The defining traits of qualitative research encompass a distinct array of qualitative methodologies that prioritize rich, context-driven experiences, emphasising open-ended exploration and interpretation (Shava & Nkengbeza, 2019:241). Researchers employing this approach, seek to explore the complexities of human experiences, social experiences and cultural contexts, facilitating a deep understanding of the subject under investigation. The following description of the enacting of the distinctive characteristics of qualitative research, of which an overview is given in Chapter Two (section 2.5.1), enabled the researcher to establish a detailed understanding of the phenomenon researched without determining a quantitative answer:

4.2.1 Qualitative research is done in a natural setting

The natural setting refers to the site where the participants experience the issue or phenomenon being studied. According to Creswell (2016:6) and Creswell and Creswell (2018:51) the setting of the research creates a holding space for the interview and this context shapes and influences how comfortable the participants are and what they will share. The researcher visited various schools in Gauteng where the school-based social workers were based and conducted most of the interviews with the participants in their natural settings. Alternatively, some participants

proposed different locations for conducting interviews. To accommodate the preferences of certain participants, less structured interviews via Microsoft Teams sessions were arranged with them. Face-to-face interviews were carried out at facilities at participants' schools chosen by the participants, ensuring their comfort. Some interviews occurred in the social workers' offices, while others were held in school boardrooms. The preference for alternative facilities indicated a desire to minimize interruptions and distractions during the interviews, a request that the researcher readily accommodated to ensure the participants' comfort (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:181).

4.2.2 In qualitative research the researcher is the primary research instrument

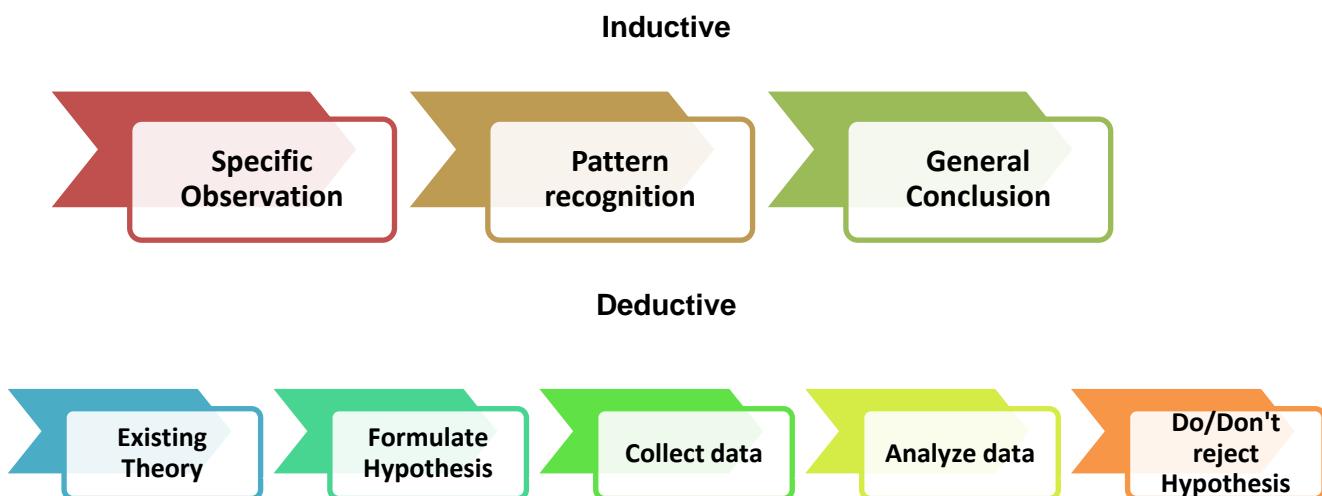
The semi-structured interview guide was collaboratively developed by the researcher and the research supervisor, with additional input received from the Research and Ethics Committee at Unisa, along with feedback gathered from the pilot testing phase. Following this preparation, the researcher initiated a dialogue with school-based social workers to extract insight into their experiences and the difficulties they encounter when providing intervention services to sexual minority youth. As the primary data collection instrument, the researcher conducted interviews either in person or through Microsoft Teams sessions, engaging with a total of 38 school social workers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:181; Dodgson, 2019:220; Yoon, & Uliassi, 2022:1097). This allowed the researcher to make observations first hand and record the interviews. With the permission of the participants, the researcher recorded the interviews digitally. The researcher subsequently transcribed the interviews himself, engaging first-hand with the data. Thereafter, the researcher and an independent coder analysed the data manually using Tesch's well-known eight steps (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198), as planned in Chapter Two (2.6.5). The researcher then engaged in a consensus discussion with the research supervisor and the independent decoder on the different sets of findings.

4.2.3 Qualitative research involves inductive and deductive reasoning

The main difference between inductive and deductive reasoning is that inductive reasoning aims to developing a theory while deductive reasoning aims at testing an existing theory (Streefkerk, 2023). Inductive reasoning moves from specific observations to broad generalisations. Deductive reasoning works the other way around. Inductive research approach is when there is little to no existing literature on a topic, it is common to perform inductive research, because there is no theory to test. The inductive approach consists of three stages namely observation, seeing patterns and developing a theory or general (preliminary) conclusion (Streefkerk, 2023). The limitation of an

inductive approach is that a conclusion drawn on the basis of an inductive method can never be fully proven, it can however be invalidated (Streefkerk, 2023).

In the deductive research approach the researcher will always start with a theory. This is usually the result of inductive research. Reasoning deductively means testing these theories. Deductive research consists of five stages, namely starting with an existing theory and creating a problem statement; formulating a falsifiable hypothesis based on existing theory; collecting data to test the hypothesis; analysing and testing the data; and the researcher deciding whether the null hypothesis can be rejected (Streefkerk, 2023). The limitation of a deductive approach is that the conclusions of deductive reasoning can only be true if all the premises set in the inductive study are true and the terms are clear. Figure 4.1 below provides an expounding view of inductive versus deductive reasoning (Streefkerk, 2023).



Streefkerk (2023)

FIGURE 4-1 INDUCTIVE VERSUS DEDUCTIVE REASONING IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The characteristics of inductive reasoning versus deductive reasoning in qualitative research, as described above, are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Qualitative researchers generate theory using inductive reasoning by building their findings from the bottom up, from the general to the specific (Borgstede & Scholz, 2021:2; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:181; Streefkerk, 2023). To conduct this process, the researcher meticulously transcribed the interview recordings verbatim. This immersive engagement with the data provided an initial understanding of the topics under consideration. Subsequently, the researcher engaged in a thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts, all the while identifying key topics. These

identified topics were then systematically organised into a structured framework of themes, sub-themes, categories and sub-categories, following Tesch's methodology as outlined in Chapter Two, section 2.6.5 (Creswell, 2018:193-198). This approach involved an inductive method, which entailed moving back and forth between the themes and the raw data found in the transcriptions, until a comprehensive set of themes was developed. Subsequently, employing a deductive approach, the researcher returned to the data to seek further evidence and storylines that would substantiate and strengthen the identified themes. This comprehensive method allowed for a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the research data.

4.2.4 Qualitative research focuses on the meaning of the participants

In this research project, the researcher's objective was to understand the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Throughout the qualitative research process, the researcher focused on comprehending and learning the meaning that the participants held regarding the phenomenon being studied, as well as their knowledge and experiences related to it (Creswell & Creswell 2018:182; Mwita, 2022:619; Zinyama, Chimbganda, Matare & Shava, 2022:924).

The focus was on exploring the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers while providing intervention services to persons of youth sexual minorities. To gather insights into these experiences and challenges, interviews were conducted with participants using the questions outlined in the interview guide (Addendum A). The participants' own words and responses were recorded and are presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

To centre the research on the participants' perspectives, the researcher employed a process of bracketing to set aside any preconceived notions the researcher might have had regarding the experiences and challenges faced by school social workers. Bracketing serves as a qualitative research technique aimed at mitigating the potential influence of the researcher's preconceived ideas, which could otherwise impact the research process negatively (Nikolopoulou, 2023). Hence, bracketing is understood as being a process in which researchers put their previous experiences of the phenomenon studied on hold to limit the impact of this on how the researcher perceives and describes the phenomenon. Bracketing is distinguished as two forms of researcher engagement, namely with data collection and with evolving findings (Nikolopoulou, 2023; McNarry *et al.*, 2019:138).

In operationalising bracketing, for the temporary setting aside of the researcher's assumptions and beliefs about LGBTQQIP2SAA, the researcher used reflective sessions with the research supervisor. Prior to and throughout the majority of the phases of the research process, with a particular emphasis during the data collection phase, the inclusion of reflective sessions served to safeguard against any potential influence of the researcher's personal experiences on the developing findings. Nikolopoulou (2023) supports the notion of having regular reflective sessions like this, since it can enhance the researchers' ability to sustain a reflexive stance and it also supports the researcher to be aware of –

...the researchers' reasons for undertaking the research; assumptions regarding gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status; the researcher's hierarchical place in the power structures of the research; the researcher's personal values and norms.

4.2.5 Qualitative research obtains a descriptive understanding

Mwita (2022:619) suggests that the researcher should gather data from participants in a manner that enables the acquisition of profound, detailed and descriptive information. The researcher's aim is to grasp the participants' experiences and interpretations as articulated in their own words, a process often referred to as obtaining an insider perspective and delivering a precise, in-depth portrayal (Doyle, McCabe, Keogh, Brady & McCann 2020:446; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:925). A specific example of using their own words was when school-based social workers used a term unknown to the researcher, namely "stabane" a derogative slur term for gay or lesbian individuals to describe an evolving phenomenon of a man who is romantically or sexually attracted to other men. In this study, school based-social workers gave responses about their experiences and challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities that were rich in detail and lengthy, detailing the different experiences and challenges faced in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

In the presentation of the research findings in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, the school based-social workers descriptions and words are quoted to illustrate the findings on school-based social workers understanding and knowledge of rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities and in some instances, to formulate the headings of sections in these Chapters.

4.2.6 Qualitative research design is emergent rather than prefigured

The design of qualitative research is emergent rather than prefigured and may change from the original design to be more effective as the research progresses. Therefore, it is essential for the

researcher to offer a detailed audit trail of all choices made while conducting the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:182; Thomas, 2017:140; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:925). The researcher outlined the research design in section 2.5.2 and the methodology in section 2.6 in Chapter Two. The researcher adapted and changed a few things as the research progressed. The researcher and the supervisor dealt with certain difficulties in using the concept interview guide that came to light after the pilot study. The changes made are listed in Table 4-1 below.

TABLE 4-1 INTERVIEW GUIDE

#	Interview guide used for pilot study	Changes on Interview guide	#	Reworked interview guide used for remaining interviews
1	Would you please tell me about your understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?	No change	1	Would you please tell me about your understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
2	What would you say are the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?	No change	2	What would you say are the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
3	What would you say are contributing factors to youth sexual minorities?	Replaced contributing factors with risk factors and challenges and split question into two exploring impact of risk factors	3	What would you say are risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities?
			4	What would you say are the impact of these risk factors or challenges on youth sexual minorities?
4	How would you describe your experiences and challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?	Question separated into two focusing on experiences and challenges	5	How would you describe your experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?
			6	Please describe your challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
5	Can you describe how you feel in rendering these services to youth sexual minorities?	No change	7	Can you describe how you feel in rendering these services to youth sexual minorities?

6	Can you describe how you feel in rendering these intervention services and what support services are available to you in rendering these intervention services?	Question reworked to prevent repetition and focusing on intervention services	8	What support services are available to you in rendering these intervention services?
7	What would say are measures that are being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools?	No change	9	What would say are the measures being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools?
8	How effective are such measures in supporting youth sexual minorities?	No change	10	How effective are such measures in supporting youth sexual minorities in schools?
9	What are your views on intervention services in schools rendered to youth sexual minorities and how can this be managed effectively?	To prevent confusion resulting from focusing on managing intervention services	11	How can these measures be managed more effectively in schools?
10	What are your views on how school based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?	No change	12	What are your views on how school based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?
11	What would you say the government should do to assist school based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?	No change	13	What would you say the government should do to assist school based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?

These changes allowed the researcher to ask clear questions and eliminated asking confusing questions, by focusing on one theme at a time making room for probing in different ways. The flexibility of the qualitative approach also allowed the researcher to adapt to the context and situation in which school-social workers find themselves and the conditions at each interview venue. This resulted in the researcher and participants being flexible in rescheduling appointments due to external challenges like loadshedding being experienced which prevented interviews from taking place as planned. In summary, the qualitative approach was experienced and proved as being effective in enabling the researcher to explore and describe the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Having revisited the nature and characteristics of the qualitative approach and describing its application in this study, the literature review is addressed in the next section.

4.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of literature or theory in qualitative research is multi-purposeful (Thomas, 2017:99). Creswell and Creswell (2018:27) offer three placement locations for the literature review in a qualitative study. Firstly, the researcher might include it in the introduction, since it is also used to frame the problem being introduced by the study. This is the more traditional approach that aids the researcher in systematically developing a theoretical framework where ideas and concepts are modelled in an orderly fashion. Secondly, literature can be presented as a separate section in the form of a review. Such a literature review's function is to provide a deeper understanding of the research topic. Thirdly, the literature becomes the basis of the inductive process of comparing and contrasting the findings of the qualitative study. Hence it becomes a tool to explain the issue and to develop categories and patterns that have been identified (Thomas, 2017:99). In this study, all three approaches as described above are utilised as follows:

- In Chapter One, literature is employed to contextualise the problem and offer an overview of LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, as well as to explore the prevalence of school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The literature is also instrumental in conceptualizing relevant definitions. Additionally, advocacy theory and ecological systems theory are substantiated by pertinent literature, while qualitative research is supported by a review of relevant literature.

- In Chapter Two literature is employed in discussing the research plan and research questions which were formulated to address the identified problem. The research objectives devised to address the specified research questions are also substantiated by existing literature. The research methodology, research methods and ethical considerations pertaining to the study are clarified by the use of literature.
- In Chapter Three literature is utilised to present perspectives on the current state of sexual minorities from the international, African and South African perspectives.
- In Chapter Four, the literature is used to introduce and substantiate the applied research process.
- In Chapter Five, Six and Seven, the literature is utilised in the form of as literature control, by comparing the findings of this study with other research related to the subject matter to support, contrast and discuss findings.
- In Chapter Eight literature is used to present the research findings, recommendations substantiated with literature and conclusions.

Next to be discussed are the research design as applied in the research.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN APPLIED

Creswell and Creswell (2018:182) indicate that beyond the general characteristics of qualitative research are the specific strategies which include the design and/or procedures that the researcher will follow. Schultz (2018:40) describes the research design as a protocol and plan for the research to be executed that will best answer the research question. As proposed in Chapter Two (section 2.5.2), the phenomenological design was followed supported by the explorative, descriptive and contextual design for this study to answer the research questions.

4.4.1 Phenomenological design

The phenomenological design employed in this research study aimed to explore research questions by immersing into the lived experiences of the study participants, as outlined by Cropley (2022:71). The researcher utilised this approach exploring inquiries such as, "What is the firsthand experience of such and such?" to gain a profound understanding of participants' perceptions of an event. This involved considering the study participants impressions and the meanings they attribute to the situation (Cropley, 2022:162). In this specific study, the researcher extended invitations to school-based social workers to share their direct, lived experiences related to

delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Participants were encouraged to articulate their perceptions, emotions and sensations associated with providing intervention services to this demographic within the scope of their work. The intention was to explore what the experience were like for them and how they navigated these encounters.

Furthermore, participants were invited to express their perspectives on the effectiveness and efficiency of current intervention services and to provide insights into potential improvements. Throughout the research process, the researcher firmly believed that obtaining first-hand accounts from school-based social workers with direct experience in delivering intervention services to young individuals identifying as sexual minorities yielded valuable and insightful data for the study.

4.4.2 Explorative research design

During the initial literature review conducted prior to commencing the research, it became evident that the topic of school social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities was under-researched. As outlined in Chapter Two, an exploratory research design was chosen to gain a foundational understanding of this phenomenon. The researcher employed face-to-face, in-depth interviews as the data collection method, aiming to elicit participants' insights and experiences in the provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities. In the specific exploration of this topic, participants were asked to share their experiences and challenges by responding to the following questions:

- Would you please tell me about your understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
- What would you say are the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
- How would you describe your experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?
- Please describe your challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- Can you describe how you feel about rendering these services to youth sexual minorities?

These questions with their answers from participants provided the researcher with information-rich data and created an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon for the researcher, as captured in the research findings (Chapters Five, Six and Seven).

4.4.3 Descriptive research design

The descriptive research design serves the primary purpose of “accurately and systematically describing a population, situation, or phenomenon, providing specific details on questions related to when, where and how” (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019:2002). In operationalizing this research design, Chapter Two of the research report outlined several research objectives, by describing the responses to them, including the following:

- To investigate the experiences and challenges encountered by school-based social workers in delivering social intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- To document the primary findings pertaining to the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- To draw comprehensive conclusions and provide recommendations regarding how existing school social work interventions can be enhanced to facilitate social workers in delivering effective and efficient intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

After the initial exploration of the experiences and challenges encountered by school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, the researcher sought detailed descriptions of the phenomenon. The interview guide employed the following questions to explore into more specific and detailed descriptions.

- Would you please tell me about your understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
- What would you say are the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
- What would you say are risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities?
- What would you say are the impact of these risk factors or challenges on youth sexual minorities?
- How would you describe your experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?
- Please describe your challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

- Can you describe how you feel in rendering these services to youth sexual minorities?
- What support services are available to you in rendering these intervention services?
- What would say are the measures being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools?
- How effective are such measures in supporting youth sexual minorities in schools?
- How can these measures be managed more effectively in schools?
- What are your views on how school based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?
- What would you say the government should do to assist school based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?

When participants were given the opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts freely, they provided descriptive answers (Sullivan-Bolyai & Bova, 2021:13). These in-depth descriptions were then transcribed and appear as storylines illustrating the findings in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

4.4.4 Contextual research design

Machado and Pacheco (2019:3) explain that in research, context has to do with events, actions and processes in which the participants of the research are involved. The goal of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the context within which participants find themselves, such as where they live and work. A contextual research design is described as instances where the participants are relating their emotions, actions, thoughts and interactions within a certain context or milieu, not only what that participants are saying, but where they are saying it (Bayeck, 2021:2). The study's context comprised schools in Gauteng with school-based social workers sharing similar working conditions, job descriptions and vocational training. These schools facilitated the researcher's access and allowed for the scheduling of appointments with social workers.

4.5 RESEARCH METHOD APPLIED

This section describes the research process that was followed based on the plan outlined in Chapter Two. The research method describes the various steps taken by the researcher to study the phenomenon of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities (Kumar, 2019:5; Creswell & Creswell, 2017:185).

4.5.1 Planning for the research

The researcher approached the Department of Social Work at Unisa to register for the research proposal writing module and was allocated a supervisor. The proposal was completed, approved with ethical clearance number 35981849_CREC_CHS_2023 and the preparation for data collection began (Attached as Addendum B).

In anticipation for data collection to commence in June 2023 the planning started much earlier. The researcher in consultation with the research supervisor crafted a timeline of events as possible ways to engage with prospective research participants. The researcher engaged with the research units at the Department of Education on the protocol to follow for interviewing potential research participants. The necessary application form to conduct such research was completed and submitted with supporting documents for the granting of approval to approach and interview research participants. Approval was granted by the Department of Education (see Addendum C). To enable the researcher to approach schools and solicit participation of school-based social workers, the Department of Education provided the researcher with a data base with the names of schools, the geographical areas where they are situated and their contact particulars.

4.5.2 The research population, sampling and participant recruitment

The term research population is discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.6.1). For this research, the population comprised school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities within the Gauteng Province of South Africa. At the time of the study there were, based on provided statistics from the Department of Education, 127 school-based social workers employed in the Gauteng Province (DBE, 2022). The research population was too large to include all its members in this qualitative research study and due to time, cost, logistical constraints and the limited nature of research for a master's degree, a sample of the population was selected according to specific criteria (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:344). Chivanga and Monyai (2021:13) state that in qualitative research the researcher selects the sample purposively and carefully so that the participants who are included in the study meet the inclusion criteria and provide multiple perspectives on the research question. The sample was purposively selected to include school-based social workers with expert and broad knowledge about the research topic. The selection criteria for inclusion in the sample required school-based social workers to be:

- registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions;
- employed by the Department of Basic Education or School Governing Bodies and servicing schools in the Gauteng province as a school-based social worker;
- accessible and willing to participate in the study; and
- proficient in communicating in English.

The researcher set up appointments with school-based social workers where telephonic enquiries revealed that the schools do have a full-time school-based social worker(s). With the above engagements in place, the researcher had access to school-based social workers and could prepare for the research process to unfold further. The researcher followed the criteria as set out above in eventually selecting 38 school-based social workers within the various Regions/Districts of the Department of Education within Gauteng province.

As a qualitative researcher, the researcher did not plan beforehand to include a specific number of participants. Sim, Saunders, Waterfield and Kingstone (2018:620) indicates, that the specific number of participants is not the researcher's main concern, but rather the inclusion of enough participants to provide a detailed understanding of the phenomenon to achieve data saturation (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:353; Creswell & Creswell, 2017:186). As required in qualitative research, the number of participants in the sample was increased until the questions were sufficiently answered and data repetition occurred, indicating that data saturation was reached. 'Saturation' or 'data saturation' refers to the point where the data being collected start to become repetitive and to repeat itself (Tracy, 2019:137) when the interviews are terminated.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection methods are informed by the research question, purpose and the research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017:186). In this section the preparation for data collection and the actual data collection process are discussed (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021:13; Creswell & Creswell, 2017:186). This is done by attending to the recruitment and preparation of participants, the preparation of the research instrument and pilot testing, preparation of the researcher, the location and settings for conducting the interviews and collecting the data.

4.6.1 Recruitment and preparation of participants

Manohar, MacMillan, Steiner-Lim and Arora (2018:3) discuss various methods for directly recruiting participants, including the facility-based, interceptive, telephonic, door-to-door and e-mail approaches. In the specific research described, in order to recruit participants, the researcher utilised data from the Department of Education to initiate telephonic contact with school-based social workers to introduce the research project to possible participants and to start preparing prospective participants for their participation. Subsequently, an e-mail was dispatched to potential participants, containing an invitation letter accompanied by a participant information sheet (Addendum D) and the interview guide (Addendum A). Those individuals who expressed a willingness to participate in the study were then requested to fill out a consent form (Addendum E).

In finalising the preparations of the participants for the interviews, the researcher had initiated a pre-interview confirmation process by contacting the participants a day before the scheduled interviews to ensure their availability. This resulted in four interviews that had to be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances.

4.6.2 Preparation of the research instrument and pilot testing

The researcher constructed the interview guide as described in Chapter Two (section 2.6.3), then proceeded to pilot test it in order to identify any problems or gaps regarding the questions and to get an idea of what to expect when conducting the interviews (McGrath *et al.*, 2019:1002-1005). Two school-based social workers were contacted and individual appointments were scheduled for conducting pilot test interviews with them. The researcher interviewed them in their offices and subsequently transcribed the interviews. Following this, in consultation with the research supervisor, adjustments were made to the interview guide to obtain richer descriptions as described in Table 4-1. The contents of these interviews were not used in this research.

4.6.3 Preparation of the researcher

As a gay man embarking on interviews with school-based social workers about intervention services for youth from sexual minorities, the researcher recognized the importance of mentally preparing himself for this task. In preparing for conducting the interviews, the researcher realised that it was crucial to approach these interviews with empathy, understanding and an open mind. The researcher understood that the experiences of LGBTQIIP2SAA youth and social work with

them, can be unique and often challenging, so the researcher needed to be emotionally resilient and compassionate in working with participants. Additionally, the researcher had to be well-informed about the issues faced by youth sexual minorities and the resources available to them. Hence, the researcher took great pains to ensure that insightful questions were asked and to create a safe and welcoming environment for the school-based social workers interviewed, to ultimately contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in supporting LGBTQQIP2SAA youth sexual minorities in educational settings. The researcher was focused to build an equal relationship with participants, develop trust and a rapport with them and made sure not to influence their storylines in the interviews for data collection.

4.6.4 Location and settings for conducting the interviews

Participants were actively engaged in selecting a suitable platform for their interviews, reflecting a collaborative approach to the research process. Upon the researcher's arrival at the interview sites, participants took the initiative to designate the specific location for the interviews (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:4). Most of the interviews occurred in participants' offices, creating an environment familiar and comfortable to them. Some interviews were conducted in school boardrooms, whilst others were conducted using the Microsoft Teams' recording functionality, as per the participants' preference, ensuring that the interviews took place within their own contextual settings, which likely contributed to a more relaxed and candid exchange of information. This approach fostered a conducive atmosphere for meaningful data collection and reflection within the participants' professional contexts.

Whilst it was noted that Indianscribes (2023) recommend that in preparation for the interviews, spaces with little distraction should be used for interviewing. two interviews were interrupted, possibly due to time constraints or other unexpected issues.

4.6.5 Collecting the data

The data collection process took place from the second week in June 2023 to the end of July 2023. The researcher utilised face-to-face semi-structured interviews with an interview guide (Addendum A) as the instrument for data collection (McGrath et al., 2019:1002-1005). Out of the total interviews, 28 were conducted as face-to-face interviews, enabling a more personal and in-depth interaction between the researcher and the participants. Additionally, ten interviews were conducted using Microsoft Teams, demonstrating flexibility in accommodating the preferences and convenience of the participants in a digital format. This combination of interview methods

provided a well-rounded approach to data collection, allowing for both physical presence and virtual engagement, based on the participants' needs and circumstances.

All interviews were conducted in English, because it is the medium of instruction at the University South Africa. All participants were informed upfront that the research activities would be conducted in English and there were no objections raised. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. The interviews commenced with the researcher inquiring whether the letter of invitation to participate in the research had been received and the consent form had been completed. If not, the participant was given a copy of the consent form to complete. The researcher clarified the goal of the research, the rights of the participants in participating in the study and the applicable ethical considerations.

The face-to-face interviews were digitally recorded with the participants' permission, for later review and transcription, as were the interviews conducted using Microsoft Teams' recording functionality. This comprehensive recording approach ensured that the researcher had access to accurate and complete data from all interview sessions, contributing to the research's integrity and thoroughness. The researcher asked and obtained each participant's permission (see Addendum E) to record the individual interviews before placing the digital recording device on a table or desk and switching it on or activating the recording functionality on Microsoft Teams. This allowed the researcher to fully concentrate on the interview.

The researcher explained that interviews would be transcribed and that all identifying details would be removed to preserve the anonymity of the participants (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:4; Kang & Hwang, 2023:2). Some participants shared their fear of disclosure and agreed that confidentiality needed to be assured and protected. The researcher gave the participants the reassurance that neither their identities, nor the names of their schools, would be disclosed. In their research with vulnerable groups Thummapol, Park, Jackson and Barton (2019:1) refer to challenges when doing sensitive research, stating that one must build trust and maintain privacy and confidentiality. The researcher took cognisance of this and acted accordingly.

On commencing with the interviews, this was done by confirming with participants how confidentiality would be maintained as described in the letter of invitation (Addendum D). This was followed by requesting biographical information from the participant before proceeding from the general questions to the specific and sensitive questions contained in the interview guide. The questions in the interview guide were asked as clearly as possible to ensure that the participants

felt comfortable and empowered, without fear in responding to the questions. The questions were open-ended and participants could respond in any way they felt comfortable with. The opening question was about the participants biographical background information. Most of the participants went into detail and were proud of their working experience in rendering intervention services to youth from sexual minorities. When asked how long they have been working as a school social worker some participants responded with humour and said, “far too long” or “I am part of the furniture”.

The skills required for effective interviewing in research, mentioned in Chapter Two (2.6.4) were utilised as follows (Dejonckheere & Vaughn, 2019:4) by the researcher having -

- striven to remain open and to generate a conducive environment that encouraged the participants to freely express their experiences as school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth from sexual minorities, by maintaining a calm and understanding disposition;
- allowed participants to do most of the talking (for instance, after transcribing, in a word count of participant DT’s interview, out of a total of 5 670 words, the researcher spoke 631 words and the participant spoke 5 039 words; out of a total of 3 521 words the researcher spoke 558 words and participant IvR spoke 2 963 words; and out of a total of 2 920 words the researcher spoke 572 words and participant CG spoke 2 348 words);
- maintained a listening posture during the interview and used probing as a method to allow the participants to unpack their responses to the interview questions (for example: “You mentioned that more resources must be allocated to you to be able to do your work, can you share with me what comes to mind?” and: “Please share with me your experience about”);
- asked clearly formulated questions as contained in the interview guide;
- asked open-ended questions (such as the following question used in all the interviews: “Please share with me your experience in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities”);
- asked the questions in a specific sequence, starting with the general and moving to the specific and from broad to narrow; and
- encouraged participants’ freedom of expression in all responses and maintained control of the interview.

In many interviews, when probing, the researcher used words that the participants themselves had used. At times, researcher had to refer back on the interview and ask questions for clarification, for instance: "You mentioned that you have a programme to support these learners in the school, would you mind sharing more information or share your experience with that aspect?" The participant then went into detail to explain the experience. The researcher also had to ask for clarification when unsure of the meaning of a word or statement, such as the concept 'Stabane'. During the interviews, participants shared their views and opinions openly without any uncertainty or discomfort. Some participants shared their emotions which included sadness, anger and fear about the situation many youth sexual minorities find themselves in. Strong emotions which included anger were also expressed about the lack of commitment in addressing the plight of youth sexual minorities in general and in the school-context.

Field notes can also be drawn on in qualitative research in the form of "reflective notes" (Babchuk, 2019:4). This is when the researcher has a particular question related to specific observations made during the interview, or to notes made on the researcher's personal experiences. Field notes go hand-in-hand with observations and add value to the unseen or unspoken elements in the research process. The use of field notes is an important data source and a common form of record keeping in observational studies (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018:2553). The researcher followed the interview guide and made field notes during the interview and often referred to his field notes and observations and could ask additional questions if needed. The field notes were valuable in that they provided additional information on the research setting and the processes involved during the interviews. The field notes made were used as an additional data collection source to gain insights into the interview. A record was kept of all field notes in a special notebook and the notes added value to the quality of the data. The researcher discussed these notes with his supervisor to clarify biases in his own interpretation of the observations. These notes helped the researcher gain insight into and an understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Participants were encouraged to talk as much as they wished. Following each interview, the researcher and supervisor engaged in a reflective process to his own perceptions and the way he conducted the interview. The researcher and supervisor took the opportunity to discuss the researchers' thoughts and feelings experienced about the interview with the supervisor, acknowledging the sensitive nature of the research topic. The supervisor played a crucial role in providing guidance and support throughout this process.

It is noteworthy that in research interviews the purpose is to collect information and data from participants, the researcher must consciously refrain from assuming a counselling or therapeutic role during the interviews and that if necessary, participants must be referred to other professionals for assistance (insert a reference). In the current research, maintaining this professional boundary was essential to ensure that the interviews remained focused on research objectives and did not inadvertently shift into a therapeutic context, which could have potentially affected the quality and integrity of the data collected.

The interview locations were private and no other people had access to the interview room for the duration of the interview. However, two interviews were interrupted, possibly due to time constraints or other unexpected issues. Once data saturation or redundancy was reached in conducting the interviews, the researcher ended the data collection phase of the research. Redundancy occurs when several sequential interviews have taken place and the researcher notices that information becomes repetitive and sees that no new themes or concepts are emerging (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:353).

The researcher and the study supervisor determined when data saturation was achieved and no new data emerged from the interview. This was achieved after 36 interviews were conducted. The researcher started noticing that repetitive data was emerging from the 35th interview. The last three interviews that the researcher conducted confirmed saturation (Tracy, 2019:137; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:246). The interviews were recorded in audio format and subsequently transcribed.

The researcher ensured that all personal information that includes the identity of the participants and the specific schools was removed to ensure confidentiality. All the recordings were downloaded from the digital voice recorder and the Microsoft Teams recording facility, onto an external hard drive and transcribed into text format with a unique alphabetical letter assigned to each line for reference in the data analysis.

4.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The concept “data analysis” can be described as a process of giving meaning to data and creating order and structure through analytical reflection on the data/information gained (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021:14; Creswell & Creswell, 2017:190; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:924). Data are analysed to establish how the collected data answer the research question. In this study the data obtained were analysed using the manual method as described by Tesch (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198). Castleberry and Nolen (2018:808) explain thematic data analysis as a process that involves

a systematic analysis of the data through the identification of themes and patterns based on the research question. The qualitative researcher works from the bottom-up by organising data and building patterned themes into abstract units of information (Taherdoost, 2021:32; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:189). The researcher used Tesch's eight steps for qualitative data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198) broadly to analyse the transcribed interviews, as proposed and outlined in Chapter Two (section 2.6.5).

In applying Tesch's steps of data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198), the researcher read through all the transcribed interviews to get a sense of the 'whole' and to obtain an overall meaning of what participants shared. The researcher then made notes of his overall impression. As the researcher read through the interviews, he made notes of common words and ideas in the margin of the transcribed page. In following the steps in analysing the data, the researcher –

- selected one interview and perused it all over again (by asking himself questions like, "what is this about?");
- made a list of all the topics from all the interviews and arranged them together into three categories, namely, major themes, unique themes and leftover topics;
- abbreviated the topics as codes, wrote the code next to the text concerned and checked for new categories or themes as they emerged;
- changed the codes to descriptive categories and reduced the categories by clustering familiar topics together;
- compiled a table of all the themes, sub-themes, categories and sub-categories (see Chapters Five, Six and Seven on research insights);
- read through all the transcripts repeatedly to identify storylines again for topics; and
- assembled the related material in one place as a report as described in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

Creswell and Creswell (2018:192-193), noted that the process of computerised coding is the same as in manual coding. The final report of the analysis consisted of segments from the interviews that were used for storylines captured in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In the consensus meeting between the researcher, the independent (manual) coder and the study supervisor, data analysis of the researcher and analysis of the coder were compared with the manually analysed results. It was decided that the themes from the manual coding report would be utilised, where adjustments had to be made on both ends of analyses this would be

incorporated and that for the storylines both analyses would be utilised (Fraser, Brady & Wilson, 2021:457).

4.8 DATA VERIFICATION

Data verification, as discussed in Chapter Two (section 2.6.6), refers to the steps taken, or the validity strategies employed to check the accuracy and credibility of a study. To achieve this, various strategies need to be applied. Zinyama *et al.* (2022:926) recommend that the researcher should make use of triangulation, peer review and participant validation. The researcher must furthermore have enough verbatim quotations from the storylines of participants to verify the gathered data. To ensure the trustworthiness of research, Stahl and King (2020:26-28) lists a number of strategies to be applied, namely triangulation; member checking; the existence of rich, thick descriptions; clarification of researcher bias; inclusion of negative or discrepant information; spending a prolonged time in the field; peer debriefing; and using an external project auditor. With reference to the evaluation and the trustworthiness of research, Guba's well known model (Daniel, 2019:102; Krefting, 1991:214-222; Guba 1981:75-91) highlights four strategies for the achievement of rigor in qualitative research, namely truth value (credibility), applicability (transferability), consistency (dependability) and neutrality (confirmability). The researcher used Guba's model of data verification to ensure the trustworthiness of the data obtained for this study (Krefting, 1991:214-222; Daniel, 2019:103).

4.8.1 Truth value (credibility)

Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) indicated that "Credibility is established when the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views." Data are credible if it is a good reflection of the participants' experiences (Daniel, 2019:104; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:92). The researcher was aware of the importance of having to accurately capture and document what the participants shared and what meaning they attached to their views. This process already commenced during the interviews. The researcher asked questions like "Am I hearing you correctly?" and "Am I correct that you said...?"

A researcher's prolonged engagement in the field of study concerned, could contribute to increasing the credibility of the data collected (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:226). In this case, due to the researcher's prolonged engagement with the research topic, his knowledge about the subject of LGBTQQIP2SAA contributed substantially to the credibility of the research. Therefore, the

researcher had a good understanding of what the situation is on the ground for youth sexual minorities.

To ensure the credibility of the research, the researcher employed the following strategies:

- The researcher had a *prolonged engagement* in collecting the data over a period of three months and this increased the rapport the researcher had with participants in extracting sensitive information (Stahl & King, 2020:27).
- Apart from obtaining the required data, the researcher ensured that during the interviews the researcher also *captured his observations* as part of the data collection process for the study (Daniel, 2019:104; Stahl & King, 2020:27). Furthermore, the researcher's casual observation of LGBTQQIP2SAA matters relating to youth sexual minorities in schools over the last couple of years informed him that a systematic exploration of this nature was needed. Some observations that the researcher made, were a lack of will from principals or SGB's to address LGBTQQIP2SAA matters and a lack of resources and skills to address these matters adequately. Socioeconomic circumstances do create more vulnerability of already vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTQQIP2SAA community and in this study specifically youth sexual minorities.
- The researcher *utilised persistent observation* and deep engagement with the data in developing the themes, sub-themes, categories, sub-categories and their codes, that helped to examine the data. The researchers read and reread the data consistently, analysed it, theorised about it and revised the concepts accordingly. The researcher studied the data until the final theory provided the intended depth of insight (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122).
- During the interviews the participants *shared rich, thick descriptions* of their experiences, including many perspectives. In other words, various storylines on a topic added to the validity of the findings (Daniel, 2019:104; Stahl & King, 2020:27).
- The researcher applied an independent data analysis process by utilisation of Tesch's steps of data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198). Babchuk (2019:5) refers to reflexivity as a critical self-reflection concerning the researchers' own biases or preconceptions. The researcher was aware that his background, perceptions and interests could influence the reliability of data. Therefore, he practised reflexivity throughout the research process by using a field journal to write down his observations and thoughts and discussed his observations and thoughts with the supervisor from time to time.

- The researcher made reflexive notes (Babchuk, 2019:5; Korstjens & Moser, 2018:123).
- In his journal the researcher self-reflected on his LGBTQQIP2SAA bias as a male/gay researcher. For example, he noted when a specific participant said that LGBTQQIP2SAA is not a problem but rather a decision or choice that the individual made and has to deal with. Another participant indicated that gender dysphoria is caused by exposure to social media and the lack of parental supervision over youth (in their adolescence developmental stage) in utilising social media spectrum. During another interview the researcher noted that there is denial from the participant about the existence of such a phenomenon and that it is regarded as just a “phase” that the individual is going through, indicating the lack of commitment by the participant to address it.
- Fairness through extensive use of quotes was employed when reporting the findings, which involves the heavy use of quotes to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The research findings are presented with the participants quotations in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.
- The researcher asked several distinct questions regarding topics relating to intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities. Participants supported their statements with examples and the researcher asked follow-up questions to clarify it (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121; Stahl & King, 2020:27).

4.8.2 Applicability (transferability)

Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) define transferability as “The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other participants.” The researcher provided a rich, thick description of the participants’ details, the participants’ understanding of their roles in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in the school context and of the findings of the study, using verbatim quotations from participant interviews in order to achieve transferability (Daniel, 2019:104; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:256; Zinyama et al., 2022:926). The thick descriptions by participants entailed detailed accounts of behaviour in their context at schools where the social workers are employed which became meaningful for the researcher as an outsider (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121). In all the descriptions the participants used examples of behaviour. The researcher collected the data from social workers at schools who are specifically tasked to respond to LGBTQQIP2SAA matters. According to Adler (2022:599) the specific persons from whom data are collected increase transferability and the role of the school-based social worker is described in Chapter Five, Six and Seven. The number of sessions with individual participants comprised 38 interviews at ten different schools

and the length of sessions was between 30 to 60 minutes per interview or session. The researcher utilised purposive sampling in the selection of participants and it supported the researcher to focus on key informants, who are particularly knowledgeable (Crossman, 2020:2). This allowed the researcher to maximise the data that were uncovered from 38 school based social workers and it provided the researcher with greater in-depth findings.

4.8.3 Dependability (consistency)

Dependability implies that the research study should be replicable in other contexts and have the same results. Dependability also implies that the data analysis process is in line with the accepted standards for a particular design (Coleman, 2021:2043; Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122). Strategies usually applied to ensure the dependability of a research study include rich descriptions of the research methods used, triangulation of data, peer examination, the researcher's position, the coding procedure and the research audit trail (Krefting, 1991:217; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:251; Stahl & King, 2020:26-28). The researcher ensured a research audit trail through compiling a description of the plan for the research, as presented in Chapter Two and presenting details regarding how the research was executed in this Chapter. The audit trail includes documents on data collection regarding how categories were arrived at and how decisions were made (Carcary, 2020:169-170; Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122). The researcher ensured that the research process was captured for an audit trail. This included providing the research supervisor with all transcribed interviews and notes, all meetings were documented in a research diary and reflective notes were taken and captured after interviews. All the findings were captured, which included a data analysis report from the independent decoder, all literature and the research report was stored on an external hard drive specially dedicated to the research study. This audit trail will provide transparency of the research path followed and the process for an audit of what took place (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:122; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:296).

The researcher made every attempt possible to minimise any assumptions and their possible impact on the research process by declaring any biases he was aware of and by being open-minded and receptive to any feedback in this direction from his research supervisor. The proposal development process and ongoing reflection assisted him in uncovering and deal with any biases and preconceived perceptions that may have existed. The researcher conducted the data analysis by utilising Tesch's eight-step data analysis process to categorise the data assisted the researcher to improve the dependability of the study (Castleberry & Nolan, 2018:2; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198).

4.8.4 Confirmability (neutrality)

According to Stahl and King (2020:28) confirmability in qualitative research can be compared with objectivity in quantitative research. The researcher applied different strategies to ensure confirmability, namely triangulation, reflexivity and bracketing (Krefting 1991:217; Stahl & King, 2020:28; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:296).

- **Triangulation** denotes to using several theories, information sources, methods or investigators when studying a single phenomenon. Adler (2022:601) describes triangulation as a process that “involves the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence.” Triangulation increase the comfortability and trustworthiness of a study (Adler, 2022:601; Daniel, 2019:104; Zinyama *et al.*, 2022:296). The researcher used interviews with different school-based social workers employed at various schools as information sources. The school-based social workers had different functions, roles and responsibilities at the schools, including that of being part of and educator in a specific curriculum subject, forming part of the disciplinary committee, spearheading awareness programmes and projects at the school. School-based social workers are also employed at different levels of the staff structure such as HOD and educators. The school-based social workers had different qualification including the degrees of BA, MA and PHD in social work as outlined in Chapter Five.
- **Reflexivity** refers to the researcher’s capacity to critically self-reflect concerning his own biases about the research and issues concerning the research (Tracy, 2019:233). In this regard the researcher was aware of personal biases, the role of his own personal background and values including sensitivity to different cultures, genders, socioeconomic statuses that could possibly influence the researcher’s interpretation in the study (Chivanga & Monyai, 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2018:183; Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023:241; Tracy, 2019:233). Where challenges were experienced peer review was employed and consultation with the study supervisor was utilised, to ensure active reflexivity on the side of the researcher.
- **Bracketing** also relates to the researcher’s biases. Bracketing is a process through which researchers attempt to set aside any aspects of themselves (such as knowledge of pre-existing theories and personal views) that might influence their research (Olmos-Vega *et al.*, 2023:242). The researcher utilised bracketing as part of his strategy to address his biases during the study. For this purpose, the study supervisor proposed that the researcher kept a journal to note down any biases he might hold (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:6). This he did throughout the research process.

The researcher documented his thoughts and feelings in this regard and discussed them in detail with her study supervisor. The participants were allowed to express themselves without the researcher influencing them with leading or closed questions. The researcher also did not offer his own opinion in the interviews. While interviewing participants, the researcher was aware of his role as a male researcher and was mindful of any prejudices he might hold due to his own experience, views and feelings identifying as a member of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community. The researcher included *various theoretical perspectives* and existing research studies were consulted to support the researcher's findings and to reduce the effect of researcher bias (DeCarlo, Cummings & Agnelli, 2021:799; Krefting, 1991:221). The use of an independent coder further ensured that the research findings presented were indeed those of the participants and were not influenced by researcher bias (Fouché, Strydom & Roestenburg, 2021:89; Zinyama et al., 2022:929).

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is a vital part of every research project (Arifin, 2018:30, Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28). In this research project, the ethical issues to keep in mind during the study were presented in Chapter Two (section 2.7). As Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:209-212) recommends, the researcher developed a strong sense of ethics and accepted moral principles or rules of conduct about what is correct and required in research because of the many choices requiring discretion that must be maintained by qualitative researchers. The researcher endeavoured to be honest and respectful throughout the research process (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022:18-19; Chivanga & Monyai, 2021:15). This study required school-based social workers to be interviewed on sensitive issues relating to their understanding and challenges of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities, strategies and programmes implemented at their schools.

It is the researcher's duty to protect the information of participants in the study (Muzari, Shava & Shonhiwa, 2022:18-19). Therefore, ethical issues were carefully considered in the collection of the information for this research, in line with recommendations by Punch (2016:277). The researcher was also aware that from an ethical perspective, making sensitive information known in research may hold a risk and be detrimental for the school concerned. Therefore, the findings and storylines do not specify any school (Arifin, 2018:30). To ensure the application of ethical considerations as outlined in Chapter Two, the researcher adhered to the following ethical criteria (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28).

- Beneficence - where the main intent of research is to do good. As a researcher the primary focus is to maximize benefits and minimise risks (see section 2.7.2).
- Autonomy/self-determination - which includes informed consent and confidentiality and that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time.
- Justice - referring to the purpose and motivation for the study, as outlined in Chapter One. The problem statement in section 1.3 proved the justification for the research project. From a social work perspective, rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools remains a primary challenge within the school educational sector for South Africa. Schools as educational and societal institutions are obligated to address this as part of their transformation mandate.
- Positive contribution to knowledge: the researcher indicated to participants during the interviews that their contribution will positively contribute to the body of knowledge in responding to the needs of youth sexual minorities in schools in South Africa. In one of the questions, the researcher explored the challenges and suggestions with the participants. This provided the study with information on what needs to be done in responding to the needs of social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Most participants expressed the need for such research with the focus on youth sexual minorities in stating that it will support the learner development fraternity. The Department of Basic Education's permission to conduct the research also expressed the need for such a study. The ethical considerations and principles applied in the research, are discussed next.

4.9.1 Obtaining informed consent

Recruiting the participants in this research was based on obtaining their voluntary informed consent. Informed consent is the standard approach for operationalising the ethical principle of respect for persons (Brear, 2020:71; Klykken, 2022:796). Informed consent embodies the provision of adequate information to a research participant regarding the research being conducted and obtaining an understanding regarding the information to be provided, as well as obtaining the participant's voluntary participation (Arifin, 2018:31; Klykken, 2022:781). Permission to conduct this study was obtained from both the Department of Social Work Research and Ethics Committee and the Department of Basic Education. Thereafter the researcher wrote an invitation letter to all the participants, inviting them to participate and informed them about the goal and procedure of the research, the risks and benefits involved, confidentiality and the researcher's contact details, while also confirming that participation is voluntary (Arifin, 2018:30; DeCarlo et

al., 2021:173). This ensured that participants had a full understanding of what they are participating in. Informed consent forms (Addendum E) were given to prospective participants for completion after a thorough explanation of the study, its aims and their voluntarily participation (Arifin, 2018:32). They were also assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without fear of penalisation or discrimination. As far as obtaining informed consent from participants is concerned, the researcher was continually aware of possible consequences should ethical principles not be adhered to. Informed consent implied more than just a once-off agreement; it included continuous negotiations with individual participants in obtaining their consent which was required for the digital recording of their interviews and transcribing of the digital recording of the interviews. As prescribed, participants were made aware that the information to be obtained was to be recorded and that their consent for this was required. Arrangements were made for all consent forms to be safely stored as part of the audit trail of the study (see Addendum E).

4.9.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality refers to the ethical principle of “not disclosing information that is discussed between the researcher and the participant” and only known to the researcher (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:4; Coffelt, 2017:228). This also entails ensuring that no individual participant can be identified from the transcripts or the research report. The researcher sent the transcribed interviews sent to the independent coder contained no personal or school details. Confidentiality also refers to the private nature of handling information. Confidentiality in research implies that the researcher fully intends to safeguard the information, identities and privacy of the participants. Muzari *et al.* (2022:18-19) refers to the responsibility to protect the participants and that confidentiality is part of the reassurance the researcher gives the participants that their shared information will be kept confidential throughout all stages of the research process. In applying the principle of confidentiality, the researcher ensured that no names or other identifiable information of participants and their employers appear on the data records. In this project, no names of participants were identified during the interviews. The researcher observed that some participants feared that if the name of their schools were mentioned, the identity of that participant would become known. Therefore, the researcher had to ensure that the names of the schools were kept confidential. If during the interview, a participant made any reference to a specific school, the researcher redacted the name from the text by obscuring or removing it. To further ensure confidentiality, the researcher developed an alphabetical coding system when he transcribed the interviews to mark each transcription without mentioning the participant’s name. In practical terms,

as discussed with participants, the following ethical elements were to be applied in this study (Arifin, 2018:30-33; Tracy, 2019:73,90):

- All transcripts, audio recordings and notes would be kept in a secure space with the researcher only having access to this space.
- No identifying information of participants and their schools was to be listed and written on the audio device, notes or transcripts.
- No identities of participants and their schools were to be discussed with the transcriber, independent coders, supervisor or editor.
- All recordings, notes and transcripts would be kept safely and would be destroyed five years after completion of the research.

4.9.3 Anonymity

Ensuring the anonymity of interviewees allows researchers to obtain reliable qualitative data on sensitive topics from participants and it enables fieldwork researchers to gain candid responses from interviewees who are thereby free to speak without fear of consequences (Dougherty, 2021:481). Anonymity ensures that the researcher or anybody else cannot trace the data to an individual participant (Coffelt, 2017:228). In this study both the participants and the schools where they are employed at, were ensured of anonymity during the interviews, the researcher had with participants to reassure them that no personal nor institutional details would be used. After completion of the data collection, no information could be linked with a specific individual (Coffelt, 2017:228).

In summary, all participants were assured of the maintenance of the principles of confidentiality, anonymity and privacy in the research (Tracy, 2019:73,90; Arifin, 2018:30-33; Coffelt, 2017:228; Dougherty 2021:481; DeCarlo *et al.*, 2021:173).

4.9.4 Beneficence

The purpose of beneficence in research is to promote and secure the well-being of all research participants and the community (Brear & Gordon, 2021:110). Beneficence is a core research ethics principle, capturing researchers' commitment to assess the potential impacts of their research and develop strategies to minimise risks and maximise benefits. Minimising physical, social and economic risks to research participants is also referred to as non-maleficence. The researcher took precautionary steps to protect participants from potential and actual psychosocial and physical harm or risk occurring to them (Brear & Gordon, 2021:110).

The design of the study was planned in such a way so as not to expose participants to risks. The researcher acknowledged that intervention services to youth sexual minorities is a sensitive subject and could have potentially evoked emotional responses from participants. Adler (2022:600-601) state that the researcher should employ reflexivity in the form of intellectual honesty (self-awareness) to enhance ethical rigour in qualitative research and thereby, ensure beneficence and minimise risks/harm to participants.

The researcher managed the potential psychosocial harm or risk to participants at the beginning of each interview by checking whether the participant was willing and able to proceed with the interview and speak about intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities at their places of employment. At the end of each interview, the researcher also enquired whether the participant felt the need for debriefing. As it is pointed out that experiencing psychosocial harm or risk experienced are potentially a long term and/or serious issue (Brear & Gordon, 2021:110), participants were invited to contact the researcher at any time if they needed any support after their interviews.

4.9.5 Management of information

Information gathered through data collection in various ways must be managed so that it will be secured in terms of anonymity and confidentiality. Storing of data must be done in such a way that it should still be accessible for a period of five years after the research was conducted (Chauvette, Schick-Maraoff & Molzahn, 2019:4; Thomas, 2017:46). In adhering to this requirement, the researcher stored and made a backup of the information in password-protected documents as well as on a flash-drive. The following information was printed as working documents during the research process: all notes that researcher made during the research process, the researcher's diary/journal, the transcribed interviews that were used in the data analysis and copies of the independent coders' reports. All the printed documents are stored in a safe space that only the researcher has access to (Kanza & Knight, 2022:2). The digital recordings are stored in the same space (Ingrim, 2016:1).

4.9.6 Debriefing of participants

DeCarlo *et al.*, (2021:576), indicates that debriefing sessions are recommended as a strategy to reduce any potential harm to participants in research. The nature of the interview will provide an opportunity for debriefing of the participant (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:6; Eppich, Gormley & Teunissen, 2019:87). The researcher was aware that there could be risks regarding psychological

stress experienced by participants during the research process. These risks were explained to participants and they were informed of the availability of a debriefing facility should they need it(see Addendum F). No participant expressed the need for debriefing after concluding the interviews.

4.10 CONDITIONS THAT IMPACTED ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The application of the qualitative research process can be influenced by various conditions that impact on the researcher's experience and the quality of the research outcomes. These conditions are often interconnected and can have both practical and psychological implications. Table 4.2 below provides and overview of the conditions that impacted on the research process and how the researcher mitigated these situations or conditions.

TABLE 4-2 CONDITIONS IMPACTING ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS AND MITIGATING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE RESEARCHER

Condition	Discussion	Mitigating strategies
Researcher Bias	<p>Researchers bring their own backgrounds, beliefs and experiences to the research process. This can introduce bias in data collection, interpretation and analysis. Remaining aware of these biases and taking steps to mitigate them are crucial for maintaining the integrity of the research (Holms, 2020:4; Berndt, 2020:226; Braun & Clarke, 2023:2).</p>	<p>Researcher bias can significantly impact the research process and in this case, as a gay male researcher, the researcher brought his own unique background, beliefs and experiences to the research. These personal factors have the potential to introduce bias into various aspects of the study, including data collection, interpretation and analysis. However, the researcher was acutely aware of these potential biases and recognized the importance of taking proactive steps to mitigate them. This awareness was crucial for maintaining the integrity and objectivity of the research. To address potential bias, the researcher employed several strategies. Firstly, he engaged in self-reflection to acknowledge his own biases and preconceptions related to the research topic. This reflection allowed the researcher to approach the research with an open mind and a willingness to challenge his own assumptions. Additionally, the researcher sought input and feedback from his study supervisor who offered diverse perspectives acting as critical voices during the research process. Furthermore, the researcher was diligent in adhering to established research methodologies and ethical guidelines, ensuring that his personal beliefs did not influence data collection or analysis inappropriately. The researcher also remained transparent in documenting his own role and potential biases in the research. Thereby allowing readers to assess the research's credibility and</p>

		trustworthiness. Overall, while his personal background and experiences could have introduced bias, the researcher's commitment to self-awareness and rigorous research practices helped mitigate these biases and maintain the research's objectivity and validity.
Emotional Resilience	Emotional resilience plays a crucial role in qualitative research, especially when delving into sensitive or emotionally charged topics. Researchers often encounter distressing narratives and challenging situations during interviews and data analysis. Hence, the researcher's ability to manage these emotions is essential to maintain the integrity of the research process (Silverio, Sheen, Bramante, Knighting, Koops, Montgomery, November, Soulsby, Stevenson, Watkins Easter & Sandall, 2022:8).	In this study, the researcher faced a unique challenge related to his personal experiences during his school-going years, which could potentially trigger strong emotional responses when dealing with similar narratives presented by school-based social workers. To ensure the research remained unbiased and objective, the researcher had to exercise a high degree of emotional resilience. This resilience allowed him to compartmentalize his personal experiences and emotions, preventing the researcher from interfering with the research process. This enabled the researcher to remain neutral, empathetic and non-judgmental when school-based social workers shared their own narratives or stories related to intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities. When acknowledging the researcher's own emotional triggers and consciously working to manage them, the researcher ensured that his personal history did not overshadow the voices and experiences of the participants. This demonstrates the researcher's commitment to maintaining the research's credibility and impartiality while exploring sensitive and potentially distressing topics. Emotional resilience, in this context, acted as a vital tool in navigating the complexities of qualitative research and honouring the authenticity of the participants' accounts.

Time Constraints	<p>Conducting qualitative research can be time-consuming. The need for in-depth data collection and analysis, along with potentially complex ethical considerations, can result in lengthy research periods.</p> <p>Researchers must manage their time effectively to meet project deadlines (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:357; DeCarlo <i>et al.</i>, 2021:544).</p>	<p>The researcher encountered the challenge of time constraints in conducting qualitative research. This research process was remarkably time-consuming, especially given the requirement for thorough data collection and analysis. Additionally, the intricate ethical considerations inherent in the research topic can further extend the time required for each phase of the study. Consequently, it has become paramount for the researcher to develop effective time management strategies to ensure that he meets project deadlines while maintaining the quality and rigor of research, which was supported and encouraged by the study supervisor. This involved meticulous planning, setting clear milestones and maintaining a disciplined schedule to balance the demands of his academic workload with the necessary dedication to the research objectives.</p>
Participant Recruitment	<p>Recruiting participants, especially for sensitive topics, can be challenging. Researchers may encounter difficulty finding suitable participants who are willing to share their experiences openly (Silverio <i>et al.</i>, 2022:8).</p>	<p>Participant recruitment can indeed pose significant challenges, particularly when researching sensitive topics. This difficulty stems from the need to find suitable participants who are not only relevant to the research but also willing to share their experiences openly and candidly. This research topic focussed on a sensitive topic. The researcher encountered these challenges first-hand. To address the challenge of participant recruitment, the researcher adopted a purposive sampling approach, carefully selecting participants who possessed the necessary knowledge and experiences related to the research topic. This approach ensured that the researcher targeted individuals who could provide valuable insights into the subject matter. Additionally, the researcher recognized the importance of establishing trust and rapport with potential participants. This involved clear</p>

		<p>and transparent communication about the research's purpose, objectives and ethical considerations. The researcher emphasised the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, assuring them that their voices would be heard without judgment. To enhance recruitment efforts, the researcher also sought collaboration with relevant organisations or institutions that could facilitate access to potential participants. These partnerships helped in identifying individuals who were not only willing to participate but also felt comfortable doing so within a supportive and ethical research context.</p> <p>Overall, while participant recruitment for sensitive topics can be challenging, a combination of purposive sampling, trust-building measures and strategic collaborations assisted to overcome these hurdles and ensure that the research garners meaningful insights from those who are willing to share their experiences openly.</p>
Researcher Reflexivity	Reflexivity involves researchers critically examining their own role in the research process. It requires self-awareness and an acknowledgment of how the researcher's presence and actions may influence the data and participant interactions (Adler, 2022:600-601; Deggs & Hernandez, 2018:2552-2553).	<p>Researcher reflexivity is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research, demanding that researchers engage in critical self-examination throughout the research process. It involved a continuous and thoughtful exploration of the researcher's own role, biases and perspectives and how these elements might impact the data collection, interpretation and participant interactions. The researcher embraced the concept of researcher reflexivity by fostering self-awareness and acknowledging my potential influence on the research process. This involved regular introspection to recognize the researcher's own biases, assumptions and personal experiences that could shape his interactions with participants and his interpretation of their responses. Moreover, the researcher remained attentive to the dynamics of power and</p>

		<p>privilege that may exist between himself as the researcher and the participants. Being aware of these dynamics allowed me to create a research environment that was respectful, equitable and conducive to open dialogue. The researcher also documented his reflections and observations throughout the research journey, maintaining a reflexive journal. This journal served as a record of his evolving thoughts and insights, which were invaluable in later stages of data analysis and interpretation. By embracing researcher reflexivity, the researcher aimed to enhance the transparency and rigor of the research, recognizing that the researchers' presence and actions were integral to the research process and had the potential to both positively and negatively influence the study's outcomes.</p>
Data Analysis Skills	<p>Effective qualitative data analysis demands specialized skills in coding, categorizing and interpreting qualitative data. Researchers should be proficient in these techniques to draw valid and meaningful conclusions from their data (Babchuk, 2019:4; Mwita, 2022:620).</p>	<p>Proficiency in data analysis skills are essential for conducting effective qualitative research. This expertise is particularly critical when it comes to coding, categorizing and interpreting qualitative data, as these processes form the backbone of deriving valid and meaningful conclusions from the collected data. The researcher recognized the significance of honing these skills to ensure the rigor and reliability of the analysis and approached this aspect in the following ways:</p> <p>Coding: The researcher developed a systematic approach to coding by creating a coding scheme or framework that aligned with the research objectives. This framework allowed him to categorize data into meaningful segments, making it easier to identify patterns, themes and recurring ideas within the dataset.</p>

		<p>Categorizing: The researcher paid meticulous attention to categorizing data into relevant themes and sub-themes. This involved sorting and organising data based on similarities and differences, ultimately helping to construct a coherent narrative that answered the study's research questions.</p> <p>Interpreting: Interpretation of qualitative data requires a deep understanding of context and an ability to extract rich insights from participants' narratives. The researcher employed triangulating data from multiple sources, engaging in constant comparison and seeking diverse perspectives to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the findings.</p> <p>Software Utilisation: The researcher leveraged qualitative data analysis software tools to streamline and enhance the analysis process. These tools facilitated data organisation, coding and the management of large datasets, ultimately saving time and increasing the accuracy of the analysis.</p> <p>Consultation and Peer Review: The researcher actively sought input and feedback from the study supervisor who is experienced in qualitative research. Their perspectives and insights were invaluable in refining the analysis and ensuring the validity of the findings.</p> <p>Overall, proficiency in qualitative data analysis skills played a crucial role in uncovering the depth and distinction within the collected data, allowing the researcher to draw valid conclusions and contribute meaningfully to the research field.</p>
Interpersonal Skills	Building rapport with participants is crucial in qualitative research. Researchers must possess strong	Interpersonal skills are indispensable in the scope of qualitative research, where building rapport with participants is paramount. The researcher exhibited strong interpersonal abilities to establish trust and foster open

	<p>interpersonal skills to establish trust and encourage open communication during interviews and interactions (DeCarlo, 2019:486; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:1211).</p> <p>communication during interviews and interactions. In the study the researcher recognized the pivotal role of the following skills in ensuring the success of the study:</p> <p>Active Listening: Active listening was at the core of the interpersonal approach. The researcher made a conscious effort to attentively listen to participants, demonstrating empathy and genuine interest in their narratives. This not only helped in building rapport but also encouraged participants to share their experiences more openly.</p> <p>Empathy and Sensitivity: The researcher approached interactions with empathy and sensitivity, recognizing the potential emotional challenges participants might face when discussing sensitive topics. This empathetic stance created a safe and non-judgmental environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.</p> <p>Respect for Diverse Perspectives: Qualitative research often involves engaging with participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences. The researcher embraced a respectful and inclusive attitude, acknowledging and valuing the diversity of perspectives presented by participants.</p> <p>Establishing Trust: Trust is the cornerstone of effective participant-researcher relationships. The researcher took deliberate steps to establish trust by being transparent about the research objectives, ethical considerations and the confidentiality of participants' information.</p> <p>Communication Skills: Effective communication was key in ensuring that participants understood the research process, their rights and the potential impact of their contributions. Clear and open communication between the</p>
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		<p>participants and researcher, fostered a sense of collaboration and partnership in the research endeavour.</p> <p>Flexibility and Adaptability: Every participant is unique and participants' communication styles and preferences vary. The researcher remained flexible and adaptable in this approach, tailoring his interactions to suit the needs and comfort levels of each participant.</p> <p>Ethical Consideration: The researcher consistently adhered to ethical guidelines and principles in all interpersonal interactions. This involved respecting participants' autonomy, obtaining informed consent and ensuring that participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any point. By prioritizing these interpersonal skills, the researcher aimed to create a supportive and respectful environment that not only facilitated data collection but also honoured the voices and experiences of the participants. This, in turn, enriched the quality and depth of the research findings.</p>
Data Management	<p>Managing and organising qualitative data, which can include text, audio or visual material, can be complex. Researchers need effective data management strategies to keep track of their data throughout the research process (Bos, 2020:262-265),</p>	<p>Data Management: Effective data management is a critical aspect of qualitative research, as it involves handling diverse types of data, including text, audio and visual material. Researchers must implement robust data management strategies to maintain organisation and traceability of their data throughout the research process. The researcher recognized the complexity of this task and employed several strategies to manage and organise the study's qualitative data effectively:</p> <p>Data Coding and Labelling: The researcher developed a systematic coding and labelling system to categorize and identify different data segments. Each piece of data was assigned a unique code or label based</p>

on themes, participants, or other relevant criteria. This system ensured that the researcher could easily retrieve specific data when needed.

Data Storage and Backups: The researcher maintained secure and organised storage for all research data, whether digital or physical. Digital data were stored on password-protected devices and cloud-based platforms, while physical data, such as consent forms or interview notes, were stored in a locked and a confidential location. Regular backups were performed to prevent data loss.

Version Control: As the research progressed, the researcher kept track of different versions of documents, data files and analysis outputs. This helped the researcher maintain a clear timeline of changes and revisions, ensuring the integrity of the data.

Data Transcription and Translation: The researcher transcribed audio data and translated material into the research language. Careful attention was paid to accuracy and consistency during this process. The transcriptions and translations were also organised systematically.

Data Security and Confidentiality: Ethical considerations were paramount in data management. The researcher ensured that all data, especially sensitive information, were handled with the utmost confidentiality and in compliance with ethical guidelines. Identifying details were removed to protect participant anonymity.

Data Retrieval and Accessibility: The researcher organised the data in a way that facilitated easy retrieval and accessibility for analysis. This involved

		<p>creating a structured folder system, maintaining detailed documentation and using appropriate software tools for data analysis.</p> <p>Audit Trail: The researcher maintained an audit trail that documented all data-related activities, including changes, annotations and decisions made during data analysis. This trail served as a record of the research process and helped ensure transparency and accountability.</p> <p>By implementing these data management strategies, the researcher not only maintained the integrity and security of the research data, but also streamlined the analysis process, making it more efficient and organised.</p> <p>Effective data management is crucial for maintaining the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research findings.</p>
Theoretical Framework	<p>Qualitative research often operates within a theoretical framework or conceptual model. Researchers must ensure that their chosen framework aligns with the research objectives and informs the research process effectively (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:30; Kross & Giust, 2019:27; Tracy, 2019:49).</p>	<p>In qualitative research, the selection and application of a theoretical framework or conceptual model are essential for guiding the research process and ensuring that it aligns with the research objectives effectively. The researcher recognized the significance of this aspect and made deliberate choices to ensure that the theoretical framework was relevant and informed the study in a meaningful way. The researcher took the following considerations into account when applying a theoretical framework:</p> <p>Alignment with Research Objectives: The researcher thoroughly assessed the research objectives and questions to determine the most suitable theoretical framework. The chosen framework needed to align closely with the research goals and provide a conceptual lens through which to explore the research topic.</p>

	<p>Theoretical Relevance: The researcher ensured that the theoretical framework selected had direct relevance to the subject matter of the research. This relevance allowed the researcher to draw upon established theories or concepts to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.</p> <p>Guidance for Data Collection and Analysis: The chosen theoretical framework served as a guide for data collection and analysis. It informed the development of interview questions, coding schemes and the identification of key themes or concepts during data analysis.</p> <p>Contextual Fit: The researcher assessed whether the theoretical framework was appropriate for the specific context of the research. Theoretical frameworks should resonate with the unique characteristics and dynamics of the study population and setting.</p> <p>Flexibility: While a theoretical framework provided structure, it also allowed for flexibility in case unexpected findings or insights emerged during the research using the emergent design. This flexibility ensured that the framework did not overly constrain the exploration of new ideas or perspectives.</p> <p>Integration with Existing Literature: The researcher integrated the chosen theoretical framework with existing literature and research on the topic. This integration allowed for building on prior knowledge and contribute to the existing body of research.</p> <p>Constant Reflexivity: Throughout the research process, the researcher engaged in ongoing reflexivity to assess the applicability and effectiveness</p>
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	<p>of the theoretical framework. Where needed, the researcher made adjustments to better align the framework with the evolving research context.</p> <p>By carefully considering these factors and choosing a theoretical framework that was well-suited to the research objectives, the researcher ensured that this qualitative research project was theoretically grounded and provided a solid foundation for data collection, analysis and interpretation. This approach contributed to the depth and rigor of the study's findings and conclusions.</p>
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In conclusion, qualitative research is a dynamic process influenced by various conditions, both internal and external. Researchers must be attentive to these conditions and take proactive measures to address challenges as they arise. By doing so, researchers can enhance the rigor, validity and ethical soundness of their qualitative research endeavours (Hamilton & Finley, 2020:5).

4.11 LIMITATIONS RELATED TO THE APPLICATION OF THE QULITATIVE RESEARCH PROCESS

Miles (2019:2), indicate that limitations are inherent in academic work. Presenting limitations also supports proper interpretation and validity of the findings and can impact on the study (Fetzer, 2022:282; Ross & Bibler-Zaidi, 2019:261). Limitations occur during research in instances that are out of the researcher's control and could affect the progress of the study. Limitations originate from the conceptual framework and research design, thereby affecting the research process. Study limitations can however present opportunities to engage in prospective improvement of the study (Ross & Bibler-Zaidi, 2019:261). Certain challenges and limitations were experienced during the study (Tulare, 2020:291). The limitations and challenges encountered by the researcher during the research and the mitigating strategies employed to address these limitation/challenges are listed in Table 4.3.

TABLE 4-3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED AND MITIGATING ACTIONS TAKEN

Limitations	Description	Mitigation Strategies	Description
Limited Resources	Challenges related to funding and time.	Budget Planning	Developed a detailed budget plan and allocated resources efficiently during the study period.
		Time Management	Developed a realistic timeline and research schedule to make the most of available time resources.
Data Limitations	Issues concerning data availability and quality.	Data Collection Planning	Carefully planned data collection methods to ensure relevance.
Ethical and Legal Constraints	Concerns related to ethical approvals and legal regulations.	Ethical Review Process	Obtained necessary ethical approvals and address ethical concerns with internal and external stakeholders. Various institutions had protocols set out which needed to be completed in order to work with school-based social workers.
		Legal Consultation	Obtained legal advice to navigate regulations and compliance.
Researcher Bias	Biases in research design and interpretation of data.	Peer Review	Engaged in peer review to identify and mitigate biases.
Technical Limitations	Challenges arising from technical issues.	Pilot Studies	Conducted pilot studies to identify and address technical problems with regards to the interview guide.
External Factors	Disruptions due to external factors like disasters.	Contingency Planning	Developed contingency plans for unexpected events. Unexpected Diary changes from participants on the day of the interview and then alternative arrangements made with participant to conduct interview.
		Remote Data Collection	Explored remote data collection methods to bypass geographic constraints – Microsoft Teams was used where distance travelled was extensive.

4.12 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This Chapter provides a comprehensive account of the implementation of the qualitative research approach, offering a clear audit trail of the steps followed throughout the research process. It begins by describing the characteristics of the qualitative research approach and the chosen research design, emphasising its explorative, descriptive and contextual nature. This design was selected to address the research question, allowing the voices of school-based social workers in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities to be heard.

The Chapter outlines the population of interest, school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities and explains how participants were purposively recruited from the Gauteng Department of Education's database. It details the preparations made by both the researcher and the participants before conducting the interviews, including equipment checks, familiarization with interview questions and ethical considerations such as informed consent and the right to withdraw. The pilot testing process and subsequent modifications to the research approach to ensure the quality and reliability of data collection, are discussed. The data collection method, involving individual, face-to-face, in-depth interviews using an interview guide with open ended questions, is described, as well as the subsequent transcription process, which included removing identifying details to protect participant anonymity.

The data analysis process, following Tesch's eight step approach, is explained, with an emphasis on identifying the themes, including continuous reflection, theme comparison, consultation with the study supervisor and the involvement of an independent coder. The trustworthiness of the research findings, guided by Guba's model of data verification, is discussed, encompassing aspects such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, all of which were addressed through various strategies like data triangulation, investigator triangulation, researcher reflexivity, maintaining an audit trail and peer examination.

Ethical considerations are detailed, covering informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, beneficence, data management, safeguarding participants from potential harm and lastly debriefing of participants. The Chapter concludes by acknowledging the factors that influenced the qualitative research process and outlining the study's limitations, providing a comprehensive overview of the research methodology and its execution.

In Chapters Five, Six and Seven the research insights from the analysis of the data collected are presented and supported through literature contextualisation.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND LITERATURE CONTEXTUALISATION (PART 1)

"In Nature, a flock will attack any bird that is more colourful than the others because being different is seen as a threat..." The Village by Wrabel (2017)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Part One of the insights and research results derived from the data collected through the interviews with 38 school-based social workers is presented in this chapter. Parts Two and Three are presented in the subsequent two chapters. This chapter specifically elaborates on the background and demographical profiles of the participants and lists the eleven themes that emerged from their accounts, before themes one to four are discussed. Themes five to eight are addressed in Chapter Six, while Chapter Seven covers themes nine to eleven.

These findings were obtained through a manual data analysis of the data obtained during the interviews with the participants by using Tesch's model (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:193–198). Quotations from the participants' interview narratives are presented verbatim, alongside a literature review that compares these narratives with existing literature on the topics they address, confirming or contrasting their findings.

5.2 PARTICIPANTS BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICS

The research participants in this study are school-based social workers who provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities as part of their daily work. To contextualise the insights and their subsequent discussion, the participants' background and demographics are provided as listed in Table 5.1 (Enago Academy, 2019).

TABLE 5-1 PARTICIPANTS BACKGROUND AND DEMOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Home language	Highest level of qualification			Period of being social worker
				Bachelors/ Honours in Social Work	Master's in social work	Doctorate in Social Work	
PM	M	A	Tshivenda		✓		11
PL	F	A	Sepedi	✓			9
SJ	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			15
LC	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			9
RH	F	W	English		✓		17
RW	F	C	English	✓			16
JN	F	C	English	✓			7
SM	F	A	isiZulu	✓			4
HS	F	A	isiZulu	✓			5
DM	M	A	Tshivenda	✓			4
FN	M	A	Swati	✓			5
ZM	F	A	isiZulu	✓			5
KL	F	A	Sesotho	✓			3
HD	M	A	isiZulu	✓			3
LM	F	A	isiZulu	✓			8
LM1	F	A	isiZulu	✓			4
YM	F	A	Sepedi		✓		6
SL	F	A	isiZulu	✓			3
YvS	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			33
FD	F	A	isiZulu	✓			8
NM	F	A	Sesotho	✓			4
EM	M	A	Sesotho	✓			5
MM	F	A	isiZulu	✓			4
TS	F	A	Sesotho	✓			9
CMM	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			10
YS	F	W	Afrikaans			✓	27
NK	F	A	isiXhosa	✓			8
AG	F	A	isiXhosa	✓			13
MD	F	A	Sepedi	✓			2
MV	F	W	Afrikaans			✓	27
DT	F	A	Sesotho	✓			6
ET	F	W	Afrikaans			✓	15
KM	F	A	Sepedi	✓			3
IvR	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			4
CG	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			17
MvA	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			8
NN	F	I	English	✓			2
TvD	F	W	Afrikaans	✓			2

As indicated in Table 5.1 above, the research involved 38 school-based social workers, comprising five (5) males and thirty-three (33) females. Regarding the ethnic background of the participants, twenty-three (23) participants identified as African, twelve (12) participants identified as White, two (2) participants identified as Coloured and one (1) participant identified as Indian.

Examining the participants' home languages, it was found that, eleven (11) participants spoke Afrikaans, nine (9) participants speak isiZulu, four (4) participants spoke English, five (5) participants spoke Sesotho, four (4) participants spoke Sepedi, 2 (two) participants spoke isiXhosa, 2 (two) participants spoke Tshivenda and one (1) participants spoke SiSwati. The listing of the different home languages of the sample is a small scale reflection of the linguistic diversity of the South African population groups. Linguistic diversity is described as a cultural touchstone that connect people to their histories, families and homes (Blakeley, n.d.).

Looking at the highest level of qualifications held by the participants, thirty-three (33) participants hold a Bachelor/Honours degrees in Social Work, three (3) participants each hold a Master's degree in Social Work and three (3) participants hold Doctorates in Social Work.

Assessing the duration of their careers as social workers, shown that seventeen (17) participants practised for a period of 0-5 years, eleven (11) for a period of 6-10 years, seven (7) for 11-20 years and three (3) practised as social workers for 21 years and longer.

The target population identified was school-based social workers providing social work intervention services to youth sexual minorities within the Gauteng region. Gauteng, South Africa's economic hub, is a province characterized by its significant urbanization and diverse population. It is divided into five municipal metros: Johannesburg, Sedibeng, Tshwane, Ekurhuleni and West Rand. The distribution of the participants in this research was as follows: seventeen (17) participants were from schools in Johannesburg, 10 (ten) participants were from schools in Sedibeng, six (6) from schools in Tshwane, four (4) were from schools in Ekurhuleni and 1 participant was from a school in the West Rand.

In accordance with the ethical considerations delineated in Chapter Four, specifically within (section 4.9.2), the imperative of safeguarding the identities of the study participants and their associated schools was underscored. Consequently, a strict protocol was adhered to, ensuring that the personal information, including the names of the participants and the affiliations of their respective schools, remained undisclosed and were deliberately omitted from any written

documentation that might establish a distinct connection between the participants and the ensuing research insights (Bradshaw *et al.*, 2017:4; Coffelt, 2017:228; Muzari *et al.*, 2022:18-19).

5.3 RESEARCH INSIGHTS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Themes derived from the accounts of the participants and the data collected from their responses are represented here. In accordance with the guidelines outlined in Chapter 4 (section 4.7), a consensus discussion involving the independent coder, research supervisor and researcher was conducted. This deliberative process culminated in the identification of eleven (11) overarching themes, illustrated in Figure 5.1 and listed in Table 5.2 below. These thematic analyses are subsequently discussed in detail. As indicated in Table 5.2, themes one to four are discussed in this chapter, themes five to eight in Chapter Six and themes nine to eleven in Chapter Seven.

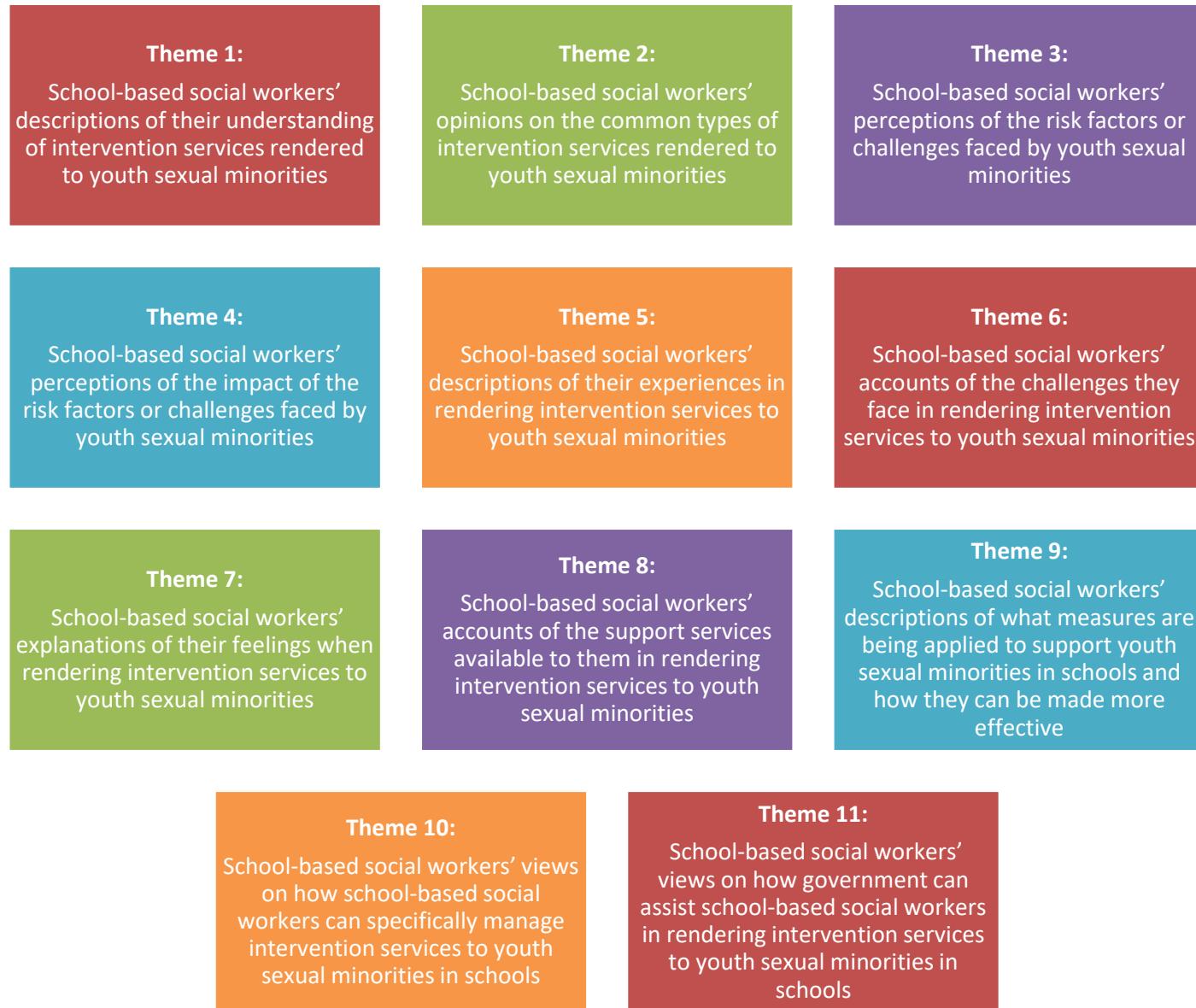


FIGURE 5-1 THEMES EMERGING FROM DATA ANALYSIS

TABLE 5-2 OVERVIEW: THEMES, SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES

THEME	SUB-THEME
Chapter Five:	
1. School-based social workers' descriptions of their understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Provide same services to all youth and treat all equally. 1.2 Provide counselling and support to youth identifying as sexual minorities and their parents. 1.3 Respond in terms of child's needs and/or age. 1.4 Develop and protect youth sexual minorities. 1.5 Teach youth about their sexuality and educate them about sexual minorities.
2. School-based social workers' opinions on the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Mainly provide counselling, emotional support and guidance. 2.2 Provide case work, group work and community work. 2.3 Identify and address needs in context. 2.4 Arrange for health and/or other protection services.
3. School-based social workers perception of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Experience lack of acceptance, understanding and support, stigma and stereotyping. 3.2 Experience victimisation, bullying, rape and death.
4. School-based social workers' perceptions of the impact of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Experiences negative feelings and psycho-social health is affected. 4.2 Academic progress and general functioning are affected. 4.3 Become withdrawn, do not trust others and fear coming out. 4.4 Live secretly or live a lie. 4.5 Prone to substance abuse. 4.6 Self-harm or self-mutilation.

THEME	SUB-THEME
Chapter Six:	
5. School-based social workers' descriptions of their experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	5.1 Has no direct experience in rendering services to youth sexual minorities. 5.2 Difficult or challenging. 5.3 Can be rewarding or heart-breaking. 5.4 Accept the person, focus on the presenting problem and win trust.
6. School-based social workers' accounts of the challenges they face in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	6.1 Parent's lack of involvement or acceptance. 6.2 Beliefs or bias about sexual minorities. 6.3 Youth sexual minorities' needs not being met. 6.4 Lack of training and resources. 6.5 Lack of confidentiality and support from educators and other professionals. 6.6 When youth is unsure about own gender orientation. 6.7 Child does not trust or asks social worker to intervene about school policy. 6.8 Bullying in school and a non-conducive environment. 6.9 Personal sexual orientation.
7. School-based social workers' explanations of their feelings when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	7.1 Feels comfortable. 7.2 Provides same services in same way as to all learners. 7.3 It is a privilege to accompany learner on learner's journey. 7.4 Feels failed by DoE.
8. School-based social workers' accounts of the support services available to them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	8.1 There are no support services available for social workers. 8.2 Consult others or use other professional resources. 8.3 Training is provided.

THEME	SUB-THEME	CATEGORIES
Chapter Seven:		
9. School-based social workers' descriptions of what measures are being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools and how they can be made more effective.	9.1 Measures applied to support youth sexual minorities.	<p>9.1.1 There are no measures to support youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.2 Counselling and support are available and assist youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.3 School policy is to accommodate and adapt to needs of sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.4 Try to accommodate youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.5 Must be sensitive to the process & the youth's needs.</p> <p>9.1.6 Schools differ.</p>
	9.2 How the measures applied in schools can be made more effective.	<p>9.2.1 Need to ensure there is a social worker with the needed resources in all schools.</p> <p>9.2.2 Need to raise awareness of sexual orientation and needs of learners.</p>
THEME	SUB-THEME	
10. School-based social workers' views on how school-based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools.		<p>10.1 Create awareness of sexual minorities and their needs and advocate for them.</p> <p>10.2 Need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge & educate yourself and accept sexual minorities.</p> <p>10.3 Create and run support groups.</p>
11. School-based social workers' views on how government can assist school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools.		<p>11.1 Develop and implement policies in schools aligned to the Constitution and people's rights.</p> <p>11.2 Department of Education must enforce awareness and the curriculum.</p> <p>11.3 Schools must have gender-neutral bathrooms and allow cross-dressing of uniforms.</p> <p>11.4 Target messaging, use social media, train and educate communities.</p> <p>11.5 Appoint more social workers in schools and provide office space.</p> <p>11.6 Provide a supportive system and training for social workers.</p> <p>11.7 Provide funding for programmes, projects and access to other resources.</p> <p>11.8 Base any measures on research and practicalities.</p>

In the upcoming part of this discussion, the main themes one to four and their associated sub-themes and categories, where relevant are presented. The researcher provided explanations and support for these themes using direct quotes from interviews conducted with school-based social workers. Additionally, a comparative analysis is made by comparing these thematic discoveries with the literature and connecting this to the relevant theoretical frameworks, thus conducting an extensive literature control for the purpose of validation and contextualisation.

5.3.1 THEME 1: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF INTERVENTION SERVICES RENDERED TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

This theme emerged from the responses provided by school-based social workers in response to the enquiry posed by the researcher wherein they were asked to explain their understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities. Sub-themes that support this topic are included in Table 5-3 and are further discussed.

TABLE 5-3 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS UNDERSTANDING OF INTERVENTION SERVICES RENDERED TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME: 1	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' descriptions of their understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities.	1.1 Provide same services to all youth & treat all equally. 1.2 Provide counselling and support to youth identifying as sexual minorities and their parents. 1.3 Respond in terms of child's needs and/or age. 1.4 Develop and protect youth sexual minorities. 1.5 Teach youth about their sexuality & educate them about sexual minorities.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Provide same services to all youth and treats all equally

In the interviews with the school-based social workers, a sub-theme emerged where they emphasised their commitment to providing rightful services to all youth, regardless of their sexual orientation. These participants voiced a clear dedication to treating all learners equally, regardless of their background or identity. This commitment was evident through various narratives and accounts documented in the interview transcripts, which serve as compelling evidence of their unwavering commitment to inclusivity and impartiality in their roles (Ryan, Toomey, Diaz & Russell, 2022:159).

The stories shared by these school-based social workers underscored their genuine belief in the importance of creating a safe and supportive environment for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation. These narratives included instances where they actively worked to address the unique challenges and concerns faced by youth sexual minorities, ensuring that they receive the same level of care and attention as any other learner in need. This approach reflects a commitment to fostering an inclusive and welcoming school community where every young person feels valued and supported (Green, Price-Feeney & Dorison, 2021:26).

The storylines from the interview transcripts illustrate the concrete steps taken by these school-based social workers to uphold their commitment to equality. The narratives within the interview transcripts not only validate the claims made by these school-based social workers but also highlight their proactive efforts to ensure that every learner, regardless of sexual orientation, receives the same level of care, support and respect within the school environment (Gibson, Glazier & Olson, 2021). These accounts serve as powerful examples of their genuine commitment to promoting diversity, equity and inclusivity in the educational system. The following storylines from the transcripts of the interviews attest to this:

“The intervention here at the school is the same. Every child is treated as the same... we don’t exclude youth sexual minority children, we don’t exclude them. We treat every child as equal...sometimes you will be able to see that the child appears to be a transgender or gay or lesbian, but you wouldn’t use that word when you offer or render services...when school policies are created, they are created in such a way that they refer to every child as a child without checking whether it’s a girl or a boy or a trans. Which is a problem because the needs of the sexual minorities are quite different to the needs of the other children however, we have to treat them all the same way” [Participant 1-PM: 46-50].

“How I intervene or how I approach is to treat all individuals with respect, integrity, no judgement, no discrimination. Always as equals” [Participant 3-SJ: 21–23].

“In terms of intervention, I believe that the minority, are still part of us, the same services that we render to each and every individual should be afforded to them. We shouldn’t discriminate against them. They should be included as part of the community and therefore I don’t see why we should, differentiate when dealing with them. They are human beings. They need to be treated as such. They are part of our community and I believe they need to be included” [Participant 17-YM: 17-25].

"My understanding is that they have the right to receive any services that any other individual would be receiving. But the reality of the fact is that they don't. There's limited services based on their need requirements and their experiences in society" [Participant 25-CMM: 24 – 29].

The principle of providing the same services to all youths and treating all equally is deeply rooted in social work, where it is often referred to as "equality of access" (Dominelli, 2017:69). This view is consistent with the ethical principles of social work, which emphasise the importance of social justice, respect for individuals and the promotion of well-being (NASW, 2017). In social work practice, it is essential for social workers to recognize and address the unique needs and challenges that different youth populations may face, such as youth sexual minorities, youth of colour, or those with disabilities. In acknowledging these differences and providing tailored support when necessary, social workers can help bridge the gaps in access to services and promote equal opportunities for all young people (Gibbs, O'Rourke & Gallagher, 2020:42).

It is essential to consider the various ecological systems that impact young people. Ensuring equitable access to services for all youth, social workers can address disparities within these systems, such as unequal access to educational opportunities or healthcare resources based on socioeconomic status. Advocating for policies and interventions that promote equal treatment and opportunities for young people across these systems, aligns with ecological systems theory, as it recognizes the interconnectedness of these systems in shaping youth development (Leung *et al.*, 2022:2).

Social workers play a crucial role in advocating for and implementing policies and practices that ensure equitable access to services and resources for young people (Allen-Meares & Fraser, 2017:175). When social workers advocate for providing the same services to all youth and treating them equally, they are acting as advocates for young people who may face discrimination, systemic barriers or unequal access to resources. Advocacy in this context can involve working to change policies, challenging discriminatory practices and ensuring that youth from diverse backgrounds receive the support and services they need to thrive. This aligns with the core principles of social work, including promoting social justice and advocating for those who may be vulnerable or oppressed (Day & Kearney, 2016; Gibson, Glazier & Olson, 2021; Green, Price-Feeney & Dorison, 2021:26; Ryan, Toomey, Diaz & Russell, 2022:159).

By incorporating ecological systems theory and advocacy theory into their practice, social workers can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all youth, ensuring that

they receive the same services and are treated equally, regardless of their individual circumstances or backgrounds.

5.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Provide counselling and support to youth identifying as sexual minorities and their parents

School-based social workers play a pivotal role in supporting the emotional and psychological well-being of learners and their families (Leung *et al.*, 2022:14). When it comes to intervention services, a substantial number of the participants emphasise the importance of providing counselling and support to both youth and their parents.

Intervention services in a school setting are multifaceted and geared towards addressing a wide range of issues that can affect a learners academic and personal development (Beck *et al.*, 2018:46). Counselling is a cornerstone of intervention services. School social workers offer a safe and confidential space for learners to express their thoughts, feelings and concerns. Extending support to parents is an integral aspect of effective intervention services. School social workers understand that the well-being of the youth is often closely tied to the well-being of their family (Marraccini, Ingram, Naser, Grapin, Toole, O'Neill, Chin, Martinez & Griffin, 2022:20).

Beyond counselling and support, school-based social workers are often involved in advocacy efforts, connecting families with community resources and serving as a bridge between home and school. They are instrumental in fostering a holistic approach to education that recognizes the interconnectedness of a learners' personal and academic life. Through counselling, support, collaboration and advocacy, school-based social workers contribute significantly to the educational and emotional growth of learners, fostering an environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:20). The following narratives from the interview transcripts provide confirmation of this:

"So my understanding of it from our school point of view is providing counselling and services to learners here who identify within one of the sexual minorities, we've got a few of the learners here who do and we sort of engage with them and work with them just in terms of their experiences at home, their experiences in society and just sort of working towards accepting themselves and finding the space of acceptance and care" [Participant 5-RH: 16-23].

"Intervention services might include that I would call in this child and provide counselling services with him, or debriefing or taking it further to maybe engage as well with the parents of the

individual. I'm having a discussion with the parents around the sexual identity of this particular child, or maybe even outside in the broad environment, the school context..." [Participant 7-JN: 16-23]

." For me I would say the interventions that are there for the LGBTQI, it's basically educational support and counselling they are struggling in accepting themselves and educating maybe the family members on how to accept them and most probably you find that most family members find it hard to accept them because mostly they have expectations that they had with regards to whatever gender the child was and now here they are, they are expressing themselves in a different gender. So the child needs counselling and the family needs education" [Participant 18-SL: 16-25].

"...first start with the individual (then) go to the family. When you get a family at that point where you can actually say that you know what I know this child; he or she will be a survivor and they will protect this child wherever. However, then you can go to the community" [Participant 7-JN: 66-71].

The literature supports the notion that school-based social workers play a crucial role in providing counselling and support to youth who identify as sexual minorities and their parents. (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:20).

This intervention aligns with the principles of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which posits that individuals are influenced by multiple interacting systems, including the microsystem (the family and school) and the mesosystem (the interactions between family and school). By addressing the unique challenges faced by sexual minority youth within these systems, social workers can help create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Additionally, their advocacy efforts can be connected to the role of the school social worker, as they work towards empowering and amplifying the voices of marginalized youth and their families within the educational system (Leung *et al.*, 2022:14). This dual approach not only supports the well-being of sexual minority youth but also contributes to broader efforts to promote equity and social justice in educational settings (Beck *et al.*, 2018:46).

5.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Respond in terms of child's needs and/or age

School-based social workers play a pivotal role in safeguarding the well-being of learners and families and their approach to intervention is grounded with the clear understanding of a child's needs and age-related considerations (Zastrow, 2017:90).

When the participants mention "responding in terms of a youth's needs", it signifies their commitment to tailoring interventions based on a thorough assessment of the youth's unique circumstances. This assessment often considers physical, emotional, educational and social aspects of the child's life. Social workers consider the age of the child when designing intervention strategies (Argüello, 2022:7).

School-based social workers understand that a child's well-being is interconnected with the well-being of their caregivers and the environment in which they live. Effective intervention often involves addressing not only the child's immediate needs but also addressing systemic issues that may be impacting the child's life (Kirst-Ashman, 2017:9).

Participants explained that school-based social workers' understanding of intervention services is rooted in a child-centred, developmental, holistic, culturally sensitive and interdisciplinary approach. Their goal is to create a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the well-being of learners, considering the unique needs and age-related considerations of each child they serve (UNICEF, 2022:7). This is supported by the narratives that follow, which are taken from the interview transcripts:

"My understanding of intervention services depends on what the client needs and what the foreground needs are. An intervention be (it) in the form of counselling for the individual or in a group setting using the person-centred approach, gestalt approach. It depends solely on the client's needs and age in terms of how I would intervene" [Participant 3-SL: 25-30].

"From my side I do counselling with regards to the problems that we see at that stage, so I don't go into their orientation and their decisions. I treat them as individuals like any other individual that comes in. If the problem is bullying, then I deal with a bully. If the problem is Mom that doesn't understand the child and they fight, then I work with Mom and the child" [Participant 4-LC: 32-38].

The participant's storylines shed light on the nuanced approach school-based social workers take when it comes to intervention services and counselling. They emphasise that the interventions

provided depend on the specific needs and circumstances of youth sexual minorities. This tailored approach aligns with the understanding that school-based social workers have a comprehensive grasp of a learners' needs, grounded in their expertise in learner development and psychology. Drawing on their knowledge, they assess a learner's emotional, social and academic needs, ensuring that interventions are carefully tailored to address these needs (UNICEF, 2022:7). Additionally, research indicates that school-based social workers excel at conducting thorough assessments to uncover any underlying issues or trauma that may impact a learner's well-being (Argüello, 2022:7). This comprehensive knowledge and approach contribute to the targeted and effective nature of their interventions.

School-based social workers not only understand a learner's needs but also take into account age-related considerations. This means they recognize that learners of different age groups have varying needs and vulnerabilities. School-based social workers adapt their interventions to address these age-specific needs, thereby promoting age-appropriate development (SAMHSA, 2023:56).

Kirst-Ashman (2017:9) concurs that social workers have a strong knowledge base in several techniques of human behaviour and the interface of people with their environment. School-based social workers play a crucial role in responding to learner's needs and addressing age-specific challenges within the educational context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Drawing upon the ecological systems theory, they recognize that a child's development is influenced by multiple interconnected systems, including the microsystem (family and school), mesosystem (interactions between home and school), exosystem (community resources) and macrosystem (cultural and societal norms) (Crawford, 2020:4).

This holistic perspective informs their practice, allowing them to tailor interventions that account for the child's unique circumstances and the broader ecological context. Additionally, social workers often employ principles of advocacy theory (Zastrow, 2017:90) to empower learners by promoting their rights, facilitating access to necessary services and collaborating with teachers, parents and other stakeholders to create an inclusive and supportive educational environment.

By embracing these theoretical frameworks, school-based social workers contribute significantly to the overall well-being and success of learners by addressing their evolving needs and developmental stages.

5.3.1.4 Sub-theme 1.4: Develop and protect youth sexual minorities

In their statement that they develop and protect youth sexual minorities some school-based social workers suggest that they view their role in supporting youth sexual minorities as centred around the concepts of development and protection. This perspective is exemplified through various storylines, illustrating the ways these school-based social workers engage with and advocate for the rights of youth sexual minorities (Brandon-Friedman, 2019:375).

The emphasis on "developing" youth sexual minorities underscores the importance of promoting their personal growth, well-being and self-acceptance. Social workers may achieve this by offering individual or group counselling, providing resources related to sexual orientation and gender identity and creating safe spaces for youth sexual minority learners to express themselves openly. They might also collaborate with educators to integrate inclusive curricula that validate diverse identities and experiences (Winkler, 2018:118).

In addition, the aspect of "protecting" youth sexual minorities highlights the need for creating a safe and affirming environment in schools. School-based social workers may advocate for anti-bullying policies, ensure that youth sexual minority learners are free from discrimination and harassment and work to foster a culture of acceptance and respect. This protection extends beyond the physical safety of learners and includes their emotional and psychological well-being, safeguarding against stigma and mental health challenges that youth sexual minorities may face (Winkler, 2018:118).

Moreover, school-based social workers may engage in community outreach and education efforts to raise awareness about LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, both within the school community and beyond. This can help reduce prejudice and create an inclusive atmosphere that supports the development and protection of youth sexual minorities (Brandon-Friedman, 2019:375).

The following storylines describe with this statement:

"My understanding of this intervention services are the inter services that are directed to youth that is mostly excluded in society because of their sexual identity or orientation. So those services would mainly be focusing on their upliftment, development and protection to ensure that they form part of the community or the societies and also to ensure their safety. It's broad like it involves everyone" [Participant 24-TS: 14-21].

“Intervention strategies should be to ensure that youth sexual minorities are respected like everybody else, that they have a space within the school that they feel that their rights are not being violated. I need to be the one advocating for social justice for them within the school and in the community by making people aware of the people and their needs” [Participant 6-RW: 17 – 23]

“The services that the Department or us, as social workers, render to the minority gender, I would say in my experience as an employee here we offer awareness and schools as a school social worker in making them as conscious of the right choice, the freedom to choose your gender and so forth. And now through such awareness that's where we now conscientize the learners, so that will not judge other learners when they see them within the school environment based on how they look biologically or maybe how they present themselves within the school premises or yard” [Participant- 22- EM: 22-23].

This is in alignment with existing literature, which underscores the significant role played by school-based social workers in supporting and advocating for the well-being of youth, particularly sexual minorities. These experts operate within educational settings to confront the distinct challenges encountered by young sexual minorities, with the goal of establishing inclusive and secure environments that nurture their social, emotional and academic development (Brandon-Friedman, 2019:375). They provide individual and group counselling, offer resources and referrals to youth sexual minorities and offer guidance on issues related to coming out, identity acceptance and coping with discrimination or bullying. School-based social workers collaborate with teachers, administrators and families to ensure that youth sexual minorities receive the support they need to thrive academically and personally. Through these comprehensive efforts, school-based social workers help create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment that supports and uplifts youth sexual minorities (Winkler, 2018:118).

The participant’s statements about school-based social workers’ understanding of intervention services for youth sexual minorities aligns as follows with the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, both of which play crucial roles developing and protecting youth sexual minorities in the school environment:

- In Applying the ecological systems approach in the context of youth sexual minorities, social workers consider the microsystem (individual interactions), mesosystem (interactions between systems), exosystem (external influences on microsystems) and

macrosystem (cultural and societal values). By focusing on development and protection, these social workers address the microsystem and mesosystem by providing individual counselling and creating safe spaces within the school environment (Fantus & Newman, 2021:9)

- Advocacy theory, underscores the importance of social workers actively advocating for the rights and well-being of marginalized populations. In this context, social workers act as advocates for youth sexual minorities by promoting policies, practices and interventions that support their development and protection. This includes advocating for inclusive curricula, anti-discrimination policies and mental health resources (Craig, McInroy & Austin, 2018:237-238).
- The ecological systems approach guides social workers to consider the multiple layers of influence on youth sexual minorities, recognizing the importance of creating a supportive environment within the school. Simultaneously, advocacy theory encourages social workers to be proactive in challenging discriminatory practices and policies that may affect the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Paceley, Sattler, Goffnett & Jen, 2020:1878).

In practical terms, school-based social workers applying these theories may collaborate with school administrators, teachers, parents and community organisations to advocate for inclusive policies and practices aimed at developing and protecting youth sexual minorities. They may also engage in outreach and education to raise awareness about youth sexual minority issues and promote understanding within the school community, thus addressing the exosystem and macrosystem influences (Sosa, 2020:76-77).

5.3.1.5 Sub-theme 1.5: Teach youth about their sexuality and educate them about sexual minorities

In the context of the statement about teaching youth about their sexuality and educating them about sexual minorities, it is evident that the participating social workers play a crucial role in fostering a safe and inclusive environment for learners. Their commitment to teaching youth about their sexuality and providing education about sexual minorities reflects a proactive and holistic approach to social work (Sosa, 2020:77). The following storylines are evident of school-based social workers fulfilling the role of teaching youth about their sexuality and educating them about sexual minorities.

"To teach young children or any person about their sexuality. So in other cultures you will find they feel it is like disrespecting or now you want to educate something which is not allowed..."
[Participant 10-DM: 17-20].

"My understanding of these services is basically primarily education, educational services informational groups because this has become can I say more prevalent in our society, especially among our youth" **[Participant 34-IvR: 28-31].**

"I think a more inclusive sex education, a lot of LGBTQI plus teenagers don't have, you know, like a life orientation within high school it's not really discussing sexual minorities and issues around this topic and so they go to the Internet to look for that information and they find other things so I think a more open, inclusive sexual discussion as to what is LGBTQI and what does that mean"
[Participant 37-NN: 14-18].

By examining the themes and actions that follow in the context of existing literature, it becomes evident that the experiences and practices of school-based social workers are substantiated by established research and theoretical perspectives. In the context of the statement that school-based social workers develop and protect youth sexual minorities, it is evident that the participating school-based social workers play a crucial role in fostering a safe and inclusive environment for learners. Their commitment to teaching learners about their sexuality and providing education about sexual minorities reflects a proactive and holistic approach to social work (Leung, Shek, Leung & Shek, 2019:2) focused on the following:

- **Education for Empowerment:** Social workers are not merely imparting information; they are empowering learners with knowledge about their own bodies, feelings and identities. This education can help learners develop a healthy sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance (Sosa, 2020:77).
- **Promoting Inclusivity:** Teaching learners about sexual minorities is an essential step in creating an inclusive society. By educating learners from a young age, social workers are helping to reduce prejudice and discrimination, fostering empathy and acceptance within the next generation (Sosa, 2020:75).
- **Storytelling as a Teaching Tool:** The use of interview transcripts and real-life stories in their teaching approach is highly effective. Stories can engage learner's imaginations and help them relate to the experiences of others, making complex topics like sexuality and

diversity more accessible and relatable (Cantos, Moliner & Sanahuja, 2023:1; Pelts & Galambos, 2017:601).

- **Normalizing Differences:** By including diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in their curriculum, social workers are contributing to the normalization of these aspects of human diversity. This can go a long way in reducing stigma and promoting a culture of acceptance (Roberts, 2016:15).
- **Creating Safe Spaces:** The fact that social workers are addressing these topics suggests that they are also creating safe spaces for learners to ask questions and seek guidance. This is vital for learners who may be struggling with their own identities or who have questions about their peers' experiences (Russell, Bishop, Saba, James & Ioverno, 2021:6).
- **Collaboration with Families:** Social workers should ideally collaborate with parents and caregivers to ensure a consistent and supportive approach to educating learners about these topics. Inclusion and open communication between school and home can reinforce these important lessons (SAMHSA, 2023:59).
- **Professionalism and Ethical Considerations:** It is worth noting that social workers must approach these subjects professionally and ethically, taking into account the age-appropriateness of the information and respecting cultural sensitivities. They should also be aware of any legal requirements or guidelines governing this type of education (Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:495).

In the context of social workers teaching learners about sexuality and educating them about sexual minorities, the ecological systems approach, becomes highly relevant. This approach emphasises the interconnectedness of various systems and contexts that influence an individual's development. In this case, it highlights how social workers consider the child's immediate environment, including family, school and community, as they undertake the critical task of educating learners about sexuality and sexual minorities (Fantus & Newman, 2021:9).

The advocacy theory also plays a significant role in understanding the social workers' actions in this scenario. Advocacy theory focuses on the role of advocates in promoting social change and justice. In this context, social workers advocating for comprehensive sexuality education and the inclusion of sexual minorities in the curriculum can be seen as advocates for social change, striving to create a more inclusive and accepting society (Winkler, 2018:2).

5.3.2 THEME 2: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' OPINIONS ON THE COMMON TYPES OF INTERVENTION SERVICES RENDERED TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

The second question within the interview guide centred on exploring the prevalent categories of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities by school-based social workers. Through the analysis of responses, four (4) distinct sub-themes prominently surfaced as captured below in Table 5.4 followed by a discussion of the sub-themes;

TABLE 5-4 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS OPINIONS ON THE COMMON TYPES OF INTERVENTION SERVICES RENDERED TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 2	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' opinions on the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities.	2.1 Mainly provide counselling, emotional support and guidance. 2.2 Provide case work, group work and community work. 2.3 Identify and address needs in context. 2.4 Arrange for health and/or other protection services.

5.3.2.1 Sub-theme: 2.1: Mainly provide counselling, emotional support and guidance.

According to the participants, the provision of counselling, emotional support and guidance support services by school-based social workers to youth sexual minorities within a school context, is an essential aspect of promoting inclusivity, mental well-being and academic success. Among the various intervention services offered to these individuals, it is noteworthy that counselling, emotional support and guidance emerge as the most frequently provided forms of assistance by the participants (Dos Santos, 2021:2). The following storylines describe the aforementioned statement.

"When it comes to the sexual minority groups, we provide mainly support services like counselling" [Participant 1-PM: 36-37].

"...mostly provide support, emotional support to the specified group and we also provide guidance in terms of what to do, how to do it or how to approach certain issues that they are faced with. So, it's mostly about providing counselling services and emotional support and guidance" [Participant 2-PM: 23-28].

"So a lot of the work is counselling. Kids come and see us here, who are perhaps feeling the issues of...sexuality or homosexuality and a lot of it has to do with exploring these issues within themselves. Some of them have come out to friends or to parents and perhaps it hasn't

necessarily gone well and working through that. Some of them are afraid to come out and are trying to. Whatever it is that they're presenting and providing therapeutic support in that way. So a lot of it is situations where it's kids coming from very, very religious, conservative religious backgrounds and they're having these questions about themselves, they're exploring these things, but they don't feel that it's safe to do so because their home circumstances does not allow for that. And so for them, it's something that there's not necessarily shame because it's far more accepted amongst their peers in this day and age, but it's not necessarily accepted by people in authority or people at home. And so it's sort of working through some of their questions and thoughts and feelings of perhaps rejection or those sorts of things. It's basically working through that therapeutically” [Participant 5-RH: 27-50].

“This would be like in terms of your psycho-social support, which can be in the form of counselling. So with the youth, because we are working with people who are usually in the developmental stage of identity versus confusion, they are not really sure about the process of exploring their identity, their sexuality, so they usually come for counselling services. We help them to understand more about themselves and some of the challenges or some of the feelings they are feeling that they can't really pinpoint to say this is what it is. There is also support in terms of a social context, so this can be in schools, where we provide this in the sense of youth empowerment programmes where we teach them or we share information about sexuality and how they can relate with each other better” [Participant 16-LM1: 17-27].

“In terms of intervention, self-esteem intervention, peer group support or support groups and gender empowerment and emotional support as well as providing them and accessing them to safer spaces because they are more vulnerable” [Participant 17-YM: 28-32].

“We focus a lot or try to focus on cognitive behavioural therapy because of possible stigmatisation that might happen or that the person might experience so how I think, how I feel will influence how I act. So, with this perhaps there might be cognitive distortions because of experiences they have. We try to rectify that and we also work a lot on how the individual perceives themselves, how I think about myself and how I feel about myself” [Participant 3-SJ: 35-42].

“Very important to make them understand that you support them, that you don't judge them” [Participant 30-MV: 39-41].

The participants accounts are in agreement with and confirmed by what authors have indicated. Counselling is a cornerstone in addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by youth

sexual minorities. These individuals often grapple with issues related to self-identity, self-acceptance, discrimination and social isolation (Gower, Rider, McMorris & Eisenberg, 2018:3). School-based counselling services provide a safe and confidential space for learners to discuss these concerns with trained professionals. School-based social workers can help learners navigate their emotions, develop coping strategies and provide guidance on issues such as coming out, peer relationships and family dynamics (Roland & Burlew, 2017:14).

Emotional support is integral to the well-being of youth sexual minorities. Youth sexual minorities may experience higher rates of stress, anxiety, depression and even suicidal ideation due to the stigma and discrimination they face. School-based services offer a critical source of emotional support, helping learners build resilience and a sense of belonging (Dos Santos, 2021:2). This support can be provided through individual or group therapy sessions, peer support groups, or even through youth sexual minority clubs or alliances within the school. School based social workers can offer advice on how to navigate potential discrimination or bias in educational and career settings, ensuring that these learners have the tools they need to succeed (Sosa & Nuckolls, 2018:6).

Counselling, emotional support and guidance services within schools operate within this ecological framework, acknowledging that the well-being of these learners is shaped by their interactions at various levels. The provision of services like counselling and emotional support aligns with the principles of advocacy theory by actively working to address the unique needs and challenges faced by these learners (Nothdurfter & Nagy, 2017:375; Vareed, 2019:2).

5.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Provide case work, group work and community work

During the interviews with the participating school-based social workers, it became evident that they employ a range of interventions when working with youth sexual minorities. The most common strategies they identified were social casework, group work and community work. Casework involves one-on-one interactions with learners, providing a safe and confidential space for them to discuss their concerns, navigate their identities and access necessary support services (Miley, O'Melia & DuBois, 2018:108). Group work, on the other hand, fosters a sense of belonging and peer support by bringing together youth with similar experiences and challenges, allowing them to share, learn and grow together (Garvin, Gutiérrez & Galinsky, 2017:202-203). In addition to these interpersonal interventions, school-based social workers also engage in community work, which involves collaborating with local organisations and resources to create a more inclusive and accepting environment within the school and its surrounding community

(Astramovich & Scott, 2020:311-312). These interventions are informed not only by the practical experience of these social workers but also by existing literature and best practices in social work, ensuring a holistic approach to supporting the well-being and development of youth sexual minorities. The following storylines explain this together with a literature control:

“...we can intervene in different levels like case, group or community work because they need to understand the differences in people and we need to support the person to understand himself and the experiences he or she is going through. In casework it is like when the child is at school...maybe they have challenges of being maybe named for their sexuality and then you need to intervene by clarifying and helping the individual first to understand themselves and what they are going through and that maybe it's something that people, they don't understand. It is also needed when I need to come and intervene at the school to make them to understand as collectively in dealing with it” [Participant 12-ZM: 15-27].

“The common types of services through psycho-social support, which are indicators of individual counselling based on the need of the client. There is also group counselling. We will have a group of people from the same community, which is LGBTQ, where they can talk about their challenges, they support and motivate each other as well as the community in terms of in terms of programmes where we'll be like sort of awareness programmes” [Participant 15-LM: 30-38].

“...on a micro level it's the counselling, it's the therapy, the crisis intervention. On a meso level, it would be the family therapy, family preservation even either assisting them with coming out or whatever it is and then on the macro level, I think a lot of what I've experienced is advocacy. There are challenges in terms of the school uniform that they want to wear, in terms of how they want to keep their hair, the pronouns they want to use. So that's like on the on the macro level, but also you know the education part you know educating educators on how to be sensitive towards the way each sexual minority wants to then be addressed. So I think on a macro level, it's advocacy and education” [Participant 31-DT: 33-46].

The storylines are confirmed by the literature control in that case, group and community work interventions with learner are the primary methods employed by school-based social workers (Chukwu *et al.*, 2017:46). A comprehensive approach to supporting youth sexual minorities involves a thorough assessment of each reported case. This assessment aims to identify the unique needs and challenges faced by all learners, considering their individual circumstances and identities (Chereni, 2017:516).

School-based social workers recognize that not all situations can be adequately addressed through individual casework alone where group work interventions have shown significant benefits in creating a sense of belonging and support among youth with similar experiences (Uranta & Ogbanga, 2017:62). These group settings provide a platform for learners to share their stories, learn from one another and develop essential coping skills (Uranta & Ogbanga, 2017:62). Moreover, community work interventions, are instrumental in fostering a more inclusive and accepting school environment. Collaboration with local organisations and community resources helps create a support network that extends beyond the school walls, reinforcing the learners' well-being and sense of acceptance.

The ecological systems theory underscores the interconnectedness of these interventions. Effective social work practice often involves considering how each level of the ecological system impacts the individual and how interventions at one level can ripple through to affect other levels. By recognizing these connections and utilising a holistic approach, social workers can better address the complex needs of their clients within their ecological contexts by focusing their interventions on the following:

- **Casework and the Microsystem:** Casework interventions in social work often focus on the microsystem level, where the individual's immediate family, school and peer groups reside. Social workers engage in one-on-one interactions with clients to assess and address their personal needs and challenges within this microsystem. By understanding the individual's unique context, social workers can provide tailored support and interventions (Miley, O'Melia & DuBois, 2018:108).
- **Group Work and the Mesosystem:** Group work interventions operate at the mesosystem level, focusing on interactions between microsystems. In group settings, individuals come together to share experiences, learn from one another and provide mutual support. This aligns with the mesosystem concept, as it involves the dynamic relationships and influences between various microsystems. Group work can bridge gaps in communication and cooperation between different parts of an individual's life (Garvin, Gutiérrez, & Galinsky, 2017:202-203).
- **Community Work and the Exosystem:** Community work interventions extend to the exosystem level, which encompasses external influences indirectly affecting individuals. Social workers engaged in community work collaborate with local organisations, schools and community resources to create supportive environments for individuals. This aligns

with the ecosystem concept, as it recognizes the importance of external factors in shaping an individual's experiences and well-being (Parker & Phillips, 2017:119).

By using the casework, group work and community work methods strategically, social workers can empower clients to advocate for themselves and also engage in advocacy efforts that address systemic inequalities and injustices faced by youth sexual minorities (Levenson, Craig & Austin, 2023:141). This involves the following:

- Casework is often the starting point for advocacy in social work. Social workers engage in one-on-one interactions with clients to understand their unique needs, challenges and goals. Through casework, social workers can identify systemic barriers and injustices that affect their clients and advocate for changes at the individual level. This may include helping clients access entitlements, navigate complex systems and assert their rights (Levenson *et al.*, 2023:141).
- Group work interventions provide a platform for individuals to come together, share experiences and collectively address issues that affect them. In group settings, clients can build solidarity, identify common concerns and develop advocacy strategies as a collective. Social workers facilitating group work can empower participants to advocate for systemic change by helping them organise, communicate their needs and engage in collective action (Schwartz-Tayri, Malka, Moshe-Grodfosky & Gilbert, 2021:464).
- Community work interventions often extend beyond individual and group levels to address systemic issues within communities. Social workers engaging in community work collaborate with community members to identify root causes of social problems and advocate for policy changes, improved services and greater social justice. Through community organising, social workers help communities develop advocacy campaigns and engage in systems-level change efforts (Abreu, Gonzalez, Arora, Sostre, Lockett & Mosley, 2023:146; Astramovich & Scott, 2020:311-312).

5.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Identify and address needs in context.

During the interviews with school-based social workers, a sub-theme emerged, shedding light on the school-based social workers approach to identifying and addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities. The responses indicate that school-based social workers provide intervention services that are not only contextually sensitive but also rooted in the best interests of the sexual minorities they serve. In the responses from the participants, it became evident that school-based social workers do far more than just offer support; they engage in a thoughtful,

specific process of understanding the intricate needs of each young person's life. This involves active listening, empathetic comprehension and cultural competence, all aimed at tailoring interventions that promote the well-being and inclusivity of sexual minority youth. Their commitment to fostering safe and affirming environments for these individuals underscores their vital role in creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. The following storylines explain this together with a literature control.

"We need to look at the context of the school, community and the family. I'm at the school for learners with special needs and learners who are severely intellectually challenges as well as the LGBTQI+ youth. We will also counsel wherever there is hurt. Therapy life skills training accepting where you are, who you are, so we identify the need and the context of that need. This part will be part of my intervention in educating and being therapeutic regarding pain that was caused or damage that was done because if I don't do that it will impact on the mental health of the child. We ensure that we protect the rights of everyone. We are guided by the Children's Act...and what is the best Interest of every child. Now as school social workers, we look into also what is in the best interest of this child. We use the channels and also as a tool to assist us in ensuring that the best interests of every child are made at a school environment and so forth, regardless of their gender or how they present themselves to others...on the individual case that we provide counselling...and then also in an incident where maybe something was done on the minority gender person, let's say maybe rape or something. We do intervene by helping the child to communicate it with the parent. If the parent is not aware and in making the parent understand that this child's gender is not the same gender that you saw at birth. For example, if it's a boy, now this child recognises himself as this person, maybe a gay person and so forth and make the parent understand...we live in an environment where some parents are still traditional in ways of doing things and understanding things and so forth. So when (there is) rape we do intervene, assist the child in opening a case at court and to see through that the perpetrator does get prosecuted according to the wrong he has done or she has done on a learner so court intervention is also there to assist and protect the rights of any learner or child" [Participant 22-EM: 28-54].

"A lot of times when we work with sexual minorities because either a little girl or a little boy or young man...they are either male or female, but they're refusing to use that bathroom that's been assigned to their sex. Or they're refusing to wear school uniform. And when they're at school, they perceive it as insolence or they're being disobedient, so I play a lot of different roles when it comes to that. The first thing would be to meet the learner and sort of try to understand it because it's so broad there are subgenres and to understand the specific learner, how they identify and then

you either advocate and then you...want to bring the ISS unit down to the school and say let us make an exception for example, to be able to wear the boys' school uniform, she's still in uniform. She's just not wearing uniform that's assigned to her sex or let us allow for example the learner to grow out your hair as long as you then wear it in a ponytail and it fits the school code of conduct for girls. I work like a broker and I connect and then I advocate and then I would say what the effect of not accommodating said learner on their either social functioning or their mental well-being...so besides being advocating, I then broker both learners and their parents, with the right people that can come and mediate. So I...mediate between school, the learner and all the rules" [Participant 31- DT: 63-89].

The described approach of school-based social workers aligns with a growing body of literature that emphasises the importance of culturally sensitive and contextually informed interventions for youth sexual minorities. Studies underscore the significance of recognizing the distinct needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities within educational settings (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016:33). By actively listening and empathetically comprehending the experiences of sexual minority youth, these social workers contribute to the development of affirming environments in schools (Bullard, 2020:2). Kosciw *et al.*, (2016:56) conducted a comprehensive national survey that highlighted the pervasive issue of bullying and harassment faced by youth sexual minorities in schools. Their insights underscore the critical role of supportive school-based social workers in mitigating the negative effects of discrimination and creating a safe and inclusive school environment they also emphasise the need for educators and support staff to adopt a culturally competent and intersectional approach to address the unique needs of youth sexual minorities.

The idea of serving the best interests of youth sexual minorities aligns with the principles of social justice and advocacy embedded in the work of school-based social workers. Social workers in educational settings play a crucial role in advocating for policies and practices that promote sexual minority inclusivity and equity (Witt & Medina-Martinez, 2022:30-31).

The approach described in the narratives reflects the current understanding in the literature about the importance of school-based social workers in supporting the well-being of youth sexual minorities. Their commitment to contextually informed interventions and best interest considerations contributes to the creation of safer and more inclusive school environments, which, in turn, can positively impact the academic and emotional development of youth sexual minorities (Perez-Brumer, Day, Russell & Hatzenbuehler, 2017:742;744).

The described practices of social workers, such as active listening and cultural competence, are in line with the ecological systems approach's emphasis on understanding the interconnectedness of these systems. School-based social workers not only consider the unique needs of youth sexual minority learners but also the broader context in which they navigate their identities and challenges within the school environment (Leung *et al.*, 2022:2; Johns, Poteat, Horn & Kosciw, 2019:152).

In practical terms, school-based social workers integrating the advocacy and ecological systems theoretical frameworks in identifying and addressing the needs of youth sexual minorities in context, entail the following:

- Incorporating advocacy theory into their work, school social workers act as advocates for youth sexual minorities, challenging discriminatory practices and promoting inclusive policies within the educational system. Their role goes beyond individual support to effecting systemic change, in line with the principles of advocacy theory (Leung *et al.*, 2022:10; Johns *et al.*, 2019:151).
- The ecological systems approach guides school social workers in understanding the multifaceted contexts in which youth sexual minority learners operate, while advocacy theory empowers them to actively champion the rights and well-being of these learners within the school system.

These frameworks underpin the approach which emphasise the importance of considering both the individual and the systemic dimensions of intervention services for youth sexual minorities.

5.3.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Arrange for health and/or other protection service.

Several school-based social workers have highlighted, the importance of coordinating health and protection services in their intervention services, tailored to the specific needs of youth sexual minorities. According to these storylines, they ensure that youth sexual minorities receive the necessary support, guidance and resources to navigate through their unique challenges. Whether it is connecting them with appropriate healthcare providers, safeguarding their rights and safety, or fostering a nurturing environment for their personal development, these social workers serve as advocates. The following storylines attest to this:

"there's also health services available to them regarding hormones and other health issues where we can refer them to for information about that and then also because they are facing these hate crimes and discrimination they can also be assisted with protection for their safety" [Participant 16-LM1: 32-37].

“The first one is health because they need information to be able to make good decisions regarding whatever it is that they're doing in terms of sexuality” [Participant 13-KL: 26-28].

“...and your SAPS, those are the close departments that we work with mostly and then they will be coming in in terms of like protection orders of these minority groups” [Participant 24-TS: 28-31].

With reference to arranging for health and/or other protection services, researchers respond as follows in the literature to confirm these storylines:

- Arranging for health, protection and other psycho-social services is a critical aspect of the role of school-based social workers and literature underscores the significance of this function in the context of schools which includes facilitating access to healthcare providers, mental health services and counselling when learners are in need (National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Centre, 2021:11; Roland & Burlew, 2017:4-5).
- The well-being of learners is a paramount concern in educational settings. School-based social workers work to ensure that the care afforded to learners should safeguard the learner's health, wellbeing and development and protecting the learner from any form of maltreatment, abuse, neglect, degradation, discrimination, exploitation and or any other physical emotional or mental harm or hazards including receive appropriate healthcare services highlighting the importance of school-based social workers in advocating for regular health check-ups and timely interventions for learn with chronic health conditions (Reyneke 2020:160-161).
- In cases involving child protection, school-based social workers often collaborate with child protective services agencies. School-based social workers are mandated reporters and are responsible for identifying signs of abuse or neglect amongst learners. They work in tandem with child welfare agencies to ensure learners safety and well-being (Reyneke 2020:160-161).
- Mental health is a significant concern in schools and school-based social workers play a crucial role in identifying, addressing or referring learners with mental health issues to appropriate services. School-based social workers are often involved in developing and implementing mental health programmes within schools (Rafter, Lee, Williams & McManus, 2023:6).

Researcher consistently emphasises the advocacy and collaboration roles of school-based social workers. They advocate for policies and programmes that support youth sexual minorities' health and protection needs. Additionally, they collaborate with various stakeholders, including parents, teachers, healthcare providers and community agencies, to create a network of support for learners (Knox, Gherardi & Stone, 2020:3; Sosa, 2020:76).

Furthermore, the ecosystem, within the ecological systems approach, which includes community resources, becomes crucial when school social workers connect youth with healthcare providers, support groups and community organisations. The advocacy efforts within the macrosystem, informed by the ecological systems approach, are supported by literature emphasising the need for policy changes and societal attitudes to become more inclusive and supportive of sexual minority youth (Paceley *et al.*, 2020:1865; Sosa, 2020:76).

Advocacy theory, on the other hand, underscores the active role of social workers in promoting the rights and well-being of marginalized individuals. The literature on advocacy theory emphasises the importance of social workers serving as advocates for their clients. In the context of school social workers working with sexual minority youth, this involves advocating for inclusive policies, promoting anti-bullying initiatives and providing educational resources to school staff and administrators to create safe and supportive environments (Sosa, 2020:76-77; Veldhuis, 2022:3).

5.3.3 THEME 3: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTION OF THE RISK FACTORS OR CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

After describing intervention services for youth sexual minorities, the school-based social workers were asked to describe the risk factors or challenges that the youth sexual minorities face and the impact of these challenges on youth sexual minorities. They responded to these questions and their responses are given under two sub-themes, namely: Risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities; and impact of risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities. Which is also reflecting in Table 5-5 below.

TABLE 5-5 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS PERCEPTION OF THE RISK FACTORS OR CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 3	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' perception of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities	3.1 Experience a lack of acceptance, understanding and support, stigma and stereotyping. 3.2 Experience victimisation, bullying, rape and death.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Experiences lack of acceptance, understanding and support, stigma and stereotyping

In the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a distressing sub-theme emerged, shedding light on the unique struggles faced by youth sexual minorities. At the heart of these difficulties lies a prevalent absence of acceptance, understanding and crucial support systems within their school environments. As these social workers recounted their interactions and experiences, it became evident that the weight of stigma and harmful stereotypes cast a shadow over the lives of youth sexual minorities. This shadow often exacerbates their struggles. The following narratives collected during the researcher's interviews vividly illustrate the profound impact of these risk factors, underscoring the urgent need for more inclusive and affirming school environments where every young person can thrive, irrespective of their sexual orientation:

“...they struggle with being accepted in families and they feel they're not being accepted by their peers” [Participant 2- PL: 43-45].

“...the risk factors involve specifically within their families, rejection and abandonment by family members, not so much here, because the teachers here are quite open. But in other schooling environments, I would imagine that they are people who have strong beliefs about these things and let it be known and perhaps shame kids, perhaps. So then that that's sinful, or it's wrong...” [Participant 5-RH: 91-98].

“...some people don't understand. They look at LGBTQI people like they are filled with demonic powers. There is a lot of stereotyping that goes with the members of the LGBTQI community” [Participant 15-LM: 45-49].

“if you are rejected, obviously you won't feel good about yourself. So accepting yourself can be a challenge” [Participant 15-LM: 53-55].

“...in African communities, so they get things like they have been bewitched, it's Satanism. It's a stigma against them, it's a trend. They think that it's in fashion to be gay” [Participant 31- DT: 95-97].

“I think they are very prone to stereotypes, judging not being accepted in the community. I think people today are very strongly opinionated about the LGBTQ. There is not a grey area you're either for it or against it and people are not shy to say how they feel” [Participant 36-MVA: 95-97].

“...most of the time it's rejection and they are struggling at times to even accept themselves. They are scared if someone will accept them for who they are and trying to be figuring out how to go about just trying to be themselves given the expectations of themselves and maybe their families” [Participant 18-SL: 28-33].

“I would say the challenges that they experience is discrimination, bullying within the school environment, a total judgement and misunderstanding of their choice in sexual behaviours and ignorance from the community side, from the school side, not only the learners but the staff and the ignorance goes with judgment and the lack of empathy for these learners and their needs. And the understanding that comes with it” [Participant 25-CMM: 41-99].

The sub-theme that emerged from interviews with school-based social workers, highlighting the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, resonates strongly with existing literature on the subject. In analysing the connections between the insights from the interviews and relevant academic research about the sub-theme of the participants experiencing a lack of acceptance, understanding and support, as well as stigmatisation and stereotyping of youth sexual minorities, its dualistic nature came to the fore. For practical purposes this duality is divided into two categories for the purpose of this discussion as derived from the above narratives. These categories are the risk factors and challenges relating to the lack of acceptance, understanding and support and the risk factors and challenges relating to the challenges grouped under stigmatisation and stereotyping of youth sexual minorities. These risk factors and challenges and the application of the theoretical framework in dealing with it, respectively entail the following:

(1) Lack of acceptance, understanding and support:

The notion of youth sexual minorities encountering a dearth of acceptance and support, as narrated by the participants, aligns with numerous studies documenting the significance of social

support in the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Leung *et al.*, 2022:3; Marzetti, McDaid & O'Connor, 2022:5; Noman, 2021:7; Roland & Burlew, 2017:20). Research consistently demonstrates that acceptance and support from family, peers and educators can significantly impact mental health outcomes, reducing the risk of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation among youth sexual minorities (Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Tran, Loecher, Kosyluk & Bauermeister, 2022:7).

The risk factors and challenges relating to the lack of acceptance, understanding and support as identified by the interviewees could be solidly linked to mutually the ecological systems theory and the advocacy theory in relation to the role and function of the school-based social workers. These risk factors and challenges are manifested and dealt with by school-based social workers as follows on the different ecological system levels:

- **Microsystem:** At the microsystem level, youth sexual minorities often grapple with the lack of acceptance and support from peers, teachers and family members. School-based social workers can intervene by providing individual counselling and support to these learners, creating a safe and accepting space within the microsystem (Craig, McInroy & Austin, 2018:233; Mecklenburg, 2020:6).
- **Mesosystem:** The lack of understanding and support from both the school and home environments can create conflicts for these youth. School-based social workers can collaborate with teachers, parents and guardians to bridge this gap, offering guidance on how to provide the necessary support, ultimately strengthening the mesosystem (Ream & Peters, 2021:46; Witt & Medina- Martinex, 2022:29).
- **Exosystem:** School policies that are not inclusive or supportive of youth sexual minorities can contribute to a hostile exosystem. School-based social workers can engage in policy advocacy, working with school administrators to develop and implement inclusive policies and practices that nurture acceptance within the school environment (Cabral & Pinto, 2023:17; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:13).
- **Macrosystem:** Societal norms and values play a crucial role in acceptance. Advocacy efforts, grounded in advocacy theory, can be used to challenge stereotypes and reduce stigma related to sexual minorities within the broader macrosystem. Social workers can organise workshops and awareness campaigns to shift societal attitudes (Cabral & Pinto, 2023:17; Chukwu *et al.*, 2019:57).

(2) Stigma and Stereotyping:

Stigmatization contributes to feelings of isolation and self-esteem issues, ultimately affecting academic performance and overall mental health. Moreover, pervasive stereotypes can restrict opportunities and hinder the development of a positive self-identity (Amnesty International, 2018:47; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:4; Patterson, Iveda & White, 2020:3).

Similarly to the above, the risk factors and challenges relating to the stigmatization and stereotyping of youth sexual minorities as described by the interviewees, are firmly linked to both the ecological systems theory and the advocacy theory in relation to the role and function of the school-based social workers. This stigmatization and stereotyping risk factors and challenges are revealed and handled by school-based social workers as follows on the respective ecological system levels:

- **Microsystem:** Stigma and stereotypes can lead to emotional distress for youth sexual minorities within their microsystem. School-based social workers can provide counselling and support to address the mental health impacts of stigma, mitigating its effects at this level (Green, Price-Feeney & Dorison, 2021:27; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:5).
- **Mesosystem:** Stereotypes may also manifest within the interactions between microsystems, such as between learners and teachers. By educating teachers and staff about youth sexual minorities and fostering understanding, social workers can help reduce the impact of stereotypes on the mesosystem (Simons, Chan, Beck & Asplund, 2019:461; Smith-Millman, Harrison, Price & Flaspohler, 2019:397).
- **Exosystem:** Advocacy at the exosystem level involves challenging systemic sources of stigma, such as discriminatory school policies or practices. Social workers can work to change these policies, making the school environment more inclusive and reducing the influence of stigma on youth sexual minorities (Russell *et al.*, 2021:2; UNICEF, 2022:2).
- **Macrosystem:** Advocacy theory is particularly relevant at the macrosystem level, where societal norms and values are deeply ingrained. Social workers can advocate for societal change by participating in campaigns, promoting youth sexual minority awareness and challenging harmful stereotypes in the wider community (Bullard, 2020:96; Coon, Alexander, Smith, Spellman, Klimasmith, Allen-Custodio, Clarkberg, Lynch, Knutson, Fountain, Rivera, Scherz & Morrow, 2022:396-397).

School-based social workers operate within a framework that considers the multi-layered influences on the lives of youth sexual minorities. They work to address challenges at each

ecological level while actively advocating for policy and societal changes that will foster greater acceptance, understanding and support for these vulnerable youth, ultimately creating more inclusive and affirming environments within the educational system and society as a whole.

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Experience victimisation, bullying, rape and death

The narratives shared by school-based social workers shed light on a deeply concerning sub-theme, emphasising the numerous challenges faced by youth sexual minorities within the educational system. Among the significant risk factors identified were instances of victimization, bullying, rape and even the harrowing spectre of death. These daunting obstacles paint a distressing picture of the realities that many young sexual minorities confront daily. The interviews brought to light poignant stories and personal accounts that serve as stark reminders of the adversity these vulnerable individuals endure. These narratives underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and inclusive policies within educational institutions to create safe and nurturing environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

“Normally due to them being minority, they are prone to being bullied...shamed, humiliated, discriminated being head battered, raped as well as being pushed and targeted, disgraced by members of our community” [Participant 17-YM: 35-39].

“Victimisation, rejection, isolation and bullying because of a lack of knowledge and poor understanding in the community..it's a topic that not everybody knows about or doesn't want to know about because of their upbringing and how they see the world...they face a lot of risks mainly due to lack of knowledge which renders them more vulnerable and more open to being rejected or judged, or irrational opinions and ideas...so they might be excluded from group activities rejected from the community or even just in class they don't have any friends or being teased by name calling or labelled and bullying. There's a lot of bullying taking place here at the school” [Participant 3-SJ: 48-60].

“Some of them get beaten some of them are sexually assaulted because they're saying I'm going to give you the best sex of your life. Then you will understand that you know what being with a man and this is a girl who identifies as lesbian. She doesn't want that. But she gets violated she doesn't want that and obviously after either the sexual assault or the rape or whatever, sometimes they panic and they kill them and these are cases that that pop up in Soweto and these are the areas we service. These things they pop up and if it's not that they are also at risk of being

disowned by the family and so the parents want nothing to do with them” [Participant 31-DT: 142-153].

“Rape is one of the very big things that they are exposed to. I’m also thinking of a case now where someone was brutally, brutally murdered. Like he was raped, he was assaulted to a point that he couldn’t do anything for himself, ended up in hospital and died because of a community that couldn’t accept him. We also have bullying here at the school. There’s one child that actually came to me and told me this is what’s happening and they actually stole his new phone to prove a point. That is what guys do. And you are not a guy....That is why your phone got stolen. Because you are not with the guys who actually do stuff like that” [Participant 7-JN: 74-86].

The sub-theme of victimization, bullying, rape and the fear of death among youth sexual minorities, as highlighted by school-based social workers, resonates with and finds empirical support in existing literature. Studies have documented the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by this specific population, shedding light on the gravity of these issues (Gower *et al.*, 2018:2; Mecklenburg, 2020:1; Russell *et al.*, 2021:1).

The sub-theme as referred to in the above narratives of the school-based social workers are described and confirmed as follows by the literature:

- (1) Bullying and Victimization:** Research consistently demonstrates that youth sexual minorities are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing bullying and victimization in school settings. The adverse effects of such victimization on their mental health, academic performance and overall well-being have been well-documented (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:3; Gower *et al.*, 2018:2; Roland & Burlew, 2017:4).
- (2) Sexual Assault and Rape:** Several studies have highlighted the disturbingly high rates of sexual assault and rape among youth sexual minorities particularly transgender individuals. These experiences often go unreported due to fear of discrimination and stigma, making it imperative to address this issue within educational and support systems (Amnesty International, 2018:39; Cabral & Pinto, 2023:1; Pretorius, 2020:142).
- (3) Fear of Death and Suicide:** The fear of death among youth sexual minorities can be linked to the disproportionate rates of suicidal ideation and attempts in this population. Discrimination, rejection and social isolation contribute to the increased risk of suicidal behaviours (Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:1; UNDP 2022:77; UNHR, 2019:19).

In the light of these insights, it is evident that the narratives shared by school-based social workers align with the broader body of literature on the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities. The experiences highlighted in these interviews underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions and policies aimed at creating inclusive and safe educational environments.

The identification and understanding of risk factors such as victimization, bullying, rape and the fear of death among youth sexual minorities are critical aspects of the work carried out by school-based social workers who play a vital role in addressing these challenges within the framework of the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory (Crawford, 2020:4) School-based social workers apply this framework to understand how these risk factors affect youth sexual minorities within multiple layers of influence. They work within the school environment to address issues like bullying and victimization on an individual basis, aiming to create a safe microsystem for these youth (Leung *et al.*, 2022:2). These social workers collaborate within the mesosystem with teachers, parents and other school staff to create a coordinated response to challenges faced by youth sexual minorities. This involves communication and advocacy efforts to ensure that learners receive the support they need (Leung *et al.*, 2022:38)

School-based social workers can advocate in the exosystem for policy changes and promote inclusive practices to address systemic issues, such as discrimination and harassment, at this level. The broader societal context, including cultural norms and legal protections, plays a significant role in the experiences of youth sexual minorities in their macrosystem (Paceley *et al.*, 2019:1879). Advocacy by school-based social workers can extend to the macrosystem level, lobbying for change in societal attitudes and policies that contribute to the challenges these youth face (Beck *et al.*, 2018:51-52; Reyneke, 2018:99).

In summary, school-based social workers use the ecological systems approach to understand the multi-layered impact of risk factors on youth sexual minorities and they employ advocacy theory to empower and support these youth at individual, group and systemic levels. Their work is essential for creating safe, inclusive educational environments and advocating for positive change within schools and society as a whole.

5.3.4 THEME 4: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT OF THE RISK FACTORS OR CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

After having given their perceptions of the challenges or risk factors that youth sexual minorities experience, the participants were asked to give their accounts of the impact that these risk factors

or challenges have on youth sexual minorities. From their responses the six (6) sub-themes summarised in table 5.6 below, emerged which are discussed separately giving the relevant storylines with a literature control.

TABLE 5-6 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT OF THE RISK FACTORS OR CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 4	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' perception of the impact of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities.	4.1 Experiences negative feelings and psycho-social health is affected. 4.2 Academic progress and general functioning are affected. 4.3 Become withdrawn, do not trust others and fear coming out. 4.4 Live secretly or live a lie. 4.5 Prone to substance abuse. 4.6 Self-harm or mutilation.

5.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Experiences negative feelings and psycho-social health is affected

Several narratives emerged from interviews with the participants, shedding light on the profound repercussions faced by youth sexual minorities. These individuals, as recounted by the social workers who work closely with them, grapple with a complex challenge that invariably translates into a heightened vulnerability to negative emotions and compromised psycho-social well-being. These stories serve to demonstrate the struggles endured by youth sexual minorities and the emotional toll exacted by societal prejudice and discrimination as follows:

“They can be bullied and when they are bullied it can lead to mental health problems, social isolation, where they refuse to come to school where they lose appetite where they start to suffer from depression (that) can lead to suicide” [Participant 6-RW: 67-72].

“I think it impacts on all aspects of their lives...it impacts their emotional stability because you sit with the knowledge that people dislike you; nobody wants to be disliked. And you sit with that ambivalence of do I be true to myself or do I be true to what I believe or do I go over into what people should think that I should be?...I think there's social exclusion, which also affects the emotional stability...it affects their familial lives...it affects all aspects of their lives...what's really interesting is that kids who have been excluded socially...might go for relationships that aren't as healthy. An almost subconscious way of proving what everyone says about that” [Participant 38-TvD: 106-120].

“...it also inhibits them from actually being who they are...it inhibits them from developing and forming part of everything else that other children who are, you know, heterosexual, for example, which is accepted by society...And I think that also impacts their sense of self, their sense of identity...being rejected, socially isolated, all of those things, the emotional psychological effects, it can actually be so strong on them that it can lead to isolation and depression and even anxiety, self -harm behaviour, substance abuse, risky behaviour...because I don't feel like they belong”

Participant 34-IvR: 73-86].

“Self-harm and mutilation we see a lot. Depressed, more introverted and withdrawn from others, conflict with peers and parents, educators, rebellious behaviour and slipping of classes and loss of interest in school and alcohol and drug abuse” [Participant 19-YvS: 45-49].

“...they tend to have low self-esteem. They tend to have suicide behaviours, poor school performance, eating disorder, anxiety, depression and the list is endless” [Participant 17-YM: 42-44].

The narratives shared by school-based social workers, which emphasise the negative feelings and adverse psycho-social impacts experienced by youth sexual minorities, resonate strongly with existing literature on the challenges faced by this marginalized group. Numerous studies and academic papers have explored the unique difficulties that sexual minority youth encounter, shedding light on the interconnectedness of these challenges with mental health and social well-being (Carastathis *et al.*, 2017:292; Ream & Peters, 2021:46; Roland & Burlew, 2017:21).

These narratives align with research that highlights the heightened risk of mental health disparities among youth sexual minorities. Literature has consistently demonstrated that these individuals are more likely to experience depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation compared to their heterosexual peers (Mecklenburg, 2020:2; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:2). The stressors associated with coming out, stigma, discrimination and family rejection can compound to create a hostile environment that negatively impacts their psychological health (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:481; van Bergen, 2021:1129; UNHR, 2019:66).

The experiences described by the school-based social workers underscore the critical role of support systems in mitigating these challenges. Existing research has consistently shown that social support, including that from family, peers and educators, can act as a protective factor against the adverse psychological effects experienced by sexual minority youth (Pretorius, 2020:144). The absence of a supportive network, as implied by the narratives, can exacerbate

feelings of isolation and despair (Brandon-Friedman, 2019:4; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2018:5; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:3).

The narratives provided by school-based social workers are confirmed by the well-documented challenges faced by youth sexual minorities as discussed in the literature. These narratives serve as a stark reminder of the pressing need for inclusive and supportive environments within educational institutions and the broader community to promote the mental health and well-being of youth sexual minorities. Understanding and addressing these challenges can lead to more targeted interventions and support systems to help youth sexual minorities thrive in the face of adversity (Carastathis *et al.*, 2017:291; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:1; Mayeza, 2021:302; Moskowitz, Rendina, Avila & Mustanski, 2021:2).

The narratives shared by school-based social workers regarding the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities can be effectively applied and understood through the lenses of the ecological systems approach and the advocacy theory. These frameworks offer valuable insights into the roles and responsibilities of school social workers in supporting and advocating for the well-being of these marginalized youth.

School-based social workers support individual learners (microsystem), foster communication between different stakeholders (mesosystem) and advocate for youth sexual minority inclusive policies and practices (exosystem and macrosystem) (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:238; Crawford, 2020:1-2; Leung *et al.*, 2022:20-21).

School based social workers engage in individual and group advocacy by ensuring access to services and support and they work towards policy changes that create inclusive and supportive environments for youth sexual minorities (Crawford, 2020:4; Edwards & Watson, 2020:6; Roland & Burlew, 2017:61; Stokes, 2023:6; Ubisi, 2021:107).

These frameworks underscore the multifaceted role of school social workers in addressing the needs and advocating for the well-being of youth sexual minorities within the school ecosystem and beyond.

5.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Academic progress and general functioning are affected

Based on interviews held with school-based social workers, it becomes evident that the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities have far-reaching implications, particularly when it comes to their academic progress and overall well-being. In these discussions, social workers

consistently emphasise that the unique struggles experienced by sexual minority youth can significantly hinder their ability to thrive in educational settings and engage in general functioning. This insight underscores the critical role of social workers in addressing the needs of these vulnerable learners and highlights the importance of fostering inclusive and supportive school environments for all.

“...in terms of their academic progress that would be impacted negatively. If you're struggling with your mental health, your relationships are impacted negatively, your academics are impacted negatively. There's a ripple effect correct in the whole life of the individual” [Participant 5-RH: 110-115].

“...some educators have a lack of understanding which will affect the learning process and emotional barrier to learning. The learners drop out of school. They are denied to act and dress according to their preferences because most schools have a code of conduct indicates they should uniformly be adhered to...” [Participant 19-YvS: 36-41].

“...a lot of the learners end up leaving the schools, because they go and do home schooling. They struggled to fit in. They struggled with acceptance” [Participant 25-CMM: 53-56].

Participants frequently noted that youth sexual minorities often grapple with mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and social isolation (Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:480; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:1-2). This response is confirmed by research consistently showing that youth sexual minorities are at a high risk of experiencing mental health disparities due to the discrimination and stigma they face in the school environment. This added stress can negatively affect their academic performance and general well-being (Ntombela, Tshuma & van Wijk, 2022:18698; Reyneke 2018:94).

The interviews also emphasised the prevalence of bullying and discrimination experienced by youth sexual minorities in schools. Studies reveal that youth sexual minorities are more likely to be victimized, which can lead to chronic absenteeism and decreased academic engagement. School-based social workers' observations align with research indicating that bullying and discrimination in schools can have profound, detrimental effects on the educational experience of youth sexual minorities (Abreu, Kenny, Hall & Huff, 2020:108; Levenson *et al.*, 2023:138; Ubisi 2021:109).

Participants frequently discussed the importance of fostering supportive, inclusive school environments. Research underscores the significance of youth sexual minorities having

supportive networks and accepting educational institutions. Studies have shown that when learners have access to supportive staff and inclusive policies, their academic achievement and mental well-being improve (Breshears & Lubbe-De Beer, 2016:100; Cabral & Pinto, 2023:16; Roland & Burlew, 2017:20).

The interviews also touched on family rejection as a significant challenge faced by youth sexual minorities. This aligns with studies indicating that family rejection can lead to homelessness or unstable living situations, which, in turn, disrupts a learners academic progress. Research also underscores the importance of family acceptance and support for youth sexual minorities to thrive in educational settings (Craig *et al.*, 2018:232; Patterson, Iveda & White, 2020:28)

The ecological systems approach recognizes that youth sexual minorities' well-being is influenced by various interconnected systems, such as family, school, community and societal norms. Challenges, like family rejection and bullying affect these youth on multiple levels. To support them, interventions must target these systems at various levels to create more inclusive and accepting environments (Patterson, Iveda & White, 2020:28; Pretorius, 2020:150; Nothdurfter & Nagy, 2017:376).

Advocacy theory empowers social workers to be advocates for youth sexual minorities. It emphasises their role in raising awareness about the challenges faced by these youth and advocating for policy changes that promote inclusivity in schools. Social workers can work both on an individual level to support youth sexual minorities and on a systemic level to drive change in the educational environment (Cocker, Hafford-Letchfield, Ryan & Barran, 2019:810; Crawford 2020:4; Human Rights Watch, 2023:7, 125).

In summary, these frameworks help social workers understand and address the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities in schools by considering the interconnected systems influencing their well-being and by empowering social workers to be advocates for positive change at various levels of the educational system.

5.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Become withdrawn, do not trust others and fear of coming out

In the interviews conducted with participating school-based social workers, a notable observation made by them was the way in which many young sexual minorities react to their circumstances by adopting behaviour marked by withdrawal, a deep-felt reluctance to trust others and a tangible fear of revealing their sexual identity. In the narratives that follow, these complex and often emotionally charged stories, offer a glimpse into the lives of youth sexual minorities as they

grapple with these challenges of coming to terms with their sexual orientation within the confines of the educational system.

“They get withdrawn. That’s the biggest impact. Not all but most drop out of school. They are withdrawn from school. They don’t participate in anything they tend to reject themselves as well to say what is wrong with me and why am I different? You know, remember in schools they haven’t really explored their sexuality. So it’s more of affirming to that. Some of them even try to commit suicide” [Participant 11-FN: 50-56].

“I think they’ve got a lack of trust. They don’t trust easily that don’t often seek professional help and rejection by others, peers, parents, educators and community and verbal bullying or assault of a learner caused by others which causes intentional harm” [Participant 19-YvS: 31-35].

“So risk factor #1 is they feel being bullied if they come out...and often they don’t want to come out because they are afraid of being exposed. They’re afraid of what people might say out there” [Participant 30-MV: 53-56].

“...I don’t feel like they belong. So I think the emotional effects of that...because they are unable to speak to anyone about it. They’re not allowed actually to be themselves. They withdraw, leading to isolation, leading to depression, leading to self-harm, all of these risky behaviours” [Participant 34-IvR: 86-92].

The theme of withdrawal is consistent with studies that highlight the impact of social isolation on the mental health of sexual minority youth (Beck, Maier, Means & Isaacson, 2018:253, Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11). To shield themselves from potential discrimination or bullying, young individuals may withdraw from social interactions, thereby further exacerbating feelings of loneliness and alienation (Anderson & Lough, 2021:1; Roland & Burlew, 2017:21, 30). This withdrawal can manifest as social avoidance, disengagement from school activities, or even self-imposed isolation (Rose, Kocet, Thompson, Flores, McKinney & Suprina, 2019:10; SAMHSA, 2023:56).

The reluctance by youth sexual minorities to trust others is also documented in the literature. School environments can be challenging for youth sexual minorities who often fear judgment or rejection from peers and even school staff. The fear of discrimination and lack of support can lead to a sense of mistrust, hindering their ability to build relationships and access critical resources (Francis, 2021:12; Jones, 2019:458; Leung *et al.*, 2022:16; UNHR, 2019:61).

The fear of coming out as a sexual minority aligns with extensive research on the challenges of disclosure and its potential consequences (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2018:19; Nyembezi, 2020:49). Disclosure can be a deeply personal and often anxiety-inducing process for these youth. The fear of rejection, harassment or negative reactions from peers and adults can be paralyzing. As a result, many youth sexual minorities choose to remain in the closet to protect themselves from these potential negative outcomes (Gower *et al.*, 2018:9; Mayeza, 2021:293; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:2).

To effectively support youth sexual minorities, it is essential to recognize these common challenges and employ evidence-based strategies that promote inclusivity, provide safe spaces and foster a sense of belonging within educational institutions (Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Russell, 2021:6). The narratives shared by school-based social workers serve as poignant reminders of the importance of addressing these issues to create a more equitable and supportive educational environment for all learners.

The ecological systems approach emphasises understanding the experiences of youth sexual minorities within the various systems they interact with, such as their immediate school environment and the interactions between school, family and community (Crawford, 2020:3; McCarty-Caplan, 2018:36; Pretorius, 2020:145). Advocacy theory underscores the importance of advocating for social change and justice on behalf of marginalized groups. In the context of youth sexual minorities, these theories highlight the need for creating more inclusive and equitable school environments through policy changes, awareness campaigns and support networks (Fantus & Newman, 2020:17; Levenson *et al.*, 2023:6; Walters *et al.*, 2020:159). In summary, applying the ecological systems approach helps those involved to understand the multifaceted challenges these youth face within their social contexts, while advocacy theory emphasises the importance of proactively addressing and rectifying these challenges to create a safer and more supportive educational environment.

5.3.4.4 Sub-theme 4.4: Live secretly or live a lie

Among the profound impacts of these adversities experienced by youth sexual minorities, a distressing revelation is the tendency for many youth sexual minorities to lead secret lives or conceal their true selves. This hidden reality is plainly depicted through the narratives extracted from the participants faced by these learners as they navigate a world where societal norms often demand that they live a lie to protect their identity.

“It’s when they end up not feeling free of being possibly rejected or being raped that they do not want come out. They will do it secretly and live secretly. Because if you are living that life it’s a problem and you need to hide who you (are) and that is so stressful and leads to depression” [Participant 12-ZM: 50-54].

“Some of them hide because they cannot come out, but. I see now it’s becoming better, I must say, because a lot of them are gaining courage and they’re coming out and they are not afraid of anybody” [Participant 20-FD: 42-45].

“...they would rather withdraw and not even try to show anyone what they’re actually made of, because some people are not even willing to see or to listen to them” [Participant 34-IvR: 103-108].

Studies have shown that the concealment of one's sexual orientation can lead to a variety of negative outcomes (Keskin, Orak, Tunç, Gümüştekin, Emirza, & Cengizhan, 2022:319). For instance, it can contribute to heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression among youth sexual minorities. Living a lie or suppressing one's true identity may result in a persistent fear of rejection or discrimination, which can have adverse effects on mental health. Moreover, the burden of secrecy may hinder the development of healthy relationships and emotional well-being of youth sexual minorities (Beagan, Bizzeth, Pride, Sibbald, 2022:1-2; Huang & Chan, 2022:630).

These insights align with the narratives shared by the participating school-based social workers, who have first-hand experience of these challenges suffered by youth sexual minorities. Their accounts emphasise the urgency of addressing the issue of secrecy and inauthenticity among youth sexual minorities, not only for the sake of their mental and emotional well-being but also for the development of a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. It underscores the importance of implementing policies and programmes aimed at fostering acceptance and understanding and providing a safe space for learners to express their true selves (Doyle & Bareto, 2023:1911).

The ecological systems approach emphasises the importance of considering the various levels of influence on an individual's life. It helps those concerned to recognize that the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities living secret lives are influenced by their immediate environments, as well as broader societal factors (Crawford, 2020:4). Advocacy theory complements this by highlighting the need to advocate for social change and policy reforms to address the issues faced by marginalized groups. In this context, the narratives shared by school-based social workers are

vital tools for advocacy efforts, bridging the gap between the lived experiences of youth sexual minorities and the push for systemic change environment (Asakura, 2016:17; Leung *et al.*, 2022:9). In essence, these frameworks together offer a comprehensive strategy for understanding and addressing the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities and advocating for a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

5.3.4.5 Sub-theme 4.5: Prone to substance abuse

Participants shared their insights on how the challenges that these young individuals encounter may contribute to an increased risk of substance abuse. Their experiences and perspectives as expressed below, shed light on the critical need for targeted support and inclusive policies to ensure the well-being and resilience of this marginalized demographic tendency.

“They fall into substance abuse and this creates issues for the health of the person” [Participant 11-FN: 41-42].

“I think our generation is constantly changing. There are things that are new to us which we need more understanding to accept them otherwise the child will be at risk of using drugs and many other things because the child lacks support and understanding” [Participant 14-HD: 39-44].

“I've seen others resorting to substance abuse” [Participant 23-MM: 74-75].

“They can end up using drugs to cope with the situation...” [Participant 27-NK: 29-30].

Research has consistently shown that youth sexual minorities, face unique stressors, including discrimination, stigma and a lack of social support, which can contribute to increased rates of substance abuse (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11; Macklenburg, 2020:44).

Moreover, studies have revealed that youth sexual minorities often resort to substance use as a means of coping with the emotional distress brought on by the challenges they face, including bullying, rejection, or family disapproval. The intersection of these stressors with the process of self-discovery and identity formation during adolescence creates a particularly vulnerable population (Daniels, Struthers, Maleke, Catabay, Lane, McIntyre & Coates, 2019:359, 372; Levenson, Craig & Austin, 2023:141).

The literature also underscores the importance of providing these young individuals with culturally competent and inclusive support systems. School-based social workers, play a pivotal role in creating safe spaces and providing resources to address the unique needs of youth sexual

minorities. By doing so, they can help mitigate the risk of substance abuse and promote overall well-being among this vulnerable population.

The ecological systems approach emphasises the interconnected systems that influence an individual's development, allowing social workers to recognize and address stressors at different environmental levels, from the individual to the community. This approach helps social workers to understand that the challenges faced by these youth are a result of complex interactions (Delany, Sanville & Shields, 2022:2; Krueger, Fish & Upchurch, 2020:60).

Advocacy theory on the other hand, underscores the role of social workers as advocates for marginalized populations. By applying this theory, social workers become champions for youth sexual minorities, advocating for inclusive policies, anti-bullying measures and resources that promote acceptance. They work not only on an individual level but also for systemic change in the educational environment (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021: 5-6; Schmitz & Tyler, 2019:712-713).

In essence, these theoretical frameworks guide social workers in understanding the complexities faced by youth sexual minorities and enable them to proactively create a more supportive and inclusive educational environment. The goal is to reduce substance abuse risks and promote the overall well-being of these learners while advancing social justice and equity in education.

5.3.4.6 Sub-theme 4.6: Self-harm or self-mutilation

Within the numerous consequences stemming from these challenges, self-harm and self-mutilation stand out as profoundly disconcerting expressions. The narratives collected from interviews with participating school-based social workers, shed light on the distressing stories that vividly illustrate the struggles faced by youth sexual minorities and the alarming prevalence of self-harming behaviour among them. The following excerpts from interviews serve as windows into the emotional and psychological toll that these young individuals endure within the school setting, emphasising the urgent need for support and intervention.

“Self-harm and mutilation we see a lot” [Participant 19-IvR: 45].

“Depression, anxiety, self-harm, denial of themselves, sort of wanting to hide who they are from, from people and that can have long-term consequences” [Participant 5-RH: 107-109].

“...what I've seen is because they are unable to speak to any anyone about it. They're not allowed actually to be themselves. They withdraw, leading to isolation, leading to depression, leading to self-harm. All of these risky behaviours” [Participant 34-IvR: 88-92].

These storylines are confirmed by existing literature, reiterating the urgent need for inclusive, accepting and supportive school environments. Additionally, the storylines emphasise the essential role of mental health professionals like school-based social workers to provide early intervention and support to learners who are grappling with the distressing impact of risk factors and challenges on their lives, notably self-harm and self-mutilation (Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:6-7; Moskowitz, Rendina, Alvarado Avilla & Mustanski, 2022:2).

The literature consistently highlights the elevated risk factors faced by youth sexual minorities. Bullying, discrimination, social isolation and lack of social support are pervasive stressors that significantly increase the likelihood of mental health struggles, including self-harm and self-mutilation (Abaver & Cishe, 2018:65; Anderson & Lough, 2021:444). The stories from the interviews echo these insights, illustrating how these risk factors are not theoretical but actual lived experiences for many youth sexual minorities.

The stories shared by school-based social workers, linked to the Ecological Systems Approach and Advocacy Theory, emphasise the multi-layered impact of risk factors and challenges on youth sexual minorities' mental health within the school environment (Leung *et al.*, 2022:7,16; Smith-Millman *et al.*, 2019:380). The ecological systems approach highlights how these challenges are influenced by various systems, from the individual to the societal level, underscoring the need for safe and supportive school environments. Advocacy Theory underscores the crucial role of advocates, like school-based social workers, in pushing for change and support within schools, working towards inclusive and accepting climates and accessible mental health resources (Rafter *et al.*, 2023:6; Silverio *et al.*, 2022:5). Together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the complex issues faced by youth sexual minorities in educational settings.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter starts with describing the research participants' background and demographical details. The initial section of the chapter introduces the study's diverse group of participants hailing from schools from various areas within the Gauteng province, by offering insights into their backgrounds and contexts.

The discussion then transitions to exploring the first four themes and their associated sub-themes identified in analysing the data obtained from the interviews with participating school based social workers. The first theme deals with the school-based social workers' description of the

intervention services provided to youth sexual minorities. The second theme is about school based social workers' opinions on the common types of intervention services provided to youth sexual minorities. A particular emphasis is placed on the common types of intervention services that these social workers render.

The third and fourth themes examined in this chapter revolve around the risk factors and challenges that youth sexual minorities face and the repercussions of these factors on their lives. Light is shed on the difficulties and adversities encountered by this vulnerable group and the importance of intervention services rendered by school based social workers is highlighted in addressing these issues. Literature is reviewed and a literature control is applied to contextualise and confirm the research findings derived from participants' views as expressed in their narratives with their insights lastly integrated in correlation with the ecological systems approach and the advocacy theory as it applies to youth sexual minorities and school-based social workers.

In the next chapter, the narrative shifts its focus towards the experiences of school-based social workers as they provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The challenges encountered in this process are explored, along with the emotional aspects involved in delivering such services. Additionally, the chapter explores the support services available to these social workers as they provide assistance to youth sexual minorities. Themes five to eight are presented.

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND LITERATURE CONTEXTUALISATION (PART 2)

I Became A Social Worker Because I Want To Give A Voice To Those Who Don't Feel Heard – Peter Swanson

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the second chapter presenting the research insight gained and the interpretation made in analysing the data obtained during the individual interviews with the participating school based social workers about their experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. In Chapter Five, the first part of the research insights and literature contextualisation are presented by focusing on themes one to four. In this chapter the research insights and literature contextualisation are presented focusing on themes five to eight.

6.2 RESEARCH INSIGHT, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Theme five provides an overview of the experiences of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Theme six, unpacks the challenges school-based social workers face in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Theme seven explores the feelings of school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities and theme eight, delves into the various support services that are available to school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The subsequent sections present in-depth narratives that emerged from these themes.

6.2.1 THEME 5: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

This theme emerged from the responses provided by school-based social workers in answer to the question posed by the researcher wherein they were asked to explain their experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The sub-themes comprising the participants' experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities discussed below, are listed in Table 6.1.

TABLE 6-1 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKER'S EXPERIENCES IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 5	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	5.1 Has no direct experience in rendering services to youth sexual minorities. 5.2 Difficult or challenging. 5.3 Can be rewarding or heart-breaking. 5.4 Accept the person, focus on the presenting problem and win trust.

6.2.1.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Has no direct experience in rendering services to youth sexual minorities

The responses to the question regarding school-based social workers experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities revealed that some school-based social workers acknowledged that they had not directly engaged in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. However, they postulated their insights and opinions for future rendering of intervention services to youth sexual minorities. These interviews not only shed light on the evolving role of school-based social workers in addressing the needs of youth sexual minorities but also highlighted the collaborative nature of the professional community in this crucial endeavour. The storylines that follow attest to the different responses to the question.

“...I've never worked with someone who identify as gay or lesbian” [Participant 10-DM: 88-89].

“I've never worked with someone who identify as gay or lesbian” [Participant 16-LM1: 61-62]. “I can say I'm confident because we have received more than one training on working with the LGBTQIA class community. So, I'd love to actually have that experience” [Participant 16-LM1:66-68].

“No, I haven't encountered any case, but then I think, they do need our support because we are living in a democratic country because they have rights and as a social worker I don't have a problem in rendering services to these individuals because I am making a difference and I am creating awareness about them and their needs and rights” [Participant 27-NK: 36-42].

It is noteworthy that some social workers admitted to lacking direct experience in rendering such services but were nonetheless willing to contribute their perspectives for future interventions (Davis, 2021:88; Mecklenburg, 2020:49-50). The willingness to engage with the topic is a positive sign of their openness to learning and growing in their roles (Davis, 2021:88). This phenomenon

can be understood in the context of the literature, which underscores the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for youth sexual minorities within schools (Heffernan, Dauenhauer & Cesnales, 2023:149-150; Leitch, 2017:23).

While direct experience is valuable, the absence of such experience should not deter social workers from engaging with the issue (Argüello, 2022:2-3). The commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities is a vital step towards improving their overall well-being (Henrickson, 2015:805). Inexperienced school-based social workers can draw from research that highlights the disproportionate rates of mental health issues and challenges experienced by youth sexual minorities, in supporting learning and exploration on the topic of youth sexual minorities (Hoff & Camacho, 2019:11). By engaging in dialogue and collaborating with colleagues who have direct experience, they can develop effective strategies for intervention and support that they can apply when opportunity for intervention services with an individual that identifies as a member of the LGBTQQIP2SAA community (Argüello, 2022:9; Winkler, 2018:41-42).

The willingness of social workers to share their insight and opinions, even in the absence of direct experience, aligns with the collaborative spirit found in the professional community (Mann, Jones, Van Bergen & Burns, 2023:8). The literature on this subject stresses the importance of teamwork and partnerships in creating a supportive environment for youth sexual minorities (Heffernan, et al., 2023:149-150; Lerner & Robles, 2016:11-12). School-based social workers can benefit from the experiences of their colleagues and friends who have directly worked with youth sexual minorities. Collaboration allows for the sharing of best practices, the exchange of ideas and the development of more comprehensive and inclusive intervention strategies (Mecklenburg, 2020:21; Pretorius, 2020:148, Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:131).

The responses from school-based social workers, even those without direct experience, are consistent with the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory. These responses reflect an understanding of the interconnected systems within which learners operate, emphasising the importance of the school environment in shaping the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Argüello, 2022:5; Lerner & Robles, 2016:11-12). Additionally, these responses show a proactive advocacy-oriented approach, as school-based social workers are willing to share their insights and collaborate with colleagues to promote inclusivity and improve support for youth sexual minorities within the school system (Heffernan et al., 2023:149-150). In essence, they recognize the significance of their role in effecting positive change in the microsystem of the school

environment and advocating for marginalized groups (Lvchenko, 2021:21-24; Mehrotra, Hudson & Hess, 2023:13-14).

6.2.1.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Difficult or challenging

Participating school-based social workers expressed the unique challenges they encounter when working with youth sexual minorities. In this narrative, their responses, shedding light on the complexities of supporting and advocating for youth sexual minorities within the school environment are explored. These storylines offer a view about the difficulties and challenges the school-based social workers encounter in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

“It was difficult because I had a learner who identified herself as a boy. So it's difficult. I don't know how to call the learner. Should I say is a he or is it she? So it was a little bit difficult in identifying the learner and grouping the learner according to the societal gender of society only recognises male and female. So this Learner recognises herself as a man, so. It was difficult because even others who are born as me, as they didn't want to be around the learner, so it was so difficult. I was conducting a group. I ended up giving her individual intervention because no one wanted to be around the particular learner, so it was difficult to engage” [Participant 21-NM: 55-66].

“...for me it's a personal thing because...my younger brother is gay...I always struggle with dealing with such cases because I always have this thing.... Why don't people understand? You know, we've been through this, me and my family and for us, it was not easy, but we made it easy. So how? Why not? Other people cannot do this and then we understand it's issues of religion, it's issues of education, it's things that people say, it's no, it's just fashion. You will change. It's just the phase. You know, people are just lost in this and then some you can save and some they just can't like, no, I'm not taking this. So for me, it's personal my experience with them like when I get in there, I give it all. I involve the family, the community, not just the community, in the school also at home I put 100% of my effort so my experience is that sometimes it gets personal that and then It's difficult for me” [Participant 23-MM: 101-116]

“It's a challenge because I only deal with cases that are referred to me from the schools, so I have found that in most cases the schools don't refer these learners to me because they view them not as challenging learners, but they view these learners as learners that do not need emotional support because they see it as it's their choice. They made a choice of sexual preference. So they

need to deal with what comes from it. You choose to be gay. You choose to be lesbian, so if you can't deal with the emotional side of it, that's your problem. That's where the ignorance comes in from the school side and the lack of empathy" [Participant 25-CMM: 68-75].

"...I've had an interesting experience in the beginning of this year where I had to guide a girl through...it was an interesting experience for me because she disclosed her sexual orientation towards the classroom in a very casual way and then due to pressure from outside, an adult in her life, she would like to draw it back but also engage in it and it was an interesting way of working with this child because you don't want to pressure her into accepting her sexual orientation, but you don't want to put her off of her accepting it...It's a very non-engaging way of rendering services, but I also think...you also have to guide the teachers through having enough sensitivity and enough opening up to this child and also working with the parents helping them understand that rejecting her isn't going solve the problem here" [Participant 38-TvD: 124-139].

The experiences shared by school-based social workers in the interviews shed light on the multifaceted challenges they face when working with youth sexual minorities. These challenges are not only important to understand but also are essential to address to ensure that the educational environment is inclusive and supportive for all learners (Bullard, 2020:74; Stokes 2023:8). A significant body of literature on this subject corroborates the difficulties faced by school-based social workers and provides valuable insights into the complexities of supporting and advocating for youth sexual minorities (Shattuck, Willging & Green, 2020: 1033-1034; Stokes, 2023: 70). The challenges identified by the social workers also connect to the broader literature on the role of schools in promoting LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusivity (Mann *et al.*, 2023:8). The research underscores that schools should implement policies and programmes that not only prevent discrimination and harassment but also actively promote acceptance and understanding. School-based social workers serve as vital advocates for these initiatives, working to create environments where youth sexual minorities feel valued and supported (Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1035).

The experiences of school-based social workers in supporting youth sexual minorities can be understood through the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory. The ecological systems approach emphasises the interconnected nature of individual, school and societal influences on youth sexual minorities (Fantus & Newman, 2021:16). School social workers navigate these systems to create inclusive environments. Advocacy theory highlights the role of the school-based social worker as a change agent, working to empower and advocate for

marginalized learners, aligning with broader goals of social justice and equity (Chan, DeDiego, & Band, 2019:31). These frameworks help inform the complexities and challenges of supporting youth sexual minorities within the school context, emphasising the importance of creating safe and inclusive educational environments for all learners.

6.2.1.3 Sub-theme 5.3: Can be rewarding or heart-breaking

In the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, the question of their experiences in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities prompted a spectrum of emotions and perspectives. School-based social workers expressed that working with youth sexual minorities could be a profoundly rewarding and fulfilling experience, while others described it as equally heart-breaking and challenging (Le, Yu & Webb, 2023:2). These storylines shed light on the multifaceted nature of this crucial field of practice, where compassion and empathy intermingle with the complexities of addressing the unique needs and struggles of youth sexual minorities navigating their sexual identities within the school environment, as follows:

“...in some situations it's...easy and difficult...where kids are out to their families and are out to their peer groups...it's a really positive experience and it's really easy...it becomes really difficult when a child is perhaps identifying with a different gender and their family is not accepting of it or they feel like they have to hide it from their family members...to provide support to them other than just the counselling is incredibly difficult. But...in a lot of situations that the work that we do with them is really positive and affirming and...when we've made breakthroughs, when we've made progress in terms of feelings of self-acceptance and self-worth...we see the child blossom and grow and that is really so wonderful and those situations are fantastic. But in the situations where the family's very close to the idea and all of those things, it can be quite heart-breaking” [Participant 5-RH: 118-139].

“My experience is that I've realised that so many children are not heard and nobody is listening to them....no one cares to understand their experiences... they feel very judged by people...they find themselves being teased a lot because people are not informed about LGBTQI they don't even know how to categorise these people. They will call them names and making the person feel like they have done something wrong for who they identify as. I honestly do not have any problem working with these individuals but honestly I feel that no one is really interested in understanding the LGBTQI community and that is very sad for me” [Participant 13-KL: 44-55].

The notion that some school-based social workers find this work profoundly rewarding and fulfilling is consistent with literature that emphasises the positive impact of supportive and inclusive school environments on the well-being and mental health of youth sexual minorities (Craig *et al.*, 2018:232-233; Le, Yu & Webb, 2023:2). Research has consistently shown that when youth sexual minorities receive appropriate support and affirmation, they are more likely to experience improved self-esteem, reduced risk of mental health issues and enhanced overall academic success (Dentato, Kelly, Lloyd & Bush, 2018:309; GLSEN, 2019:28, 43-44).

On the other hand, the experiences described as heart-breaking and challenging by other school-based social workers underscore the ongoing challenges and disparities faced by sexual minority youth in schools (GLSEN, 2019:29; Leung *et al.*, 2022:16). Literature highlights the prevalence of discrimination, bullying and stigmatization that many of these learners endure, which can lead to increased rates of anxiety, depression and even suicidal ideation. The emotional toll on school-based social workers attempting to address these issues within the constraints of the school environment is reflective of the broader societal struggles faced by youth sexual minorities (Colvin, Egan & Coulter, 2019:1940).

In essence, these interviews underscore the delicate balance that school-based social workers must navigate in trying to provide a safe and supportive space for sexual minority youth while grappling with the systemic and individual barriers they encounter (Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:1; Mecklenburg, 2020:40). The literature reinforces the critical role that social workers play in advocating for policy changes, fostering inclusivity and offering targeted support to help these learners thrive in their educational journeys (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2; Pretorius, 2020:150). The emotional diversity expressed in the interviews serves as a powerful reminder that the work in this field is far from a one-size-fits-all approach and requires a deep understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities in schools (Bullard, 2020:7; Gower *et al.*, 2018:8).

The ecological systems approach underscores the importance of understanding the interconnected layers of influence on youth sexual minorities within the school environment. It emphasises the need for school-based social workers to navigate and address these various systems to create a supportive and inclusive space (Leung *et al.*, 2022:2). Advocacy theory highlights the role of school-based social workers as advocates for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities. It encourages social workers to actively work to change policies, practices and attitudes that perpetuate discrimination or harm, thereby creating a safer and more supportive

educational environment (Chan *et al.*, 2019:37). Together, these theoretical frameworks provide a comprehensive and actionable guide for school-based social workers to address the complex challenges and support the unique needs of youth sexual minorities in their care (Crawford, 2020:4).

6.2.1.4 Sub-theme 5.4: Accept the person, focus on the presenting problem and win trust

The school-based social workers highlighted their commitment to creating all-encompassing and safe environments within educational settings. Rather than emphasising the learners' sexual orientation or gender identity, these social workers demonstrated an unconditional acceptance of youth sexual minorities. Their approach is centred on addressing the presenting issues and building trust with these young individuals, fostering an atmosphere of lived and experienced support and understanding that is paramount for their overall well-being and personal development. This proactive approach underscores the vital role school-based social workers play in advocating for and empowering youth sexual minorities within the school system. The following storylines reflect this discussion:

“Acceptance is all that is required from me. Accepting the person for who and what he or she is without judging them. That's all that's required so that they'll be able to open up and ask for whatever assistance they want. But the minute you judge them that's where they will withdraw to say no, I can't trust this person, so I need to get them to trust me by accepting them the way they are holistically” [Participant 29-MD: 45-52]

“I think from a social work site we are we have non-judgmental attitude. I've encountered a lot of my friends especially and also clients being a part of the LGBTQ community and I think for them, they are longing for acceptance and being loved and being able to be themselves and feel comfortable” [Participant 36-MVA: 43-48].

“I try my best to have open conversations and try not to be shocked or surprised by questions that come up and just being honest. Say, look, I don't know, but we can do the research together including other role players, I have a transgender girl now who we've arranged to see a therapist who specialises in that so we try as much as possible to intervene and to do intervention services as far as educational and support services” [Participant 37-NN: 65-73].

“... [youth sexual minorities] are very open and receptive and often just want to hear about being accepted I don't really focus on homosexuality or what the problem is. I focus on the problem...at that stage, at that moment. For instance a girl sits in front of me and she's got a conflict situation

with her girlfriend. Then we will adjust. If I only focus on their sexuality, she will get withdrawn. She don't want talk open and freely to me, so that is very important for me to be approachable to the child and that the child realises that I won't judge him or her and that they can trust you because they have a trust issue. In my 9 years as a school social worker, learners in the adolescence phase are very confused and they often experiment and social media will play a role and peer group and sometimes they are just experimenting with it and later you'll find that they come back to school and tell you I've been married and I'm going to have a baby. So I focus on that problem the child is experiencing at that time. Is it identity problem is it a conflict problem relationship problem whatever this situation is" [Participant 19-YvS: 54-74].

The experiences shared by school-based social workers in their interviews align with existing literature on providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The following crucial aspects supported and confirmed by literature are emphasised:

- **Inclusive and Safe Environments:** Creating inclusive and safe school environments is essential for the well-being of youth sexual minorities as documented in various studies. Safe schools are associated with lower instances of bullying, better academic performance and improved mental health outcomes for these learners (Breshears & Lubbe-De Beer, 2016:100; Fantus & Newman, 2021:14).
- **Acceptance and Non-Stigmatization:** The acceptance demonstrated by school-based social workers mirrors the literature's emphasis on providing non-stigmatizing support for youth sexual minorities. Acceptance helps reduce the negative psychological and social impacts experienced by sexual minority youth (Deloatch-Williams, 2020:39; Mecklenburg, 2020:2).
- **Client-Centred Approach:** The focus on addressing presenting issues, rather than fixating on sexual orientation or gender identity, aligns with the well-established client-centred approach in school social work. This approach prioritizes understanding the unique needs and concerns of the youth sexual minority learners (Astramovich & Scott, 2020:312; Davis, 2021:84, 90; SAMHSA, 2023:51).
- **Building Trust and Therapeutic Alliance:** Building trust is a fundamental component of effective counselling and intervention in school social work, particularly with vulnerable individuals like youth sexual minorities. Trust and a strong therapeutic alliance facilitate open communication and successful intervention (Alessi, Dillon & Van der Horn, 2019:4; Miller, 2016:311; Sagui-Henson, Welcome Chamberlain & Smith, 2022:440).

- **Advocacy and Empowerment:** School-based social workers advocate for and empower youth sexual minorities. This corresponds with literature urging educators and professionals to actively support these learners. Allies play a crucial role in creating a more inclusive and equitable educational experience for youth sexual minorities (Mims, Hof, Dinsmore & Wielechowski, 2016:8; Pryor, 2020:77).
- **The Role of School-Based Social Workers:** The experiences of school-based social workers underscore their evolving and expanding role in addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities within the educational system. This aligns with the growing recognition of the pivotal role they play in ensuring the well-being of all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Chukwu *et al.*, 2019:48; Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18699).

The experiences of school-based social workers in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities align well with the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory in that the ecological systems approach emphasises the interconnectedness of an individual's development within various systems, from the microsystem (the immediate environment) to the macrosystem (societal and cultural influences) (Beck *et al.*, 2018:46; Fernandes, Alves & Gato, 2023:8). In the context of the interviews, the social workers are fostering inclusive and safe school environments (microsystem) by demonstrating acceptance, addressing presenting issues and building trust. It also underscores the broader impact of these actions within the school system (mesosystem) and the wider societal context (macrosystem) (Crawford 2020:4).

Advocacy theory related to the responses from the participants emphasises the role of professionals in championing the rights and well-being of individuals or groups facing discrimination or inequality (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:4). The school-based social workers in these interviews serve as advocates for youth sexual minorities by actively supporting and empowering them (Crawford, 2020:4). Their commitment to creating inclusive environments and addressing presenting problems reflects a proactive advocacy stance. Advocacy theory highlights the significance of professionals taking a stand and working to eliminate systemic barriers that impede the rights and dignity of youth sexual minorities and the social workers' actions exemplify this advocacy-oriented approach (Argüello, 2022:9; Beck *et al.*, 2018:46).

6.2.2 THEME 6: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' ACCOUNTS OF THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

After the school-based social workers had explained their experiences of providing services to youth sexual minorities, the researcher went on to ask them to recount the challenges they face in rendering such services. The sub-themes that support this topic are listed in Table 6.2 and are further discussed.

TABLE 6-2 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKER'S ACCOUNTS OF CHALLENGES THEY FACE IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 6	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	6.1 Parent's lack of involvement or acceptance. 6.2 Beliefs or bias about sexual minorities. 6.3 Youth sexual minorities' needs not being met. 6.4 Lack of training and resources. 6.5 Lack of confidentiality and support from educators and other professionals. 6.6 When youth is unsure about own gender orientation. 6.7 Child does not trust or asks social worker to intervene about school policy. 6.8 Bullying in school and a non-conducive environment. 6.9 Personal sexual orientation.

6.2.2.1 Sub-theme 6.1: Parent's lack of involvement or acceptance

In the voices of the participating school-based social workers, an expressive challenge emerges when they strive to offer effective support and intervention services to youth sexual minorities, namely the absence of parental involvement or acceptance. In the interviews it became evident that, despite their commitment to creating inclusive and affirming environments for all learners, they frequently encounter hurdles when parental support is lacking. The experiences shared by school-based social workers shed light on the complex landscape in which they operate, where the emotional and psychological well-being of youth sexual minorities hinges not only on their own resilience but also on the vital role parents play in their journey towards self-acceptance and a safe educational experience. The following storylines underscore the critical importance of fostering collaboration and understanding among all stakeholders – parents and families:

"What also is the challenge, obviously some of the families are very rigid and very black and white thinking and in some families it's a big no. We don't talk about it and that's not even an option. So that child needs the support but the parents, in my experience are totally against it. They don't

even want to talk about it. So that's extremely challenging also to give support and educate the parents especially for the extended family to also to come on board and to be on the same page and to support this child” [Participant 3-SJ: 139-147].

“Whether the parents is for it or against it, it is said that your parents is your basic support, your first person. And if that is lacking, it makes your job even more difficult because you are struggling to get a support system for them to be able to function to be able to cope” [Participant 36-MVA: 97-103].

“...parents are absent in this children's lives. They believe that if a child is at school it is the responsibility of the school...We come across challenge whereby now if you want to have a meeting and set up an appointment with the parent so that you educate them about maybe their child's behaviour or maybe for example, how the child wants to express themselves, then most of them are absent. They never come to schools, we have to go to them...We have similar challenges in understanding how their kids now express themselves or want to be seen. Then most of them do not come and then some of them take them to initiation schools saying: 'Hey I'll show you that you are men. You are not a gay, so you must go to initiation school'. You see those traditional parents? That is the most challenging part when you have to intervene and assist the child...” [Participant 22-EM: 160-182].

“...mostly co-operation from the parents' side, because a lot of these learners have not yet disclosed their status to their family or their parents, so they will come and say that they're struggling in the home environment, they want to come out to their parents, but they don't know how and it's not for me to push or to make that decision. It's their choice, so it's difficult for me to support them in making that decision if I cannot involve the parents” [Participant 25-CMM: 103-111].

Literature underscores these sentiments raised by school-based social workers in the following ways:

- **Parental Lack of Involvement:** The interviews with school-based social workers highlighted a recurring challenge, namely the lack of parental involvement and acceptance when working with youth sexual minorities. This challenge is a critical point of concern, echoing findings from existing literature. Studies emphasise the essential role that parental support plays in the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Katz-Wise, Rosario & Tsappis, 2016:4). Parental acceptance is associated with positive mental health outcomes, reduced rates of depression, suicide, substance abuse and homelessness among these

young individuals (Breshears & De Beer, 2016:95). When parents are not involved or accepting, it creates a void in the support network that school-based social workers strive to provide (Abreu, Lefevor, Conzalez, Teran & Watson, 2022:2).

- **Impact on Youth Well-Being:** The literature further clarifies the impact of parental non-involvement or rejection on the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Abreu *et al.*, 2022:3). Research consistently shows that young people who lack familial acceptance are at a heightened risk of experiencing social isolation, emotional distress and reduced self-esteem or even suicidal ideation (Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18702). They may also face barriers in accessing essential resources and information regarding their sexual orientation and gender identity (Kim, Jeong, Appleby, Christensen & Miller, 2021:3744; O'Malley & Holzinger, 2018:54). The absence of parental involvement can exacerbate the challenges youth sexual minorities face both within and outside the educational setting (Mills-Koonce, Rehder & McCurdy, 2018:643; SAMHSA, 2020:7).
- **Supportive Interventions:** In response to this challenge, school-based social workers often need to design and implement targeted interventions that aim to bridge the gap left by non-supportive parents (Haltom & Ratcliff, 2021:1117; SAMHSA, 2023:73-74). The literature underscores the value of such interventions, highlighting that supportive school environments can significantly mitigate the negative effects of parental non-involvement (Patterson *et al.*, 2020:3). These interventions may include support groups, counselling services and safe spaces where youth sexual minorities can connect with peers and find a sense of belonging and acceptance (Breshears & De Beer, 2016:88; Mims *et al.*, 2016:5; Patterson *et al.*, 2020:195-196).
- **Legal and Policy Implications:** The literature also underscores the importance of legal and policy frameworks in addressing the challenge of parental non-involvement (Bullard, 2020:101-102; Human Rights Watch, 2023:3). Comprehensive anti-discrimination policies and legal protections that explicitly cover youth sexual minorities can offer guidance and a mandate for schools to create inclusive environments (Chereni, 2017:512). This legal context can encourage parental involvement by sending a clear message of support for youth sexual minorities (Necel, 2019:512).
- **Cultural and Community Context:** Parental non-involvement often stems from cultural and community factors, as reflected in the responses from school-based social workers (Keskin *et al.*, 2022:312). The literature notes that the cultural and religious beliefs of parents can significantly influence their acceptance of youth sexual minorities (Kleinhans, 2018:20; SAMHSA, 2023:41). Understanding and addressing these cultural and

community factors is vital for school-based social workers as they work to foster understanding and acceptance between parents and their LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Craig et al., 2018:236; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:497).

The challenge of parental non-involvement in providing services to youth sexual minorities is a critical issue. When viewed through the ecological systems approach, it is evident that this challenge affects youth sexual minorities at various levels, from individual well-being to interactions between systems and external cultural influence (Cheung & Leung, 2020:2; Marraccini, 2022:31). Advocacy theory suggests that school-based social workers can play a key role in addressing this challenge by advocating for change in educational, family and legal contexts to support youth sexual minorities (Abreu, Audette, Mitchell, Simpson, Ward, Ackerman, Gonzalez & Washington, 2021:117; Marraccini, 2022:41). By integrating these frameworks, school-based social workers can work to bridge the gap left by non-involved parents and promote the well-being of youth sexual minorities in inclusive and affirming environments.

6.2.2.2 Sub-theme 6.2: Beliefs or bias about sexual minorities

This sub-theme provided a prevalent emerging challenge that hinders school-based social workers ability to provide effective intervention services to youth sexual minorities, namely the presence of deeply ingrained beliefs or biases surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity. The school-based social workers shared compelling stories that shed light on the impact of such biases in the educational system, revealing the need for greater understanding, empathy and inclusivity to ensure the well-being and success of all youth sexual minorities. The following storylines are evidence to this:

“...the child starts to feel small and even started to questioning what's actually happening to him. Like is it normal?... Should I even be going through all of this and even going to flipping the sides of spirituality? They've been questioning whether this is something demonic because those are the things that also are being said. Is it and you start to wonder” [Participant 9-HS: 76-80].

“...the school not cooperating in allowing me to do awareness with regards to LGBTQ. I think it's a simple fact of they don't view it as Important. It's where the old school principles and beliefs still is enforced because my schools are the Afrikaans schools. I mostly work only in the Afrikaans schools, so they still very much (hold) that staunch Christian, moral belief. So there's no need in their eyes to do awareness on LGBTQ because it's wrong” [Participant 25-CMM: 112-123].

“...in African communities, so they get things like they have been bewitched, it's Satanism. It's a stigma against them, it's a trend. They think that it's in fashion to be gay. And they also experience emotional abuse even threats of abuse. Others will say no you just need somebody to really be crude, give you good sex and then you realise that it's either good to be a girl or good to be a boy” [Participant 31-DT: 95-101].

One of the school-based social workers expressed her own beliefs about sexual minorities and the challenge this presents: *“...they say we should separate ourselves into two - me as the person and secondly being a social worker...at some point I think I'm failing to get to a point where I separate myself because I see myself first as the person that I am, in terms of who I believe in because my feelings are personal. My feelings are based on the Bible. So the Bible says something else about sexual minorities and the Constitution says another thing. So, because between the two, well to say, I should accept and then my values tells me something else. So I think I'm strongly for my views as a Christian...but I'm not judging them. It's how they decide to feel, how they decide to become...it's a controversial topic”* [Participant 8-HS: 18-32].

The challenge of beliefs or biases affecting the provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities by school-based social workers is well-documented in the literature. Researchers have examined the prevalence of bias, discrimination and the negative consequences it can have on youth sexual minorities within the educational system (Deloatch-Williams, 2020:39; Macklenburg, 2020:98). For instance, research by Kosciw, Clark and Menard (2022:xxiv-xxix) in their "The 2021 National School Climate Survey" revealed that LGBTQQIP2SAA learners often face hostile and biased environments in schools, leading to lower academic achievement and emotional distress, where this hostile environment is often perpetuated by school staff, including school-based social workers, who may not be adequately trained to address the unique needs of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:60). These accounts highlight the detrimental effects of bias and prejudice on the mental health and overall well-being of youth sexual minorities (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:30; Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:374). These findings underscore the significance of addressing these biases among school-based social workers to create safe, inclusive and supportive environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Cantos *et al.*, 2023:2; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:8).

School-based social workers face challenges in addressing biases about sexual minorities among youth, utilising both the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory to understand interconnected systems and their impact.

Using the ecological systems approach entail the following:

- **Microsystem:** This is where school-based social workers directly interact with learners. Beliefs and biases held by these other professionals like educators and by their school-based colleagues, can create a hostile or unsupportive microsystem for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. The individual interactions between social workers and learners can have a profound impact on the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Guest, Hunter & Schoenberg, 2023:3).
- **Mesosystem:** The interactions between the Microsystems within the school environment play a critical role. A lack of coordination and understanding between school-based social workers, teachers, administrators and support staff can perpetuate bias and discrimination, thereby negatively affecting the learners (Jung, Hunter, Saleh, Quinn & Nippita, 2023:35).
- **Exosystem:** This level includes external factors such as school policies, community norms and parental beliefs. Biases held by individuals within these systems can indirectly influence the experiences of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners within the school environment (Dunlop & Lea, 2023:5).
- **Macrosystem:** Cultural and societal beliefs about sexual minorities can shape the overall atmosphere of the school and the attitudes of school staff. Advocacy for change at this level is necessary to challenge deeply ingrained biases and create more inclusive educational settings(Huang, Lu & Širůček, 2023:2). .

Advocacy Theory emphasises the importance of school-based social workers taking an active role in advocating for social justice and policy change on behalf of marginalized and oppressed populations. In the context of beliefs and biases about sexual minorities, social workers can engage as follows in advocacy at various levels:

- **Client-Level Advocacy:** School-based social workers can advocate for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners by providing support, counselling and resources to help them navigate a biased environment. This may include creating safe spaces and promoting inclusivity (Shattuck, Richard, Jaramillo, Byrd & Willging, 2022:3).
- **Agency-Level Advocacy:** School-based social workers can advocate within their agencies and schools to implement anti-discrimination policies and training programmes that address LGBTQQIP2SAA issues (Swords & Houston, 2023:11).

- **Community and Policy-Level Advocacy:** Advocating for change at the community and policy levels is essential to address systemic biases. School-based social workers can work with LGBTQQIP2SAA organisations, parent groups and policymakers to push for legislation and policies that protect the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities (Schwartz-Tayri et al., 2021:465-166).

By applying the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, school-based social workers can better understand the multifaceted nature of biases and beliefs about sexual minorities within the educational system and work to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners.

6.2.2.3 Sub-theme 6.3: Youth sexual minorities' needs not being met

School-based social workers play a pivotal role in providing support and intervention services to youth sexual minorities, yet their efforts are often hindered by a myriad of challenges. Among these, a significant concern highlighted in the interviews are the profound gap between the needs of sexual minority youth and the services available to meet those needs. The following storylines support this statement.

“...in general terms the school policies when school policies are created, they are created in such a way that they refer to every child as a child without checking whether it's a girl or a boy or a trans which is a problem because the needs of the sexual minorities are quite different to the needs of the other children. However, we have to treat them all the same way” [Participant 1-PM: 56-62].

“...sometimes you see a child would come to me wanting me to negotiate that they don't want to wear the uniform for their sex. What the school is telling them to wear is not negotiable and there is no policy which covers that, to say that there is a middle uniform for the minority group” [Participant 1-PM: 88-96].

“I think there's a very big misinterpretation with regards to the LGBTQ community and learner and what I've also found is a lot of social workers themselves choose not to work with these learners. Because number one, it goes against their own values and morals. And number two, they're not sure how to handle it” [Participant 25-CMM: 268-274].

“I think the biggest challenge, I think would be to find that balance between respecting the individual and allowing the individual to live out their lives without angering the people around

them, because even if we all understand that people's rights need to be respected, but if people are angry, they're not going to respect the rights of this child. So it's a gentle guidance and a gentle way of trying to get them to accept this child and to support this child and I think the biggest is finding that balance between not angering people but allowing this child to be herself" [Participant 38-TvD: 144-154].

The challenge of meeting the needs of youth sexual minorities, as voiced by school-based social workers, reflects a longstanding issue well-documented in the literature on social work, education and LGBTQQIP2SAA studies (Crockett, Martinez & Caviedes, 2022:2; Paschen-Wolff, DeSousa, Paine, Huges & Campbell, 2023:20). Research in these fields consistently highlighted the unique challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, such as discrimination, bullying, mental health disparities and the need for specialized support (Rand, Paceley, Fish & Anderson, 2021:27). The disconnect between the recognized needs of these youth and the actual services provided is a central theme in literature. By exploring the stories and experiences of school-based social workers in this context, valuable insights can be gained into the real-world application of these research findings and the hurdles school-based social workers encounter when trying to bridge the gap between the ideal and the actual support offered to youth sexual minorities in the educational setting (Leung *et al.*, 2022:4; Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:371; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:5-6).

The ecological systems approach emphasises the importance of understanding individuals within the context of their environments. In this case, it is crucial to recognize that the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities are not isolated incidents but are deeply rooted within various levels of their ecological system (Leung, 2021:11). These challenges are influenced by factors at the microsystem (individual level), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems such as family, school and peer groups), exosystem (indirect influences like school policies) and macrosystem (cultural and societal attitudes). School-based social workers, in their roles as advocates, traverse these complex systems to address the needs of sexual minority youth, aiming to create supportive and inclusive environments (Kiperman, Schacter, Judge & DeLong, 2022:20; Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1035).

Advocacy theory further underscores the essential role of school-based social workers in advocating for policy changes and systemic improvements (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:159; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:30). School-based social workers' experiences, as revealed through interviews, shed light on the challenges they face when advocating for youth sexual minorities within the

educational system. The disconnect between recognized needs and actual services becomes a focal point for advocacy efforts, as school-based social workers work to change policies and practices to better support these marginalized learners (Argüello, 2022:2; Crawford, 2020:5; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:13).

6.2.2.4 Sub-theme 6.4: Lack of training and resources

In interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a prevailing challenge emerged, namely the scarcity of adequate training and resources for effectively delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This deficiency in preparation and support significantly impedes their ability to assist and support these vulnerable learners (GLSEN, 2019:51, 71). The narratives that follow serve as testimonials to the hurdles they encounter while striving to meet the unique needs of this marginalized demographic.

“And then you're finding this, situation and you attended training two years back, but then you find that what I have learned is outdated. Today is nothing compared to the new developments that have come through, so I would really say resources and keeping up in what the new terminologies that are changing and everything. Because now I might find that you go to someone where you say for an example you're a lesbian and then the person says I don't identify as a lesbian and then you've already offended the person” [Participant 11-FN: 70-79].

“How are you supposed to do an intervention if you don't have the expertise or the theory to back you doing intervention programmes?...in the Afrikaans community you don't speak about sex and you don't speak about death. This is also one of the topics.... It's not discussed. It's like a taboo, but it's real and it is here and it needs to be addressed and supported...” [Participant 35-CG: 290-299].

“There's not a lot of Afrikaans resources or organisations, so being the only African social worker I do then handle these learners on a basis of doing counselling up to six sessions. But my challenge...I'm supposed to get in and get out. I getting I refer I move on, which I cannot do because of a lack of services and in general there isn't a lot of acceptance in organisations and private social workers that deal with LGBTQ. That is also a challenge” [Participant 25-CMM: 131-141].

The challenges faced by school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities resonate with existing literature, which underscores the importance of

addressing this critical issue. Literature emphasises the necessity for specialized training and resources to provide culturally competent care to youth sexual minorities in educational settings (Rand *et al.*, 2021:31; Smith-Millman *et al.*, 2019:4). These studies have highlighted the adverse consequences of neglecting such support, including increased rates of bullying, mental health issues and academic underachievement within this group of individuals. As the narratives from the school-based social workers' attest, these challenges persist, reinforcing the urgent need for comprehensive solutions that bridge the gap between research and practice (Bullard, 2020:89; Müller, Meer & Haji, 2020:25).

The challenges faced by school-based social workers in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities can be analysed through the lenses of the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, shedding light on the multi-level factors at play and the need for proactive advocacy efforts.

The ecological systems approach emphasises the importance of understanding human development within the context of multiple interrelated systems. In this context, the challenges encountered by social workers can be seen as a result of various ecological factors operating at different levels (Pretorius, 2020:149). These challenges are not solely the result of individual choices or actions but are shaped by the broader environment, including the school system, community attitudes and policy frameworks (Crawford, 2020:3). Social workers must navigate these interconnected systems to provide effective support.

Advocacy theory, on the other hand, emphasises the role of social workers in advocating for policy changes and resource allocation that address the unique needs of marginalized populations, such as youth sexual minorities (Necel, 2019:513). In this context, the lack of training and resources can be seen as a failure of advocacy efforts at various levels. Social workers should be actively engaged in advocating for changes in educational policies, curricula and support systems that better accommodate the needs of youth sexual minorities and then, by doing so, they can contribute to a more inclusive and supportive environment for these learners (Argüello, 2022:9).

6.2.2.5 Sub-theme 6.5: Lack of confidentiality and support from educators and other professionals

The participating school-based social workers shared a prominent concern regarding the persistent absence of confidentiality when cases are discussed or presented and support from educators and other stakeholders. This evident issue not only hampers the effectiveness of their

interventions but also raises concerns about the overall well-being and inclusivity of youth sexual minorities within educational settings (Smith-Millman et al., 2019:9). These disclosures shed light on the complex environments these social workers navigate, as they strive to create safe and affirming environments for the most vulnerable members of the school communities.

"My big challenge is a lack of confidentiality. It's a priority for me...but it's not always for educators a priority. If there's a child that is not performing as the child should do or missed a few classes then I will also ask the child's permission to come talk to the educator about the situation and then the child will often give the permission but educators does not see it that way. They openly talk about the child not realising that they are breaking the trust the child had in this educator...I must stand up for the right of the child even when an educator is bullying a child. I must engage with an educator and this causes conflict between us when the educator does not see that confidentiality or the right of the child is violated. My work is overseen by the principal which is another profession and the principal does not always see things the way to benefit the child it is the name of the school that is important then I have a problem with the NGOs that is not supporting us. "[Participant 19-SL: 77-95].

"The staff won't discriminate against them, but don't notice them either...they act like they don't exist...let's say you're bisexual and you come to me because another learner physically attacked you. As a teacher, they would handle it diplomatically because they don't acknowledge that learner's sexual identity, they'll just say: 'OK. But just stay away from that learner then'. They won't approach the other learner and say what you did was wrong. And none of that and it also won't be reported to the social worker to intervene at all. It's just overseen" [Participant 25- CMM; 186-197].

"...one of the challenges is bias. Often people are biased they're not supposed to say it then they are in trouble, but inside they feel that. So how do you really give support to someone that actually need the support and you feel...this is not for me..... I don't feel comfortable with this but you can't say it out loud out loud. I think that's a big issue and this has come out in some of my courses because we do talk about LGBTQ, the sexual minority groups as you refer them to or refer to them and many of these social workers feel this is actually against their beliefs. Because a social worker is usually very conservative. Although social workers are also advocates, so it's actually roles that can sometimes clash. So you know, so mostly social workers out there would feel, but this is something that I don't believe in. It goes against my values and my belief system. So where

does this child go to? Because you know that children can feel authenticity. They can feel if someone is real or not” [Participant 30-MV:130-148].

The challenges faced by school-based social workers in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, particularly the issues of confidentiality and support from educators and professionals, are deeply rooted in the existing literature. Studies and articles have examined these concerns, shedding light on the broader context of this problem (Argüello, 2022:6). Research conducted by experts in the field of social work and education has consistently highlighted the need for improved collaboration and support systems within educational institutions (Argüello, 2022:6; Le *et al.*, 2023:3).

Literature refers to the critical role of school-based social workers in promoting the well-being of sexual minority youth and underlines the challenges they face, including the lack of collaboration with educators (Winkler, 2018:77). The impact of confidentiality breaches on the mental health and academic performance of youth sexual minorities, highlighting the urgency of addressing this issue (Hadland, Yehia & Makadon, 2016:3).

Literature on the professional development of educators offers insights into how training programmes and school policies can be enhanced to provide a more supportive and inclusive environment for youth sexual minorities (Ubisi, 2021:131). The significance of bridging the gap between school-based social workers and educators, ensures that the vital services and support required by youth sexual minorities can be effectively delivered within a framework of confidentiality and understanding which aligns to the principles of the ecological systems approach across the various levels or systems (Gower *et al.*, 2018:3; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:5).

The social workers' efforts to bridge the gap between their services and that of educators, align with the advocacy theory, as they work to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for these learners focussing on collaborative initiatives and impressing on the value of confidentiality (Mecklenburg, 2020:40; Roland & Burlew, 2017:53).

6.2.2.6 Sub-theme 6.6: When youth is unsure about their own gender orientation

What became known in the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, is the prominent obstacle highlighting the uncertainty surrounding a learner's gender orientation. This uncertainty, as expressed by the social workers, has proven to be a complex and sensitive issue

within a school setting. The following insights shed light on the specific challenges they face when addressing this aspect of their work.

"My challenge is sometimes you come across one or two teenagers that's still not sure about their identity. What gender they are or want to be. I experienced that as challenging because I never want to be in a position where I impose my thoughts and my beliefs onto somebody. That's that teenager's journey and that's the questions [they] have and I don't always have the answers for them and I may even really want to dictate and say that this is wrong and this is right or you must do this... so when they have all these questions and they themselves explain what they are experiencing physically and emotionally regarding their identity it is challenging because you want to give the guidance and support without dictating and without giving the solutions or specific answers to the questions" [Participant 3-SJ: 123-137].

"We are generalising or normalising something that's supposed to be 0,01% of the population and at the moment when you see something that's popping up everywhere, then you know it's...a fashion statement. Because then I get attention and I'm one of those now. And that worries me, because it will have an influence on them one day. So it's not that I am judging them, but in 2-3 years' time, even 10 years' time, they might sit with these things that I was one of those that said this and actually it's not me and now I want to get married and I want to have a relationship...with another gender and then suddenly I have been living a lie and I need to deal with that now. So I'm worried about what the message that we are sending out" [Participant 30-MV: 174-196].

The above storylines are in line with what the literature is currently describing as 'gender dysphoria'. Gender dysphoria is a psychological condition where a person experiences significant distress and discomfort because the person's emotional and psychological gender identity does not align with the person's assigned or biological sex. In other words, individuals with gender dysphoria may feel that the gender identity, which is their internal sense of being male, female, a combination of both, or neither, does not match the sex they were assigned at birth (American Psychiatric Association, 2013:451-459).

It's important to note that not all individuals who identify as transgender experience gender dysphoria. Some transgender people have a strong and congruent gender identity and do not experience the distress associated with gender dysphoria. However, for those who do, support from mental health professionals, medical interventions such as hormone therapy or gender-

affirming surgeries and social acceptance and inclusion can be crucial for their well-being (American Psychiatric Association, 2013:451-459).

The evolution of terminology from "gender identity disorder" to "gender dysphoria" in the DSM-5 emphasises the importance of recognizing and addressing the emotional distress that can result from gender incongruence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013:451-459). School-based social workers are well-positioned to help learners navigate these challenges and create a more inclusive and supportive school environment, which can significantly contribute to the mental and emotional well-being of learners experiencing gender dysphoria (Jung et al., 2023:25; SAMHSA, 2023:37; South African National AIDS Council, 2021:18-19). Recognizing and respecting an individual's gender identity and providing appropriate care and support are essential in addressing the challenges associated with gender dysphoria (Jadva, Guasp, Bradlow, Bower-Brown & Foley, 2021:106). The challenges faced by school-based social workers when working with youth sexual minorities who are unsure about their gender orientation find resonance in the broader literature on social work, education and LGBTQQIP2SAA issues (Laiti, Parisod, Pakarinen, Sariola, Hayter & Salanterä, 2021:491-492; Lerner & Robles, 2016:14). Researchers have underscored the importance of inclusive and culturally competent support in educational settings. Understanding the complexities of gender identity, as highlighted by these social workers, is integral to creating safe and welcoming environments for these learners (Stewart, Spivey, Widman, Choukas-Bradley & Prinstein 2019:91). By linking the experiences of school-based social workers to existing literature, a deeper insight can be gained into the significance of their work and the imperative for continuous research and advocacy in this field (Stokes, 2023:9).

The ecological systems theory posits that individuals are influenced by multiple interconnected systems or environments that shape their development where in the case of youth sexual minorities exploring their gender identity, the challenges faced by school-based social workers can be understood within this framework (Fernandes et al., 2023:8; Pretorius, 2020:149). School-based social workers operate within the microsystem which includes the immediate school environment. Here, they interact with learners, teachers, parents and other professionals (Cheung & Leung, 2020:6). The challenges arise as they attempt to navigate the mesosystem, linking the school and the learners' broader social and family environments (Stokes, 2023:9-10; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:2). The uncertainty about gender orientation can be seen as a manifestation of the exosystem and macrosystem, where societal norms and values impact the youth's self-discovery (Stokes, 2023:9-10). Understanding these ecological layers helps school-based social

workers identify the sources of support and barriers in facilitating the well-being and development of youth sexual minorities (Guest *et al.*, 2023:3).

The advocacy theory emphasises the role of advocates in promoting social change and advocating for the rights and needs of marginalized groups (Roberts, 2016:34; Stokes, 2023:9). School-based social workers' experiences align with the need for policy changes, educational reforms and public awareness campaigns to better serve LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. School-based social workers can draw attention to the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities who are exploring their gender identity where school-based social workers become advocates at multiple levels, whether it's within the school system, at the district level, or in collaboration with LGBTQQIP2SAA advocacy organisations (Chan *et al.*, 2019:31-32; Fantus & Newman, 2021:15; Reyneke, 2018:84). Their stories can serve as catalysts for change and policy development, aligning with the core tenets of advocacy theory.

6.2.2.7 Sub-theme 6.7: Learner does not trust or asks social worker to intervene about school policy

Beyond the complexities associated with addressing the unique needs of this marginalized group, school-based social workers revealed additional hurdles that demand their attention. Among these, concerns about building trust with the learners and navigating situations where young individuals request intervention regarding school policies emerged as particularly significant challenges. The following storylines not only underscore the pivotal role of school-based social workers in supporting sexual minority youth but also shed light on the intricate nature of the issues they grapple with on a daily basis:

"My challenge is in rendering intervention service to sexual minorities is that some of them think you judge them, but we don't... maybe they just feel scared and not ready to work with you so you will use the skill of empathy but it does not always work that way" [Participant 14-HD: 58-63].

"...the challenge is also from a cultural aspect for the parents because it will be a fight in the house and at school. The children or sexual minorities fight with the parents and the parents fight with the children when the school says you are a boy it is expected of the child to wear this and the parents and my child is not comfortable wearing that. The child is coming to communicate that message to me: 'Sir, can you help me? Because I don't want to wear clothes for girls, I want to wear clothes for boys'...as I've said, when I indicated that I don't see whether someone is

transgender or whatever. I see children as children. I would be asking what you would want to wear. So normally it will manifest in that way. So, it is the school saying here you do one or two, there's no middle way to have a gender-neutral uniform for sexual minorities” [Participant 1-PM: 108-123].

The challenges faced by school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, as highlighted in the interviews, aligns with existing literature in the field of school social work and education (Adams *et al.*, 2019:175; Ciszek, 2020:5; Miller, 2016:311). There is great emphasis on building trust as a foundational element of effective support and intervention services for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Leung *et al.*, 2022:7,14, 16). Trust-building is integral for youth sexual minorities, who may be apprehensive about disclosing their sexual orientation in an educational setting.

Addressing issues related to school policies and advocating for more inclusive, affirming environments is a topic well-documented in the literature (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:28; Naser, Clonan-Roy, Fuller, Goncy & Wolf, 2022:42-43). Studies like that of Kosciw *et al.*, (2022) have extensively explored the challenges faced by LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools, including policy-related concerns (Proulx, Coulter, Egan, Matthews & Mair, 2019:609). These interviews reflect the findings in the literature, further underlining the multifaceted challenges social workers encounter while supporting youth sexual minorities in educational settings (Stokes, 2023:9). As such, they underscore the need for continued research and the development of best practices to address these issues effectively.

In the context of school-based social work, the ecological systems approach highlights the importance of considering various levels of influence on LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, including the microsystem (individual level), mesosystem (interactions between systems), exosystem (external factors indirectly affecting individuals) and macrosystem (cultural and societal norms) (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2; Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:31). This approach accentuates that the challenges of building trust and navigating school policy issues are not isolated incidents but are shaped by these interrelated systems.

Social workers often act as advocates for youth sexual minorities, striving to create more inclusive and affirming environments. In the context of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, this means not only assisting individuals but also advocating for changes at the meso, exo and macrosystem levels (Leung *et al.*, 2022:2; Stokes, 2022:9). This could involve working with school administrators to update policies that protect the rights of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners or collaborating with

community organisations to create safer spaces. It also involves raising awareness and educating stakeholders about the unique challenges youth sexual minorities face (Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:495; Rakner & Gloppen, 2021:201; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:5).

6.2.2.8 Sub-theme 6.8: Bullying in school and a non-conducive environment

The school-based social workers revealed that the persistent issue of bullying within school settings, coupled with an often-non-conducive environment, significantly impedes their ability to effectively support and advocate for youth sexual minorities (Kleinhans, 2018:16,73; Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:378; Pretorius, 2020:142). The following insights voiced by participants shed light on the difficulties and obstacles these social workers confront in their crucial roles, underlining the importance of addressing these issues to create safe and inclusive spaces for all learners.

“The children, our staff, the adults, we are very open to it and accepting but the biggest challenge is bullying which is a big problem in the school... We immediately intervene. We don't, tolerate that. So we immediately intervene and then we will have group sessions with these learners about sexual development group sessions. To create a willingness to accommodate and to create more awareness. Obviously, they get their parents' permission, but then we some of our learners have attended diversion programmes where there's been serious bullying. But then otherwise we do like psycho-educational group sessions...” [Participant 3-SJ: 150-163]

“I'd say our schools in South Africa, especially public schools, they do not have outside resources or materials available...whereby kids were maybe be made aware that even if the person is like this, we still have to support this person and all that...even when we call for...group work, or maybe we call for an educational awareness to educate them about such, it will be in an environment where it's not conducive for youth gender minority person because even the other leaders will start laughing. And then when they speak of something, then they start pointing at the person and then they laugh and all this. So the environment also at schools is not conducive” [Participant 185-195].

The challenges faced by school-based social workers in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities resonate with themes found in existing literature. Scholars and researchers have recognized the detrimental impact of bullying and an unsupportive school environment on the mental and emotional well-being of sexual minority youth (Abreu *et al.*, 2021:116; Abreu *et al.*, 2022:1; Kosciw *et al.*, 2020:46, 62). These challenges often align with broader discussions within the academic literature about the importance of fostering safe and inclusive school environments

to promote the overall well-being of all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Edwards & Watson 2020:6; Gower *et al.*, 2018:1-21; Proulx *et al.*, 2019:608).

The challenges faced by school-based social workers when working with youth sexual minorities can be examined through the lenses of the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, shedding light on the interconnected factors at play.

The ecological systems approach emphasises the importance of understanding an individual's development within the context of various systems, from microsystems (like the family) to mesosystems (including the school), exosystems (such as the larger community) and macrosystems (like societal attitudes and policies) (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:32; Pretorius, 2020:145). In this case, the bullying and unsupportive school environment can be seen as components of the mesosystem, significantly impacting the well-being of the sexual minority youth. This approach underscores the necessity of school-based social workers addressing not just the individual, but also the systems within which these youth operate, advocating for changes at different ecological levels to create a more supportive environment (Cheung & Leung, 2020:2; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:7-8; Gower *et al.*, 2018:4).

Advocacy theory further informs this perspective by emphasising the role of the school-based social worker as an advocate for the rights and well-being of sexual minority learners. This theory suggests that social workers should engage in activities that empower and support these learners, including advocating for anti-bullying policies, inclusive curricula and safe spaces (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:30; Ciszek, 2020:6). School-based social workers play a crucial role in not only providing direct support but also advocating for systemic changes at the school and community levels to create a more inclusive and accepting environment for youth sexual minorities (George & Ekoh, 2020:73; Leung *et al.*, 2022:5; Miller, Jennings & Angelo, 2021:455; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:478).

6.2.2.9 Sub-theme 6.9: Personal sexual orientation

One school-based social worker highlighted her unique perspective. This social worker, who identifies as lesbian, grapples with the delicate balance of being openly lesbian in a school environment while rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The intersection of her personal sexual orientation with the awareness of the learners adds a layer of complexity to her role as a supportive figure for youth sexual minorities. Her experience highlights the multifaceted dynamics and intricacies that school-based social workers encounter when providing care and intervention services to young sexual minorities, emphasising the importance of

addressing these issues to create safe, inclusive spaces within educational institutions (Messinger, Natale, Dentato & Craig, 2020:717). This is what she said:

"I think my challenge is that sometimes because it's easy to see someone, when they are gay, as someone who has a femininity side as a guy and someone who has sort of a masculinity in her who's a woman; it's easy to see all those things. So I think that I get uncomfortable with is the fact I know that they can see whenever I speak and that I identify as gay and I get worried. They start to look at me, in a way, it's like I'm affirming it to them. I don't know how to put it but it's like a child having to see someone who's doing something that they're actually experiencing...because there's someone that I'm seeing who also is in the same situation. So my challenge is that I don't really like to be affirming towards them because I don't want them to take something because they see it or even to basically being validated by something else. For me the self and how they feel needs to come from within themselves and not based on their experience of working with me..." [Participant 9-HS: 101-118].

The experience of the school-based social worker who identifies as lesbian and provides support to youth sexual minorities resonates with themes explored in the existing but limited literature on LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusion and social work within educational settings (Messinger *et al.*, 2020:717). This intersectionality of identity, awareness and the challenges it poses aligns with the literature discourse on the significance of representation and authenticity in fostering trust and rapport among LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Dentato, Craig, Lloyd, Kelly, Wright & Austin, 2016: 675-677). Researchers in the field of school social work have highlighted the importance of LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals in positions of authority and support who can serve as role models and advocates for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. This particular case serves as a real-world illustration of the complexities discussed in the literature surrounding LGBTQQIP2SAA learners' experiences and the crucial role that school-based social workers play in promoting a safe and inclusive learning environment for all (Dentato *et al.*, 2016:675-677). It underscores the need for further exploration and examination of the unique challenges and opportunities that school-based social workers encounter as they navigate the connection of their personal identities and professional roles within the context of youth sexual minority support (Papadaki, 2016:67).

Within the ecological systems approach, the social worker's personal identity as a lesbian individual and the awareness of this identity by the youth sexual minorities she serves, highlights the importance of the microsystem (Veldhuis, 2022:2). The microsystem represents the immediate environment where individuals interact and in this case, it's the school. The recognition

of the social worker's lesbian identity creates a unique dynamic within this microsystem, impacting the relationships and support she can provide to the learners (Papadaki, 2016:67). This underscores the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments and how personal identities can influence the microsystem dynamics (Craig, Dentato, Messinger & McInroy, 2016:118-119; Eisenberg, Mehus, Saewyc, Corliss, Gower, Sullivan & Porta, 2014:970).

Advocacy theory comes into play as the social worker navigates the macro and exosystems. The macro level involves policies, laws and societal norms, while the exosystem comprises elements indirectly impacting the individual, like the school's policies and practices. The social worker's experience as an openly gay professional at a school can be seen as a form of advocacy (Craig *et al.*, 2016:118-119). Her presence challenges existing norms and promotes inclusivity, making a statement that LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals have a place in the education system. Her experiences and the challenges she faces become a form of advocacy by promoting acceptance and support for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners at both the micro and macro levels (Messinger *et al.*, 2020:717).

6.2.3 THEME 7: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' EXPLANATIONS OF THEIR FEELINGS WHEN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

After describing their challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, the researcher asked the school-based social workers to explain their feelings when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The sub-themes that support this topic are included in Table 6.3 discussed.

TABLE 6-3 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' FEELINGS WHEN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 7	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' explanations of their feelings when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	7.1 Feels comfortable. 7.2 Provides same services in same way as to all learners. 7.3 It is a privilege to accompany child on child's journey. 7.4 Feels failed by DoE.

6.2.3.1 Sub-theme 7.1: Feels comfortable

In the interviews conducted with participating school-based social workers, a prevalent theme emerged as they shared their experiences and feelings in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The prevailing sentiment, as expressed below by the participants, is a resounding sense of comfort and empathy when working with this vulnerable population. Their stories and insights shed light on the profound dedication these social workers possess in ensuring that youth sexual minorities receive the care and support they need within the educational system. This report highlights their perspectives and testimonials, revealing the compassionate and inclusive approach that these professionals bring to their vital roles in schools.

"I have had only a few numbers of learners who appear to be transgender or gay or lesbian maybe we have 3 or 4 here at the school. For me services are rendered are done in such a way that they are not discriminating. They are meant for every child and I feel ok in working with these young people... I don't have any problem. I'll take what the child tells me. If I see the child and I think it's a boy and the child tells me he is a girl then I take it that the child sees herself as a girl. I take it as it is with no questions asked" [Participant 1-PM: 141-156].

"Fortunately enough, in my school days we had somebody who identified as a gay person and did not have a problem then so now as a professional I don't have a problem in working with them. I know that I'm not supposed to be judgmental and I should be natural. So it is easy for me" [Participant 15-LM: 63-68].

"I don't have a problem. It's my job. I have to meet any type of a person and in fact I find enjoyment to meet different kind of types of human beings. Yes, I quite admire them" [Participant 14-HD: 66-69].

"...because I'm young and I grew up post-apartheid and there was so many people who were free to be whatever it is that they wanted to be so for me it's not a huge issue in terms of whether someone is pansexual, I don't know. I don't if it makes you happy. That is OK. So I don't have any qualms or reservations in terms of working with sexual minorities whatsoever. I'm also very open to advocating for them" [Participant 31-DT: 296-303].

Despite the above storylines there was, however, one participant who said she is not comfortable to provide services to youth sexual minorities: *"So for me as a person I wouldn't be comfortable to deal with it because they do allow us to say, OK, my colleagues should deal with this one*

because I. I don't feel comfortable in working with this... They say I should separate myself, but I feel that I'm one person and I can't cut myself into two. I don't know. It's very controversial for me"
[Participant 9-HS: 141-156].

The heartening accounts of school-based social workers feeling at ease in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities are confirmed by the literature on the importance of creating a safe and inclusive environment for all learners (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:2; Cortez, Arzinos & Soto, 2021:40). The alignment between these personal narratives and literature underscores the significance of collaboration between practitioners and scholars to address the unique needs of this demographic group and promote an inclusive educational experience (Chereni, 2017:515; SAMSA, 2023:59,67). These interviews provide a valuable real-world perspective that complements the theoretical underpinnings found in the academic literature, further highlighting the pivotal role school-based social workers play in ensuring the well-being and success of youth sexual minorities in educational settings (Abreu *et al.*, 2021:148, Analisah & Indartono, 2019:243).

The accounts of the participating school-based social workers about their comfort in serving youth sexual minorities align with the principles of the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, shedding light on the multi-faceted nature of their work and the importance of advocating for marginalized groups within the educational system. The ecological systems approach underscores the idea that individuals are influenced by their immediate and broader social environments. In this context, school-based social workers are functioning within the microsystem, where they interact directly with learners (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:2; Cortez *et al.*, 2021:40). These social workers' comfort in working with youth sexual minorities can be seen as an acknowledgment of the need to create a supportive microsystem within the school environment. This not only benefits the individual learners but also contributes to a positive, inclusive school climate that can be considered a mesosystem-level intervention (Logie, Lacombe-Duncan, Lee-Foon, Ryan & Ramsay, 2016:3-4). The ecological systems approach underscores the interconnectedness of various systems, highlighting the importance of advocating for inclusive policies and practices that affect the entire educational environment (Chan *et al.*, 2019:31).

Advocacy theory, on the other hand, emphasises the role of professionals in advocating for marginalized groups and working to effect systemic change. The social workers' comfort in rendering services to youth sexual minorities can be viewed as a manifestation of advocacy in action (Chereni, 2017:515; Witt & Medina-Martinez, 2022:31). By providing support and creating

inclusive spaces, these social workers are advocating for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities within the school system (Astramovich & Scott, 2020:318; Miller *et al.*, 2021:455). This advocacy goes beyond the individual microsystem interactions to effect changes in the exosystem and macrosystem levels, where policies, curricula and institutional practices are influenced (Necel, 2019:511-512).

6.2.3.2 Sub-theme 7.2: Provide same services in same way to all learners

In the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a significant finding emerged as a common thread among these professionals: a steadfast commitment to providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities with the same dedication and approach as they do for all youth or learners. School-based social workers resolute in their stance, emphasising a steadfast commitment to non-discrimination and inclusivity. The results of these interviews revealed that school-based social workers do not differentiate in their efforts, offering a vital source of support and acceptance to the youth sexual minority population within the school system. This commitment to equality and inclusivity as expressed below, highlights the critical role these professionals play in the lives of these vulnerable youth, fostering a more inclusive and accepting educational environment.

“For me, I believe a person must know who they are so there is this thing of judging other people. For me, it starts from even if you’re a social worker, regardless of your belief you have to be value free. We have to accept them as they are and help them to become who they want to become” [Participant 12-ZM: 68-82].

“In terms of rendering services to sexual minorities, they are human beings like any other person. They are included as part of our community. So I provide services to them like any other person who comes and knock on my door and look for intervention. I treat them equally” [Participant 17-YM: 87-92].

“I vowed when I took the profession that I will protect any person who is vulnerable within our communities and I think people belonging in that community, they need my help. So I put my emotions aside and I wear my profession kepi [hat], which is to ensure that every individual is treated with respect. That they need first of all as a human being and also addressing appropriately without making them feel less of a human being. So I think the most important thing

is for me to address them appropriately and give them the necessary intervention services that they need” [Participant 21-NM: 73-83].

“I think for me as I am from a younger generation and I've spent time with people of different sexual orientations and different sexual identities, for me a child is a child and a person is a person as it does not particularly affect me. I think I do feel guilty in the sense that I don't always have all the information to give and because they are vulnerable you need to be sure of your information so training is important for me because I don't have all the information” [Participant 37-NN: 86-94].

The approach of school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, where they emphasise equality and non-discrimination, confirms with several key themes in the literature (Cortez *et al.*, 2021:42; UNHR, 2019:89). Literature have long recognized the importance of creating safe and inclusive environments for all learners, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Mkhomi, 2023:106; Shattuck *et al.*, 2022:11). This approach is consistent with the call for schools to become more affirming and supportive of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, ultimately contributing to their overall well-being and academic success. By offering unconditional support to youth sexual minorities, school-based social workers exemplify the potential of education to foster inclusivity and diversity, a theme that has been extensively explored in literature on school social work practices (Barnett, Salem, Rosas, Feinberg, Nunez-Pepen, Chu, Belmont-Ryu, Matsuno & Broder-Fingert, 2023:669-670; Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:148; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:42).

The school-based social workers' commitment to providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, while treating them the same way as all learners, aligns with both the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:117; UNDP, 2022:6; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:5).

The ecological systems approach emphasises the interplay of various systems in an individual's life. In this context, school-based social workers recognize that the experiences of youth sexual minorities are shaped by multiple systems, including the microsystem (individual interactions), mesosystem (school environment), exosystem (community influences) and macrosystem (cultural norms) (Asakura, 2016:15; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2). By treating all learners equally, they create a supportive and affirming microsystem within the school. Their actions also reflect an awareness of the need to challenge and change harmful norms (macrosystem) that can stigmatize and discriminate against LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. Moreover, through their advocacy

efforts, they seek to bridge the gap between these systems, advocating for change at multiple levels to create more inclusive educational environments (Sosa, 2020:77; Veldhuis, 2022:2-3).

Advocacy theory underscores the role of professionals in promoting and safeguarding the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities. In the context of school-based social workers, their commitment to treating youth sexual minorities the same as all learners is a form of advocacy (Craig *et al.*, 2018:237-238; Sosa, 2020:76). They advocate for the rights of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners to access supportive services and education in an environment free from discrimination. By offering equal support and intervention, they challenge systemic inequalities and work towards creating a more equitable educational system. In doing so, they exemplify the principles of advocacy theory, which emphasise the active and dedicated support of marginalized and vulnerable populations, in this case, youth sexual minorities (Patterson *et al.*, 2020:101; Sosa, 2020:76; UNICEF, 2022:31).

6.2.3.3 Sub-theme 7.3: It is a privilege to accompany learner on learner's journey

Resulting from interviews held with school-based social workers, a profound sentiment emerged regarding their role in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Many of the participants expressed a deep belief that accompanying a child on the learners journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance is a privilege. Their perspectives, as shared in their own words, shed light on the compassion, empathy and dedication that these social workers bring to their work, underscoring the profound impact they have on the lives of youth sexual minorities navigating the complex terrain of sexual identity.

"Feel like it's a privilege...the work we're doing with kids is regardless of where they are at and what they're struggling with, if we can walk alongside them in their journeys and help them to become more of themselves and more accepting of themselves. That helps them to flourish and...related to sexual minorities...for them they're not only dealing with the struggles of being a teenager, they're dealing with a whole additional complicated factor where perhaps society is not that accepting or their families are not that accepting and to be able to support them in that and to be able to help them see that this is OK and their wonderful little bodies and whoever they are is amazing and they can become who they want to be in terms of their lives and any aspect of themselves. If they can come to accept and embrace this aspect of themselves and love themselves, you know, then that's just wonderful" [Participant 5-RH: 191-208].

“...have had the privilege to work with many children and my preferred method is first community, then group then casework...I feel you, as a therapist, have to know what your opinion is, but you need to decide and you can't discriminate...I feel very strongly that you must be who you are. I speak about your core. So it's actually been wonderful to be able to journey and to say, you know, you're OK who you are. And because I've been here so long, a lot of my old kids will come back who I always knew for example were gay but they couldn't...say to you and...they come back and introduce their boyfriends to me and...you give them a hug and they're doing well and they're functioning adults and good jobs and I'm so proud of them because they could make that decision. So to have been a part of that journey is a privilege for me...I feel like they're my kids. I can't explain how proud I am” [Participant 35-CG: 171-183].

The sentiment expressed by school-based social workers who perceive their role as a privilege when assisting youth sexual minorities finds resonance in literature related to LGBTQQIP2SAA learners support and school social work (Franke, 2023:186). Their perspective aligns with the idea that social workers play a crucial role in creating an affirming and accepting environment for LGBTQQIP2SAA sexual minorities which is essential for the members of the community's well-being and self-identity development (Henrickson, 2018:764).

Literature often highlights the significance of having supportive adults in the lives of youth sexual minorities (Franke, 2023:188). Their approach aligns with the concept of "allyship" where school-based social workers who see their work as a privilege often position themselves as allies to LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, offering not only emotional support but also advocacy for their rights and well-being (Franke, 2023:188; Gates, Bennett & Baines, 2023:372-373; Leung *et al.*, 2022:7).

The perspective of school-based social workers who consider their role a privilege when working with LGBTQQIP2SAA learners can be effectively linked to both the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, underscoring the multidimensional nature of their work and their role as advocates for these vulnerable populations (Gates *et al.*, 2023:374)

School-based social workers who see their role as a privilege recognize the importance of understanding the multi-layered contexts in which LGBTQQIP2SAA learners navigate their identities. They not only provide direct support to youth sexual minorities but also consider the broader ecosystems at play (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2; Gower *et al.*, 2018:7). For example, they may work to create inclusive school policies and educate other learners and teachers about LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, thereby addressing the mesosystem within the school environment.

They may also provide resources and referrals to LGBTQQIP2SAA community organisations, acknowledging the role of the exosystem in supporting these youth sexual minorities. The holistic and systemic approach of ecological systems theory is reflected in their practice (Gower *et al.*, 2018:4; Pretorius, 2020:145; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:3).

Advocacy is a central component of social work and it is particularly vital when working with marginalized and stigmatized populations such as youth sexual minorities. Advocacy theory underscores the school-based social worker's role in promoting the rights, well-being and equitable treatment of their clients. School-based social workers who view their role as a privilege often engage in advocacy at multiple levels. They advocate for policy changes that protect LGBTQQIP2SAA learners from discrimination and harassment within the macro system, ensuring that the legal and societal framework is more supportive (Brandon-Friedman, 2019:18). At the micro level, school-based social workers advocate for individual clients by connecting them with resources, support networks and mental health services. Their advocacy aligns with the core principles of empowering LGBTQQIP2SAA learners and advocating for social justice (Crawford, 2022:4; Necel, 2019:513).

6.2.3.4 Sub-theme 7.4: Feels failed by Department of Education

Exploring school-based social workers' feelings regarding the rendering of intervention services to youth sexual minorities, one participant expressed a sentiment of disappointment and frustration, characterizing her experiences in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Her response indicated a profound sense of being let down by the Department of Education, as she conveyed her feelings of having been failed by the very system she dedicates her efforts to navigate and improve. In her own words, she stated, "My feeling is of having been failed by the Department of Education." This expressive reflection expanded as follows, underscores the complex challenges and emotions that school-based social workers grapple with when addressing the needs of youth sexual minorities within the educational context:

"I feel more of being failed by the Department where I feel like as if I could get more information I would be able to render better services. I'm one person who personally believes in do it the first time and do it right and then don't be forced to come back the next time and having to do the same thing again because you want to do good in the life of a person. You don't want to go from bad to worse" [Participant 11-FN: 81-87].

The sentiment expressed by the school-based social worker, feeling let down by the Department of Education in the context of supporting youth sexual minorities, bears a striking resemblance to themes explored in literature. This emotional struggle aligns with the concept of "institutional betrayal" that has been examined in various literary works and academic discussions (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:10-15). Much like characters in literature who grapple with the disillusionment and frustration resulting from institutional shortcomings, this school-based social worker's experience sheds light on the very real and poignant human emotions that can arise when institutions are perceived as failing the marginalized populations they are meant to support. The idea of institutional betrayal and its consequences has been a theme in literary works and sociological literature, reflecting the complex interplay between individuals and the systems they rely on for support and guidance (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:10-15; Skhosana, 2020:113).

The ecological systems approach emphasises the interconnectedness of various systems in an individual's life, including the microsystem (individual interactions), mesosystem (interactions between microsystems), exosystem (external systems indirectly affecting the individual) and macrosystem (cultural values and norms). In the case of the school-based social worker experiencing a feeling of being let down by the Department of Education, that can be seen as a breakdown within the exosystem. The Department of Education, as an external system, should ideally provide support, policies and resources to help her address the needs of youth sexual minorities. However, when this support is perceived as inadequate or failing, it disrupts the ecological balance, impacting her ability to provide effective services (Gray & Lombard, 2023:432).

Advocacy theory in social work involves promoting and supporting the rights and needs of marginalized populations, which, in this context, includes youth sexual minorities. The social worker's sentiment of having been failed by the Department of Education can be seen as an opportunity for advocacy. This experience may motivate her to become an advocate for policy changes, improved resources and better support systems for youth sexual minorities. Her personal experience becomes a catalyst for change, aligning with the principles of advocacy theory, which seeks to address systemic issues and advocate for social justice (Tmsafri, 2019).

6.2.4 THEME 8: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' ACCOUNTS OF THE SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THEM IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

The researcher asked the school-based social workers to describe what support services are available to them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Table 6.4 below provides an overview of their responses and the sub-themes that emanated from it in this theme.

TABLE 6-4 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS ACCOUNTS OF THE SUPPORT SERVICES AVAILABLE TO THEM IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 8	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' accounts of the support services available to them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	8.1 There are no support services available for social workers. 8.2 Consult others or use other professional resources. 8.3 Training is provided.

6.2.4.1 Sub-theme 8.1: There are no support services available for social workers

In the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a recurring and disheartening theme emerged as they shared their experiences in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. A number of participants responded with a resounding sentiment, expressing the profound lack of support services available to them within the educational system. Their voices echoed a pervasive concern, shedding light on the absence of resources and assistance necessary for them to effectively address the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities in schools. The following collective perspective of the participants underscores the urgent need for greater recognition, resources and professional support to facilitate a more inclusive and affirming environment for these marginalized youth.

“...the Department of Basic Education is not doing enough inasmuch as the Constitution of the country advocates for dignity for each and every human being. You see, the school hasn't made it a mission to make sure that everyone is catered for which would make my job easier...there was supposed to be bathrooms for everyone, because that's what is creating some of the problems. There was supposed to be middle uniform or gender neutral uniform. But also there are no support services to me as a social worker. I have to see how best I can support the child or person or the family. When I get stuck, I have to see where I can get help from a colleague or

somewhere but honestly there is nothing that I can think of in terms of support for me” [Participant 1-PM; 141-156].

“There is none available to me as a professional. I do my own research to find information and to get an understanding of LGBTQI. This is mostly based on what I know and what I pick up from what I read. What I see on social media” [Participant 13-KL: 70-73].

“There's no training for social workers...we are social workers who really want to help these children. We have to do it ourselves and we have to hope that (what) we are doing is correct because we don't have a guideline or a framework or a policy or anything to work on because the government hasn't put that in place. So we really have a lack of resources to be able to help these children because I think it's not something that is socially acceptable yet to all people” [Participant 34-IvR: 247-255].

“...you find that sometimes they need other services that maybe I cannot render so I do referrals, but for as far as I am concerned other than that there is nothing for me... not even debriefing so you are kind of like alone in this process” [Participant 18-SL: 62-66].

The absence of support services for school-based social workers engaged in assisting youth sexual minorities align with an increasing body of literature on the challenges and opportunities within social work (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:10-15). It underscores the broader discourse surrounding LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, minority stressors and the complex connection of identity and education. Scholars and researchers recognize the importance of culturally competent care and the necessity for schools to foster environments where all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, can thrive (Ubisi, 2021:107, Winkler, 2018:5). The experiences of these social workers, as shared through their interviews, not only highlight the existing gap but also call attention to the critical need for better integration of evidence-based practices, training and mentorship programmes into social work education. Furthermore, their accounts emphasise the profound influence that institutional policies, social attitudes and professional training can have on the well-being and academic success of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, a concern that has been thoughtfully examined in the field of education and social work (Ciszek, 2020:5; Ubisi, 2021:107; Winkler, 2018:5).

The accounts of school-based social workers encountering limited support services in their work with youth sexual minorities, can be effectively linked to both the ecological systems approach and the advocacy theory within the field of school-based social work.

The ecological systems approach emphasises the interconnectedness of an individual's development within various systems, including microsystems (such as the family and school), mesosystems (interactions between these systems), exosystems (external factors impacting the individual) and macrosystems (cultural and societal influences). In this context, the absence of support services for social workers mirrors a deficiency within the mesosystem – the interaction between schools and social services. This deficiency can be detrimental to the well-being and development of youth sexual minorities, thereby illustrating the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to address their unique needs (Cheung & Leung, 2020:3; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2; Semprevivo, 2023:10).

Advocacy theory, in turn, emphasises the importance of social workers acting as advocates for individuals, groups or communities facing systemic challenges and injustices. In the case of school-based social workers, advocating for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities aligns with this theory. The limited support services available to the social workers reveal a systemic issue that requires advocacy to effect change. Social workers can engage in advocacy efforts to raise awareness, influence policies and promote a more inclusive educational environment that respects the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ youth, which in turn will accelerate the provisioning of support services to school-based social workers (Scourfield, 2021:1; Necel, 2019:512).

6.2.4.2 Sub-theme 8.2: Consult others or use other professional resources

School-based social workers voiced a common concern: the lack of adequate support services available to assist them in their crucial role. They expressed the challenges they face when navigating the complex terrain of supporting LGBTQIP2SAA learners within the school environment. To address this deficiency, several school-based social workers revealed that they have adopted alternative strategies, often consulting with colleagues or drawing upon external professional resources to bridge the gap. This sub-theme highlights the unmet needs of these individuals and underscores the essential nature of creating a more supportive environment for those entrusted with the well-being of youth sexual minorities in educational settings. The following accounts from the interviews serve as compelling testaments to this pressing issue.

"The Department does provide psychological services employed by the departments are eligible to use. And if I need to use it...but otherwise I must basically find another, a senior social worker or psychologist, basically with whom I can debrief...and get their feedback. And then I've got a social work colleague in the intervention centre, who spends 50% on school work and 50% on

serving the outside schools in the district. The school sister is available and we get along quite well and you know, we can also just sometimes share this just a little bit because I know it's in a professional manner; it's professional information and it's for professional reasons” [Participant 14-LC: 114-127].

“Very limited. We've got our school-based support team. The team consists of senior managers and that you can trust actually and...it might be a behaviour problem or learning problem, we involve the school-based support team (SBST) and we involve the district by supporting us as well and I am seeing other psychologist or social work professionals so we get that support. We've got a network with the government where clinics are also available psychiatrists and psychologists that we use religious institutions and the community. So there is a lot of support available but to me as a social worker there is none. But as a social worker I have a colleague who is also a social worker and we supervise each other” [Participant 19-SL: 105-115].

“So I'm part of some supervision groups and some forums that's, you know, if these issues come up, we can discuss them and also I have sort of relationships with other very experienced psychologists and social workers and if I feel like I need to discuss something with them about specific issues... Professional support is available. I can find it if I need it” [Participant 5-RH: 211-219].

“I would say there are services that we have. Mostly we use our stakeholders also there are organisations that do support LGBTQI people or maybe minority gender people with counselling and...in one of the townships, there was one organisation where they used to accommodate gender minority people...in their groups and where they make them feel comfortable in speaking out and be able to share the information with others. That the feeling that this is not different. And now you don't have to be afraid or be anxious to express how you feel or want to be seen in the community...” [Participant 22-EM: 198-208].

Literature emphasises the negative impact of the lack of support services for school-based social workers who provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This, in turn, affects the mental health and well-being of youth sexual minorities. The experiences recounted by school-based social workers confirm the findings of these studies, shedding light on the challenges these social workers face in the absence of appropriate resources. The resourcefulness and adaptability of school-based social workers in seeking support outside of the school system can be connected to the literature on the strengths and coping strategies of social workers. Social workers identify and utilise available resources and support networks. Social work literature confirms that this is

essential in social work practice and that is precisely what social workers do when addressing the needs of youth sexual minorities by often consulting with colleagues or drawing upon external professional resources to bridge the gap (Dentato *et al.*, 2016:683; Kia, Robinson, Mackay & Ross, 2021:594).

The challenges faced by school-based social workers in supporting youth sexual minorities and their use of alternative strategies can be linked to both the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory.

The ecological systems approach emphasises how various systems impact on an individual's development, especially in the case of supporting LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools. School-based social workers face barriers and lack support services, which affect the immediate school environment (microsystem) and the well-being of these learners. They utilise alternative resources and external consultations, highlighting the importance of the mesosystem, the interaction between the school and the broader professional community. This approach calls for a more supportive microsystem and stronger connections between systems to ensure the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Crawford, 2020:6; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:3).

Advocacy theory suggests that social workers should not only provide services but also advocate for policy, practice and resource changes to meet their clients' needs. In this context, social workers' actions in seeking external support and professional resources are a form of advocacy, actively working to address structural deficiencies and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. Their efforts align with the advocacy theory's notion that professionals should work to bring about positive change within their educational microsystem and beyond by sharing their stories and bridging gaps (Chan *et al.*, 2019:31-32; Fantus & Newman, 2021:15).

By connecting the experiences of school-based social workers to the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, it becomes evident that these professionals are not only working within the existing framework but also actively engaged in advocating for systemic change to better support youth sexual minorities within the school ecosystem.

6.2.4.3 Sub-theme 8.3: Training is provided

Through the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, the researcher explored into their experiences and perspectives on the vital support services available to them when delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. In these dialogues, it became apparent that many of these social workers are equipped with specialized training aimed at addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by sexual minority youth. In the following narratives, the first-hand accounts of these social workers, shedding light on the importance of training in fostering a safe and inclusive educational environment for all learners, are given.

“I recently attended a training. It was citizen sensitisation so all the training was informative. It gave us information regarding offering and rendering services to LGBTQI community members, there was a lot that was being shared. The psychological guidelines of assisting members of this community. So I feel like training is helping and is a support to me” [Participant 15-LM: 84-91].

“Our Department is trying to empower us through use of in-service training. There was this recent in-service training that we had on Mencare 50:50 programme. I just feel like it could be shared with everyone - from the school, parents, learners, everyone, even professionals because it's very inclusive. We are also individuals at the end of the day; we've had past experiences and probably some of our professionals they've never dealt with past experiences, so that approach then will help you to deal with your own opinions about everything. Your perceptions even the undealt issues. So even if you are having your own stereotypes, views about the minority group in that training, you will be able to talk about them and to address them. It's very important that before you engage with any client, to ready yourself so that you don't do more harm than good on them. Self-awareness is very important before we can even start to render services” [Participant 24-TS: 90-106].

“We receive a budget on training so we get to choose every year what kind of training we would like to do, so that the choice is left to us if we want to do that kind of training and get that kind of information” [Participant 37-NN: 97-100].

“I think that we get support in training so that we can help these people” [Participant 10-DM: 92-93].

The exploration of support services for school-based social workers in their work with youth sexual minorities aligns with a broader academic and literary discourse on social work, education and LGBTQQIP2SAA issues. By highlighting the training experiences and stories of school-based

social workers in this context, a contribution is made to this evolving dialogue emphasising the significance of well-informed social workers in nurturing the well-being of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. These real-life narratives are confirmed by the literature showcasing the practical application of principles and theories in social work and education (Francis, 2017:16; Ubisi, 2021:132).

The accounts of school-based social workers in providing support services to youth sexual minorities can be linked to both the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory.

When school-based social workers are provided with specialized training and resources to support LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, they are better equipped to navigate and influence these interconnected systems. By empowering social workers with the tools and knowledge needed to advocate for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners within the school environment, the ecological systems approach is effectively applied. Social workers, in collaboration with other stakeholders, work to create a more inclusive and supportive educational ecosystem that benefits the well-being of these learners (Le *et al.*, 2023:2; Leung *et al.*, 2019:19).

Advocacy theory focuses on the role of professionals in actively promoting the rights and interests of the populations they serve. In this context, school-based social workers can be seen as advocates for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. When they receive training and support, they gain the skills and knowledge needed to become effective advocates within the educational system (Abreu *et al.*, 2021:118; Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669).

Through the narratives of these social workers, it is clear how they actively engage in advocacy by promoting policies and practices that create a safe and inclusive environment for sexual minority learners. They may work to change school policies, challenge discrimination and educate their colleagues and the broader community about the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities. In doing so, they exemplify the principles of advocacy theory, working to create positive change for youth sexual minorities at a systemic level.

6.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Six of this dissertation serves as a logical continuation of Chapter Five, focusing on themes Five, Six, Seven and Eight which explored critical aspects of school-based social workers' experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Theme five delved into the first-hand descriptions provided by school-based social workers regarding their experiences in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This theme gives voice to the professionals on the front lines, sharing their unique perspectives and insights.

Theme six took a closer look at the challenges that school-based social workers encounter when providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This exploration helped in understanding the obstacles these professionals confront and the complexities of their roles.

Theme seven explored the emotional and psychological aspects of school-based social workers, shedding light on the feelings and experiences they encounter when delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Theme eight provided an analysis of the support services available to school-based social workers engaged in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, exploring the resources and assistance mechanisms that contribute to their effectiveness.

In chapter Seven, the concluding part of the research insights and literature contextualisation, themes nine to eleven are explored. This encompasses an examination of the measures in place to support youth sexual minorities in schools, its effectiveness, strategies for school-based social workers to manage these intervention services effectively and the viewpoints of school-based social workers on how Government assistance can enhance their ability to provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools.

CHAPTER SEVEN

RESEARCH INSIGHTS AND LITERATURE CONTEXTUALISATION (PART 3)

Activism is my rent for living on the planet – Alice Walker

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter Six, the second part of the research insights and literature contextualisation was presented by focusing on Themes five to eight. In this chapter, the last part of the research insights and literature contextualisation are presented by focusing on Themes nine to eleven.

7.2 RESEARCH INSIGHTS, INTERPRETATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme nine aims to offer a comprehensive overview of the strategies and initiatives that educational systems have adopted to create inclusive and affirming environments for youth sexual minorities. It critically assesses the effectiveness of these measures in addressing the unique challenges and needs of youth sexual minorities in schools. Transitioning to theme ten, the focus shifts towards the role of school-based social workers and how they can specifically manage their intervention services to youth sexual minorities. In theme eleven, the spotlight is on government involvement and the examination of how policymakers can facilitate and enhance the efforts of school-based social workers in rendering crucial intervention services for youth sexual minorities within the school context. This sequential exploration provides a comprehensive and clear perspective on the multifaceted aspects of supporting and nurturing the well-being of youth sexual minorities in educational settings. All relevant storylines are discussed and confirmed by supporting literature in the form of a literature control, contextualisation and theoretical integration.

7.2.1 THEME 9: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MEASURES APPLIED TO SUPPORT YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SCHOOLS AND HOW IT CAN BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to provide support and create inclusive environments for youth sexual minorities within school settings (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:40). To gain deeper insights into this important aspect, interviews were conducted with the school-based social workers participating in this research, who serve as critical sources of guidance and provide emotional support for learners. They were asked to describe the measures currently in place to support youth sexual minorities in schools and to provide their insights on how these measures could be made more effective. The findings from these interviews have been

divided into two distinct sub-themes and into several categories as presented in Table 7.1 below. The knowledge and perspectives shared by these school-based social workers offer valuable insights into the ongoing efforts to create safer, more inclusive and supportive learning environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation.

TABLE 7-1 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEMES AND CATEGORIES RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MEASURES APPLIED TO SUPPORT YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SCHOOLS AND HOW IT CAN BE MADE MORE EFFECTIVE

THEME 9	SUB-THEMES	CATEGORIES
School-based social workers' descriptions of what measures are being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools and how they can be made more effective.	9.1 Measures applied to support youth sexual minorities.	<p>9.1.1 There are no measures to support youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.2 Counselling and support services are available for youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.3 School policy is to accommodate and adapt to needs of youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.4 Try to accommodate youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>9.1.5 Must be sensitive to the process and the youth's needs.</p> <p>9.1.6 Schools differ.</p>
	9.2 How the measures applied in schools can be made more effective.	<p>9.2.1 Need to ensure there is a social worker with the needed resources in all schools.</p> <p>9.2.2 Need to raise awareness of sexual orientation and the needs of learners.</p>

7.2.1.1 Sub-theme 9.1: Measures applied in schools to support youth sexual minorities

In the evolving landscape of education, addressing the unique needs and challenges of youth sexual minorities has become an increasingly critical aspect of creating safe and inclusive school environments (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:42). School-based social workers play a pivotal role in this endeavour, offering vital insights into the measures and strategies being applied to support youth sexual minorities within educational settings. The examination of these perspectives has unveiled a diverse array of responses, each contributing to a broader understanding of the approaches adopted by schools. These responses can be effectively organised into six categories, shedding light on the efforts aimed at fostering acceptance, empowerment and well-being for youth sexual minorities in schools.

(1) Category 9.1.1: There are no measures to support youth sexual minorities

Through the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, this exploration delves into the critical issue of support for youth sexual minorities within educational institutions. It is disheartening to note that, despite the pressing need for such support, a significant number of school-based social workers reported that their respective schools lack concrete measures to provide assistance and care for youth sexual minorities (Bennett & Gates, 2019:609; Day, Fish, Grossman & Russell, 2020:420; 426-427; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:42). This lack of support not only raises concerns about the overall well-being and mental health of sexual minority learners but also highlights the ongoing challenges faced by this marginalized demographic in the school environment. This sets the stage for a deeper examination of the stark disparities in the level of support available to youth sexual minorities in schools, highlighting the urgent need for change and inclusivity in our schools. This is clear from the following storylines:

"I wouldn't say that there are specific programmes. With other challenges within the schools like teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, there are policies that are in place to guide on the process Intervention strategies, but I find that with youth (sexual) minority group, we don't have such...No guidance on dealing with violence, how to set up the environment to make sure the environment is inclusive of everyone. If it's not documented, it's very difficult because I will be coming in and addressing the situation in my own way...and then the next person will be coming up with a different approach and it creates a lot of misunderstandings, a lot of conflict even amongst the professionals, because if there's nothing documented, we are not guided by anything. So, we do need school policies in place" [Participant 24-TS: 109-125].

"I don't think there is any we just go with the flow of things...if you get a case like that, you just try and improvise. Do it with your own experience like try and handle it that way, but other than that no support" [Participant 7-JN: 141-144].

"To be honest, I don't think there are really support. I think nobody is up to date, including myself. I think especially with like life orientation in schools a lot of the education is centred around straight relationships and not LGBTQI. So, it creates stigma and shame to people who don't fall within that category. Well, I don't think at this point there are not many support services that go with that" [Participant 37-NN: 103-110].

"...in my personal opinion, I think we're still trying to find the balance between having no measures implemented and having measures implemented...Because I think having a very aggressive way

of taking something on, angering people in the process is also not in the best interest of the kids that are going through these experiences because angry people are not going to act in the best interest of things...we're trying to find the balance between schools being entirely quiet and not...having any opinions on this and almost like covering it up versus very aggressively trying to inform children about the facts without being sensitive, if that makes sense, which in response angers parents and angers kids and angry parents, make angry kids and that just further affects the lives of the children going through this experience" [Participant 38-TvD: 181-198].

The absence of adequate support for youth sexual minorities in schools, as reported by school-based social workers in the interviews, is underscored by a critical gap that has been recognized and extensively documented in the literature (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:148-149; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:29-30). Research in this area consistently emphasises the importance of creating safe and inclusive educational environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity (Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:375; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:479; Shepherd, 2019:260). Studies have highlighted the detrimental effects of the absence of support measures on the mental health, academic performance and overall well-being of youth sexual minorities (Messinger *et al.*, 2020:712-713; O'Neill, 2020:42; SAMHSA, 2023:47; Shattuck *et al.*, 2022:8).

These findings align with the broader discourse on the importance of promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in educational settings (Abreu *et al.*, 2016:329; Deloatch-Williams, 2020:20; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:34). This theme not only serves to confirm the concerns expressed in existing literature but also aims to contribute by shedding light on the specific experiences and perspectives of school-based social workers in their roles as advocates for youth sexual minorities in schools (Colvin *et al.*, 2019:1939; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:24; Rand *et al.*, 2021:25).

The ecological systems theory posits that individuals are influenced by multiple interconnected systems, from the microsystem (individual-level experiences) to the macrosystem (societal and cultural influences). In the context of this study, school-based social workers interact with youth sexual minorities within the mesosystem (school environment) and may encounter obstacles stemming from the exosystem (school policies) and macrosystem (societal attitudes) (Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:7; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:3) This framework underscores that a lack of support measures at the school level is not just an isolated issue but is rooted in broader systemic and societal factors, emphasising the need for a more holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by these youths (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:13; Cheung & Leung, 2020:6; Gower *et al.*, 2018:7).

Advocacy theory, as applied in social work, underscores the critical role of social workers in advocating for the rights and well-being of marginalized populations. In this context, school-based social workers are ideally positioned to act as advocates for youth sexual minorities, given their intimate knowledge of the school ecosystem (Craig *et al.*, 2018:237-238). Their experiences, as revealed in the interviews conducted with the participants, highlight the need for advocacy efforts at multiple levels—individual, group and societal—to create change and improve the support structures for these learners. Advocacy within this framework involves not only addressing the immediate concerns of these youths but also working to change policies and practices that perpetuate their marginalization within schools (Levenson *et al.*, 2023:7; Simons, 2018:159; Simons, 2021:1-2; Simons & Russell, 2021:469).

These theoretical frameworks provide a robust foundation for comprehending the multifaceted issues at play and for developing strategies to effect positive change in the lives of youth sexual minorities.

(2) Category 9.1.2: Counselling and support are available to youth sexual minorities

Based on interviews conducted with school-based social workers, it is evident that counselling and support are forms of measure in place to provide essential support to youth sexual minorities within the school environment. Through counselling and other support mechanisms, school-based social workers facilitate a safe and inclusive space for young individuals who identify as sexual minorities. The following storylines support his view:

“I honestly don’t think there is much that is being done because in terms of us as school social workers...we provide all the support because we understand that we must treat all our clients the same...but in terms of the clients or the minority group feeling or being catered for in the school environment, I think it’s still a big challenge” [Participant 2-PL: 86-92].

“There is counselling, you know, we are working on. Unfortunately, we are not based in schools. We are rendering services in schools, so there are educators that identify learners and refer them to us for counselling... they are effective. But not to the greater extent, I will visit the school only if there is a case and I don’t have a long-term counselling like it’s only assessing from my side. I assess and refer so obviously it will be a challenge to open up to me while they’re trying to warm up to me and get used to me then I am referring the person to the next professional, so it is a big concern to me” [Participant 15-LM: 94-108].

"I think the services are very effective, especially the ones of individual counselling, because there will be no discrimination and the learner is able to express whatever issue that they are facing with the social worker one-on-one and we speak to the learners to the point where they are able to find a solution within themselves. But this is I think, the route that they need to take. And then group sessions, I think they assist in terms of support I believe if I'm a Sexual minority if the social worker links me up through a group session and I'm playing there by the field and it's six or eight of us, I will not be bullied or be discriminated against. So by linking them up, I'm providing that support so that they are not discriminated or harassed as they are" [Participant 17-YM: 126-139].

The measures applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools, as revealed by the interviewed school-based social workers, find validation in the literature on LGBTQQIP2SAA youth and education. In alignment with a growing body of research, the role of school-based social workers in providing counselling and support highlights the importance of acknowledging the unique challenges faced by sexual minority learners (Goodrich & Barnard, 2019:213). Scholars and educators have long recognized the significance of creating inclusive and affirming school environments, which is in line with the efforts of school-based social workers (Cheung & Leung, 2020:13; Goodrich & Barnard, 2019:213; Roland & Burlew, 2017:10).

The ecological systems theory emphasises the importance of understanding individuals within the context of their various environments. In this case, it underscores how school-based social workers operate within the microsystem of the school, directly impacting the experiences of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. These social workers work closely with the learners (microsystem), as well as collaborating with teachers, parents and administrators (mesosystem) to create a supportive and inclusive environment (Cheung & Leung, 2020: 3; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:2).

Advocacy theory, links with the role of social workers as advocates for marginalized and vulnerable populations. In this context, the school-based social workers can be seen as advocates for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities (Messinger *et al.*, 2020:717). By offering counselling and support, they not only address immediate concerns but also work to dismantle systemic barriers that these learners might face in the educational environment. Their efforts to create an affirming and inclusive school climate align with the core principles of advocacy, which seek to empower and protect the rights of underrepresented groups (Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669; Winkler, 2018:2).

These two theories, when applied to the support measures provided by school-based social workers, demonstrate how these professionals operate within the larger framework of educational ecosystems, advocating for the needs and rights of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners while recognizing the influence of various systems on their experiences and well-being. This multifaceted approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of individuals and their environments, as well as the active role of advocates in effecting positive change within the educational system.

(3) Category 9.1.3: School policy is to accommodate and adapt to the needs of youth sexual minorities

Through interviews with school-based social workers, it is apparent that the schools are actively striving to accommodate and adapt to the diverse needs of youth sexual minorities, underscoring a commitment to fostering a more equitable and accepting educational landscape (Rand *et al.*, 2021:13). The participants expressed this as follows:

“...we've got this one girl that identifies as a boy. And so we make sure that she goes to a gender neutral toilet. So we have a policy in our school on sexual minority children. The policy states that you must accommodate them in the practical school setting and emotionally and psychologically, so basically the alterations the school has made is as we get these children, we adapt according to that” [Participant 4-LC: 130-137].

“I wouldn't say that there are specific programmes. With other challenges within the schools like teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, there are policies that are in place to guide on the process Intervention strategies, but I find that with youth minority group, we don't have such. The policies are there, but they are not specifically aimed (at) the minority group” [Participant 24-TS: 130-137].

However, one social worker cautioned that school policy is drawn up by the SGB (school governing body) and may or may not accommodate youth sexual minorities: *“not all schools have social workers or counsellors and there must be a policy in place which is not always sensitive towards youth, minorities and the policy is being drawn up by the SGB so it can favour the child or not” [Participant 19-YvS: 141-145].*

Drawing parallels with the reference of literature, school-based social workers' efforts to support youth sexual minorities in educational settings align with the recurring themes of inclusion and acceptance (Francis, 2017:14; Stokes, 2023:iv). The commitment to accommodating and adapting to provide for the needs of youth sexual minorities mirrors the themes of acceptance

and identity exploration (Bullard, 2020:106; Colvin *et al.*, 2019:1940; Kosciw *et al.*, 2020:134; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:55-56).

The efforts of school-based social workers to support youth sexual minorities in schools are closely aligned with the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory. The ecological systems approach focusses on the importance of understanding how an individual's development and well-being are influenced by various interconnected systems. In this context, the measures applied in schools are a reflection of the microsystem and mesosystem, as they directly impact the well-being of youth sexual minorities by creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment (Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:7; Gower *et al.*, 2018:4; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:31; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:3).

By promoting and encouraging the implementation of policies and initiatives to support youth sexual minorities, School-based social workers, are engaging in advocacy work (Crawford, 2020:4; Goodrich & Barnard, 2019:218, 222). School-based social workers recognize the need to challenge discrimination and promote equity within the educational system, aligning with the principles of advocacy theory (Mecklenburg, 2020:61). By advocating for the needs and rights of these learners, they are not only addressing immediate concerns but also contributing to broader social change by challenging stigmatization and prejudice (Argüello, 2022:9; Barnett *et al.*, 2023:668; Ciszek, 2020:6; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:495).

(4) Category 9.1.4: Try to accommodate youth sexual minorities

In explorative interviews with school-based social workers, a picture emerges of dedicated professionals committed to creating inclusive and supportive environments for youth sexual minorities within the educational system (Cizek 2020:5; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:28). These interviews reveal a common sentiment among these social workers and their schools, where concerted efforts are made to accommodate and provide a safe, affirming space for youth sexual minorities. The insights from these social workers shed light on the various measures and strategies employed to address the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minority learners within the school setting, ultimately reflecting a broader commitment to promoting diversity and inclusivity within the educational community.

"It's very tricky and it's a sensitive one. As a social worker and school, we accommodate those individuals. We met with the parents and we sat down and we discussed. OK, what does the parents expect from the school to accommodate this learner? As far as possible, we try to

accommodate these learners for instance, we do have a private toilet or bathrooms. Another example is how we address this learner as there was a special request on how we address this learner because there was a name change as well and the learner is still going through the process of change. So we respect that. So we call this learner on the name that is requested because this is not part of this learner's identity and we are not here to ask questions. We're not here to say we are not going to. We must respect that. It's part of accepting. It's part of respecting and support" [Participant 3-SJ: 89-105].

"I think we are guided as officials because we are conscious of using the correct terms when we are completing a register, you must include the correct term to use to accommodate these different kinds of people..." [Participant 14-HD: 81-85].

"...some of the schools that I've spoken to are also in the process of establishing a gender neutral bathroom, for example, where some of these youth can go to if they feel the need. For me, for now, I would say make sure that there's support make sure that there is a place or facilities where these where these learners can go to if they need to use a bathroom" [Participant 30-MV: 43-49].

In contrast with the above, one of the school-based social workers spoke out strongly against trying to accommodate youth sexual minorities by providing unisex bathrooms: *"I've seen the unisex bathrooms. And in my opinion I just don't agree with that, because for example, now you let all the children use the same bathroom. You've got LGBTQ children and you've got heterosexual children, so they're possible. Things that can happen there, for example, because you can't monitor, there can't be cameras, but for example now you want to accommodate LGBTQ children. But who's gonna monitor that? Because now other kids are also gonna take chances, you know?" [Participant 34-IvR: 271-280].*

The efforts of school-based social workers to support youth sexual minorities in schools closely align with the themes and discussions found in the academic literature regarding LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusion and diversity within educational settings (Amnesty International, 2018: 142; Barnett *et al.*, 2023:667; Francis, 2017:14; Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:144). Scholarly studies have emphasised the importance of creating safe and affirming school environments for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners to foster their well-being and academic success (Abreu *et al.*, 2021:117; Argüello, 2022:6; UNDP 2022:31; Winkler, 2018:5;). These interviews with school-based social workers provide real-world insights that supports the recommendations and principles outlined in such literature, illustrating the practical application of theories and strategies

for supporting youth sexual minorities within the educational context. By bridging these interviews with the literature, a more comprehensive understanding is gained of the ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity and diversity in schools, thus contributing to the broader discourse on LGBTQQIP2SAA issues in education (Cantos *et al.*, 2023:1; Kaasbøll, Pedersen & Paulsen, 2022:8; Manimtim, San Juan, Padilla, Aterrado & Blanquisco, 2022:2935; Mecklenburg, 2020:6; Proulx *et al.*, 2019:609; UN, 2019:76).

The ecological systems theory, suggests that individuals are deeply influenced by the various systems in their environment, ranging from the microsystem (immediate surroundings) to the macrosystem (cultural and societal influences). The efforts of social workers to create a supportive environment for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners align with this theory by acknowledging the impact of the microsystem (the school itself) and the mesosystem (interactions between the school and the LGBTQQIP2SAA learners' families and communities). These social workers actively work within these systems to provide support and accommodation, recognizing that a positive change within these microsystems can have far-reaching effects on the learners' well-being and development (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:240; Colvin *et al.*, 2019:1941; Crawford 2020:4; Fantus & Newman, 2021:156).

Advocacy theory, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of speaking out and acting on behalf of marginalized or oppressed groups. In the context of the interviews with school-based social workers, the participants advocate for policies, programmes and resources that promote LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusivity and ensure that the rights and needs of youth sexual minorities are addressed within the educational system. Their work aligns with the central tenets of advocacy theory, as they actively engage in advocating for the rights and well-being of the LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in their care, pushing for systemic change and more equitable treatment (Argüello, 2022:9; Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669; Winkler, 2018:2).

(5) Category 9.1.5: Must be sensitive to the process and the youths' needs

Interviews with school-based social workers revealed, an important theme that highlights the crucial role of sensitivity in supporting youth sexual minorities within educational institutions. These dedicated social workers underscored the significance of understanding and addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools. In the context of this discussion, it became evident that fostering a safe and inclusive environment for youth sexual minorities requires a multifaceted approach that involves not only the provision of

resources and policies but also a deep commitment by those involved to empathy and understanding (Mecklenburg, 2020:49; O'Neill, 2020:40).

One school-based social worker spoke of the need to be sensitive and cited a case where the child's gender marker has changed:

"The parents made the decision to go through medical procedures like surgical and hormone replacements and those kind of things so that this learners stops developing as a specific gender. So that's the process and they are still busy with that. Change of clothing from one gender to another, allowing for sport activities, challenges that must happen. I think what we learn out of this, it's not just straightforward. There's a lot of things to consider that we might take for granted, but that we must be very sensitive too, because you don't want that person not to feel accepted as he or she is" [Participant 3-SJ: 109-119].

Another school-based social worker also cited a case of a boy who sees himself as a girl:

"I understand this boy doesn't want to use the boys' bathroom because he's not a boy. So we went to the school and now he can't use the girls' bathroom because he's physically not a girl. I get that then you make a third bathroom. I honestly feel if we make it safe, they will be safe to go there and now accusations are being thrown around. He's not doing anything wrong. He is who he 100% believes in his soul he is...I definitely don't believe enough education has been done. You know, everything is sex Ed or don't discriminate against races there's way more discrimination than just that so they do the topics they're comfortable with but we don't go to the hard issues. I also think more research and more practical training so that people can open their minds, hopefully and then their heart" [Participant 35-CG: 228-238].

Scholars and researchers have explored into the importance of creating safe and supportive environments for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, highlighting the potential negative consequences of stigma, discrimination and harassment they may face (Marraccini et al., 2022:41; Mecklenburg, 2020:18). These issues are well-documented in literature that emphasises the psychological well-being and academic success of LGBTQQIP2SAA youth (Francis, 2017:2). The interviews with school-based social workers provide valuable insights into how these social workers translate these theoretical concepts into practical measures to support youth sexual minorities, offering a real-world perspective that complements and enriches the existing body of literature (Francis, 2017:2; Kosciw et al., 2022:130; Le et al., 2023:9).

LGBTQQIP2SAA youth navigate a complex web of influences, including the microsystem (individual interactions), mesosystem (school and family dynamics), exosystem (community and social support networks) and macrosystem (cultural norms and values). School-based social workers, by emphasising sensitivity, are essentially addressing these different ecological layers. They create supportive microsystem interactions, foster positive mesosystem relationships by collaborating with teachers and parents and advocate for LGBTQQIP2SAA youth within the exosystem, aiming to change the broader community's attitudes and policies that impact these learners (Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:8; Pretorius, 2020:145,149; Beck & Wikoff, 2020:13).

Advocacy theory emphasises the importance of championing the rights and well-being of marginalized groups. In the context of supporting youth sexual minorities in schools, school-based social workers function as advocates. Their emphasis on sensitivity reflects a commitment to understanding the unique needs and challenges faced by these youth and it signifies advocacy in action. By providing a safe and supportive environment, working to change policies and practices and educating others about the specific needs of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, these social workers are engaged in advocacy at various levels, from individual interactions to systemic change (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:118; Chereni, 2017:507; Winkler, 2018:2).

(6) Category 9.1.6: Schools differ

In response to the researcher's question, the insights garnered from interviews with school-based social workers shed light on the diverse approaches adopted by educational institutions when it comes to supporting youth sexual minorities. The perspectives shared reveal a complex landscape where schools exhibit varying levels of commitment and strategies in fostering an inclusive environment for learners who identify as sexual minorities (Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:48; SAMHSA, 2023:48). This understanding underscores the importance of exploring the myriad measures and initiatives applied within educational settings to ensure the well-being and acceptance of these youth, who often contend with unique challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity (Abreu *et al.*, 2022:13; Messinger *et al.*, 2020:709). The diverse approaches adopted by schools in this regard are described as follows:

"It differs with the schools that we are rendering service to, some are judging, some say they give support, same say they give full support, but some kids are in the closet. They are afraid of their community society. The school where it's situated as it is not easy for them to be themselves. Or like being true to themselves. Like in the urban areas it is more accepted as opposed to the rural

location where it is not accepted and then those people stay in the closet” [Participant 14-HD: 90-99].

“...it’s also dependent on the geographical area where the person lives. In the suburbs it is more accepted but in the rural areas they live it is not accepted and they are being called names like ‘moffie’ so you know, they have been labelled” [Participant 14-HD: 90-99].

“...not all schools have social workers or counsellors and there must be a policy in place which is not always sensitive towards youth, minorities and the policy is being drawn up by the SGB” [Participant 19YvS: 140-141].

The insights provided by school-based social workers regarding the divergent approaches to supporting youth sexual minorities in schools find verification within the broader literature on LGBTQQIP2SAA issues in education (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:29). Literature underscores the need for inclusive policies and practices in schools to create safe and affirming spaces for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:13; Manimtim *et al.*, 2022:2935). The variability in schools' approaches highlights the multidimensional nature of this topic and emphasises the importance of examining how diverse factors, including school culture, leadership and community context influence the level of support provided to these learners. By drawing on both the experiences of school-based social workers and the existing literature, a comprehensive understanding can be gained of the challenges and opportunities in the ongoing effort to promote inclusivity in educational environments (Abreau *et al.*, 2020:117; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:7).

The observations made by school-based social workers, coupled with its confirmation by the literature, can be effectively framed through the lenses of ecological systems theory and advocacy theory. Ecological systems theory, posits that an individual's development is influenced by multiple interrelated systems or environments, ranging from the microsystem (individual interactions) to the macrosystem (cultural and societal influences). In the context of supporting youth sexual minorities in schools, the diverse approaches highlighted by the social workers can be understood as manifestations of the multiple ecological levels at play. For instance, the microsystem might encompass individual interactions with teachers and peers, while the exosystem might involve school policies and community attitudes (Crawford, 2020:4; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:8; Gower *et al.*, 2018:7).

Advocacy theory, on the other hand, emphasises the role of advocacy and activism in creating social change. The varying levels of support for youth sexual minorities can be seen as a reflection

of the advocacy efforts or lack thereof within these school environments. Effective advocacy is crucial for influencing school policies, raising awareness and fostering a more inclusive atmosphere for sexual minority learners. By examining the interplay between ecological systems and advocacy, there is a deeper appreciation of how changes occur at different levels of influence, from the grassroots efforts of learners and parents to the broader societal norms and policies that shape school environments. This holistic perspective can guide future initiatives aimed at creating more supportive and inclusive educational settings for youth sexual minorities (Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669; Dentato *et al.*, 2016:674; Leung *et al.*, 2019:3).

7.2.1.2 Sub-theme 9.2: How the measures applied in schools to support youth sexual minorities can be made more effective

In examining the measures currently in place to support youth sexual minorities in schools, it becomes evident that some significant strides have been made in fostering an inclusive educational environment. School-based social workers have played a crucial role in these efforts, advocating for greater awareness, understanding and support for these learners. While progress has been achieved, the question arises of how these measures can be further strengthened to ensure that they are truly effective in addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities in this context. In response to this query, the school-based social workers have offered valuable insights, which can be categorized into two primary areas: the imperative of ensuring the presence of well-equipped social workers in all schools and the necessity of elevating awareness about sexual orientation and the distinct requirements of youth sexual minorities. These insights lay the groundwork for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to supporting these learners, emphasising both the provision of vital resources and the cultivation of a more empathetic and informed school environment (Glazzard & Stones, 2021:2; Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Ivchenko, 2021:22; McDermott *et al.*, 2023:2; O'Neill, 2020:9). Their responses are discussed below:

(1) Category 9.2.1: Need to ensure there is a social worker with the needed resources at all schools

Through interviews conducted with school-based social workers, it becomes evident that the effectiveness of support measures for youth sexual minorities in educational settings can be significantly enhanced. One resounding consensus among these social workers is the pressing need for a dedicated, resource-equipped social worker at every school. The collective wisdom and experiences of these social workers underscore the importance of fostering inclusive environments where young individuals grappling with their sexual orientation or gender identity

can receive the necessary support and guidance to navigate their educational journeys successfully as confirmed by the literature (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:160; Martin-Castillo, Jimenez-Barbero, Pastor-Bravo, Sanchez-Munoz, Fernandez-Espin & Garcia-Arneds, 2020:5; Valido, Merrin, Espelage, Robinson, Nickodem, Ingram, El Sheikh, Torgal & Fairclough, 2022:1122, 1140). In this exploration of measures that can better support youth sexual minorities, it is clear that placing social workers with appropriate resources at the heart of school communities can play a pivotal role in fostering a more accepting, nurturing and equitable educational experience for all LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. In the words of participants -

“...the services of school-based social workers are very important. It does help you know, for example, if you're having a child that is coming from a home where they feel unaccepted and they come here feeling overwhelmed, or they just feel tired of the situation and when they come to school and they know they the social worker is here that they can go to and speak to about their feelings...it would be so much easier if all schools had social workers to help the kids to deal with all of that, because it is very real” [Participant 2-PL: 124-131]. She added: “...some schools are only serviced by the Department of Education’s district social workers who deal with like 20 other schools and it's impossible for that social worker to attend to every need at each school the way they should, because the caseload is just too high. Therefore, it is difficult to get the time to be at a school and address all the issues. So, I think if every school could have a social worker that focuses specifically on that school and that school’s challenges it would be so much better” [Participant 2-PL: 194-202]. “...resources like internet access. I need to send emails; I need to be able to do your research and I need to keep up with current affairs like studies done. I need to keep up with the current affairs and things that are happening, because it is quite difficult to work in a place where there are no resources” [Participant 2-PL: 214-219].

“I would say having more social workers in schools to be available when the situation presents itself, when the crisis happens. But also to see the counselling process through with the client as opposed to only assess and refer” [Participant 15-LM: 111-115].

The movement of placing dedicated, resource-equipped social workers in schools to support youth sexual minorities aligns with several key themes in the existing literature on youth sexual minorities and their educational experiences (Pretorius, 2020:147; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:17-18). Research in this field consistently underscores the critical role of school-based support systems in mitigating the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by sexual minority learners. Studies have highlighted the significance of providing a safe and inclusive environment for these learners

and the presence of a knowledgeable and empathetic social worker can be a crucial component in achieving this goal (Reyneke, 2018:103; Škorić, Nedeljković & Tančik, 2021:180). Literature in addition, recognizes the positive impact of proactive intervention by school personnel in reducing stigma and discrimination and that social workers can serve as advocates, mentors, counsellors and allies for youth sexual minorities. The interviews with school-based social workers reinforce and validate the empirical evidence present in the literature, emphasising that a resource-equipped social worker in every school is a promising avenue for improving the support structures available to youth sexual minorities within the educational system (Ball & Skrzypek, 2020:179; Reyneke, 2018:83; Webber, 2018:88).

The ecological systems approach emphasises the importance of examining the various systems and environments that influence and impact on an individual's development. In this context, the presence of social workers in schools can be viewed as an intervention at the microsystem level, which includes the immediate settings where youth interact and develop, such as schools. Placing dedicated social workers with the necessary resources at schools acknowledges the importance of the school environment in the lives of youth sexual minorities. It recognizes that the school setting is a crucial part of their daily lives and social development and that having a support figure within this microsystem can significantly impact their well-being, mental health and academic success (Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:5; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:45; Valido *et al.*, 2022:1117).

Advocacy theory focuses on the role of individuals or organisations in promoting positive changes and influencing policy or practices to benefit a particular group or cause. In this context, the presence of a social worker at a school is a form of advocacy for youth sexual minorities (Winkler, 2018:76). These social workers serve as advocates for the needs and rights of sexual minority learners within the educational system. By providing a dedicated social worker at every school, would indicate that there is a systematic effort to address the unique challenges faced by these learners, would challenge discrimination and work toward more inclusive policies and practices. This advocacy not only offers direct support to LGBTQ+ youth but also has the potential to influence systemic change in the school environment to create a more accepting and supportive atmosphere for all learners (Chereni, 2017:508; Chukwu *et al.*, 2019:55; Mecklenburg, 2020:35).

In summary, the integration of dedicated, resource-equipped social workers in schools to support learners (including youth sexual minorities) aligns with the ecological systems approach in recognizing the importance of the school as a microsystem in the lives of learners from youth sexual minorities. Additionally, it embodies the principles of advocacy theory by actively working

to improve the well-being and experiences of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners while advocating for broader systemic change within educational institutions. This multifaceted approach has the potential to create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all learners.

(2) Category 9.2.2: Need to raise awareness of sexual orientation and needs of learners.

Through the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a pressing issue at the forefront of their discussions emerged as they explored the measures implemented in schools to support youth sexual minorities. One recurring suggestion for enhancing the effectiveness of these measures was the imperative need to raise awareness regarding sexual orientation and the unique needs of youth sexual minorities within the educational environment (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:145). In recognizing the significance of this awareness, the Social workers emphasised the vital role it plays in fostering a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere in schools for young individuals grappling with their sexual identities (O'Neill, 2020:58; Winkler, 2018:2). This introspective approach to inclusivity represents a critical step in shaping the future of educational support for youth sexual minorities. The following storylines support this view:

"I think it would start with educating the learners about sexual orientation and I know they're already doing that in the classes, but I think it just touches the basics. So, I think in their education, they can just go a little deeper so that they have a better understanding of sexual orientations then it would be so much better" [Participant 2-PL: 151-156].

This school-based social worker then went on to state that awareness of sexual orientation should be expanded to parents, families and the community: *"when we are done with the children then we go into families for support and education but because it's a bit difficult to deal with families sometimes because we are here at school during the day and the parents or families are also at work, that maybe it would be perfect or it would work better if we could collaborate with NGOs or other stakeholders in the community and try to find a way to do educational programmes that educate the communities about sexual orientation in order for everybody to be aware that it is OK to be different" [Participant 2-PL: 156-166].*

"...there should be a way whereby they're able to have a platform where they are able to express and expose themselves to the community of the school so that they are accepted and not be judged. But only if the head of the school allows that. Because it comes from them as they are the ones who are able to open up that door so that they have that space. Then that's another way for them" [Participant 29-MD: 70-77].

"We're not comfortable working with the sexual minorities, so I think they can look at firstly empowering the teachers themselves in the schools. The age gap is very big in some of the teachers they are very old and when culture comes into play they are not comfortable talking about certain things with the learners. So then already it's a challenge. So before we can even look at supporting or empowering the sexual minorities, maybe educate the teachers. So yeah, I think that's one thing because I haven't noticed any positive measures that are in place to support or to even acknowledge that the sexual minorities are there from as early as primary school"

[Participant 16-LMI!: 86-98].

The insights gleaned from interviews with school-based social workers regarding measures to support youth sexual minorities draw from and is confirmed by a rich body of literature addressing issues related to youth sexual minorities within the educational context. Researchers and scholars have conducted extensive studies on the experiences, challenges and needs of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, contributing to a growing literature that underscores the significance of awareness and inclusivity (McDermott *et al.*, 2023:12; Roland & Burlew, 2017:76; Shattuck, Willging & Green, 2020:1033).

Furthermore, literature emphasising the importance of awareness and inclusivity in educational settings, such as that of Kosciw *et al.*'s (2016, 2020 & 2022) "The National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools," provides empirical evidence of how raising awareness can positively impact the experiences of youth sexual minorities, fostering more inclusive and supportive school environments.

The recommendations put forth by school-based social workers align with this extensive literature, reinforcing and confirming the critical role of awareness in shaping the future of educational support for youth sexual minorities. By grounding their suggestions in existing research and scholarship, these social workers contribute to a broader conversation and the ongoing evolution of best practices for supporting LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools, ensuring that the educational landscape becomes more inclusive and affirming for all (Antonelli & Sembiane, 2022:138; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:46; Rand *et al.*, 2021:39).

This aligns with the ecological systems approach underlines the interconnectedness of various environmental factors in a person's life. In this context, it underscores the importance of understanding how school environments, home environments and societal attitudes all impact the experiences of youth sexual minorities (Ding, Lightfoot, Berkowitz, Guz, Franklin & DiNitto,

2023:3). To enhance support measures, raising awareness of sexual orientation and the needs of these individuals acknowledge the complex web of influences and challenges they face across multiple systems. By advocating for greater awareness and sensitivity to the needs of youth sexual minorities, school-based social workers are acting as agents of change, striving to improve the educational system and social environment to better serve the interests of this vulnerable population. This dual-pronged approach rooted in ecological systems thinking and advocacy theory thus underlines the proactive efforts of these professionals in creating a more inclusive and supportive educational landscape for all learners (Mecklenburg, 2020:4; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:8; Winkler, 2018:56).

7.2.2 THEME 10: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' VIEWS ON HOW THEY CAN SPECIFICALLY MANAGE INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

In recent years, the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities in schools have gained significant attention in the realm of education and social services. To better understand how school-based social workers perceive their role in managing intervention services for these vulnerable populations, interviews were conducted with experienced school-based social workers. The following key findings are made from these interviews, with an emphasis on the three sub-themes that emerged as central to the discussions. The insights and perspectives shared by these social workers shed light on the crucial role school-based social workers play in supporting and empowering youth sexual minorities in educational settings. Table 7.2, below provides an overview of the sub-themes discussed further.

TABLE 7-2 OVERVIEW OF SUB-THEME RELATED TO SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' VIEWS ON HOW THEY CAN SPECIFICALLY MANAGE INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

THEME 10	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' views on how school-based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools.	10.1 Create awareness of sexual minorities and their needs and advocate for them. 10.2 Need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge and educate yourself and accept sexual minorities. 10.3 Create and run support groups.

7.2.2.1 Sub-theme 10.1: Create awareness of sexual minorities and their needs and advocate for them

School-based social workers play a crucial role in creating safe and inclusive environments for all learners, including youth sexual minorities. Through interviews with these dedicated social workers, it is evident that their work extends beyond conventional counselling and support services. Their role includes not only addressing immediate emotional and psychological needs but also advocating for broader changes within the school community. To effectively manage intervention services for youth sexual minorities, school-based social workers emphasise the importance of raising awareness about the unique challenges and needs these learners face (United Nations, 2019:21; Cortez et al., 2021:86). By fostering understanding and empathy, they seek to create a more supportive and accepting atmosphere within schools, ensuring that every learner can thrive academically and personally. The following storylines support this view:

“I think what can be done is to try and create more awareness. I mean as early as possible to the rest of the school, so that instead of people operating knowing that there are only females and males, they need to grow up knowing that there are different people because of their orientation and they need to know this... we need to create a lot of awareness. It creates a lot of problems because normally it is discovered at a later time and people will be so confused.” [Participant 1-PM: 203-212].

“I think schools also need to cover the topics like LGBTQ, so that the children are aware of it even at an early age so that they will not be surprised when they see or hear these things” [Participant 10-DM: 96-99]. “I think also that the social workers can try and do more for these people by having information sessions to educate people in the school and in the community about LGBTQ” [Participant 10-DM: 108-111].

“We have parents that are ignorant out there. They do not have information. So as social workers it is within us to raise awareness in our community. We have now a global community, which is the social media. If you feel you cannot be going to the communities we have now global community, we have your Tik Toks we have your Youtubes. Where you can raise awareness to say, I have a platform and then I teach on mental health. I teach on minority groups, sexual minority groups...Everybody is on social media and I think that's a good way for us to link to network. Let us love social media. That's where you can find your learners. And like me, going to a hall and things like that, our learners want to be on social media. So if we are visible on our

social media and we talk to them, it's more quicker and relevant on social media platforms, there's no restriction...We are one global community” Participant 17-YM: 156-172].

“I'd say making or having more resources or maybe even if it's billboards and so forth, that make others aware, that would maybe make other learners understand...even on the walls of corridors, so that they are able to read about it. Because for example if we are able to put the, I'll say billboards or maybe even pamphlet in all the corridors, talking about HIV and AIDS, how people should understand it. And there's the sexual aid, safe sex and all that then we can still have such” [Participant 22-EM: 223-232].

“...they themselves must train teachers, have awareness campaigns and give guide to parents and understand the age group that they're working with. If you don't understand the age group of teenagers between the age of 12 to 18 and you don't know how to really deal with this, you won't be able to assist them because, like I said previously, they are in a psycho emotional developmental phase where they need to be part of a peer group, they are finding their identity” [Participant 28-AG: 221-229].

“I believe very strongly that within schools, life orientation is not enough. I feel that that curriculum needs to be changed and I feel that social workers who deal with this kind of thing should be a part of changing that curriculum” [Participant 38-TvD: 134-138].

The efforts of school-based social workers to manage intervention services for youth sexual minorities within educational settings align with the growing body of literature on the intersection of social work and LGBTQIP2SAA issues in schools (Francis, 2017:3; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:3). Research and scholarly works have increasingly emphasised the vital role of school-based social workers in advocating for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities and recognized the importance of creating awareness about the challenges faced by these learners and the need for inclusive policies and practices that foster acceptance and support within the school environment (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:8). As such, the insights from interviews with school-based social workers confirms the themes and recommendations found in the academic literature, highlighting the practical applications of these ideas in the daily work of these dedicated professionals. This integration of practice and research underscores the critical role that school-based social workers play in advancing the rights and emotional health of youth sexual minorities at schools (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:117; Francis, 2017:3; Gower *et al.*, 2018:8; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:3; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:8).

The ecological systems approach stresses the importance of considering the multiple systems and contexts that individuals are a part of. In the context of school-based social work, this means recognizing that youth sexual minorities are influenced not only by their personal experiences but also by the microsystem (family and peer relationships), mesosystem (school and home interactions), exosystem (community support and policies) and macrosystem (societal attitudes and cultural norms). School-based social workers, through their interventions, aim to address and positively impact each of these systems to create a more supportive environment for youth sexual minorities (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:13; Cheung & Leung, 2020:2-3; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:8; Valido *et al.*, 2022:1138).

Advocacy theory, emphasises the role of social workers in promoting social change and addressing systemic issues. It involves raising awareness about an issue, mobilizing resources and advocating for policy changes or community support. In the context of supporting youth sexual minorities, school-based social workers can be seen as advocates. They work to create awareness not only among learners but also among teachers, administrators and parents. They advocate for changes in school policies, establish anti-bullying programmes and the curriculum to be more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of these learners. They also collaborate with community organisations and resources to provide additional support (Abreu *et al.*, 2021:117; Barnett *et al.*, 2023; Ciszek, 2020:6; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:30; Roberts & Marx, 2018:284).

By integrating the ecological systems approach, school-based social workers take into account the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities and address them at various levels of their environment. At the same time, by applying advocacy theory, they actively work to raise awareness and make systematic changes to create a more inclusive and accepting school environment. These two frameworks, when combined, provide a comprehensive and effective approach for supporting and advocating for the well-being of youth sexual minorities within schools.

7.2.2.2 Sub-theme 10.2: Need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge and educate yourself and accept sexual minorities

One resounding perspective from these social workers underscored the paramount importance of equipping themselves with appropriate knowledge, engaging in continuous self-education and embracing an unwavering acceptance of youth sexual minorities. These school-based social workers recognize that fostering a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation, is an imperative part of their responsibilities. This theme

explores into the proactive approach taken by these social workers as they navigate the complex terrain of managing intervention services for youth sexual minorities at schools (Reyneke, 2020:163; Smith-Millman *et al.*, 2019:4; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:11). The participants expressed themselves as follows about it:

"I think maybe the Department can equip the social workers in order to be able to work with LGBTQI people in a better way like we must go for programmes...we need those programmes where we can be taught. We need those people who identify as LGBTQI community to come and teach us about them so that we have a better understanding and are better equipped to work with those people and communities" [Participant 12-ZM: 104-111].

"You should start teaching yourself. What are the signs? What do I look out for? What am I going to do if this happens?...Talk to people...speak to the kids and say this is what's happening. This is what it is. You can just be you. You don't have to be suppressed because you are different. Be open, try and get that sense in of you know what life is not limited. You can be whoever, you can do whatever and you don't have to explain yourself if people don't want to listen" [Participant 7-JN: 150-159].

The perspective of school-based social workers actively seeking knowledge, education and acceptance as essential components of their role in supporting youth sexual minorities in schools corresponds strongly with literature in the field. Literature have consistently emphasised the significance of fostering inclusive school environments, particularly for sexual minority learners. This aligns with the principles of social work, where social workers are encouraged to engage with evolving research and practice to better serve their communities (Knox *et al.*, 2020:3; Rafter *et al.*, 2023:13).

Literature on this topic underscores the positive impact of knowledgeable and accepting school-based social workers, not only in enhancing the psychological well-being of youth sexual minorities but also in promoting their academic success and overall development. By grounding their practice in this broader context school-based social workers are actively contributing to the body of research and knowledge that informs social work in education (Argüello, 2022:5; Ding *et al.*, 2023:20; Mecklenburg, 2020:36-37; Rafter *et al.*, 2023:13).

The ecological systems approach underscores the importance of understanding individuals within the context of their environments. In this case, the school environment represents a critical microsystem. School-based social workers who recognize the need for creating inclusive and

accepting environments for youth sexual minorities are effectively addressing this microsystem (Hsu, Givens, Bailey, Wilson, Rattliff & Winter, 2022:534). School-based social workers acknowledge that to effect change; they must consider not only the individual but also the interconnected systems within which the learner exists. By advocating for policies and practices that support the well-being of sexual minority learners, these social workers are operating at various levels of the ecological system, from the microsystem (the school) to the mesosystem (school-community interactions) and possibly even the exosystem (government policies and social attitudes) (Crawford, 2020:1-2; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2; Wu & Greig, 2022:10; Katz-Wise *et al.*, 2016:2; O'Keefe, Fish, Maudrie, Hunter, Tai Rakena, Ullrich, Clifford, Crawford, Brockie, Walls, Haroz, Cwik, Whitesell & Barlow, 2022:6272).

Advocacy theory in social work underscores the role of social workers as advocates for their clients and for social justice. In this context, school-based social workers who actively seek knowledge and education while fostering acceptance for youth sexual minorities are embodying the advocacy role (Roberts & Marx, 2018:281). They are not only supporting individual learners but also advocating for a broader change in school culture, policies and societal attitudes. By raising awareness, promoting inclusive practices and challenging discrimination, they are working towards creating a more equitable and accepting educational environment (Craig *et al.*, 2018:237; Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020: 157-158; Nothdurfter & Nagy, 2017: 375; Steck & Perry, 2018:235; Walters *et al.*, 2020:145).

The actions of school-based social workers in managing intervention services for youth sexual minorities in schools are deeply intertwined with the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory. They understand the interconnectedness of systems and work as advocates to effect change at multiple levels, thereby promoting the well-being and success of sexual minority learners within the educational context.

7.2.2.3 Sub-theme 10.3: Create and run support groups

In a series of interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a range of perspectives and strategies emerged on how to effectively manage intervention services for youth sexual minorities within the school environment. One notable approach, underscored by several of these dedicated social workers, revolves around the establishment and operation of support groups (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022: 40-41; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:2). These support groups serve as safe and inclusive spaces that provide invaluable emotional and social support to youth who identify as LGBTQQIP2SAA, helping them navigate the unique challenges they may encounter during their

school years. This approach not only addresses the needs of this vulnerable population but also fosters a more welcoming and accepting school community, where diversity and inclusion are championed (Kleinhans, 2018:36; SAMHSA, 2023:53). The following storylines attest to this:

"I think support groups might help because sometimes it's something that they don't want to talk about, or they are too scared to talk about it. So if we create a safe space for them to come and just to sit and share and just realise, you know what, I'm not alone in this...This individual was also going through the same as me. ..we can focus on facilitating more support groups in that regard...the other groups we facilitate with regards to sexual development...we can...maybe start at a younger age as well with these groups because some of these groups are focused on our teenagers and maybe shift the focus and maybe start at the earlier age, because at even a young age they might have started to ask these questions" [Participant 3-SJ: 246-262].

"...there can be support groups for specifically for LGBTQ children. There can be support groups for the parents in the broader spectrum of the entire school, more awareness programmes and educational programmes and it can't just be, for example, one every six months. People are not always so open to change because these things need to be reinforced and it needs to be constantly...It needs to be continuous until more people get on board and maybe get a better understanding so they will be more accepting and...the school social workers also need to recognise if a...LGBTQ child is struggling and make contact with the parents, maybe get them in more involved for group sessions...on a broad scale, the child individually, the LGBT group, the entire school and the parents and the teachers also need to be a part of this" [Participant 34-IvR: 334-352].

Research emphasises the positive impact of support groups on the mental health and overall school experiences of youth sexual minorities (Adams *et al.*, 2019:109; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11). These groups often provide a platform for learners to share their experiences, concerns and insights, reducing feelings of isolation and fostering a sense of belonging. Additionally, research has shown that support groups can help mitigate the adverse effects of bullying, discrimination and the unique stressors faced by LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, contributing to improved mental health outcomes and academic performance (Leung *et al.*, 2022:14). By drawing upon such literature, school-based social workers can not only bolster their understanding of the benefits of support groups but also refine their intervention strategies in alignment with evidence-based practices (Carastathis *et al.*, 2017:312; Dunlop & Lea, 2023:8; Logie *et al.*, 2016:2; McDermott *et al.*, 2023:3; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:8).

The ecological systems approach focusses on the interconnectedness of various systems and their influence on human development. In this context, the school environment is recognized as a crucial microsystem within which youth sexual minorities navigate their experiences. Support groups can be seen as a targeted intervention operating within the microsystem of the school. They function as a buffer against the negative influences and stressors present within the school environment, such as discrimination and social isolation. By providing a supportive network, these groups create a protective environment that complements the school's larger ecosystem, ultimately fostering the well-being and development of these learners (Colvin *et al.*, 2019:1939-1940; Fantus & Newman, 2021:11; Knox *et al.*, 2020:2; Rafter *et al.*, 2023:212)

Advocacy theory, in turn, highlights the role of advocating for the rights and needs of marginalized populations, including youth sexual minorities. The creation and operation of support groups within schools exemplify an advocacy-driven approach. School-based social workers are positioned as advocates for these learners, working to create safe spaces and promoting inclusivity and acceptance within the school community. They actively engage with school policies and practices, addressing issues related to LGBTQQIP2SAA learners' well-being and promoting a more equitable educational environment (Colvin *et al.*, 2019:1939; Fantus & Newman, 2021:15; Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020:160).

Incorporating both the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory into their work, school-based social workers can strategically utilise support groups to effect change within the school microsystem and advocate for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities. These frameworks help guide the development of comprehensive intervention strategies that address not only the individual needs of the learners but also the broader social and systemic contexts in which they learn and grow.

7.2.3 THEME 11: SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS VIEWS ON HOW GOVERNMENT CAN ASSIST SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SCHOOLS

In the pursuit of fostering a safe and inclusive educational environment for all learners, the question of how government can best support school-based social workers in their vital role of providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities is of paramount importance. This theme probes into the responses provided by the participants in this regard. Table 7.3 below, offers an overview of the school-based social workers' views on how government can assist school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools.

TABLE 7-3 SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS' VIEWS ON HOW GOVERNMENT CAN ASSIST SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS IN RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES IN SCHOOLS

THEME 11	SUB-THEMES
School-based social workers' views on how government can assist school-based social work in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools.	11.1 Develop and implement policies in schools aligned to the Constitution and people's rights. 11.2 Department of Education must enforce awareness and the curriculum. 11.3 Schools must have gender-neutral bathrooms and allow cross-dressing of uniforms. 11.4 Target messaging, use social media, train and educate communities. 11.5 Appoint more social workers in schools and provide office space. 11.6 Provide a supportive system and training for social workers. 11.7 Provide funding for programmes and projects and access to other resources. 11.8 Base any measures on research and practicalities.

7.2.3.1 Sub-theme 11.1: Develop and implement policies in schools aligned to the Constitution and people's rights

As mentioned before, during the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a critical consensus emerged regarding the essential role of the Government in facilitating effective intervention services for youth sexual minorities. The social workers unanimously voiced their perspective that for real progress to be made in supporting these vulnerable populations, it is imperative for the Government to craft and enforce school policies that harmonize with the principles enshrined in the Constitution and safeguard the fundamental rights of all individuals (Day *et al.*, 2019:420; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2018:970; Johns *et al.*, 2018:8; SAMHSA, 2023:48). These insights shed light on the pivotal role that governmental actions and legislation play in creating safe and inclusive spaces within educational institutions for youth sexual minorities, ultimately enabling social workers to provide them with the necessary assistance and support they require. This was highlighted in the following storylines:

"The Constitution recognises that all learners are equal and then every learner should be free to choose their gender identity, sexual orientation and the way they express themselves. Unfair discrimination against them based on the choices they make about their gender identity and sexual orientation is unconstitutional and should not be allowed in our schools. The Constitution further recognises freedom of choice and therefore the rights of LGBTQI learners are not equal to the rights of other learners but suppressed. There is still a lot to be done to ensure equal

treatment of LGBTI learners...the government hasn't listened to this call by the Constitution. So, what they need to do is to make sure that they develop policies which do not exclude sexual minority learners. You see, that's why I said earlier that when they draft everything...the government needs to give us support in ensuring that the rights of the LGBTQI learners are protected" [Participant 1-PM: 221-229].

"...schools should be forced to change their policies and let them speak to sexual minorities" [Participant 23-MM: 168-170].

"...they [the Government] should also put a group of professionals together that can come up with these policies, especially the people who are within the minority group...But it's not always the case. Most of the time we find that with our intervention strategies, there's only the people who are deciding on the minority group to say this is what we will do to assist them, but those people are not the ones on the ground they're not the ones who are going through what these people are going through so it is very important if they involve us as social workers. We have contact with the minority group, we will be able to get from them key factors like a safe environment, what can be done, where are the hotspots? We are able to bring up all those inputs. The formulation or development of policies is a must.." [Participant 24-TS: 141-156].

"So if you read our policies, you say all is well, everything is happening...our government needs to be...monitoring evaluation of those policies to see how are they implemented on the ground. If you look at our Bill of Rights, you look at our Children's Act and all these things that are all well and so beautifully written. But the only challenge that we have is the implementation, so the government needs to have more people on the ground focusing, monitoring and evaluating these policies being implemented" [Participant 17-YM: 185-196].

It was also noted that currently the SGB and/or the principal draw up policies: "...there must be a policy in place which is not always sensitive towards youth, minorities and the policy is being drawn up by the SGB (school governing body) so it can favour the child or not... we must identify the support that is needed by assessing the needs and the problems and providing consultations in collaboration with parents, children, learners, everybody involved in community, so draft policies together" [Participant 19-YvS: 140-152].

The sentiments expressed by school-based social workers, emphasising the role of government in crafting policies aligned with constitutional principles and individual rights, resonate with themes explored in the literature. In particular, these views evoke the essence of social justice and equity

within the educational system, themes frequently explored in literature focusing on education and social work (Day *et al.*, 2019:420; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2018:970; Johns *et al.*, 2018:8; SAMHSA, 2023:48).

Prominent works, such as Kosciw *et al.* (2016, 2020 & 2022) underscore the importance of transforming education to promote the empowerment of marginalized groups. The interviews with social workers align with the literature's emphasis on creating inclusive environments that safeguard the rights of all learners, thus ensuring that educational institutions become platforms for social change and progress (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:2; O'Neill, 2020:62; Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1033; Sosa, 2020:76; Thacker & Minton, 2021:45). This intersection between the perspectives of school-based social workers and the literature accentuates the enduring significance of governmental policies in fostering a more inclusive and just educational system for youth sexual minorities (Coon *et al.*, 2022:395; Vicars & Van Toledo, 2021:9).

The views expressed by school-based social workers regarding the Government's role in supporting youth sexual minorities in schools can be linked to ecological systems theory and advocacy theory, shedding light on the multi-level dynamics involved in advocating for marginalized groups. According to ecological systems theory, individuals are influenced by interconnected systems, ranging from the microsystem (individual relationships) to the macrosystem (societal values and laws).

Government policies aligning with constitutional rights impact the mesosystem, which comprises interactions between individuals and their immediate environments, including the school system (Dunlop & Lea, 2023:5; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2021:2; Johns *et al.*, 2018:3; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:2,5). School-based social workers' advocacy for these policies aligns with ecological systems theory, as they recognize that changes at the macrosystem level can create a more supportive school microsystem for youth sexual minorities (Chan *et al.*, 2019:32).

Advocacy theory focuses on promoting social change and advancing the rights and well-being of specific populations (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:110; Levenson *et al.*, 2023:5; Simons *et al.*, 2019:460; Springer *et al.*, 2020:188). School-based social workers can be seen as advocates for youth sexual minorities within the educational context. Their emphasis on government policy aligning with constitutional principles aligns with advocacy theory, which stresses leveraging policy change to address systemic injustices and promote the rights of marginalized groups. Their advocacy reflects a commitment to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for these youth,

enacting the principles of advocacy theory (Craig *et al.*, 2018:237-238; Crutchfield, Phillippo & Frey, 2020:190; Taylor *et al.*, 2019:369).

7.2.3.2 Sub-theme 11.2: Department of Education must enforce awareness and the curriculum

School-based social workers shed light on their unique perspective, emphasising the pressing need for the Government, particularly the Department of Education, to enhance its capacity to provide effective intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Central to their views is the call for greater awareness and curriculum enforcement, which they contend can be instrumental in creating safer and more inclusive educational environments for all learners (Craig *et al.*, 2018:231-232; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:6; UNICEF, 2022:16). The following narrative represents a glimpse into the voices of these compassionate advocates for youth well-being and their vision for a more inclusive and accepting educational system.

“...we are contracted with GDE (Gauteng Department of Education). They don't have their own social workers. So we have a memorandum of understanding (between Department of Education and Department of Social Development)... So GDE sends us a list of schools that we have to render services in and they give us the mandates and say you need to do awareness on 12345. But when we go to them and we say we need you to enforce this on the schools, send them a notice to tell them they do not have a choice, they have to give us a time slot. They do not come to the party. So the only real way to change this is if the Department of Education enforces this and the same with the curriculum. Yes, they cover this to a certain extent within their life orientation programmes. But what I've noticed is when they get to those chapters, the teachers just skip over it. They leave certain aspects out of the curriculum...they won't discuss it in class...they'll say this is in the exam, they'll cover which parts they feel comfortable with. The rest, they'll tell the learners you need to study this, it's going to be in the test, but they'll not discuss it in the class. So what I've attempted to do is...I go to the schools and then I say, OK, well, if teachers are uncomfortable to discuss this as a topic, let me present those classes, so you're not falling behind on your curriculum....and I present on that. So it stays the same. The teacher gets off period. I get my awareness, but still not a lot of schools on board with that. Because they feel if we talk about it, we're promoting it and we're not going to promote it because it goes against the school's values. We won't judge that child or deny that child to come to the school, but we're not going to promote it either” [Participant 25-CMM: 231-266].

"I think a more inclusive sex education, a lot of LGBTQI plus teenagers don't have, you know, like a life orientation within high school it's not really discussing sexual minorities and issues around this topic and so they go to the Internet to look for that information and they find other things so I think a more open, inclusive sexual discussion as to what is LGBTQI and what does that mean: [Participant 37-NN: 31-38].

The demands for increased awareness and curriculum enforcement align with the broader discourse on the importance of diversity and sensitivity in the curriculum (Astramovich & Scott, 2020:318; Francis, 2017:2,8; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:3). Literature highlighting the need for social and curricular changes to better serve minority learners. The interviews with school-based social workers echo these themes, reinforcing the idea that the Government can draw inspiration from established educational literature to enhance its support for youth sexual minorities and promote a more inclusive and equitable educational experience (Amnesty International, 2018:142; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:3,124; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:5, 12; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:7; McGowan, Wright & Sargeant, 2022:35; Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:369; Steck & Perry, 2018:239; Tran *et al.*, 2023:5).

The views expressed by school-based social workers regarding government support for youth sexual minorities can be closely tied as follows to the two theoretical frameworks used in this research, the ecological systems theory and advocacy theory.

- **Ecological Systems Theory:** This theory underscores the importance of understanding human development within the context of various interconnected systems, from the individual level to the broader societal level (Patterson *et al.*, 2020:2; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:5). The call for government intervention in promoting awareness and curriculum changes aligns with the ecological systems perspective. By acknowledging the school environment as a microsystem and recognizing the vital role of the Government (a component of the ecosystem) in shaping educational policies, school-based social workers underscore the need for systemic change to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for youth sexual minorities. This perspective is consistent with the ecological systems theory's emphasis on the interplay of multiple systems in influencing an individual's development (Beck *et al.*, 2018:46; Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18694; Reyneke, 2018:84; Springer *et al.*, 2020:181; Wofford, Garcia, Hendrix, Tavianini, Ellsworth, Torres, Lizarraga & Reyes-Bonds, 2019:59,63).

- **Advocacy Theory:** The advocacy theory, on the other hand, is centred on the notion that social workers should serve as advocates for individuals and communities who are marginalized or oppressed. The school-based social workers' call for government action in supporting youth sexual minorities aligns with the principles of advocacy theory (McCarty-Caplan & MacLaren, 2019:149; Merlin-Knoblich, Mingo & Saunders, 2022:134; Roberts & Marx, 2018:294). In their interviews, these social workers are not just providing direct services but also advocating for systemic changes that would benefit their clients. By pushing for greater awareness and curriculum enforcement, they are actively engaged in advocacy efforts to create more inclusive educational environments. This aligns with the advocacy theory's core idea that social workers should work to address the root causes of social issues and promote social justice (Franke, 2023:198; Martin-Castillo, 2020:12; Fleshman, 2019:8; Mullen, Newhart, Haskins, Shapiro & Cassel, 2019:161).

7.2.3.3 Sub-theme 11.3: Schools must have gender-neutral bathrooms and allow cross-dressing of uniforms

In interviews conducted with school-based social workers a profound and multifaceted perspective emerged on the role of government in supporting their vital work in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Among these voices, there were those who advocated for tangible and inclusive changes within educational institutions, such as the establishment of gender-sensitive bathrooms and the freedom for learners to express their identities through cross-dressing in school uniforms. These sentiments reflect the growing recognition of the unique challenges faced by youth sexual minorities within the educational system and underscore the critical need for government initiatives to foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for them (Eisenberg et al., 2021:13; McCarty-Caplan, 2018:36; Mehrotra et al., 2023:12; Shattuck, 2020:1035; Shattuck et al., 2022:6). This sub-theme explores the insights shared by these social workers, shedding light on their views and recommendations regarding government assistance in improving the well-being and educational experiences of youth sexual minorities expressed as follows:

"I really think that it should just be standard...that there should be gender neutral bathrooms. That is the most basic it just should be part of a need.... not just from government up there. But to filter down into the departments to say you know what, we understand...we're not taking cross-dressing for fun, those who want to wear the girls' school uniform should wear it, but it should be

full and neat as a girl is expected to be and vice versa, because then it shouldn't be a big issue..."

[Participant 31-DT: 477-498].

Contrary to the above position that gender neutral bathrooms should be in schools, another school-based social worker expressed her opposition to this idea as follows: "*I've seen the unisex bathrooms. And in my opinion I just don't agree with that, because for example, now you let all the children use the same bathroom. You've got LGBTQ children and you've got heterosexual children, so they're possible. Things that can happen there, for example, because you can't monitor, there can't be cameras, but for example now you want to accommodate LGBTQ children. But who's gonna monitor that? Because now other kids are also gonna take chances, you know?*"

[Participant 34-IvR: 271-280].

The views expressed by school-based social workers regarding the Government's role in assisting youth sexual minorities in educational settings aligns with the literature in social work and education. Studies and scholarly articles have explored the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, including issues related to identity, mental health and school environments (Singh, 2022:110). The recommendation for gender-sensitive bathrooms and uniform flexibility is grounded in research that emphasises the importance of creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools (Drury, Stride, Firth & Fitzgerald, 2022:1126-1128; Singh, 2022:110).

Kosciw *et al.* (2020) emphasise that schools can play a pivotal role in the well-being of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners through the implementation of inclusive policies, such as non-discriminatory dress codes and facilities.

Additionally, the concept of gender-sensitive bathrooms aligns with the broader movement for gender-inclusive facilities and has been a topic of discussion in scholarly work regarding the rights of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals (Howell, & Allen, 2021: 424-425). Government initiatives to address these issues can find support in the literature on gender-inclusive spaces within educational institutions, promoting a more inclusive and affirming environments for all learners (Bower-Brown, Zadeh & Jadva, 2023:87; Howell, & Allen, 2021: 424-425).

Incorporating these perspectives into government policies and educational practices can contribute to the betterment of the educational experience and mental health of youth sexual minorities, as suggested by academic studies and articles. Thus, the views expressed by school-

based social workers in this context aligns with and are informed by existing literature on the topic (Davy & Cordoba, 2020:360; Warin & Price, 2020:145-146).

The views of school-based social workers on government support for youth sexual minorities in schools can be understood and linked to the two theoretical frameworks in social work used in this research.

The ecological systems theory emphasises the influence of various systems and environments on an individual's development. This theory posits that individuals are shaped by multiple layers of influence, from the microsystem (family and peers) to the macrosystem (government policies and cultural norms). The school environment, wherein social workers operate, is considered part of the microsystem (Crutchfield *et al.*, 2020:187; Patterson *et al.*, 2020:136; Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18694; Springer *et al.*, 2020:181). In this context, the school-based social workers' advocacy for gender-sensitive bathrooms and uniform flexibility can be seen as an attempt to create a more supportive microsystem for youth sexual minorities. Their advocacy is driven by an understanding of how the school environment, a key microsystem, can significantly impact the well-being of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Beck *et al.*, 2018:46; Crutchfield *et al.*, 2020:189; Ivchenko, 2021:36; Sosa, 2020:76-77).

Advocacy theory focuses on the role of social workers as advocates for marginalized populations, working to address systemic injustices and create positive change. In this case, the school-based social workers' recommendations align with the principles of advocacy theory (McCarty-Caplan, 2019:149; Taylor *et al.*, 2019:369). They are advocating for changes in school policies and practices to support the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities. By recommending gender-sensitive bathrooms and uniform flexibility, they are acting as advocates for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, addressing the systemic barriers that may hinder their educational and emotional development. Their actions reflect the core principles of advocating for social justice and equality, as emphasised in advocacy theory (Craig *et al.*, 2018: 237-238; Leitch, 2017:43; Witt & Medina-Martinez, 2022:29; Tran *et al.*, 2023:8).

7.2.3.4 Sub-theme 11.4: Target messaging, use social media, train and educate communities

The interviews with school-based social workers resulted in consensus emerging regarding the vital role of government intervention in supporting the provision of essential services to youth sexual minorities within educational settings. The voices of the school-based social workers

quoted below, underscored the importance of targeted and inclusive messaging as well as the strategic use of social media platforms in order to foster awareness and understanding among communities (Berger, Taba, Marino, Lim, Cooper, Lewis, Albury, Chung, Bateson & Skinner, 2021:4; Berger, Taba, Marino, Lim, Skinner, 2022:3; Craig, Eaton, McInroy, Leung, & Krishnan, 2021:2). As these social workers navigate the complex landscape of adolescent identity and provide indispensable support to marginalized youth, their insights serve as a compelling call to action for the government to facilitate change and promote inclusivity in schools, ultimately nurturing safe and supportive environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

"I guess it's about training possibly. Also, I think messaging, you know our laws are very open and I think messaging to the broader society would be helpful to youth sexual minorities because you know, much like with the HIV AIDS pandemic messaging around that happened on multiple levels and so that helps in some ways to destigmatise HIV and perhaps messaging could be the same way you submitted by the government to the broader society, that is more inclusive and more accepting and less judgmental. I think that might be helpful. Though you know people have very strong religious beliefs and those sorts of things that's a challenge. But as yeah, I think perhaps the government speaking more towards the laws they have in terms of inclusivity and that sort of thing that might be helpful to the broader society" [Participant 5-RH: 267-300].

"The government should invest more in information. The most problematic thing when it comes to LGBTQI is that people don't have information...they just talk because oh, we see Caitlyn Jenner on TV and we think we know but we don't know!!! So I think if we could just get proper information, then that's what the government can do...and invest more in programmes that are aimed at removing stigmas starting at homes where the people live and starting at clinics. The government can try and engage with healthcare workers, give them information so that we all can be agents of change. Hence we have so much stigma; hence we have people killing lesbians; hence, a lot of things because people don't understand, people don't want to engage, people just don't want to take time to really get to understand the topic" [Participant 13-KL 99-146].

The sentiments expressed by school-based social workers in their interviews aligns with themes and concerns addressed in contemporary literature. Within the literature, the experiences of youth sexual minorities often serve as a poignant backdrop for exploring themes of identity, acceptance and societal perceptions. The need for targeted messaging and the use of social media platforms to promote awareness and understanding is a theme that has found significance in various literary

works (Lucero, 2017:125; Miller, 2016:145). These issues often find expression in coming-of-age narratives, where characters grapple with their sexual identity and seek acceptance within their communities. The Government's role in fostering inclusivity, as advocated by the social workers, parallels the exploration of societal influence and governmental policies in literature. In this context, literature often serves as a reflection of real-world challenges and aspirations, showcasing the potential for change and acceptance in society, just as the school-based social workers aspire to bring about change in their educational environments (Dhiman,2023:2; MetroSource, 2022; Wallace, 2019).

The perspectives of school-based social workers, as well as the suggested strategies for government intervention in support of youth sexual minorities, can be analysed through the lenses of both ecological systems theory and advocacy theory.

Ecological systems theory focuses on examining the multiple layers of influence on an individual's development. In this context, the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities can be understood as interactions between the microsystem (the immediate school environment and peer groups), the mesosystem (interaction between school and home environments) and the exosystem (government policies and community attitudes). School-based social workers, by advocating for targeted messaging and the use of social media, are addressing the need to create a supportive microsystem within the school environment that aligns with advocacy for change at the exosystem level. This approach is consistent with ecological systems theory, which recognizes the interconnectedness of these systems in shaping a youth's experience and well-being (Decarlo *et al.*, 2021:782; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:31; Robinson & Scmitz, 2021:4).

Advocacy theory, on the other hand, focuses on the role of individuals or groups in championing specific causes and bringing about social change. The school-based social workers interviewed can be seen as advocates for the rights and well-being of youth sexual minorities. Their advocacy aligns with the principles of advocacy theory, which emphasise the importance of raising awareness, mobilizing support and working with institutions and policymakers to drive change. The suggested use of social media and targeted messaging as tools for advocacy reflects a contemporary approach to engaging broader audiences and promoting a more inclusive and accepting society, which is a key goal of advocacy theory (Appiahene, Varadarajan, Zhang & Afrifa, 2023:12; Ciszek, 2020:1996; Valido *et al.*, 2022:1122).

The insights provided by school-based social workers, the ecological systems theory and advocacy theory converge in the effort to create a more supportive, inclusive and accepting

environment for youth sexual minorities, acknowledging the interconnectedness of ecological systems while using advocacy strategies to promote change at various levels of society.

7.2.3.5 Sub-theme 11.5: Appoint more social workers in schools and provide office space

Interviews with school-based social workers revealed a prevailing sentiment emerging regarding the critical need for government support in enhancing their capacity to provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities. A clear agreement emerging from these interviews emphasises the pressing need for heightened government engagement, specifically through the appointment of additional social workers in schools. This viewpoint is corroborated by an article by Willemse (2023) in a local newspaper, which notes that the government acknowledges the necessity for more social workers but cites limited funding as a constraint. Ensuring dedicated office spaces is deemed crucial in this context (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:130; Vergottini & Weyers, 2022:21). These insights underscore the essential role that school-based social workers play in addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities and highlight the significance of governmental support in ensuring their effective engagement and service delivery within the educational system. This is what they said:

“...more resources we need resources you know, as a social worker. Just imagine only 7 social workers in my unit serving 255 schools. We need office space, can you imagine having to see the client in an open space where there is no confidentiality. So office space is a challenge” [Participant 15-LM: 120-125].

“I think government needs to employ social workers. That's number one. They have to employ social workers in schools. I cannot over emphasise that” [Participant 17-YM: 176-178].

“I think government should employ more school social workers because right now in this area I am the only social worker” [Participant 33-KM: 158-160].

The call for more social workers and dedicated office spaces corresponds with recommendations found in academic research, which emphasises the need for increased resources and support within schools to better serve the diverse needs of youth sexual minorities (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:130; Vergottini & Weyers, 2022:21; Vergottini, 2019:3,84). This alignment between the insights of school-based social workers and existing literature underscores the urgency of these recommendations and the potential for their positive impact on the well-being of sexual minority learners in educational settings.

Ecological systems theory advances that individuals are influenced by various environmental systems, with the microsystem (the immediate environment) having a direct impact on their development. In this context, the school can be considered a microsystem and school-based social workers operate within it. The call for more social workers and dedicated office spaces aligns with this theory by recognizing that these social workers, as integral components of the microsystem, can effectively support youth sexual minorities when they have the necessary resources and structures in place (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:13; Cheung & Leung, 2020:6; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:8; Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Pretorius, 2020:149-150).

Advocacy theory emphasises the role of individuals and groups in advocating for change in societal systems and policies to address pressing social issues (Crawford, 2020:4; Goodrich & Barnard, 2019:218, 222). The school-based social workers' recommendations for government support in this regard, reflect an advocacy approach. They are advocating for policy changes that would enhance the support and services available to youth sexual minorities. Their voices contribute to a broader advocacy movement that seeks to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment (Levenson *et al.*, 2023:7; Simons, 2018:159; Simons & Russell, 2021:469; Simons & Simons, 2021:1-2).

Both theories underscore the importance of considering the systemic and environmental factors at play in the lives of youth sexual minorities. By advocating for additional resources and support, the school-based social workers are operating within the framework of these theories, striving to improve the microsystem (school environment) and advocating for systemic changes that can better meet the needs of these vulnerable learners.

7.2.3.6 Sub-theme 11.6 Provide a supportive system and training for social workers

School-based social workers, with their front-line perspective on the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities in educational settings, have voiced a critical need for government support to enhance their capacity in rendering intervention services (Leung, 2021:11; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:3). School-based social workers emphasised the importance of a multifaceted approach that involves the provision of a supportive system, targeted training and essential resources. Their collective insights underscore the urgency of addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities within the educational context and highlight the vital role that government initiatives can play in promoting inclusivity, well-being and resilience among this vulnerable population as follows (Barnett *et al.* 2023:669; Sumbane & Makua, 2023:11):

“There must be a supportive system also for me but first the rights of these people need to come alive in our society... my feeling is that the government still has a lot to do to support these groups and me as a social worker. We need to be free to educate children as early as grade one about different genders. They should be able to know that there is a boy, a girl child and a child who is different from what they think they know” [Participant 1-PM: 241-249].

“I think the government can equip us with resources...resources as simple as a register, because we usually have just the column form when it comes to gender, just male or female. Already we are creating some sort of exclusion, or we are suggesting some sort of ignorance like you're either male or female. They are in the process of exploring their own sexual identity and now we are coming with these registers already, we are limiting them...if they can empower us, equip us with resources such as that, like be open-minded so that when we go into the field, we are not letting anyone feeling excluded... most definitely more training. I think on an on-going basis because with social minorities, it's every time there's something new, it's evolving...on-going training acknowledging the age gaps and culture. So that we are all self-aware as well to say, how do I feel? Am I ready to engage with the youth sexual minorities in a way that does not suggest any exclusion or discrimination?” [Participant 16-LM1: 116-124].

“...government really needs to start, you know, developing programmes that social workers can use, guidelines, policies. But especially just awareness programmes and training for social workers, training and skills development for social workers to render services to this specific minority group” [Participant 34-IvR: 364-371].

“I think it mustn't be a choice for you to be trained. It must be a mandatory that as an employee. You must undergo this training. So training must be offered to people who work with this type of people. Professionals must keep up with the developments and then if you don't know you will not be able to help or support this person” [Participant 14-HD: 104-110].

The call for government support to empowers school-based social workers in serving youth sexual minorities aligns with various themes explored in the existing literature on LGBTQQIP2SAA youth, education and mental health (Katz-Wise et al., 2022:16; Roland & Burlew, 2017:763). Research within this domain emphasises the importance of creating inclusive school environments, where youth sexual minorities can access supportive services and resources to address their unique needs. Scholars have highlighted the significance of the role school-based social workers play as key agents of change in promoting the well-being of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:6). The literature also underscores the potential benefits of targeted training

programs for educators and support staff to better understand and address the specific challenges faced by youth sexual minorities (Kleinhans, 2018:50). Therefore, the insights from the interviews with school-based social workers agrees with and contribute to the broader discourse within the academic community, that advocates for evidence-based interventions and government support to improve the educational experiences of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Bennett & Gates, 2019:609; Day *et al.*, 2020:420; 426-427; Kleinhans, 2018:50; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:42; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:6).

The ecological systems approach emphasises the interplay of various systems and their impact on an individual's development and well-being. In the context of LGBTQQIP2SAA youth in schools, this approach acknowledges that the school environment is just one component within a larger system. The call for government support aligns with this perspective, as it recognizes the need to address not only the school level but also the broader socio-political context (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:45; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:5; Valido *et al.*, 2022:1117). By advocating for governmental action, school-based social workers are seeking to create changes at the macro level of the ecological system, which can lead to systemic improvements for LGBTQQIP2SAA youth in educational settings (Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669; Dentato *et al.*, 2016:674; Leung *et al.*, 2019:3).

Advocacy theory within social work underscores the role of social workers in advocating for the rights and well-being of their clients or the populations they serve. In this case, school-based social workers are acting as advocates for youth sexual minorities, urging the government to act (Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669; Winkler, 2018:2). Their advocacy aligns with the tenets of this theory, which stress the importance of raising awareness, mobilizing support and influencing policy and practice to address social injustices and meet the needs of marginalized populations (Levenson *et al.*, 2023:7; Simons, 2018:159; Simons & Russell, 2021:469; Simons & Simons, 2021:1-2).

By connecting the insights of school-based social workers with the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory it becomes evident that their call for government assistance is rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted systems impacting LGBTQQIP2SAA and a commitment to advocating for positive change within these systems to promote the well-being and inclusion of this vulnerable population.

7.2.3.7 Sub-theme 11.7 Provide funding for programmes and projects and access to other resources

Through the interviews conducted with school-based social workers, a resounding theme emerged regarding the critical role of government support in enhancing the social workers' ability to provide effective intervention services to youth sexual minorities. A number of school-based social workers stressed the importance of financial backing for initiatives and programmes aimed at supporting these vulnerable groups. In addition to financial assistance, these social workers also articulated the need for improved access to essential resources. Their perspectives highlight the growing demand for government intervention to empower school-based social workers in their efforts to create safe, inclusive environments and foster the well-being of youth sexual minorities within the educational system as follows (Bos, 2020:208; Omellas, Engelbrecht & Attamturk, 2020:242; Truter & Fouché, 2019:453):

"The government (should give)...funding and more funding to initiate educational programmes. I think you can do a lot and you can even go into the community, but I think funding with regards to initiating projects and groups...I don't think there is enough resources outside to do that because we work with the kids here at school from 8:00 to 2:00 and they go home into their communities and we don't know what happens to them. I think in some communities they really suffer a lot of discrimination, because they come to school just to be safe from the evils outside in the communities. But I think funding to create resources outside of school for these youth to go to in the afternoon, so that they also get support or attend support groups outside as well. So, funding and resources is a big thing" [Participant 3-SJ: 268-282].

"...access to a lot of resources, but because we are so limited, you can't sometimes do stuff on your own. Bring people that you maybe know from outside and say you know what, I'm going to give an information session to this class 'cos I know there are two or three kids in that class that might benefit from this, but I don't want to single them out...Do awareness programmes as if you are doing Cancer awareness. Act as if it's just for the specific society or the specific group. They don't have to do it themselves, we can also do it. Exposure, train me on how I should approach certain things. You can only go so far from a book...Exposure to networks on how to handle matters like these..." [Participant 7-JN: 163-177].

"...I think funding as there's always funding when it comes to like gender-based violence, the protection of women. Part of that funding needs to be for sexual minorities, whether that is a minor or an adult and how do we support this? How do we not create shame and fear? How do

we teach these people how to have healthy relationships? And because there's no education that leaves them open to have toxic relationships and to be taken advantage of, so I think it's an empowerment thing and finding funding for outside organisations like CMR, Rata the Department of Social Development must be able to put measures in place within communities. A lot of older generation parents have children who identify as gay or lesbian or transgender and they have nowhere to look for help. And especially if you look at communities, not everyone has access to a laptop, to a cell phone, to Internet to do the research on their own. So providing support to parents whose children identify this way, providing education to parents and how to work through those emotions..." [Participant 37-NN: 134 – 148].

With reference to programmes and projects, one school-based social worker highlighted the following: “*There's a lot of things that can be done but it's impossible for the school-based social workers to do it because they are not given free reign. They have to do what the governing body says they must do. In everything they do within the schools, your social worker that gets a governing body salary you have to go to the principals. I want to do awareness on 1-2-3. The principal approves or disapproves...*” [Participant 25-CMM: 201-208].

Research has shown that marginalized populations, such as sexual minorities, often require tailored support to navigate the complex social and psychological issues they encounter during their formative years (Hamilton & Ratcliff, 2021:117). Government initiatives that allocate funds for specialized programmes, resources and comprehensive training for professionals can play a pivotal role in creating safe and inclusive school environments, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. These findings underscore the importance of aligning policy recommendations and practitioners' insights to advance the well-being of youth sexual minorities and ensure that they have equal opportunities for success in school and beyond (Abreau *et al.*, 2020:108; Breshears & De Beer, 2016:21; Hamilton & Ratcliff, 2021: 117).

The views expressed by school-based social workers on government assistance in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities align closely with the ecological systems approach and the tenets of advocacy theory. The ecological systems approach emphasises the interconnectedness of various systems that influence an individual's development, with a particular focus on the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. In this context, school-based social workers operate within the mesosystem, where they interface directly with the educational environment and the learners. They require support from the Government (exosystem) to provide appropriate interventions and resources that are responsive to the unique

needs of youth sexual minorities. The Government's role as a critical exosystem entity is essential in enabling school-based social workers to bridge the gap between the educational setting and the learners' diverse experiences (Ding *et al.*, 2023:3).

Advocacy theory in turn, underscores the importance of advocating for social change and justice on behalf of marginalized or disadvantaged populations. School-based social workers, through their work with youth sexual minorities, engage in advocacy by recognizing the specific challenges and barriers these learners face. They advocate for equitable access to resources and support within the educational system (Barnett *et al.*, 2023:669; Winkler, 2018:2).

When they call for government funding and resource allocation, they are essentially acting as advocates for their learners, seeking to create an environment that promotes their well-being and inclusivity. This aligns with the principles of advocacy theory, where individuals or professionals work to address systemic issues and create more just and supportive conditions for marginalized groups, such as youth sexual minorities (Colvin *et al.*, 2019:1939; Fantus & Newman, 2021:15; Kokozos & Gonzalez, 2020:160).

In essence, the views of school-based social workers on the need for government assistance to better serve youth sexual minorities through funding and resource provision are inherently linked to the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, as they reflect the need for systemic change and recognition of the interplay between various systems that affect the well-being and development of these vulnerable learners.

7.2.3.8 Sub-theme 11.8 Base any measures on research and practicalities

In answering the last question of the interview guide, one school-based social worker's profound sentiment was the need for government initiatives to be grounded in thorough research and a pragmatic approach. In this context, the participant emphasised that effective strategies must be carefully tailored to the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities reflecting a commitment to evidence-based practices that can make a tangible difference in the lives of those they serve (Daly, 2022:1; Teater 2017:2). The following storyline describes this sub-theme:

“...the first thing that government should do is I think anything that is implemented in schools should be based on research and should be realistic. Like I'm thinking specifically now about unisex bathrooms that are brought into schools...research and practicality should be brought in because now allowing boys and girls to share often, which is great for human rights, but now it's going to be easier for boys to rape girls...they should base the measures that are implemented

on practical reasons and that practical reasoning and research and what has worked in other countries and what has not worked in other countries and being respectful of everyone in the community. So I think it's going to be measures should be put in place, but I think first there should be a lot of research done because these measures...be put in place and then the kids are harmed in the process” [Participant 38-TvD: 240-258].

The viewpoint expressed by this participant in the quest for government support in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities connects with the broader discourse found within the pages of relevant literature. Scholars and researchers have long explored the intricate relationship between government policies and the well-being of marginalized youth populations, particularly those in the LGBTQQIP2SAA community (Argüello, 2022:3).

In school social work and education, the call for evidence-based practices and research-informed approaches is a recurrent theme. It aligns with the academic literature's insistence on the necessity of informed and targeted strategies to address the unique challenges faced by youth sexual minorities within the school environment.

This emphasis on research-based interventions mirrors the scholarly community's commitment to fostering inclusive, safe and supportive educational settings for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Thus, the perspectives of school-based social workers form a crucial bridge between the practical realities on the ground and the ongoing academic discourse that seeks to advance the well-being of youth sexual minority in educational institutions (Argüello, 2022:3; Winkler, 2018:10-11).

The perspectives of school-based social workers on government support for intervention services to youth sexual minorities can be closely linked to the ecological systems approach and advocacy theory, shedding light on the multi-dimensional nature of this issue. The ecological systems approach advances that individuals are influenced by a complex interplay of systems, from the micro-level of family and school to the macro-level of government policies and cultural norms.

In this context, the Government's role in shaping policies and regulations directly impacts the micro-level experiences of learners, especially youth sexual minorities (Beck *et al.*, 2018:46; Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18694; Reyneke, 2018:84; Springer *et al.*, 2020: 181; Wofford, *et al.*, 2019:59,63).

Advocacy theory emphasises the importance of advocating for change at various levels, including individual, community and structural. School-based social workers, in their call for government assistance, embody the principles of advocacy theory by acting as advocates for marginalized learners within the school system (Chereni, 2017:508; Chukwu *et al.*, 2017:55; Mecklenburg, 2020:35). They recognize the need for systemic change, urging the government to implement policies and practices that better support youth sexual minorities (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:118; Chereni, 2017:507; Winkler, 2018:2).

These perspectives highlight the intersection of ecological systems theory and advocacy theory, illustrating how government policies and actions influence the various systems in which youth sexual minorities are embedded and how school-based social workers play a crucial role in advocating for positive change within these systems.

By emphasising the importance of research-informed and practical government measures, these social workers are championing both ecological and advocacy principles to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all learners.

7.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter Seven serves as a seamless extension of the preceding Chapters Five and Six, exploring themes nine, ten and eleven to offer a comprehensive synthesis of research insights and a distinct exploration of literature contextualisation. In this pivotal chapter:

Theme Nine explored the first-hand accounts and experiences of school-based social workers, shedding light on the measures being employed to support youth sexual minorities in school settings and proposing enhancements to optimize their effectiveness.

Theme Ten casted a discerning view upon the perspectives of school-based social workers concerning the management of intervention services tailored to the unique needs of youth sexual minorities within schools, providing valuable insights into the intricacies of this critical role.

Theme Eleven presented the views of school-based social workers focusing on how government entities can play a supportive role in facilitating their efforts to provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities in school environments, offering a comprehensive perspective on the potential avenues for external support.

Chapter Eight, the concluding chapter of this research report, offers a comprehensive synthesis of the research insights, draws conclusions, acknowledges potential limitations and provides recommendations for future research and practical implications.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We struggled against apartheid because we were being blamed and made to suffer for something we could do nothing about. It is the same with homosexuality. The orientation is a given, not a matter of choice. It would be crazy for someone to choose to be gay, given the homophobia that is present.

- Desmond Tutu

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One of this study, a broad overview is presented of the research problem that the study aimed to address. The chapter covered the justification for the study and the theoretical frameworks used, along with an explanation of key concepts relevant to the research.

In Chapter Two, the formulated research plan is detailed, including the research questions, goals and objectives. It also delved into the research methodology and explored the research methods and ethical considerations associated with the study.

Chapter Three explored the perspectives of the International, African and South African views on the status of sexual minorities, with a focus on relevant policies and legislation. The chapter concluded by highlighting the challenges faced by sexual minorities in South Africa.

Chapter Four provided a description of how the chosen research methodology described in the research plan, was operationalised in practice. It elaborated on the research process, design and methodology, elucidating their application to this study.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven encompassed the research insights, presented in themes, sub-themes and categories based on the contributions of the participants. These findings were supplemented with a contextualisation of relevant literature. In the form of a literature contextualisation.

This chapter, the concluding chapter of the study, consists of a synopsis of the research which examines the results, utilising the employed theoretical frameworks and discussing the influences of the ecological systems theory and the advocacy theory on the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Also included is an exposure of the limitations inherent in this study. The research findings are summarised, conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made.

8.2 CHAPTER SYNOPSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

In this section, a summarised overview of the dissertation is provided and conclusions are drawn pertaining to each chapter. This is done by relating the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

8.2.1 Synopsis and conclusions of Chapter One: General introduction and orientation to the study

The formulation of the problem statement and the rationale for the study is discussed in Chapter One. The motivation for this study arose from the shortage of school-based social workers, recognized as a complex issue with serious consequences (Colditz, 2018; Huxtable, 2016:1; Opperman, 2022; Reyneke, 2018:79; Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125). This shortage is especially concerning for youth sexual minorities in schools who face numerous challenges due to their sexual orientation. This chapter outlines the significance of this issue and highlights the urgent need for social workers in schools, based on various local and international studies and policy documents.

The theoretical frameworks employed in this study are the Advocacy theory and the Ecological systems theory. Advocacy theory emphasises the role of social workers in promoting social justice and ethical obligations (Clark, 2020; Dewees & Hanley, 2018:235). This study explores how school-based social workers view their role as social justice advocates for youth sexual minorities. Advocacy theory aims to represent underprivileged and oppressed groups in decision-making processes to improve their status (Chereni, 2017:508). Various forms of advocacy are discussed, including legislative advocacy, whistleblowing and rights representation, whilst the importance of service system configuration in advocacy is also emphasised.

The ecological systems theory, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner, categorizes an individual's surroundings into five systems that influence their development (Leung et al., 2022:2). This theory highlights the interaction between individuals and their social contexts, which can impact on their behaviour (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:239). School-based social workers can use this framework to understand the various factors affecting youth's overall well-being and behaviour.

The chapter concluded with an exposition of key concepts to provide readers with a solid foundation for understanding the core terminology and the concepts, central to the research.

Conclusion: Chapter One serves as a cornerstone for the upcoming research, providing a crucial foundation for delving into the pressing issue of the shortage of school-based social workers and its specific ramifications for youth sexual minorities. The chapter not only guides readers through the development and refinement of the research proposal but also sheds light on the findings within the problem statement and rationale of the research. The identified complexities drove the research forward by emphasising the urgency of addressing the shortage of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

The chapter introduces the theoretical frameworks Advocacy theory and Ecological systems theory, which contributed significantly to the study. The utilisation of these frameworks enhanced the understanding of the subject matter. Advocacy theory provides a lens through which school-based social workers can actively engage in promoting social justice, addressing the shortage and advocating for the needs of marginalized youth. Simultaneously, Ecological systems theory offers a comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted influences shaping youth development within the context of this shortage.

By concluding with a clarification of key concepts, Chapter One ensures that readers are not only well-versed in the essential elements shaping the research proposal but also understand how the identified research problem, rationale and theoretical frameworks collectively lay the groundwork for comprehensive and impactful research.

8.2.2 Synopsis and conclusion of Chapter Two: The research plan

- *What experiences and challenges do school-based social workers encounter while providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities within the school environment?* The answer to this research question was explored and concluded on in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. Reflected in these three chapters are the experiences, challenges and responses of the school-based social work participants.
- *How can the existing strategies for school-based social work intervention be improved to better assist and support school-based social workers in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?* This research question was answered in Chapters Five, Six and Seven that resulted in the recommendations of this chapter (section 8.4). Recommendations for school-based social workers were made and arrived at from the storylines of the participants. The following questions as contained in the interview guide assisted in finding the answers to these questions:

- *Would you please tell me about your understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?*
- *What would you say are the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?*
- *What would you say are risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities?*
- *What would you say are the impact of these risk factors or challenges on youth sexual minorities?*
- *How would you describe your experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?*
- *Please describe your challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.*
- *Can you describe how you feel in rendering these services to youth sexual minorities?*
- *What support services are available to you in rendering these intervention services?*
- *What would say are the measures being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools?*
- *How effective are such measures in supporting youth sexual minorities in schools?*
- *How can these measures be managed more effectively in schools?*
- *What are your views on how school based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?*
- *What would you say the government should do to assist school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?*

Conclusion: The researcher concludes that the research questions of this study were answered by the information acquired from the school-based social workers through the observations and their storylines. Further evidence attesting to the fact that the research questions have been answered was provided in Chapters Five, Six and Seven. In these chapters, a detailed presentation of the findings is made through an analysis of each theme and sub-theme. A summary of the research findings in this chapter (presented further below) also attests to the conclusion that the research questions have been adequately answered.

The research questions informed the presentation of the study's goal and objectives set to achieve the goal. The research goals provided a broad and abstract overview of the study's ultimate objective, guiding the research journey. The research goals for this study were to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities and to formulate recommendations for enhancing existing school social work interventions.

The research goals are deduced from the research questions. The research goal is not really aimed at testing theories, but rather aims to develop and discover by answering "what" and "why" questions relating to the research phenomenon. The goals and a concluding statement on how each goal was achieved are presented below in Table 8.1.

TABLE 8-1 SUMMARY OF THE GOALS OF THE STUDY AND THE CONCLUSIONS ON THEIR REALISATION

The following goals were formulated at the outset of the study:	Conclusion statement on the realization for the stated goal formulated for the study:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researcher obtained an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, comprehensively described in Chapter Five, Six and Seven.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To proffer suggestions as to how school-based social workers can be supported in rendering intervention services to youth-sexual minorities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Chapter Eight (section 8.4) suggestions for the support of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, are made.

Given the information provided above, it is concluded that the research goals formulated for this study were achieved.

To achieve the research goals the necessary research objectives were formulated in the research plan (Chapter Two section 2.4 and Chapter Four section 4.2). The research objectives, as delineated by Rubin and Babbie (2017:557), specify concrete actions that researchers can engage in during their research endeavours. Achieving the research objectives enabled the researcher to answer the research questions and achieve the research goals. The following research objectives were designed to address the research question and goal:

- To explore the experiences and challenges encountered by school-based social workers in delivering social intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

- To describe the primary findings related to the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- To draw comprehensive conclusions and provide recommendations on how existing school social work interventions can be improved to support school-based social workers in delivering effective and efficient intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Research models, or paradigms provided a framework for organising and guiding the research process. These paradigms played a crucial role in shaping the researcher's critical reasoning during the research project. Researchers often use logical philosophies to justify their choice of research methodologies. There are five main research paradigms, namely positive theory, constructivism or interpretivism, critical theory, transformational theory and pragmatism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018:5; Creswell & Poth, 2018:22–23).

In the context of the study, a qualitative research approach was adopted, aligning with the constructivism or interpretivism paradigms, recommended for understanding human social life scenarios (Berryman, 2019:273). This study focuses on participants' perspectives and experiences within the specific context under investigation (Berryman, 2019:273; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:421). Social constructivists believe that individuals actively interpret their experiences and construct meanings from them, aligning with the notion that "truth and knowledge are subjective", given cultural and life experience variations (see Chapter Two Section 2.5 and Chapter Four section 4.2).

Interpretive researchers aim to construct facts by structuring research questions that delve into the "how and why" aspects, relying on participants' perceptions and understandings of the phenomenon concerned. Applying this approach involved using open-ended research questions to empower participants to co-create meaning from their circumstances, facilitating the comprehension of diverse perspectives and experiences (Berryman, 2019:273).

In this study on intervention services for youth sexual minorities, the researcher chose the qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. As is further described in this chapter, applying the qualitative research approach encompassed the methods used in the research process, including data collection, analysis and interpretation (also see Chapters Two, section 2.5.1 and Four, section 4.2). Using this approach involved exploring participants' experiences and challenges within their natural context, focusing

on their meaning and viewpoints. The study aligned with the qualitative research approach and its characteristics, such as inductive data analysis and reflexivity (see Chapters Two section 2.5 and Four section 4.2 and 4.4)

The research design is a crucial framework that provides structure and guidance to the research process, serving as a blueprint for data collection and analysis (Lune & Berg, 2017:36). In this study, the research design incorporated elements of phenomenological, explorative, descriptive and contextual designs.

The research method served as a guiding framework for directing the research process, specifying tasks, structuring the study and allocating resources for participant recruitment. Research procedures encompassed specific tactics and techniques used to identify the target population, select a sample and gather and analyse the data.

In this study, the target population comprised of school-based social workers based in school settings in the Gauteng province, responsible for providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were carefully defined to select participants who met the study's objectives.

The interview guide with open-ended questions is provided in Addendum A of the study and the data collection methods used adhered to the relevant ethical principles and practices.

A comprehensive process was implemented to ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the research findings. This encompassed the aspects of credibility, applicability/transferability; consistency/dependability; and neutrality/confirmability (Creswell, 2022:55; Kozleski, 2017:28; Yates & Leggett, 2016:227). Incorporating these strategies ensured that the qualitative research in this study was conducted with rigor and integrity, enhancing the trustworthiness and reliability of the findings. The application of these practices enabled the researcher to produce research contributing meaningfully to the social work body of knowledge and considered as valuable within both the research community and the broader audience (see Chapters Two, section 2.6.6 and Four, section 4.8).

The ethical considerations outlined in this chapter demonstrated a commitment to conducting the research with the highest standards of ethical conduct (Flick 2018:18; Yegidis *et al.*, 2018:25). Ethical considerations that were discussed in this chapter included obtaining informed consent; avoidance of harm, beneficence; the right to privacy; confidentiality of data and anonymity; management of information; and debriefing of participants. These ethical considerations

collectively demonstrated the commitment of the researcher to conducting research in a responsible, ethical and participant-centred manner (see Chapters Two section, 2.7 and Four, section 4.9).

Conclusion: The conclusion to the application for the methodology applied, is presented in section 8.2.4 below.

8.2.3 Synopsis and conclusion of Chapter Three: International, African and South African views of the current Status of Sexual Minorities

To formulate a contextual view of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, it was important to understand the current International, African and South African views of the status of sexual minorities. For the purposes of this study it was especially important to delve into the specific challenges faced by sexual minorities in South Africa. With reference to the international legislation and current state of the rights of sexual minorities, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights (ICCPR) was discussed (United Nations, 2023). A world view of sexual orientation laws and the criminalization of consensual same-sex acts between adults was obtained and reviewed. From this view, it was evident that the African continent holds the highest prevalence of criminalization of consensual same sex acts.

The African view sketched a grim picture on the promotion of human rights of sexual minorities. It was noted that countries like Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania, are the forerunners in aggressively persecuting sexual minorities. Prohibiting legislation and policies of this on the African continent are discussed. A reflection on the South African legislation pertaining to LGBTQQIP2SAA rights and the current state of these rights within the country is discussed. It is clear that the journey of LGBTQQIP2SAA rights in South Africa is a story of remarkable transformation, reflecting both the nation's progressive legal framework and the challenges that persist in the quest for full equality and acceptance.

South Africa was noted as the only country in the African continent that afforded full protection and extended rights to sexual minorities. The Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) (South Africa, 1996), hailed as the most progressive such act in the world, although there are still reported incidents of discrimination recorded, is briefly discussed. A timeline was provided on the progression of equality of sexual minorities in South Africa.

The chapter moved to focus on the challenges faced by sexual minorities in South Africa with reference to the family setting; fear of coming out/disclosure; emotional distress and suicidal thoughts; rejection and lack of social support. Specific challenges within the community setting, faced by sexual minorities, like homophobia, violent attacks and hate crimes; corrective rape crimes and verbal /physical abuse and harassment are examined. Within the institutional settings the challenges related to health services and educational settings are also discussed.

The chapter concluded by exploring the responsibilities, roles and functions of social workers in relation to the International, African and South African state of the rights of sexual minorities.

Conclusion: Upon reviewing the literature to establish a groundwork for the study, the researcher concluded that the absence of school-social workers creates a gap in the provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities within schools. This scarcity of availability not only hinders the delivery of crucial services but also amplifies the limited research conducted on the involvement of school-based social workers in offering interventions to youth sexual minorities (Colditz, 2018; Huxtable, 2016:1; Opperman, 2022; Reyneke, 2018:79; Vergottini & Weyers, 2020:125).

8.2.4 Synopsis and conclusion of Chapter Four: Application of the Qualitative Research Process

In Chapter Four, a comprehensive exposition of the qualitative research process as utilised in this study is presented. The decision to dedicate an entire chapter to the applied research process serves the purpose of justifying the selection of the qualitative approach, establishing an audit trail and offering a detailed account of how the research plan outlined in Chapter Two was implemented throughout the stages of data collection and analysis. This chapter not only furnishes the reader with an audit trail but also presents a chronological narrative replete with intricate, diverse and elaborate descriptions of the steps undertaken during the research process, thereby ensuring transparency for external observers (Butina, 2015:195; Carcary, 2020:169-170; Creswell, 2016:103).

The application of the qualitative research process entails explaining the qualitative approach, research design, research population, sampling, recruitment of participants, pilot testing, method of data collection, data analysis, data verification and the ethical considerations as summarised below. The conclusions drawn on each step of the research process are also listed.

The qualitative approach: This approach was highly appropriate for examining the interventions of school-based social workers with youth sexual minorities. It facilitated a thorough comprehension of the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers in delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, encompassing the "what" and "how" aspects of their engagement (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019:232). This method allowed the exploration of contextual factors influencing interventions and provided flexibility in data collection, yielding rich, descriptive data. The exploratory nature was valuable in obtaining information about the relatively unexplored topic and participant empowerment enhanced collaboration, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the subject researched.

The researcher provided a description of the application of the qualitative research approach by elaborating on the inherent characteristics of qualitative research (see Chapters Two, section 2.5.1 and Four, section 4.2) and how these characteristics were manifested, implemented and recorded in this study. Creswell and Creswell (2018:180) and Patel and Patel (2019:52), express the core characteristics in qualitative research, of which the nature and application in this study are listed below:

- Focus at gaining an in-depth understanding and description of a phenomena under study after the exploration of multiple sources of data;
- Attend to the context of the matter under investigation;
- Compiling the research report for qualitative research, the focus is on storylines, themes and narratives;
- Embraces reflexivity by the researcher during the research process; and
- Involve data verification.

A qualitative approach favours studies that take place in a naturalistic setting; meaning the social behaviour of participants is studied in its own natural environment (Merriam & Tisdell 2016:15). The second motivation for adopting a qualitative approach was that qualitative research is used in topics that are sensitive, not well defined and where not much is known about the topic because of lack of research.

Conclusion: Based on the review of literature on the topic of this study, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that the field experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities is a very sensitive subject. Some of the characteristics of qualitative research that rendered it relevant were that it is emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic in nature (Silverman & Patterson, 2021:326). These characteristics of the qualitative research enabled the researcher to conduct interviews in the natural setting of the

participants: school-social workers were interviewed at their places of work or at a place where they would feel most comfortable. The researcher was thus able to investigate and gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Research design: The research design applied in this qualitative research approach, consisted of a *phenomenological strategy*, supplemented with *explorative, descriptive and contextual strategies of enquiry* (see Chapters Two, section 2.5.2 and Four, section 4.4). Below are brief descriptions of the research designs used and the conclusions on their suitability in the study.

The *phenomenological design* is geared towards investigating research questions by delving into the lived experiences of study participants (Cropley, 2022:71). The phenomenological design serves as a robust research strategy, particularly adept at delving into complex issues within social research. It enables the researcher to leverage the essence of phenomenology to ensure harmony between the research question and the underlying philosophy (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019:90).

Conclusion: the utilisation of the phenomenological design in investigating the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This research strategy, aligned with the nature of phenomenology, allowed for a rich exploration of the subjective experiences of school-based social workers, shedding light on the complexities and nuances inherent in their roles within this specific context. The approach provided a valuable platform to capture the depth and diversity of these experiences, contributing to a more holistic comprehension of the challenges faced by school-based social workers in supporting youth sexual minorities.

The *explorative design* is particularly valuable when examining areas of study that have not been extensively investigated (Cropley, 2022:40; Howitt, 2016:93; Kapoor *et al.*, 2022:134). Exploratory design aims to highlight the significance or extent of a particular issue and can generate initial insights into it (Mishra & Alok, 2017:4).

Conclusion: The scarcity in existing literature on the area of study of the explorative research design motivated the researcher to gather in-depth comprehensive data to gain an understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This design also assisted the researcher to obtain

suggestions from the participants on how school-based social workers can be supported in rendering intervention services to youth-sexual minorities. The questions in the semi-structured interview guide effectively encouraged participants to share their stories.

The *descriptive design* serves the primary purpose of “accurately and systematically describing a population, situation, or phenomenon, providing specific details on questions related to when, where and how” (McGrath *et al.*, 2019:2002). The utilisation of the descriptive research design played a pivotal role in clarifying the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Conclusion: This design guided the researcher in using descriptive language to give meaning to the content collected during data collection. In accordance with the principles of descriptive research design, the data collection interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. During the analysis and results phase, the researcher focused on describing the observations and recordings made in detail. The descriptive research design, as applied in this study, finds its manifestation in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, where detailed verbatim descriptions of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities are presented. These descriptive elements contribute to the richness and depth of the study's findings, enhancing the overall understanding of the complexities involved in school-based social work with youth sexual minorities.

The *contextual design* as emphasised by Hamilton and Finley (2019:3), underscores the critical role of qualitative research in uncovering and documenting the context in which the phenomenon presents itself.

Conclusion: By emphasising the importance of specific environments and contexts, this design uncovered nuanced insights into the complex dynamics at play, considering factors such as the school environment, cultural norms and institutional policies. The study, detailed in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, demonstrates that integrating contextual elements enrich findings, offering a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Conclusion: The researcher further arrived at the conclusion that the research designs chosen for this study was appropriate in that it enabled the attainment of the research goal to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities as well as to proffer suggestions as to how school-

based social workers can be supported in rendering intervention services to youth-sexual minorities.

Research population: The research comprises a research population consisting of social workers based within school settings, specifically tasked with providing intervention services to adolescents who self-identify as sexual minorities within the Gauteng region. The researcher encountered challenges in terms of gaining access to schools (see Chapter 4, section 4.10 - Participant recruitment). There were too many potential participants to include in this qualitative research study and due to time, cost, logistical constraints and the limited nature of research for a master's degree, a sample of the population was selected according to specific criteria (Casteel & Bridier, 2021:344).

Sampling: The researcher made use of purposive sampling to seek out participants that fulfilled the requirements for inclusion in the sample of the study (see Chapters Two, section 2.6.1 and Chapter Four section 4.5.2) being school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. By way of the criteria for inclusion developed for this study, the researcher recruited and interviewed a total of 38 participants, when the principle of data saturation indicated that the sample of participants was big enough.

Conclusion: The purposive sampling method, thoughtfully chosen for its suitability, yielded participants who contributed remarkably rich, descriptive and comprehensive data. By intentionally selecting school-based social workers actively involved in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, the study ensured a focused and relevant participant group. This strategic approach significantly enhanced the depth and relevance of the data, offering nuanced insights into the experiences and challenges of these social workers in their critical roles.

Recruitment: In recruiting participants for the study, the researcher first approached the National Department of Basic Education, given the comprehensive scope of the study across all schools within the Gauteng province. Subsequently, gatekeepers, including school principals, were also contacted to gain access to potential research participants. The researcher set up appointments with school-based social workers where telephonic discussions revealed that the schools do have a full-time school-based social worker(s). With the above engagements in place, the researcher had access to school-based social workers and could prepare for the research process to unfold further. The researcher followed the criteria as set out in Chapter Two (section 2.6.1) in eventually selecting and interviewing 38 school-based social workers within the various regions/districts of the Department of Education.

Conclusion: The researcher's groundwork engagements successfully provided access to a suitable pool of school-based social workers, establishing a robust foundation for the unfolding research process. This approach ensured the selection of a diverse and representative participant group, ultimately contributing to the acquisition of rich, descriptive and comprehensive data for the study.

Pilot testing: As a matter of principle, the researcher embarked on the process of subjecting the interview guide to a pilot test. This was done prior to starting with the implementation of the main study, using the same methods of data collection and analysis to be used for the main study. The researcher identified two school-based social workers who complied with the inclusion criteria, to take part in the pilot test. These two participants did not take part in the main study and the outcomes of the pilot test were not included in the findings of the main study. The purpose of the pilot test was to test the interview questions and to ascertain if they yield useful information (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018:1). The outcome of the pilot test suggested the refinement of the interview guide (see Chapter Four, section 4.2.6) which was duly done.

Conclusion: Following the pilot testing and adjustments to the interview guide, it became evident that the guide was pertinent to addressing the objectives and aims of the study.

Data collection: The method of data collection, upon reflection, proved suitable for the study's circumstances, as detailed in Chapter 2 (sub-section 2.6.3) and Chapter Four (section 4.6).

Conclusion: Both the face-to-face and MS Teams interviews yielded equally comprehensive information, effectively capturing participants' views on their experiences and challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The use of an independent coder in this study revealed no discernible difference in the depth or richness of information. Reflecting on the employed data collection methods, it can be affirmed that these approaches facilitated the gathering of pertinent information, effectively addressing the research questions. This process enabled participants to candidly share their experiences and challenges related to the study's topic.

Data analysis: The data analysis process involved the researcher personally applying Tesch's eight-step approach, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018:193–198). Tesch's analytical strategy proved valuable in effectively managing and interpreting the extensive data gathered from 38 participants.

Conclusion: This strategy was suitable, providing a systematic and logical framework for the data analysis. Additionally, to support the study's trustworthiness, an independent coder was

engaged to conduct a separate analysis of the data, further ensuring the rigor and reliability of the findings.

Data verification: The verification of data in a study attains scientific validity when it aligns with established research standards. Guba (1981) propose that qualitative researchers uphold rigor by adhering to the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. An elaborate account of how these principles were implemented for ensuring trustworthiness and creativity in this study is presented in Chapter Four (Daniel, 2019:102; Krefting, 1991:214-222).

Conclusion: The researcher used the strategy advocated by Lincoln and Guba (Daniel, 2019:102; Krefting, 1991:214-222) to fortify the trustworthiness of the research, contributing to and ensuring compliance of the research with the scientific standards imperative in qualitative research projects.

Ethical considerations: Ethics is a vital part of every research project (Arifin, 2018:30, Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28). The researcher applied the following ethical considerations in order to ensure that the study was conducted in a responsible and honest manner: obtaining informed consent; ensuring confidentiality; ensuring anonymity; beneficence; management of information; and debriefing of participants. In upholding the ethical considerations throughout this study, paramount principles were meticulously applied. Obtaining informed consent was prioritized, ensuring participants were fully aware of their involvement and rights in the research process. Rigorous measures were implemented to safeguard confidentiality and anonymity, underlining the commitment to protecting participants' privacy. The principle of beneficence guided the research, emphasising the well-being and dignity of participants. An ethical framework for the management of information was established, ensuring the responsible handling and storage of sensitive data. Participants were offered thorough debriefing, fostering transparency and addressing any potential concerns that may have arisen during or after their involvement.

Conclusion: The conscientious application of these ethical considerations by the researcher not only underscores the commitment to research integrity but also reflects a steadfast dedication to the well-being and rights of the participants involved in this study (see Chapters Two, section 2.7 and Four section, 4.9).

8.2.5 Synopsis and conclusion of Chapters Five, Six and Seven: Research Insights and Literature Contextualisation

The insights derived from the data are presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven, focusing on the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers providing intervention services to

youth sexual minorities. These chapters combine research findings with a contextualisation of the literature in the form of a literature control. The interviews conducted offer detailed descriptions of settings and participants, incorporating verbatim quotations related to the research topic. Participants not only shared their experiences but also provided valuable insights and recommendations for school-based social workers and other professionals facing similar challenges in serving youth sexual minorities. The summaries and conclusions drawn from these chapters are outlined below.

In terms of participant demographics, the study involved 38 participants, comprising five (5) males and thirty-three (33) females. Their social work careers were categorized based on their experience: 17 participants had 5 years or less service as social workers, 11 had 6-10 years, 7 had 11-20 years and 3 had 21+ years. Regarding educational qualifications, 33 participants held a Bachelor/Honours degree in Social Work, three a Master's degree and three a Doctorate in Social Work. Chapter 5, section 5.2 provides additional biographical details about the participants.

In reflecting on the biographical information of the participants, the researcher arrived at the following **conclusions**:

- Without exception, every participant met the meticulously outlined inclusion criteria articulated in Chapter Two, section 2.6.1 and Chapter Four, section 4.5.2, ensuring a coherent and well-defined participant selection process.
- A prevailing trend surfaced as the majority of participants showcase a professional tenure of 5 years or less service, underscoring a concentration of early-career practitioners in the realm of school-based social work.
- A rich spectrum of racial classification among participants unfolded, with the majority identifying as African, followed by White, Coloured and Indian individuals.
- Every participant holds a social work degree, with the majority possessing a four-year Bachelor's degree in Social Work (32 individuals). Notably, three participants hold Master's degrees, while an additional three hold the highest academic qualification of a Doctoral degree in Social Work.

A synopsis and conclusions based on the eleven themes that were deduced from the process of data analysis related to the research topic follows.

8.2.5.1 Theme 1: School-based social workers' descriptions of their understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities

The perspectives shared by school-based social workers regarding their understanding of intervention services for youth sexual minorities reveal a multifaceted and inclusive approach. School-based social workers strive for equitable service provision to all youth, emphasising uniform treatment. They offer counselling and support to both youth identifying as sexual minorities and their parents, tailoring interventions based on the learner's needs and age. The goal is to develop and safeguard sexual minority youth while also educating all learners about sexuality and fostering an understanding of sexual minorities.

The researcher arrived at the following **conclusions** regarding school-based social workers' descriptions of their understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities:

- School-based social workers ensure that there is no differentiation in the provision of services to all learners and treat them uniformly and equally.
- The provision of counselling and support services is extended to learners identifying as sexual minorities and their parents.
- The response to the youth sexual minority is based on the learner's needs and/or age.
- School-based social workers actively strive to develop and protect youth sexual minorities.
- School-based social workers act as mentors to teach learners about their sexuality and educate them about sexual minorities.

In support of these conclusions the dedication to providing equitable services for all learners, irrespective of sexual orientation is of paramount importance. There is a deep steadfast commitment to inclusivity and impartiality in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. These social workers actively address the unique challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, ensuring they receive equal care and attention. School-based social workers contribute significantly to learners' emotional and psychological well-being, offering counselling, support and advocacy services. Their holistic approach recognizes the interconnectedness of personal and academic life, fostering environments where every child can thrive. Their interventions are rooted in a child-centred, developmental and culturally sensitive approach, tailoring services to address immediate needs and systemic issues.

This statement suggests that school-based social workers perceive their role in supporting youth sexual minorities as centred on development and protection. They emphasise "developing" these

youth by promoting personal growth, well-being and self-acceptance through counselling, resource provision and safe spaces. Simultaneously, they focus on "protecting" by advocating for anti-bullying policies, ensuring freedom from discrimination and fostering a culture of acceptance. Community outreach and education efforts contribute to reducing prejudice and creating inclusive atmospheres, aligning with established research and theoretical perspectives (Leung *et al.*, 2019:2).

School-based social workers play a pivotal role in fostering a safe and inclusive environment for children and youth, actively engaging in teaching about sexuality and educating on sexual minorities. This proactive and holistic approach aligns with promoting inclusivity, using storytelling as a teaching tool, normalizing differences, creating safe spaces and collaborating with families. The experiences and practices of school-based social workers align with established literature, demonstrating a commitment to professionalism, ethical considerations and legal guidelines in educating learners about these topics (Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:495; Roberts, 2016:15; Russell *et al.*, 2021:6; SAMHSA, 2023:59; Sosa, 2020:77).

8.2.5.2 Theme 2: School-based social workers' opinions on the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities

School-based social workers consistently express their commitment to providing intervention services tailored to the unique needs of youth sexual minorities. Their opinions underscore a focus on delivering counselling, emotional support and guidance, emphasising the importance of case work, group work and community involvement. The social workers prioritize understanding and addressing the specific needs of these individuals within their broader context. Additionally, they actively engage in arranging health and other protective services to ensure the overall well-being and safety of youth sexual minorities.

The following **conclusions** were drawn by the researcher about the school-based social workers' opinions on the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities:

- School-based social workers mainly provide counselling, emotional support and guidance to learners.
- The school-based social workers' intervention services with youth sexual minorities comprise of case work, group work and community work.
- School-based social workers keenly identify and address youth sexual minorities needs in context.

- School-based social workers organise health and/or other protection services for youth sexual minorities as and when needed.

The provisioning of support services to youth sexual minorities by school-based social workers within a school context is crucial for promoting inclusivity, mental wellbeing and academic success. Notably, counselling, emotional support and guidance are frequently offered, addressing the unique needs and challenges faced by these individuals (Dos Santos, 2021:2; Gower *et al.*, 2018:3; Roland & Burlew, 2017:14; Sosa & Nuckolls, 2018:6). The conclusions align with advocacy theory, actively addressing the specific concerns of youth sexual minorities (Nothdurfter & Nagy, 2017:375; Vareed, 2019:2). School-based social workers apply casework, group work and community work as common strategies when working with youth sexual minorities. Casework as the first entry point for intervention services, involves one-on-one interactions, while group and community work foster peer support and collaboration with local resources, confirmed by existing literature (Chereni, 2017:516; Chukwu *et al.*, 2017:46; Uranta & Ogbanga, 2017:62).

The approach to identifying and addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities by school-based social workers, is contextually sensitive and rooted in their best interests. Skills applied for this include active listening, empathetic comprehension and cultural competence, contributing to a more inclusive educational environment (Bullard, 2020:2; Johns *et al.*, 2019:152; Kosciw *et al.*, 2016:33; Leung *et al.*, 2022:2; Perez-Brumer *et al.*, 2017:742;744; Witt & Medina-Martinez, 2022:30-31). It is evident that school-based social workers coordinate health and protection services tailored to the specific needs of youth sexual minorities, advocating for their rights, safety and well-being. Literature underscores the significance of this function, emphasising access to healthcare, child protection and mental health services (National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Centre, 2021:11; Rafter *et al.*, 2023:6; Reyneke 2020:160-161; Roland & Burlew, 2017:4-5).

8.2.5.3 Theme 3: School-based social workers perception of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities.

School-based social workers recognize that youth sexual minorities encounter significant challenges, including a lack of acceptance, understanding and support. These individuals often face stigma, stereotyping and, distressingly, victimization, rejection, bullying, instances of rape and even threats to their lives. The multifaceted nature of these risk factors underscores the

critical role of school-based social workers in addressing the complex issues and fostering a safe and supportive environment for youth sexual minorities.

The researcher reached the subsequent **conclusions** regarding school-based social workers' perception of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities:

- Youth sexual minorities experience a lack of acceptance, understanding and support, stigma and stereotyping.
- Youth sexual minorities experience victimisation, rejection, bullying, rape and death in the form of suicide and being murdered.

What became clear is that school-based social workers revealed distressing challenges faced by youth sexual minorities due to a lack of acceptance, understanding and support in their school environments. The clear impact of stigma and harmful stereotypes, indicates the urgent need for more inclusive and affirming school environments. The identified challenges are confirmed by existing literature, emphasising the importance of addressing risk factors such as the absence of acceptance and harmful stereotypes. One significant challenge identified, is the lack of acceptance and support, echoing findings in studies emphasising the role of social support in the well-being of youth sexual minorities (Leung *et al.*, 2022:3; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:5; Nomani, 2021:7; Roland & Burlew, 2017:20). However, more positive experiences on the other hand offer the feeling of acceptance and support on mental health outcomes for this population (Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Tran *et al.*, 2023:7). Stigmatization and harmful stereotypes about youth sexual minorities, contribute to feelings of isolation, self-esteem issues and adverse effects on learners' academic performance and mental health (Amnesty International, 2018:47; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:4; Patterson *et al.*, 2020:3).

It is clear that school-based social workers are aware of the significant risk factors, including victimization, bullying, rape and the fear of death among youth sexual minorities. These challenges highlight the vulnerabilities and adversity faced by this population (Russell *et al.*, 2021:1; Mecklenburg, 2020:1; Gower *et al.*, 2018:2). Youth sexual minorities are at a higher risk of bullying and victimization, with documented adverse effects on mental health and academic performance (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:3; Gower *et al.*, 2018:2; Roland & Burlew, 2017:4). It is evident that high rates of sexual assault and rape among LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals within this population is a matter for concern and urgent attention (Amnesty International, 2018:39; Cabral & Pinto, 2023:1; Pretorius, 2020:142). The views of the school-based social workers regarding

the fear of death among youth sexual minorities are linked to elevated rates of suicidal ideation and attempts (Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:1; UNDP 2022:77; UNHR, 2019:19).

Therefore, the need for comprehensive interventions and policies to create inclusive and safe educational environments are noted. School-based social workers play a crucial role, applying an ecological systems approach and advocacy theory to address challenges within multiple layers of influence. They work on individual and collaborative levels, aiming to create safe microsystems and coordinate responses to challenges faced by youth sexual minorities (Crawford, 2020:4; Leung *et al.*, 2022:2,38).

8.2.5.4 Theme 4: School-based social workers' perceptions of the impact of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities

School-based social workers perceive that the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities have a significant impact on their well-being. These challenges result in adverse emotional and psychosocial effects, affecting both academic progress and overall functioning. Additionally, learners may become withdrawn, struggle with trust issues and fear revealing their sexual orientation. Some may resort to living a secretive or inauthentic life, making them vulnerable to substance abuse. Furthermore, there is an increased risk of self-harm or self-mutilation among youth sexual minorities.

The **conclusions** about school-based social workers' perceptions of the impact of the risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, as determined by the researcher, are as follows:

- Youth sexual minorities experience negative feelings which impact negatively on their psycho-social health.
- The identified risk factors lead to a visible drop in youth sexual minorities' academic progress and their general functioning is severely affected.
- In facing these risk factors, youth sexual minorities then choose to become withdrawn, they do not trust others and fear coming out.
- This results in youth sexual minorities living a secret life or they choose to live an untruth.
- Youth sexual minorities are at a high risk for falling prone to substance abuse.
- The devastating effect of these risk factors could lead to self-harm or self-mutilation amongst youth sexual minorities.

A clear picture can be derived from the conclusions that school-based social workers are aware of the profound repercussions faced by youth sexual minorities. Youth sexual minorities grapple with a complex challenge that invariably translates into a heightened vulnerability to negative emotions and their compromised psycho-social well-being (Carastathis *et al.*, 2017:292; Ream & Peters, 2021:46). The heightened risk of mental health disparities among youth sexual minorities are clearly indicated in the literature (Mecklenburg, 2020:2; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:2). The stressors associated with coming out, stigma, discrimination and family rejection can compound to create a hostile environment that negatively impacts their psychological health (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:481; UNHR, 2019:66; van Bergen, 2021:1129). Furthermore, to circumvent the impact of these risk factors or challenges, school-based social workers underscore the critical role of support systems in mitigating these challenges (Pretorius, 2020:144). The impact of these challenges faced by youth sexual minorities is confirmed by existing literature (Carastathis *et al.*, 2017:291; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:1; Mayeza; 2021:302; Moskowitz *et al.*, 2022:2;). Clearly this is a stark reminder of the pressing need for inclusive and supportive environments within educational institutions and the broader community to promote the mental health and well-being of youth sexual minorities through the application of the ecological systems theory and the advocacy theory (Analisa & Indartono, 2019:238; Crawford, 2020:1-2; Leung *et al.*, 2022:20-21). School-based social workers engage in individual and group advocacy by ensuring access to services and support and they work towards policy changes that create inclusive and supportive environments for youth sexual minorities (Crawford, 2020:4; Edwards & Watson, 2020:6; Roland & Burlew, 2017:61; Stokes, 2023:6; Ubisi, 2021:107). It is also clear that because of being exposed to these risk factors, youth sexual minorities are subjected a far-reaching implication, particularly when it comes to their academic progress and overall wellbeing (Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18698; Reyneke, 2018:94). School-based social workers consistently emphasise that the unique struggles experienced by sexual minority youth can significantly hinder their ability to thrive in educational settings (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:108; Levenson *et al.*, 2023:138; Ubisi, 2021:109).

A second resounding feeling that can be deduced is that youth sexual minorities react to their circumstances by adopting behaviours marked by withdrawal, a deep-felt reluctance to trust others and a tangible fear of revealing their sexual identity (Beck *et al.*, 2018:253, Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11). This withdrawal is consistent with studies that highlight the impact of social isolation on the mental health of sexual minority youth (Anderson & Lough, 2021:1; Roland & Burlew, 2017:21,30). To effectively support youth sexual minorities, it is essential to recognize these

common challenges and employ evidence-based strategies that promote inclusivity, provide safe spaces and foster a sense of belonging within educational institutions (Gower *et al.*, 2018:7; Russell *et al.*, 2021:6).

A distressing revelation is the tendency for many youth sexual minorities to lead secret lives or conceal their true selves (Keskin *et al.*, 2022:319). This can contribute to heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression among youth sexual minorities (Beagan, Bizzeth, Pride & Sibbald, 2022:1-2; Huang & Chan, 2022:630). These disclosures align with school-based social workers, who have first-hand experience with these challenges (Doyle & Bareto, 2023:1911).

Because of these lived experiences, youth sexual minorities may engage in substance abuse (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11; Mecklenburg, 2020:44). It is therefore clear that youth sexual minorities often resort to substance use as a means of trying to cope with the emotional distress brought on by the challenges they face (Daniels *et al.*, 2019:359, 372; Levenson, Craig & Austin, 2023:141).

Within the numerous consequences stemming from these challenges, the strong possibility of self-harm and self-mutilation amongst youth sexual minorities, stand out as profoundly disconcerting expressions (Abaver & Cishe, 2018:65; Anderson & Lough 2021:444). It can then be viewed that these risk factors are not theoretical but actual lived experiences for many youth sexual minorities (Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:6-7; Moskowitz *et al.*, 2022:2).

8.2.5.5 Theme 5: School-based social workers' descriptions of their experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

In the context of school-based social work, the interactions with youth sexual minorities vary, potentially influencing their readiness and capacity to deliver intervention services to these individuals. Some school-based social workers admitted to having had limited direct experience in providing services tailored to this specific group of learners. The nature of this work is acknowledged as challenging, presenting difficulties that demand resilience from the social workers. Despite the hurdles, these experiences unfold with a mix of rewarding moments and heartbreak. School-based social workers navigating this terrain emphasise the importance of accepting each individual learner, focusing on immediate problems and actively working to build trust with the learner in question. The journey involves a delicate balance of challenges and rewards, marked by a commitment to understanding and supporting youth sexual minorities in their unique circumstances.

The following **conclusions** were established by the researcher about school-based social workers' descriptions of their experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities:

- There are school-based social workers with limited or no direct experience in rendering services to youth sexual minorities.
- The resonating feeling amongst social workers of working with youth sexual minorities, is that it is either difficult or challenging.
- The experience in working with youth sexual minorities leads to emotions of either fulfilment or heartbreak amongst social workers.
- Irrespective of limited or adequate intervention experience on the side of the school-based social workers, they accept the person, focus on the presenting problem and win the trust of the identified learner.

Drawing from these conclusions, it can be asserted that even in the absence or lacking direct experience in providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities, there is a willingness amongst social workers for future interventions, showcasing openness to learning and the need for professional growth (Davis, 2021:88; Mecklenburg, 2020:49-50). This attitude aligns with the literature emphasising the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for these learners within schools (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:149-150; Leitch, 2017:23). Although direct experience is valuable, the absence of it does not discourage school-based social workers from engaging with the issue (Argüello, 2022:2-3). The commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities is clearly crucial for improving the overall well-being of youth sexual minorities (Henrickson, 2015:805). Inexperienced school-based social workers can therefore draw from research highlighting the mental health challenges faced by youth sexual minorities and through collaborating with experienced colleagues to develop effective strategies for intervention and support (Argüello, 2022:9; Hoff & Camacho, 2019:11; Winkler, 2018:41-42).

A second element of the school based social workers experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities is the importance of understanding and addressing difficulties faced by youth sexual minorities in the school environment to create an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all learners (Bullard, 2020:74; Stokes, 2023:8). Literature corroborates these challenges and supports this view into the complexities of supporting and advocating for youth sexual minorities (Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1033-1034; Stokes, 2023:70). These challenges also connect to the broader literature on the role of schools in promoting

LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusivity (Mann *et al.*, 2023:8). Schools should implement policies and programmes that prevent discrimination and harassment while actively promoting acceptance and understanding, with school-based social workers serving as vital advocates for these initiatives (Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1035).

A wide spectrum of emotions and perspectives give life to the notion that working with youth sexual minorities can be profoundly rewarding and fulfilling, aligning with literature emphasising the positive impact of supportive and inclusive school environments on the wellbeing of these youth (Craig *et al.*, 2018:232-233; Le, Yu & Webb, 2023:2). It is therefore clear that when appropriate support and affirmation is present in the workings of school-based social workers, the result manifests in leading to improved self-esteem, reduced risk of mental health issues and enhanced academic success for youth sexual minorities (Dentato *et al.*, 2018:309; GLSEN, 2019:28, 43-44). The emotions associated with working with sexual minority youth can be distressing and demanding for social workers, underscoring the persistent challenges confronted by these individuals in school settings (GLSEN, 2019:29; Leung *et al.*, 2022:16). This emotional burden on school based social workers underscores the delicate balance they navigate, striving to provide a safe and supportive space for youth sexual minorities while grappling with systemic and individual barriers (Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:1; Mecklenburg, 2020:40). School-based social workers therefore play an important role in advocating for policy changes, fostering inclusivity and offering targeted support to help these learners thrive (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:2; Pretorius, 2020:150). The emotional diversity portrayed, distinctly identifies the complex nature of this field, requiring a deep understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities in schools (Bullard, 2020:7; Gower *et al.*, 2018:8).

The foundation of any intervention service or relationship is found in building trust with youth sexual minorities. This view underscores the vital role of school-based social workers in advocating for and empowering these learners within the school system (Breshears & De Beer, 2016:100; Deloatch-Williams, 2020:39; Fantus & Newman, 2021:14; Mecklenburg, 2020:2). It can therefore be concluded that providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities is driven by various feelings, thoughts and experiences. However, the end results should be about emphasising the importance of inclusive and safe environments, acceptance, fostering a client-centred approach, building trust and therapeutic alliance and advocacy and empowerment (Alessi, Dillon & Van Der Horn, 2019:4; Astramovich & Scott, 2020:312; Davis, 2021:84,90; Miller, 2016:311; Mims *et al.*, 2016:8; Pryor, 2020:77; Sagui-Henson *et al.*, 2022:440; SAMHSA, 2023:51). These experiences of school-based social workers underscore the evolving role of

school-based social workers in addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities within the educational system (Chukwa *et al.*, 2017:48; Ntombela *et al.*, 2022:18699).

8.2.5.6 Theme 6: School-based social workers' accounts of the challenges they face in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

School-based social workers encounter various challenges when providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. These challenges include parents' disengagement or non-acceptance, prevailing beliefs or biases about sexual minorities, unmet needs of youth sexual minorities, insufficient training and resources, a lack of confidentiality and support from educators and other professionals, uncertainty among youth about their own gender orientation, a reluctance of the learner to trust or seek intervention from the school-based social worker regarding school policies, bullying in school coupled with a non-conducive environment and potential influences of the school-based social workers' own personal sexual orientation.

The following **conclusions** were deduced by the researcher from the school-based social workers' accounts of the challenges they face in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities:

- Parent's lack of involvement or acceptance hampers the rendering of effective intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- Societal unfound beliefs or bias about sexual minorities makes the advocacy work of school-based social workers challenging in promoting a sense of acceptance for youth sexual minorities.
- Even the most basic needs of youth sexual minorities are not being met.
- A concerning lack of training and resources exist that impacts negatively on effective and efficient service delivery to youth sexual minorities.
- Compromised confidentiality and a lack of support from educators and other professionals within the education system negatively impacting on trust of youth sexual minorities in feeling accepted and to disclose their orientation.
- Some learners are unsure about their own gender orientation and focus on gender dysphoria or identity confusion.
- An inherent fear of being ridiculed and judged by youth sexual minorities leads to these learners not trusting or asking the school-based social worker to intervene about school policy making life at school difficult for them.

- The prevalence of bullying in schools and a non-conducive environment contributes to psychosocial challenges faced by youth sexual minorities.
- The personal sexual orientation of the school-based social worker could create conflict within the intervention relationship.

School-based social workers face a significant challenge in providing effective support to youth sexual minorities due to the frequent lack of parental involvement or acceptance (Abreu *et al.*, 2022:2). However, despite the school-based social workers' commitment to inclusivity, the recurrent absence of parental support creates hurdles, impacting the emotional wellbeing of these learners. Existing literature emphasises the crucial role of parental acceptance in promoting positive mental health outcomes for sexual minority youth (Katz-Wise *et al.*, 2016:4). Challenges stemming from parental non-involvement extend beyond the educational setting, requiring targeted interventions such as support groups and counselling services (Breshears & De Beer, 2016:88; Mims *et al.*, 2016:5). Legal and policy frameworks are also crucial, emphasising the need for anti-discrimination policies to create inclusive environments (Chereni, 2017:512). Cultural and community factors contribute to parental non-involvement, highlighting the importance of addressing these issues for fostering understanding and acceptance about it (Keskin *et al.*, 2022:312).

Another challenge faced by school-based social workers is the presence of deeply ingrained societal beliefs or biases regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Literature corroborates these challenges, demonstrating the negative consequences of biased environments for sexual minority youth (Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:xxiv-xxix). The dire need for training and resources to address these biases is very important, emphasising the value of supportive school environments in mitigating their impact (Patterson *et al.*, 2020:195-196). Legal and policy implications also play a role in combating bias, emphasising the importance of comprehensive frameworks (Human Rights Watch, 2023:3). The scarcity of training and resources for delivering intervention services to youth sexual minorities is a prevalent challenge acknowledged by school-based social workers (GLSEN, 2019:51, 71). Intervention services aimed at youth sexual minorities can be seen as a specialization field and the need for specialized training to provide culturally competent care, as neglecting this support could lead to increased rates of bullying and mental health issues (Rand *et al.*, 2021:31). Challenges faced by school-based social workers regarding confidentiality and support from educators and other professionals further hinder the rendering of intervention services, emphasising the importance of collaboration between school-based social workers and

educators to the benefit of the identified youth sexual minority and associated family members (Hadland *et al.*, 2016:3).

The uncertainty surrounding a learner's gender orientation emerges as a complex and sensitive issue, with literature describing it as gender dysphoria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013:451-459). School-based social workers play a vital role in mitigating these challenges and creating inclusive environments for learners experiencing gender dysphoria (SAMHSA, 2023:37; SANAC, 2021:18-19).

Apart from addressing the unique needs of sexual minority youth, school-based social workers also face challenges related to building trust, navigating school policies, bullying and fostering inclusivity (Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:60). Once again, the sentiments of the school based social workers underscore the importance of trust-building and addressing policy-related concerns to create safe and affirming environments for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Proulx *et al.*, 2019:608).

The experiences of a lesbian school-based social worker highlighted the intersectionality of personal identity and professional roles (Messinger *et al.*, 2020:717). Her unique perspective emphasises the complexities and intricacies that school-based social workers encounter in providing care and intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This case aligns with literature discussing the significance of representation and authenticity in fostering trust among LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Dentato *et al.*, 2016: 675-677). Researchers in the field of school social work have highlighted the importance of LGBTQQIP2SAA individuals in positions of authority and support who can serve as role models and advocates for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. This case serves as a real-world illustration of the complexities discussed in the literature surrounding LGBTQQIP2SAA learners' experiences and the crucial role that school-based social workers play in promoting a safe and inclusive learning environment for all (Dentato *et al.*, 2016: 675-677). It underscores the need for further exploration and examination of the unique challenges and opportunities that school-based social workers encounter as they navigate the connection of their personal identities and professional roles within the context of youth sexual minority support (Papadaki, 2016:67).

Overall, the challenges faced by school-based social workers in supporting youth sexual minorities underscore the need for continued research, advocacy and the development of best practices to create safe and inclusive educational environments.

8.2.5.7 Theme 7: School-based social workers' explanations of their feelings when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

This exploration delves into the complex emotions experienced by school-based social workers while providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. It investigates their comfort, consistent service delivery and the privilege of accompanying learners on their unique journeys. However, despite their commitment, a subset of these social workers expresses disillusionment with the Department of Basic Education, highlighting perceived shortcomings within the system.

Therefore, the following **conclusions** can be made by the researcher about school-based social workers' feelings when rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities:

- School-based social workers genuinely feel comfortable in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
- Irrespective of their background, race, or gender, school-based social workers provide the same services in the same way to all learners.
- Rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities fosters a deep sense of pride within school-based social workers and this is viewed as a privilege to accompany youth on their journey of self-discovery.
- Many school-based social workers feel failed by the Department of Basic Education due to a lack of resources and training.

School-based social workers clearly have a profound dedication and feeling of empathy when providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities. There is a resounding sense of comfort, emphasising school-based social workers' commitment to equal service delivery for all learners. Despite this dedication, there is also the disappointment with the Department of Basic Education, where school-based social workers feel let down by perceived shortcomings (Beck *et al.*, 2018:2; Cortez, Arzinos & Soto, 2021:40). Reflecting on school-based social workers' expression of disappointment and frustration in this regard, highlights the emotional struggles that school-based social workers face when institutions, such as the Department of Education, are perceived as failing the marginalized learners populations they aim to support, reflecting the concept of institutional betrayal (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:10-15; Skhosana, 2020:113). The alignment between their experiences underscores the importance of collaboration between all stakeholders to address the unique needs of youth sexual minorities (Chereni, 2017:515; SAMHSA, 2023:59,67). The commitment to equality and inclusivity by school-based social workers

emphasises the creation of safe and affirming environments for all learners (Mkhomi, 2023:106; Shattuck *et al.*, 2022:11). Additionally, their perspective of accompanying youth on their journeys of self-discovery and identity affirmation is seen as a privilege that aligns with the idea of “allyship.” An ally is someone who is not a member of a marginalized group but works to understand, empathize and stand in solidarity with that group. The vital role school-based social workers play in fostering inclusivity and diversity in education further emphasises this commitment. (Franke, 2023:186; Gates *et al.*, 2023, 372-373; Leung *et al.*, 2022:7).

8.2.5.8 Theme 8: School-based social workers' accounts of the support services available to them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

School-based social workers report experiencing a lack of support services to them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. In the absence of such dedicated support, school-based social workers take it upon themselves to consult with other social workers or utilise alternative professional resources for this. However, training opportunities are provided to assist them, however this seems to be insufficient in providing intervention services that are linked to current developments within the LGBTQQIP2SAA world.

The researcher reached the subsequent **conclusions**, following the school-based social workers' accounts of the support services available to them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities:

- For some of the school-based social workers there are no support services available.
- Being proactive in the absence of support services, some school-based social workers consult other professionals or resources to fill the abyss of non-existent support services.
- Other school-based social workers view the training provided to them, as a support service made available to them to assist them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

School-based social workers consistently expressed a disheartening emotion of experiencing a lack of support services within the educational system which prevents them from rendering intervention services adequate to meet the needs of youth sexual minorities (Chibonore & Chikadzi, 2017:10-15). Their shared experiences highlighted the absence of resources needed to effectively address the unique needs and challenges faced by these learners (Ciszek, 2020:5; Ubisi, 2021:107; Winkler, 2018:5). This collective perspective underscores the urgent need for greater recognition, resources and professional support to create a more inclusive environment

for marginalized youth. This absence of support services for school-based social workers aligns with the challenges in social work, emphasising the broader discourse on LGBTQQIP2SAA issues and the complex interplay of identity and education (Ubisi, 2021:107). The need for culturally competent care and the importance of fostering inclusive environments for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have been long recognized as a specialization field of practice for social workers (Ubisi, 2021:107). These experiences shared by school-based social workers, emphasise the critical need for better integration of evidence-based practices, training and mentorship programs in school-social work education.

Despite the reported lack of support, school-based social workers have taken alternative approaches, consulting with colleagues and utilising external professional resources to address the challenges they face in rendering effective intervention services to LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Dentato *et al.*, 2016:683; Kia *et al.*, 2021:594). As indicated, this resourcefulness aligns with literature on the strengths and coping strategies of school-based social workers, showcasing their adaptability in seeking support outside the school system. It is therefore evident that school-based social workers undergo specialized training to address the unique needs of sexual minority youth, emphasising the importance of training in fostering a safe and inclusive educational environment (Francis, 2017:16; Ubisi, 2021:132). These real-life experiences contribute to the broader academic discourse on social work education and LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, showcasing the practical application of principles and theories in social work (Francis, 2017:16; Ubisi, 2021:132).

8.2.5.9 Theme 9: School-based social workers' descriptions of the measures applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools and how it can be made more effective

The knowledge and perspectives derived from school-based social workers offer valuable insights into the ongoing initiatives to establish safer, more inclusive and supportive learning environments for all learners, irrespective of their sexual orientation. There has been an increasing acknowledgment of the necessity to cultivate supportive and inclusive environments for sexual minority youth within educational institutions. The sub-themes that follow, centre on the current measures employed to support sexual minority youth in schools but also explore ways to improve the effectiveness of these measures.

(1) Sub-theme 9.1 School-based social workers description of the measures applied to support youth sexual minorities.

Varying opinions are noted in the responses from school-based social workers about the measures applied to support youth sexual minorities. Some indicated that there are no measures applied to support youth sexual minorities, in contrast with other school-based social workers who indicated that there are measures being applied to some extent to support youth sexual minorities. Some school based social workers implement certain measures to support youth sexual minorities, such as providing counselling and support services to assist them. School-based social workers motivate and advocate for the adaption of school policies that accommodate the needs of sexual minorities and ensuring sensitivity to the unique processes involved and the needs of youth sexual minorities. It is however important to note that in some schools there is a distinct lack of any form of such measures being applied. There is also a distinct inconsistency in the application of measures in many schools to support youth sexual minorities.

The following **conclusions** are drawn by the researcher about the measures used to support youth sexual minorities:

- There are mostly no concrete measures in place to support youth sexual minorities. However, school-based social workers strive to support youth sexual minorities to the best of their ability.
- Counselling and support are available and assist youth sexual minorities.
- School policies should be tailored to accommodate and adapt to the needs of youth sexual minorities.
- School-based social workers strive to accommodate youth sexual minorities within the boundaries of the school environment.
- All measures should be sensitive to process and provide in all learners' needs.
- Schools differ in terms of measures being applied.

This discussion based on the measures applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools clearly indicates the lack of support for youth sexual minorities in educational institutions. Despite the recognized need for assistance, a dearth of concrete measures is evident in their schools to aid sexual minority youth (Bennett & Gates, 2019:609; Day *et al.*, 2020:420; 426-427; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:42). This deficiency not only raises concerns about the wellbeing of these learners but also underscores the persistent challenges faced by this marginalized group in schools,

therefore highlighting the urgent call for concrete change and inclusivity (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:148-149; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:29-30).

Despite the lack of tangible measures being applied to support youth sexual minorities, counselling and support measures are in place to address the needs of youth sexual minorities at some schools that cultivate an inclusive educational environment (Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:375; Ntuli & Ngcobo, 2022:479; Shepherd, 2019:260). The efforts of school-based social workers reflect a commitment to creating safe spaces for sexual minority learners, resonating with broader discussions on diversity, equity and inclusion in educational settings (Abreu *et al.*, 2016:329; Deloatch-Williams, 2020:20; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:34). School-based social workers are actively striving to adapt to the diverse needs of youth sexual minorities, indicating a commitment to fostering a more equitable educational landscape (Rand *et al.*, 2021:13). The activities undertaken by school-based social workers to support youth sexual minorities align with their established role in fostering inclusive environments (Francis, 2017:14; Stokes, 2023:iv). The dedication of school-based social workers illustrates their commitment to creating supportive spaces for sexual minority youth (Cizek, 2020:5; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:28). These efforts reflect the academic literature on LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusion, offering practical insights that complement existing theories and strategies for supporting these learners (Barnett *et al.*, 2023:667; Francis, 2017:14; Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:144).

Sensitive support for youth sexual minorities is highlighted, emphasising the importance of understanding and addressing their unique needs (O'Neill, 2020:40; Mecklenburg, 2020:49). The measures offer practical insights into translating theoretical concepts into measures, contributing to LGBTQQIP2SAA issues in education (Francis, 2017:2; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:130; Le *et al.*, 2023:9). Varying approaches are applied within educational institutions to support youth sexual minorities, which emphasise the need to explore consistent and universally applied measures for their wellbeing and acceptance (Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:48; SAMHSA, 2023:48). This aligns with LGBTQQIP2SAA issues in education, stressing the importance of inclusive and uniformly applied policies and practices (Emetu & Rivera, 2018:13; Manimtim *et al.*, 2022:2935). The discussion underscores the multidimensional nature of the topic and highlights the influence of factors such as school culture, leadership and community context on the level of support provided to these learners (Abreau *et al.*, 2020:117; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:7).

(2) Sub-theme 9.2: School-based social workers description of how the measures applied in schools can be made more effective to support youth sexual minorities

In examining the applied measures currently in place to support youth sexual minorities in schools, it becomes evident that some significant strides have been made in fostering an inclusive educational environment. While progress has been achieved, the question arises of how these measures can be further strengthened to ensure that they are truly effective in addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities. In response to this query, school-based social workers emphasise the importance of having adequately resourced school-based social workers in every school to enhance the effectiveness of measures. Additionally, they stress the need to increase awareness about learner's sexual orientation and their specific needs.

Therefore, the following **conclusions** can be made concerning how the measures applied in schools can be made more effective to support youth sexual minorities:

- Policy reform needs to be instituted to ensure that there is a school-based social workers with the needed resources are employed at all schools.
- A robust effort needs to be made at schools to raise awareness of sexual orientation and the needs of youth sexual minorities.

It is evident that enhancing support measures for youth sexual minorities in educational settings is crucial with the emphasis on dedicated, resource-equipped school-based social workers at all schools to create inclusive environments. The importance of such support for learners will assist them in navigating their sexual orientation or gender identity (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:160; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:5; Valido *et al.*, 2022:1122, 1140). Placing resource-equipped social workers in schools aligns with the role of school-based support systems in mitigating challenges faced by sexual minority learners (Pretorius, 2020:147; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:17-18). Empirical evidence stresses the positive impact of proactive intervention by school personnel, positioning social workers as advocates and allies for youth sexual minorities (Ball & Skrypek, 2020:179; Reyneke, 2018:83; Webber, 2018:88).

Raising awareness about sexual orientation and the unique needs of youth sexual minorities in educational settings is critically important. The emphasis on awareness, as supported by (Heffernan *et al.*, 2023:145; O'Neill, 2020:58; Winkler, 2018:2), is crucial for fostering inclusivity and support in schools. The insights gathered also aligns with the significance that if awareness is created it could foster and achieve inclusivity (McDermott, 2023:12; Roland & Burlew, 2017:76;

Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1033). The works of Kosciw *et al.* (2016, 2019, 2020 & 2022) titled *The National School Climate Survey* about the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth in the United States of America's schools, provide ample evidence of how raising awareness positively impacts the experiences of youth sexual minorities in schools.

It is clear that having a resource equipped social worker at each school and raising more awareness about youth sexual minorities can be seen as a best practice for supporting LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Antonelli & Sembiante, 2022:138; Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:46; Rand *et al.*, 2021:39).

8.2.5.10 Theme 10: School-based social workers' views on how school-based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools

School-based social workers believe that effectively managing intervention services for youth sexual minorities in schools involves promoting understanding about their needs, advocating on their behalf, acquiring relevant knowledge, self-education and fostering acceptance. Additionally, they emphasise the importance of establishing and facilitating support groups for sexual minorities in the school community.

Therefore, the following **conclusions** are deduced about how school-based social workers can manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools:

- School-based social workers create awareness and cultivate societal understanding of sexual minorities and their needs and advocate for them.
- School based social workers need to be equipped with appropriate knowledge to accept sexual minorities. If necessary, they have to educate themselves.
- One method to manage intervention services is to create and facilitate support groups with the client system.

School-based social workers play a crucial role in fostering safe and inclusive environments for all learners, particularly youth sexual minorities. Their responsibilities extend beyond traditional counselling, encompassing advocacy for broader changes within the school community (Cortez *et al.*, 2021:86; United Nations, 2019:21). To effectively manage intervention services, the importance of raising awareness about the unique challenges faced by youth sexual minorities is emphasised (Cortez *et al.*, 2021:86; United Nations, 2019:21). Promoting understanding of and empathy for youth sexual minorities, will result in the creation of supportive and accepting

atmospheres for youth sexual minorities (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:117; Francis, 2017:3; Gower *et al.*, 2018:8; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:3; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:8).

In this context, continuous professional development (CPD) is required with school-based social workers equipping themselves with appropriate knowledge, engaging in continuous self-education and maintaining unwavering acceptance of youth sexual minorities (Reyneke, 2020:163; Smith-Millman *et al.*, 2019:4; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:11). Through raising consciousness and understanding of youth sexual minorities would result in the commitment to creating a safe, inclusive and supportive environment for all learners (Knox *et al.*, 2020:3; Rafter *et al.*, 2023:13). This pursuit of knowledge and acceptance is confirmed with the literature on the principles of social work contributing positively to the psychological wellbeing, academic success and overall development of youth sexual minorities (Argüello, 2022:5; Ding *et al.*, 2023:20; Mecklenburg, 2020:36-37; Rafter *et al.*, 2023:13).

The literature lays emphasis on the fact that the establishment and operation of support groups, serve as safe spaces that provide crucial emotional and social support for LGBTQQIP2SAA-identifying youth (Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:40-41; Martin-Castillo, 2020:2). This strategy not only addresses the specific needs of this vulnerable population group but also contributes to a more welcoming and accepting school community. Creating a “safe space” for youth sexual minorities has a positive effect on the mental health and overall school experiences of youth sexual minorities (Adams *et al.*, 2019:109; Emetu & Rivera, 2018:11). Support groups offer a platform for sharing experiences, reducing isolation and mitigating the adverse effects of bullying, discrimination and unique stressors faced by LGBTQQIP2SAA learners, contributing to improved mental health outcomes and academic performance (Leung *et al.*, 2022:14). By drawing upon existing studies and literature, school-based social workers can enhance their understanding of the benefits of support groups and refine their intervention strategies in accordance with evidence-based practices (Carastathis *et al.*, 2017:312; Dunlop & Lea, 2023:8; Logie *et al.*, 2016:2; McDermott *et al.*, 2023:3; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:8).

8.2.5.11 Theme 11: School-based social workers’ views on how government can assist school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools

The call on government to assist school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities stands as a collective voice in an advocacy multifaceted approach. School-based social workers’ underscore the importance of developing and implementing school

policies that align with constitutional and human rights, fostering an environment that is inclusive and respectful of diversity. To fortify these efforts, the Department of Education is called upon to take a proactive stance by enforcing awareness campaigns and integrating the relevant curriculum that addresses the unique needs and challenges faced by sexual minorities in schools.

Schools are encouraged by school-based social workers to adopt measures such as the provision of gender-neutral bathrooms and the acceptance of cross-dressing in school uniforms, affirming the right of every learner to express their identity comfortably. Recognizing the power of communication, the Government is urged to employ targeted messaging, leveraging social media platforms to disseminate information and promote understanding. Additionally, community training and education initiatives are deemed essential by school-based social workers in fostering a culture of acceptance beyond the school walls. In the practical realm, the call extends to an increase in the number of school-based social workers employed in schools, accompanied by the provision of suitable office space for them. A supportive system, coupled with ongoing training for social workers, is seen as vital in ensuring effective intervention and support. Financial backing is not forgotten in this equation. The plea to the government includes the allocation of funds for programs and projects dedicated to supporting youth sexual minorities, as well as ensuring access to other essential resources. Ultimately, it underscores the crucial role of making decisions based on evidence. Any measures taken by the government are encouraged to be rooted in research findings and practical considerations, ensuring that interventions are not only well-intentioned but also effective in creating a safe and inclusive educational environment for all learners.

The following **conclusions** are drawn by the researcher regarding the school-based social workers' views on how government can assist them in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools:

- Government should be working collaboratively with all stakeholders and school-based social workers to develop and implement policies in schools that are aligned to the Constitution and people's rights.
- The Department of Education must enforce awareness amongst teachers of the curriculum to create awareness and building a sense of acceptance of youth sexual minorities.
- Schools must have gender-neutral bathrooms and should allow cross-dressing of uniforms where possible.

- National Government should use social media as a tool for creating awareness of youth sexual minorities through target messaging, resulting in educating communities.
- Government should prioritize the appointment of more school-based social workers in schools and provide the necessary office space for them to form part of the service delivery team within the school on a permanent basis.
- Government should play a leading role in providing a supportive system and the provisioning of training for school-based social workers.
- Budget realignment and ringfencing the funding by Government departments for programmes and projects and access to other resources for school based social workers to render a more effective and efficient intervention service to youth sexual minorities.
- Policy decisions and practical initiatives by Government should be well-informed by reliable data and take into account real-world feasibility and effectiveness.

Critical consensus emerged from the interviews with participants regarding the essential role of National Government in facilitating effective intervention services for youth sexual minorities at schools (Day *et al.*, 2019:420; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2018:970; Johns *et al.*, 2018:8; SAMHSA, 2023:48). The feeling is that for real progress to be made in supporting these vulnerable populations, it is imperative for the government to craft and enforce school policies that harmonize with the principles enshrined in the Constitution (South Africa, 1996) and safeguard the fundamental rights of all individuals. Governmental actions and legislation play a critical role in creating safe and inclusive spaces within educational institutions for youth sexual minorities, ultimately enabling school-based social workers to provide them with the necessary assistance and support they require. The role of government in crafting policies aligned with constitutional principles and individual rights, is confirmed by themes explored in the literature (Day *et al.*, 2019:420; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2018:970; Johns *et al.*, 2018:8; SAMHSA, 2023:48). Prominent works, such as that of Kosciw *et al.*, (2016, 2019, 2020 & 2022) underscore the importance of transforming education to promote the empowerment of marginalized groups. The views expressed in the interviews with school-based social workers are confirmed by the literature's emphasis on creating inclusive environments that safeguard the rights of all learners, thus ensuring that educational institutions become platforms for social change and progress (Beck & Wikoff, 2020:2; O'Neill, 2020:62; Sosa, 2020:76; Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1033; Thacker & Minton, 2021:45).

A distinct feeling is that the Government, particularly the Department of Education, should enhance their capacity in the form of school based social workers to provide effective intervention

services to youth sexual minorities (Craig *et al.*, 2018:231-232; Fernandes *et al.*, 2023:6; UNICEF, 2022:16). Their demands for increased awareness and curriculum enforcement align with the broader discourse on the importance of diversity and sensitivity in the curriculum (Astramovich & Scott, 2020:318; Francis, 2017:2,8; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:3). Literature highlights the need for social and curricular changes to better serve minority learners (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020: 133; Vergottini & Weyers, 2022:15). The feeling by school-based social workers is also that the government should draw inspiration from established educational literature to enhance its support for youth sexual minorities and promote a more inclusive and equitable educational experience (Amnesty International, 2018:142; Kosciw *et al.*, 2022:3,124; Martin-Castillo *et al.*, 2020:5,12; Marzetti *et al.*, 2022:7; McGowan *et al.*, 2022:35; Menhinick & Sanders, 2023:369; Steck & Perry, 2018:239; Tran *et al.*, 2023:5).

In interviews held with school-based social workers a profound and multifaceted perspective emerged on the role of government in supporting their vital work in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities (Mehrotra *et al.*, 2023:12; Shattuck *et al.*, 2020:1035; Shattuck *et al.*, 2022:6). The recommendation for providing gender-sensitive bathrooms and uniform flexibility is grounded in research emphasising the importance of creating safe and inclusive spaces for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners in schools (Drury *et al.*, 2022:1126-1128; Singh, 2022:110). Kosciw *et al.* (2016, 2019, 2020 & 2022) emphasise that schools can play a pivotal role in the well-being of LGBTQQIP2SAA learners through the implementation of inclusive policies, such as non-discriminatory dress codes and facilities. Additionally, the concept of gender-sensitive bathrooms aligns with the broader movement for gender-inclusive facilities and has been a topic of discussion in scholarly work regarding the rights of transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals (Warin & Price, 2020:145-146). The need for government initiatives to address these issues is supported in the literature on gender-inclusive spaces within educational institutions, promoting a more inclusive and affirming environments for all learners (Bower-Brown *et al.*, 2023:87; Howell, & Allen, 2021:424-425). Incorporating these perspectives into government policies and educational practices would contribute to the betterment of the educational experience and mental health of youth sexual minorities (Davy & Cordoba, 2020:360; Warin & Price, 2020:145-146).

Consensus amongst participants emerged regarding the vital role of government intervention in supporting the provision of essential services to youth sexual minorities within educational settings (Berger *et al.*, 2021:4; Berger *et al.*, 2022:3; Craig *et al.*, 2021:2). The need for targeted messaging and the use of social media platforms to promote awareness and understanding about youth sexual minorities is a step in the right direction to create a more empathic and

accommodating community (Lucero, 2017:125). The Government's role in fostering inclusivity, as advocated by the school-based social workers, parallels the exploration of societal influence and governmental policies as described in the literature. In this context, literature often serves as a reflection of real-world challenges and aspirations, showcasing the need and potential for change and acceptance of youth sexual minorities in society, just as the school-based social workers aspire to bring about change in their educational environments (Dhiman, 2023:2; MetroSource, 2022; Wallace, 2019).

Interviews with school-based social workers revealed a prevailing sentiment emerged regarding the critical need for government support in enhancing their capacity to provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities (Leung *et al.*, 2022:11; Van Sittert & Wilson, 2018:3). School-based social workers emphasised the importance of a multifaceted approach that involves the provision of a supportive system, targeted training and essential resources. Government can be a pioneer in solidifying the potential benefits of targeted training programs for educators and support staff to better understand and address the specific challenges faced by youth sexual minorities (Bennett & Gates, 2019:609; Day *et al.*, 2020:420; 426-427; Kleinhans, 2018:50 Marraccini *et al.*, 2022:42; Robinson & Schmitz, 2021:6).

Financial backing for initiatives and programmes aimed at supporting these vulnerable groups is another critical area that needs attention and consideration (Bos, 2020:208; Ornellas, Engelbrecht & Atamtürk, 2020:242; Truter & Fouché, 2019:453). Youth sexual minorities, often require tailored support to navigate the complex social and psychological issues they encounter during their formative years. Government initiatives that allocate funds for specialized programmes, resources and comprehensive training for professionals can play a pivotal role in creating safe and inclusive school environments, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for LGBTQQIP2SAA learners (Abreu *et al.*, 2020:108; Breshears & De Beer, 2016:21; Haltom & Ratcliff, 2021:117).

This need for government initiatives should be grounded in thorough research and a pragmatic approach (Daly, 2022:1; Teater 2017:2; Wong, 2017:1-2). Effective strategies must be carefully tailored to the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, reflecting a commitment to evidence-based practices that can make a tangible difference in the lives of those they serve (Argüello, 2022:3; Winkler, 2018:10-11). There should be a clear relationship between government policies and the wellbeing of marginalized youth populations, particularly those in the LGBTQQIP2SAA community. Therefore, the call for evidence-based practices and research-informed approaches is a recurrent theme. The perspectives of school-based social workers form

a crucial bridge between the practical realities on the ground and the ongoing academic discourse that seeks to advance the well-being of youth sexual minorities in educational institutions (Argüello, 2022:3; Winkler, 2018:10-11; Willemse, 2023).

8.3 DELINEATIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Miles (2019:2) asserts that limitations are inherent in academic endeavours. The acknowledgment of limitations not only aligns with scholarly integrity but also contributes to the accurate interpretation and validity of findings, thereby exerting an impact on the overall study (Fetzer, 2022:282; Ross & Bibler-Zaidi, 2019:261). During the research process, instances beyond the researcher's control gave rise to limitations, influencing the study's progression. These limitations emanate from the conceptual framework and research design, shaping the path of the research.

However, it was crucial to recognize that study limitations can serve as catalysts for potential enhancements to the research (Ross & Bibler-Zaidi, 2019:261). The study at hand encountered several challenges and limitations (Tulare, 2020:291). Table 8.2 below lists the specific limitations and challenges confronted in the research, along with the strategies employed to mitigate these impediments.

TABLE 8-2 LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES THE RESEARCHER ENCOUNTERED AND MITIGATING STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS THESE LIMITATION/CHALLENGES.

Limitation(s)		Mitigation Strategies	
Description	Discussion	Description	Discussion
Limited Resources	Challenges related to insufficient funding and time.	Budget Planning and Time Management	Created a realistic timetable and research program to optimize the use of time resources in consultation with study supervisor. A budget plan was created to distribute funds appropriately during the research period.
Data Limitations	Issues concerning data availability and quality.	Data Collection Planning; Data Verification and Data Augmentation	Thorough planning of methods for collecting data to guarantee applicability. Procedures for data validation (rigor) were put in place to address accuracy issues. Considered supplementing limited data with other sources or methods, such as qualitative interviews or expert opinions.
Ethical and legal constraints	Concerns related to ethical approvals and legal regulations.	Ethical Review Process and Legal Consultation	Obtained necessary ethical approval and address ethical concerns with internal and external stakeholders. Obtained legal advice to comply with regulations from internal and external stakeholders.
Researcher Bias	Biases in research design and interpretation of data.	Peer Review	Implemented blind data analysis to reduce confirmation bias. Engaged in peer review to identify and mitigate biases.
Technical Limitations	Challenges arising from technical issues and methods.	Pilot Studies	Performed a pilot study to identify and resolve technical issues, consistently enhancing research methods in alignment with evolving best practices. The pilot study revealed technical errors associated with the interview guidelines which were corrected.
External Factors	Disruptions due to external factors like disasters.	Contingency Planning and Remote Data Collection	Created backup plans in case something unforeseen happened. For example should there be last minute cancellations, No Shows of participants or weather anomalies. Investigated remote data gathering techniques to get over geographical and personal restrictions. In this case MS Teams were utilised where mentioned restrictions had impacted on and prevented conducting the interviews face to face.
Inadequate Representation of South African Literature	Scarcity of available literature specifically from South Africa addressing/ focussing on the research topic	Further Research in the Topic and Collaboration with local researchers and institutions	Contacted more academic sources in the field of school-based social work as well as retired school-based social workers with expertise and experience dealing with young people who identify as sexual minorities. contacted LGBTQIIP2SAA organisations in order to do research

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

As described by Alex (2023), research recommendations suggesting future actions or proposed subsequent steps substantiated by the research findings, flow forth from the analysis phase of the research. This allows the researcher to make suggestions of specific interventions or strategies to address the issues and constraints identified in the research project. It is a response to the findings made through the data collection and analysis. The author points out that constituting a proposed action plan based on the outcome of the research, the aim with recommendations is to improve the field of research through future research or to provide frameworks for decision-makers or policymakers (Alex, 2023).

With this in mind, recommendations are made pertaining to the qualitative research process; guidelines for school-based social work support; policy and practice in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities; for further research; and for the continued professional development of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

8.4.1 Recommendations pertaining to the qualitative research process.

In this study, the focus is on the exploration of school-based social workers' experiences and challenges related to the provisioning of intervention services to youth sexual minorities within an educational context. Seeing that this is a sensitive research domain, it becomes paramount to establish a methodological framework that not only addresses the complexities of the subject matter but also upholds the highest standards of research integrity.

To this end, the following recommendations were tailored to guide the research process, ensuring that the study was not only methodologically sound but also ethically all-encompassing. From meticulous planning and pilot studies to continuous refinement of methods and transparent reporting, these recommendations aim to enhance the credibility, validity and applicability of findings, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges of school-based social workers in the delivery of intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

The following **recommendations** for qualitative research processes include:

- Thorough Planning: Ensured a comprehensive and well-thought-out research plan, including clear research questions and objectives.

- Pilot Studies: Conducted pilot studies to identify and address any potential issues with data collection methods or interview guides before the main study commenced.
- Refinement of Methods: Continuously refined research methods based on emerging best practices and lessons learned during the study.
- Data Management: Developed a robust system for data management and analysis to ensure accuracy, consistency and the ability to trace findings back to the original data.
- Researcher Reflexivity: Acknowledged and addressed the potential impact of the researcher's background, biases and perspectives on the research process and findings.
- Ethical Considerations: Adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and the protection of participants throughout the research process.
- Member Checking: Implemented member checking, allowing participants to review findings to enhance the credibility and validity of the study.
- Triangulation: Used multiple data sources, methods, to strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings through triangulation.
- Continuous Analysis: Engaged in continuous data analysis to iteratively inform the research process and adapt the study design as needed.
- Transparent Reporting: Documented the research process, decisions and any deviations from the original plan in the final research report.
- Peer Review: Sought peer review or input from other researchers in the field to enhance the rigor and credibility of the study.

It can therefore be **concluded** that the researcher implemented these recommendations that contributed to the overall quality, rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative of this research study.

8.4.2 Recommended guidelines for school-based social work support, policy and practice in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

The following recommended guidelines highlight the urgency of addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities in school-based social work. These guidelines are aimed at creating inclusive policies and practices and to empower school-based social workers in establishing supportive spaces for all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The goal is to intervene effectively and support the wellbeing of youth sexual minorities, emphasising the importance of acknowledging diverse identities and fostering affirming environments. Table 8.3 below, provides a comprehensive overview of the recommended job

descriptive guidelines for school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, developed from the research outcomes of this study and the achievement of its research goal.

These guidelines aim to provide a comprehensive and structured approach for school-based social workers, aligning their efforts with various levels of government and educational institutions to support youth sexual minorities effectively.

TABLE 8-3 RECOMMENDED JOB DESCRIPTIVE GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
School-Based Social Workers' Understanding of Intervention Services.	Understanding of Intervention Services.	Ensure that school-based social workers have a comprehensive understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities.	Provide regular training sessions on LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, including cultural competency and sensitivity. Encourage continuous professional development to stay informed about evolving terminology, research and best practices related to sexual minorities.	These guidelines aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment within schools, ensuring that school-based social workers are equipped to address the unique needs of youth sexual minorities and contribute to their overall well-being.
	Counselling and Support.	Provide counselling and support services to youth identifying as sexual minorities and their parents.	Establish a safe and confidential space for counselling sessions. Develop a referral network for specialized services when needed, such as LGBTQQIP2SAA organisations and mental health professionals. Offer family counselling to foster understanding and support for parents of sexual minority youth.	
	Age-Appropriate Responses.	Tailor interventions to the learner's needs and age	Utilise developmentally appropriate language and materials. Recognize the diverse experiences within the LGBTQQIP2SAA community and provide age-specific resources and support.	
	Development and Protection.	Develop and protect youth sexual minorities	Implement anti-bullying programs that specifically address LGBTQQIP2SAA issues. Advocate for inclusive policies and practices that protect sexual minority learners from discrimination.	
	Education on Sexuality.	Teach learners about their sexuality and educate them about sexual minorities.	Integrate LGBTQQIP2SAA inclusive curriculum into sex education programmes. Foster an environment where discussions about sexual orientation and gender identity are open, respectful and age appropriate.	
	Counselling, Emotional Support and Guidance.	Prioritize the provision of counselling, emotional support and guidance for youth sexual minorities.	Establish a counselling framework that respects the confidentiality and privacy of the individuals involved. Offer individual and group counselling sessions to address the emotional and psychological well-being of youth sexual minorities. Ensure that counselling approaches are LGBTQQIP2SAA affirming and culturally sensitive.	
School-Based Social Workers' Opinions on Intervention Services.	Case Work, Group Work and Community Work.	Implement diverse intervention methods, including case work, group work and community work.	Conduct thorough case assessments to understand the unique needs and challenges of individual learners. Facilitate support groups for sexual minority youth to foster a sense of community and shared experiences. Engage in community outreach to promote awareness, acceptance and inclusivity.	These guidelines aim to empower school-based social workers to provide a range of intervention services that are responsive to the diverse needs of youth sexual minorities, creating an inclusive and supportive school environment.
	Needs identification and addressing in context.	Identify and address the needs of youth sexual minorities within the context	Conduct regular needs assessments to understand the evolving challenges faced by sexual minority learners. Tailor interventions based on the cultural, familial and social contexts of the learners.	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
		of their individual experiences.	Collaborate with teachers, parents and other stakeholders to create a comprehensive support system.	
	Arranging Health and Protection Services.	Facilitate access to health and other protection services for youth sexual minorities.	Collaborate with healthcare professionals to ensure the availability of LGBTQQIP2SAA affirming health services. Advocate for policies and practices that protect sexual minority learners from discrimination and bullying. Establish partnerships with local organisations to provide additional resources and support.	
School-Based Social Workers' Perception of Risk Factors and Challenges Faced by Youth Sexual Minorities.	Lack of Acceptance, Understanding, Support, Stigma and Stereotyping.	Recognize and address the challenges related to the lack of acceptance, understanding, support, stigma and stereotyping faced by youth sexual minorities.	Conduct regular assessments to identify learners facing discrimination or lack of acceptance based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Implement awareness programmes to foster a culture of acceptance and understanding within the school community. Provide resources and training for teachers and staff to address and challenge stereotypes related to sexual minorities.	These guidelines aim to equip school-based social workers with strategies to identify and address the specific challenges and risk factors faced by youth sexual minorities. By fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment, school-based social workers can contribute to the overall well-being and safety of sexual minority learners.
	Victimization, Rejection, Bullying, Rape and Death.	Address and mitigate the risks of victimization, rejection, bullying, rape and death experienced by youth sexual minorities.	Establish a comprehensive anti-bullying programme that specifically addresses issues faced by LGBTQQIP2SAA learners. Implement clear reporting mechanisms for instances of bullying, harassment, or violence against sexual minority learners. Collaborate with law enforcement and community organisations to ensure the safety and well-being of at-risk learners. Provide trauma-informed counselling and support services for victims of violence or harassment.	
School-Based Social Workers' Perceptions of the Impact of Risk Factors or Challenges Faced by Youth Sexual Minorities.	Negative Feelings and Psychosocial Health.	Recognize and address the impact of risk factors on the mental and psychosocial health of youth sexual minorities.	Provide regular mental health screenings for youth sexual minority learners to identify those experiencing negative feelings or distress. Offer individual and group counselling services to address mental health concerns and promote emotional well-being. Collaborate with mental health professionals to provide specialized support when needed.	These guidelines aim to empower school-based social workers to recognize and address the diverse impacts of risk factors and challenges faced by youth sexual minorities, promoting their overall well-being and success in both academic and personal realms.
	Academic Progress and General Functioning.	Mitigate the impact of challenges on the academic progress and general functioning of youth sexual minorities.	Monitor academic performance and attendance patterns to identify potential challenges faced by sexual minority learners. Collaborate with teachers and educators to create a supportive learning environment that fosters academic success. Advocate for inclusive educational policies that address the unique needs of sexual minority learners.	
	Withdrawal, Lack of Trust and Fear of Coming Out.	Address social and emotional challenges such as withdrawal, lack of trust and fear of coming out.	Create safe spaces within the school environment where learners can express themselves without fear of judgment. Facilitate support groups to encourage positive social connections and foster trust among sexual minority learners. Implement awareness programmes to reduce stigma and promote acceptance.	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
	Living Secretly or Living a Lie.	Address challenges related to youth sexual minorities living secretly or living a lie.	Promote a culture of acceptance and authenticity within the school community. Provide counselling services to help learners navigate their identity and build confidence in being true to themselves. Advocate for policies that create an inclusive and accepting school environment.	
	Substance Abuse.	Recognize and mitigate the risk of substance abuse among youth sexual minorities.	Provide education on the risks of substance abuse and its impact on mental and physical health. Offer counselling and support services to address the underlying factors contributing to substance abuse. Collaborate with substance abuse prevention programmes and resources in the community.	
	Self-Harm or Self-Mutilation.	Address and prevent self-harm or self-mutilation among youth sexual minorities.	Implement comprehensive mental health support programmes that include early intervention and crisis management. Train school staff to identify signs of self-harm and respond appropriately. Establish clear reporting mechanisms and referral pathways to mental health professionals for learners at risk.	
School-Based Social Workers' Experiences in Rendering Intervention Services to Youth Sexual Minorities.	No Direct Experience.	Provide support and resources for school-based social workers who have no direct experience in rendering services to youth sexual minorities.	Offer training programmes and workshops focused on LGBTQQIP2SAA awareness, cultural competency and best practices in supporting sexual minority youth. Encourage collaboration with experienced colleagues or external experts for mentorship and guidance. Establish a supportive network within the school system for sharing experiences and learning from others.	These guidelines aim to enhance the experiences of school-based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment within the school system.
	Difficult or Challenging Experiences.	Equip school-based social workers with strategies to navigate and overcome difficulties and challenges in rendering services to youth sexual minorities.	Provide ongoing training on dealing with challenging situations, including bullying, discrimination, or family rejection. Establish a peer support system within the school to facilitate the sharing of experiences and strategies for addressing difficult cases. Ensure access to supervision and consultation services to help school-based social workers process and manage challenging situations effectively.	
	Rewarding or Heart-breaking Experiences.	Acknowledge and support school-based social workers in recognizing the emotional impact of their work with youth sexual minorities, both positive and challenging.	Establish debriefing sessions or support groups to allow school-based social workers to share their experiences and emotions in a safe and confidential space. Recognize and celebrate successes and positive outcomes in supporting sexual minority youth. Provide access to resources on self-care and stress management to mitigate the potential negative impacts of challenging cases.	
	Acceptance, focusing on the Presenting	Promote a person-centred and strengths-based	Emphasise the importance of creating a non-judgmental and accepting environment for all learners.	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
	Problem and Building Trust.	approach in working with youth sexual minorities.	<p>Provide training on active listening and building trust with sexual minority youth.</p> <p>Encourage school-based social workers to focus on the presenting problem while respecting the individual's identity and experiences.</p>	
Challenges Faced by School-Based Social Workers in Rendering Intervention Services to Youth Sexual Minorities.	Parent's Lack of Involvement or Acceptance.	Address challenges related to parents' lack of involvement or acceptance in supporting their sexual minority youth.	<p>Provide resources and information for parents to enhance their understanding and acceptance of their child's sexual orientation or gender identity.</p> <p>Offer family counselling services to facilitate communication and foster acceptance within the family.</p> <p>Advocate for inclusive parent education programmes that address the needs of sexual minority youth.</p>	These guidelines aim to empower school-based social workers to navigate and overcome the challenges they may face in providing effective intervention services to youth sexual minorities, creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment.
	Beliefs or Bias About Sexual Minorities.	Address biases and beliefs that may impede effective intervention services.	<p>Conduct awareness programmes to challenge stereotypes and biases among school staff, educators and learners.</p> <p>Provide training on cultural competence and LGBTQQIP2SAA sensitivity for all professionals within the school system.</p> <p>Implement policies that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.</p>	
	Youth Sexual Minorities' Needs Not Being Met.	Ensure that the diverse needs of youth sexual minorities are identified and addressed effectively.	<p>Conduct regular needs assessments to identify gaps in services and resources for sexual minority youth.</p> <p>Collaborate with community organisations and agencies to provide additional support when school resources are insufficient.</p> <p>Advocate for the development of inclusive policies and practices that address the specific needs of sexual minority learners.</p>	
	Lack of Training and Resources.	Address challenges related to insufficient training and resources for school-based social workers.	<p>Advocate for ongoing professional development opportunities focused on LGBTQQIP2SAA issues, including cultural competency and best practices.</p> <p>Ensure access to updated resources, literature and toolkits that support the provision of effective intervention services.</p> <p>Collaborate with external organisations and experts to provide specialized training sessions.</p>	
	Lack of Confidentiality and Support from Educators and Other Professionals.	Ensure that school-based social workers can maintain confidentiality and receive support from colleagues and professionals.	<p>Establish clear policies on confidentiality and privacy for all interactions with sexual minority learners.</p> <p>Promote a culture of collaboration and support within the school community.</p> <p>Create avenues for school-based social workers to seek guidance and supervision when dealing with sensitive cases.</p>	
	Youth Unsure About Own Gender Orientation.	Address challenges related to youth who are unsure about their own gender orientation.	<p>Create a supportive and non-judgmental environment for learners to explore and understand their gender identity.</p> <p>Collaborate with gender identity specialists and mental health professionals to provide specialized support.</p> <p>Offer resources and educational materials to help learners navigate their own identity.</p>	
	Learner Does Not Trust or Asks school-	Address situations where the learner does not trust the	Build trust through consistent and transparent communication with the learner.	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
	based Social Worker to Intervene About School Policy.	school-based social worker or requests intervention regarding school policies.	<p>Collaborate with school administrators and policymakers to advocate for inclusive and affirming school policies.</p> <p>Offer counselling services to help learners navigate challenges related to school policies and advocate for their needs.</p>	
	Bullying in School and a Non-Conducive Environment.	Address challenges related to bullying and the creation of a non-conducive environment within the school.	<p>Implement comprehensive anti-bullying programmes that specifically address LGBTQQIP2SAA issues.</p> <p>Advocate for a positive and inclusive school climate through awareness programmes and policy changes.</p> <p>Provide counselling services and support for learners who experience bullying or harassment.</p>	
	Personal Sexual Orientation.	Address challenges related to a school-based social worker's personal sexual orientation.	<p>Promote diversity and inclusion within the school workforce, fostering an environment that embraces professionals of diverse backgrounds.</p> <p>Establish policies and practices that ensure the protection of school-based social workers from discrimination based on their sexual orientation.</p> <p>Encourage open communication and education to dispel stereotypes and biases regarding school-based social workers' personal characteristics.</p>	
School-Based Social Workers' Feelings When Rendering Intervention Services to Youth Sexual Minorities.	Feels Comfortable.	Foster a supportive environment where school-based social workers feel comfortable providing intervention services to youth sexual minorities.	<p>Ensure that school-based social workers receive training on LGBTQQIP2SAA cultural competency to enhance their comfort and understanding.</p> <p>Promote a culture of acceptance and inclusivity within the school community.</p> <p>Provide ongoing support and resources to enhance school-based social workers' confidence in addressing the unique needs of sexual minority youth.</p>	These guidelines aim to enhance the emotional well-being and job satisfaction of school-based social workers as they provide intervention services to youth sexual minorities, ultimately contributing to a more supportive and inclusive school environment.
	Provides Same Services in the Same Way as to All Learners.	Promote consistency and equity in the provision of intervention services to all learners, including sexual minority youth.	<p>Establish clear policies that emphasise the equal treatment of all learners, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.</p> <p>Provide training on the principles of equitable and inclusive service delivery for all school-based social workers.</p> <p>Encourage a person-centred and strengths-based approach that focuses on individual needs rather than identity.</p>	
	It Is a Privilege to Accompany Child on Child's Journey.	Cultivate a sense of privilege and responsibility in accompanying sexual minority youth on their personal journeys.	<p>Promote a strengths-based approach that recognizes and celebrates the resilience and uniqueness of each learner.</p> <p>Encourage school-based social workers to view their role as a supportive guide in a learner's journey toward self-discovery and acceptance.</p> <p>Provide resources and training on the importance of affirming and validating the identities and experiences of sexual minority youth.</p>	
	Feels Failed by the Department of Education.	Address school-based social workers' feelings of being failed by the Department of Education by advocating for	<p>Establish channels for school-based social workers to provide feedback on the challenges they face in their roles.</p> <p>Advocate for policy changes within the Department of Education to address gaps in training, resources and support for school-based social workers.</p>	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
		supportive policies and practices.	Collaborate with other stakeholders, including educators, administrators and policymakers, to strengthen the overall support system for school-based social workers.	
Support Services Available to School-Based Social Workers in Rendering Intervention Services to Youth Sexual Minorities.	No Support Services Available for school-based social workers.	Address the absence of support services for school-based social workers.	<p>Advocate for the establishment of support services dedicated to school-based social workers dealing with issues related to youth sexual minorities.</p> <p>Collaborate with school administrators and policymakers to highlight the importance of support services in ensuring the well-being and effectiveness of school-based social workers.</p> <p>Establish peer support networks within the school system to facilitate informal support and information-sharing among school-based social workers.</p>	These guidelines aim to create a supportive infrastructure for school-based social workers, ensuring they have access to the necessary resources, training and consultation services to effectively render intervention services to youth sexual minorities. This support system is crucial for promoting the well-being of school-based social workers and, in turn, improving outcomes for the learners they serve.
	Consults Others or Uses Other Professional Resources.	Encourage school-based social workers to seek consultation and utilise professional resources.	<p>Establish a culture of collaboration within the school system, encouraging school-based social workers to consult with colleagues and other professionals.</p> <p>Provide access to external experts and resources through partnerships with community organisations, mental health professionals and LGBTQQIP2SAA support groups.</p> <p>Develop a network of professionals within and outside the school system who can offer guidance and expertise.</p>	
	Training Is Provided.	Ensure that training opportunities are provided to school-based social workers to enhance their knowledge and skills in supporting youth sexual minorities.	<p>Implement regular training programmes focused on LGBTQQIP2SAA cultural competency, sensitivity and best practices in intervention services.</p> <p>Collaborate with external organisations and experts to deliver specialized training sessions.</p> <p>Establish a professional development plan that includes ongoing education and skill-building related to the needs of sexual minority youth.</p>	
Measures Applied to Support Youth Sexual Minorities.	There Are No Measures to Support Youth Sexual Minorities.	Address the absence of measures to support youth sexual minorities.	<p>Advocate for the establishment of measures and policies dedicated to supporting the unique needs of sexual minority youth.</p> <p>Collaborate with school administrators and policymakers to highlight the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment for all learners.</p> <p>Develop and implement anti-discrimination policies that explicitly address issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.</p>	These guidelines aim to create a supportive and inclusive environment within schools, ensuring that measures are in place to effectively support and accommodate the needs of sexual minority youth.
	Counselling and Support are Available and Assist Youth Sexual Minorities.	Ensure that counselling and support services are readily available to assist youth sexual minorities.	<p>Establish a counselling framework that specifically addresses the needs and concerns of sexual minority youth.</p> <p>Promote awareness of available counselling and support services among sexual minority learners.</p> <p>Collaborate with external mental health professionals and LGBTQQIP2SAA organisations to enhance the range of support services.</p>	
	School Policy is to Accommodate and	Establish school policies that actively accommodate and	Advocate for the development and implementation of inclusive school policies that address the unique needs of sexual minority learners.	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
	Adapt to the Needs of Sexual Minorities.	adapt to the needs of sexual minority youth.	<p>Work with school administrators to create an environment that actively supports and accommodates sexual minority learners.</p> <p>Provide training for teachers and staff on implementing and adhering to inclusive policies.</p>	
	Try to Accommodate Youth Sexual Minorities.	Encourage efforts to accommodate the needs of sexual minority youth.	<p>Establish a collaborative process for identifying and addressing the specific needs of sexual minority learners.</p> <p>Encourage open communication between school staff, school-based social workers and learners to facilitate accommodation.</p> <p>Develop a system for regularly assessing the effectiveness of accommodation measures and adjusting as needed.</p>	
	Must Be Sensitive to the Process and the Youth's Needs.	Emphasise the importance of sensitivity in supporting the needs of sexual minority youth.	<p>Provide training for school staff and school-based social workers on cultural competency and sensitivity related to LGBTQQIP2SAA issues.</p> <p>Encourage a person-centred approach that considers the individual needs and experiences of each sexual minority learner.</p> <p>Foster an environment where learners feel comfortable expressing their needs and preferences.</p>	
	Schools Differ.	Acknowledge and address variations in the approaches of different schools.	<p>Recognize that each school environment may have unique challenges and strengths in supporting sexual minority youth.</p> <p>Facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration between schools to identify best practices and lessons learned.</p> <p>Encourage schools to adapt and tailor their approaches based on the specific context and needs of their learner population.</p>	
Enhancing the Effectiveness of Measures Applied in Schools.	Need to Ensure There is a school-based social worker with the needed Resources in all schools.	Ensure the presence of school-based social workers with the necessary resources in all schools to support youth sexual minorities.	<p>Advocate for the inclusion of dedicated school based social workers at all schools, with training in LGBTQQIP2SAA issues and cultural competency.</p> <p>Ensure that school-based social workers have access to resources, materials and training specific to supporting sexual minority youth.</p>	These guidelines aim to improve the effectiveness of measures applied in schools by ensuring the presence of knowledgeable and equipped school- based social workers in all schools and by raising awareness about sexual orientation and the unique needs of sexual minority learners within the school community. These efforts contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all learners.
	Need to Raise Awareness of Sexual Orientation and Needs of Learners.	Raise awareness about sexual orientation and the unique needs of sexual minority learners within the school community.	<p>Develop and implement awareness programmes for learners, teachers and parents to foster understanding and acceptance of sexual diversity.</p> <p>Integrate LGBTQQIP2SAA education into the school curriculum to provide learners with accurate information about sexual orientation and gender identity.</p> <p>Conduct workshops and training sessions for school staff to increase awareness of the specific needs and challenges faced by sexual minority youth.</p>	
Managing Intervention Services for Youth Sexual Minorities in Schools.	Create Awareness of Sexual Minorities and Their Needs and Advocate for Them.	Foster awareness and advocacy for the needs of sexual minority youth within the school community.	<p>Develop and implement awareness programmes for learners, teachers and parents to enhance understanding and acceptance of sexual diversity.</p> <p>Advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQQIP2SAA issues in school curricula and educational programmes.</p>	These guidelines aim to empower school-based social workers with specific strategies for managing intervention

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
			Collaborate with school administrators to create a supportive and inclusive school environment for sexual minority learners.	
	Need to Be Equipped with Appropriate Knowledge and Educate Yourself and Accept Sexual Minorities.	Equip school-based social workers with the necessary knowledge and skills to support sexual minority youth effectively.	<p>Provide ongoing CPD training for school-based social workers on LGBTQQIP2SAA cultural competency, sensitivity and best practices.</p> <p>Encourage self-education and staying informed about current research, terminology and evolving issues related to sexual minorities.</p> <p>Foster an environment of acceptance and inclusion within the social work profession to ensure a supportive community for all professionals.</p>	services for youth sexual minorities in schools. By creating awareness, enhancing knowledge and providing targeted support through initiatives like support groups, school-based social workers can contribute to the well-being and success of sexual minority learners within the school environment.
	Create and Run Support Groups.	Establish and facilitate support groups to address the unique needs of sexual minority youth.	<p>Create a safe and confidential space for sexual minority youth to share experiences, concerns and support.</p> <p>Collaborate with mental health professionals and community organisations to provide additional resources and expertise for support groups.</p> <p>Advocate for the incorporation of support groups into the school's overall mental health and well-being initiatives.</p>	
Government Support for School-Based Social Workers in Rendering Intervention Services.	Develop and Implement Policies in Schools Aligned to the Constitution and People's Rights.	Ensure the development and implementation of policies that align with constitutional principles and safeguard the rights of sexual minority youth.	<p>Advocate for the creation and enforcement of anti-discrimination policies that specifically address issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity.</p> <p>Collaborate with relevant government bodies to ensure that school policies adhere to constitutional principles and promote inclusivity.</p> <p>Provide training for school administrators and staff on the importance of aligning school policies with constitutional and human rights principles.</p>	These guidelines aim to provide comprehensive support from the government to school-based social workers, fostering an environment that is inclusive, aware and responsive to the needs of sexual minority youth in schools.
	Dept of Education Must Enforce Awareness and the Curriculum.	Ensure that the Department of Education actively promotes awareness and inclusion of LGBTQQIP2SAA issues in the school curriculum.	<p>Advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQQIP2SAA awareness in teacher training programmes and professional development.</p> <p>Collaborate with the Department of Education to incorporate LGBTQQIP2SAA issues into the school curriculum in a comprehensive and age-appropriate manner.</p> <p>Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of LGBTQQIP2SAA-inclusive content in educational materials.</p>	
	Schools Must Have Gender-Neutral Bathrooms and Allow Cross-Dressing of Uniforms.	Advocate for inclusive school facilities and dress code policies that respect the diverse gender identities of learners.	<p>Collaborate with schools to promote the creation of gender-neutral bathrooms that accommodate the needs of all learners.</p> <p>Advocate for dress code policies that allow learners to express their gender identity through clothing without discrimination.</p> <p>Provide training for school staff on the importance of creating inclusive spaces for all learners.</p>	
	Target Messaging, Use social media, Train and Educate Communities.	Utilise targeted messaging, social media and community education to raise awareness and promote inclusivity.	<p>Collaborate with government agencies and community organisations to develop targeted messaging campaigns that promote inclusivity and understanding.</p> <p>Utilise social media platforms to disseminate information, resources and positive narratives related to sexual minority youth.</p>	

Core concept	Underlying concept	Intentions	Guidelines	Desired outcome
			Conduct community education programmes to dispel myths, reduce stigma and foster acceptance.	
	Appoint more school-based social workers in schools and provide office space.	Increase the number of school-based social workers in schools and provide the necessary infrastructure for effective intervention services.	Advocate for increased funding to appoint additional school-based social workers in schools, especially in areas with identified needs. Collaborate with government agencies to ensure that schools have adequate office space and resources to support school-based social workers in their roles. Promote the importance of a sufficient school-based social work workforce to address the diverse needs of learners.	
	Provide a Supportive System and Training for Social Workers.	Establish a supportive system and provide ongoing training for school-based social workers.	Advocate for the creation of a supportive infrastructure that includes supervision, mentorship and peer support for school-based social workers. Collaborate with government agencies to develop and implement comprehensive training programmes on LGBTQQIP2SAA cultural competency, sensitivity and best practices. Ensure that school-based social workers have access to continuous professional development opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills.	
	Provide Funding for Programmes and Projects and Access to Other Resources.	Secure funding for programmes and projects that support the well-being and inclusion of sexual minority youth in schools.	Advocate for government funding to support initiatives that address the specific needs of sexual minority learners, including awareness campaigns, support groups and training programmes. Collaborate with government agencies to identify and allocate resources, both financial and material, to enhance the effectiveness of intervention services.	
	Base Any Measures on Research and Practicalities.	Ensure that all measures taken are evidence-based, rooted in research and practical for implementation.	Advocate for the inclusion of research findings in the development and evaluation of policies related to sexual minority youth. Collaborate with academic institutions and research organisations to conduct studies that inform the development of evidence-based measures. Promote a culture of continuous evaluation and adaptation based on the practical realities and effectiveness of implemented measures.	

8.4.3 Recommendations for the continued professional development of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

Ensuring the effective and efficient delivery of intervention services to youth sexual minorities within the school setting necessitates continuous training and development for school-based social workers in the form of the SACSSP's requirements for the continuous professional development (CPD) of social workers.

These professionals play a pivotal role in creating a supportive environment that addresses the diverse needs and challenges faced by youth identifying as sexual minorities. In response to the unique circumstances encountered by this demographic group, targeted training is essential to equip school-based social workers with the knowledge, skills and sensitivity required for comprehensive and inclusive interventions. This involves prioritizing areas such as counselling, case work, group work and community engagement to foster understanding and acceptance. Additionally, emphasis is placed on addressing specific challenges, advocating for inclusivity and mitigating the psychosocial impact on the well-being of youth sexual minorities. This comprehensive approach to training underscores the importance of developing a cadre of school-based social workers who are not only well-versed in best practices but are also attuned to the distinctions of supporting a diverse learner population, contributing to a more inclusive and affirming educational environment.

The provisioning of further education and training and guidelines in the form of CPD for school-based social workers can take on the form of the following CPD programme as proposed by the researcher and research study supervisor. Recommendations for further education and training for school-based social workers were captured in Table 8.3 above, however, the researcher will only elaborate shortly below on a proposed education and training programme focussing on the foundations, frameworks and guidelines for school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

CPD PROGRAMME: GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOL-BASED SOCIAL WORKERS RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES	
1. Foundations and frameworks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Module 1: Understanding sexual minority identities – Introduction to LGBTQQIP2SAA Identities; Module 2: Social work ethics and professional standards – ethical considerations for school-based social workers; Module 3: Mental health and well-being – Mental health disparities within LGBTQQIP2SAA communities; Module 4: Creating safe and inclusive spaces – School climate and bullying; Module 5: Family and community engagement – Family dynamics and acceptance, Community resources and partnerships; Module 6: Practical intervention strategies – Individual counselling and support, Group interventions, advocacy and empowerment; and Module 7: Self-care for school-based social workers: Managing burnout and compassion fatigue, supervision and peer support
2. Guidelines for school-based social workers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cultivate cultural competence; Promote inclusivity; Confidentiality and trust; Collaborate with stakeholders; Continuous professional development; Self-reflection; Crisis management; Community engagement; and Legal and ethical considerations

By integrating the Ecological Systems Approach and Advocacy Theory into the training programme and guidelines, school-based social workers can better understand the interconnectedness of individual experiences with broader systems and develop strategies to advocate for positive change at multiple levels.

8.4.4 Recommendations for further research

Based on the guidelines and themes discussed, recommendations are made for further research of the following aspects of school-based social work and intervention services to youth sexual minorities:

- Effectiveness of Current Intervention Strategies:** Research the effectiveness of existing intervention strategies employed by school-based social workers in addressing the unique needs of youth sexual minorities. Explore and evaluate the impact of counselling, support groups and community initiatives on the wellbeing of these learners.

- **Inclusive School Policies and Environments:** Research the impact of inclusive school policies and environments on the mental health and academic success of youth sexual minorities. Analyse how these policies aligned with constitutional rights and awareness campaigns, contribute to creating safer spaces for youth sexual minorities.
- **Continued Professional Development (CPD):** Examine the adequacy of CPD programmes in contributing to school-based social workers' efficiency, skills and know-how in addressing the challenges faced by youth sexual minorities. Explore the content and frequency of training sessions and their impact on service delivery.
- **Support Services for School-Based Social Workers:** Investigate the availability and effectiveness of support services for school-based social workers dealing with issues related to youth sexual minorities. Explore the impact of consultation, professional resources and training on school-based social workers' ability to address challenges.
- **Parental Involvement and Acceptance:** Explore the role of parental involvement and acceptance in the success of intervention services for youth sexual minorities. Research the challenges school-based social workers face when parents are not involved or accepting and identify strategies to enhance family support.
- **Impact of School Culture on Youth Sexual Minorities:** Examine how the overall school culture, including acceptance, diversity and anti-bullying policies, influence the experiences of youth sexual minorities. Investigate how positive or negative school environments affect their mental health, academic progress and overall well-being.
- **Comparative Analysis of School-Based Social Work:** Conduct a comparative analysis of school-based social work approaches across different regions or countries. Explore variations in policies, intervention strategies and support services, considering cultural and contextual differences.
- **Long-Term Outcomes of Intervention Services:** Investigate the long-term outcomes of intervention services provided to youth sexual minorities. Assess the impact on their academic and career trajectories, mental health and overall life satisfaction as individuals transitioning into adulthood.
- **Intersectionality and Diverse Identities:** Explore the intersectionality of identities within the youth sexual minority population. Examine how factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender identity intersect with sexual orientation, influencing the challenges faced and the effectiveness of intervention services.
- **Evaluation of School Policies and Government Initiatives:** Evaluate the effectiveness of government initiatives and school policies aimed at creating inclusive environments for

youth sexual minorities. Assess the implementation of gender-neutral facilities, curriculum inclusivity and anti-discrimination measures.

- **Social Media and Community Engagement:** Investigate the role of social media and community engagement in promoting awareness and acceptance of sexual minorities in schools. Analyse the impact of targeted messaging and community education initiatives on reducing stigma and discrimination.
- **Ethical Considerations in School-Based Social Work:** Examine the role and use of ethical considerations in the provision of intervention services to youth sexual minorities. Investigate challenges related to confidentiality, informed consent and balancing the needs of the individual with those of the broader school community.

By addressing these research areas, researchers and school-based social workers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding intervention services for youth sexual minorities in school settings, leading to more informed practices and policies.

8.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this, the concluding chapter of this dissertation, a comprehensive introduction is offered that provides a concise overview of the preceding seven chapters. The recap touches on key elements explored in each section, setting the stage for the final discussions.

The chapter proceeds with presenting a meticulous summary of the research and conclusions drawn from the entire research process. In the summary it is indicated that Chapter One's focus is on the general introduction and study orientation, emphasising its foundational role in shaping the research landscape. Chapter Two's proposed research plan is scrutinized, with a condensed summary and concluding remarks provided.

The summary then shifts to Chapter Three, which delves into international, African and South African perspectives on the current status of sexual minorities. The summary and conclusions highlight the insights gained and the significance of these diverse viewpoints.

Chapter Four, dedicated to the application of the qualitative research process, is next in line for scrutiny. A concise summary is provided and conclusions are drawn regarding the effectiveness and relevance of the chosen research methodology.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven collectively receive attention in the subsequent section, focusing on research insights and literature contextualisation in the form of a literature control across

eleven thematic areas. This comprehensive examination serves to underscore the richness and depth of the study's findings.

Moving forward, this chapter tackles the limitations inherent in the study, offering thoughtful mitigation strategies. Recommendations related to the qualitative research process are discussed, followed by guidelines for school-based social work support, policy and practice in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. These recommendations are thoughtfully linked to the primary or shared target area for intervention and actioning.

The chapter also extends its scope to propose recommendations for further research, emphasising areas that warrant additional academic exploration. Simultaneously, it addresses recommendations for the continued professional development of school-based social workers involved in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities. The researcher introduces a proposed framework for achieving this goal, including revisiting and confirming the foundations, frameworks and guidelines designed for school-based social workers.

In closing, this chapter provides a holistic view of the entire dissertation, encapsulating the journey from inception to conclusion. The comprehensive nature of the summary and recommendations underscores the significance of the study in contributing to both academic discourse and practical implications for the field of school-based social work.

As the researcher brings this dissertation to a close, it is important to reflect on the profound words of Nelson Mandela, a beacon of justice and equality. Nelson Mandela reminds us that true freedom is a shared journey, emphasising that our own liberation is intricately linked to the freedom of others. In the context of the experiences and challenges faced by school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities, Mandela's wisdom, expressed as follows, resonates, urging us to strive for a world where the oppressor and the oppressed alike regain their humanity through the pursuit of understanding, acceptance and inclusivity:

"I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity".

– Nelson Mandela

"I Drink Wine"

How can one become so bounded by choices that somebody else makes?
How come we've both become a version of a person we don't even like?
We're in love with the world, but the world just wants to bring us down
By puttin' ideas in our heads that corrupt our hearts somehow
When I was a child, every single thing could blow my mind
Soaking it all up for fun, but now I only soak up wine
They say to play hard, you work hard, find balance in the sacrifice
And yet I don't know anybody who's truly satisfied

You better believe I'm tryin' (Tryin', tryin')
To keep climbin' (Climbin', climbin')
But the higher we climb feels like we're both none the wiser

So I hope I learn to get over myself
Stop tryin' to be somebody else
So we can love each other for free
Everybody wants somethin', you just want me

Why am I obsessin' about the things I can't control?
Why am I seekin' approval from people I don't even know?
In these crazy times, I hope to find somethin' I can cling on to
'Cause I need some substance in my life, somethin' real, somethin' that feels true

You better believe for you, I've cried (I've cried, I've cried)
High tides (High tides, high tides)
'Cause I want you so bad, but you can't fight fire with fire, oh

So I hope I learn to get over myself
Stop tryin' to be somebody else
Oh, I just want to love you, love you for free
Everybody wants somethin' from me, you just want me
Listen, I know how low I can go, I give as good as I get
You get the brunt of it all 'cause you're all I've got left
Oh, I hope in time (Hope in time)
We both will find (We'll both find), peace of mind
Sometimes, the road less traveled is a road best left behind
Well, I hope I learn to get over myself
Stop tryin' to be somebody else
Oh, I just want to love you, love you for free, yeah
'Cause everybody wants somethin' from me, you just want me

You better believe I'm tryin' (Tryin', tryin')
To keep climbin' (Climbin', climbin')
But the higher we climb, feels like we're both none the wiser

*The only regret I have
I wish that it was just at a different time
A most turbulent period of my life
Why would I put that on you?
That's just, like, a very heavy thing to have to talk about
But because of that period of time
Even though it was so much fun
I didn't get to go on and make new memories with him
There were just memories in a big storm*

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ADDENDUM A – INTERVIEW GUIDE

The experiences and challenges of school based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Interview Guide for School-Based Social Workers

Biographical questions:

1. What is your race?
2. What is your home language?
3. What is your highest qualification?
4. How long have you been a social worker?

Topical questions:

1. Would you please tell me about your understanding of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
2. What would you say are the common types of intervention services rendered to youth sexual minorities?
3. What would you say are risk factors or challenges faced by youth sexual minorities?
4. What would you say are the impact of these risk factors or challenges on youth sexual minorities?
5. How would you describe your experiences in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities?
6. Please describe your challenges in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.
7. Can you describe how you feel in rendering these services to youth sexual minorities?
8. What support services are available to you in rendering these intervention services?
9. What would say are the measures being applied to support youth sexual minorities in schools?
10. How effective are such measures in supporting youth sexual minorities in schools?
11. How can these measures be managed more effectively in schools?
12. What are your views on how school based social workers can specifically manage intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?
13. What would you say the government should do to assist school based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities in schools?

ADDENDUM B – ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

03 March 2023

Dear Mr Nicolaas Jacobus Marais

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
35981849_CREC_CHS_2023

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 03 March 2023 to 03 March 2024

Researcher(s): Name: Mr. N. J. Marais
Contact details: 35981849@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr A. G. Adlem
Contact details: adlemag@unisa.ac.za

Title: THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL BASED SOCIAL WORKERS RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES.

Degree Purpose: Masters

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The *medium risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.



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PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
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4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (03 March 2024). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 35981849_CREC_CHS_2023 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature:

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP

Prof ZZ Nkosi
Acting-Executive Dean: CHS
E-mail: nkosizz@unisa.ac.za
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ADDENDUM C – APPROVAL LETTER FORM DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION (DBE)



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	04 April 2023
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2023– 30 September 2023 2023/123
Name of Researcher:	Marais NJ
Address of Researcher:	6 Jannie Smuts Street
	Edleen
	Kempton park
Telephone Number:	082 849 8564
Email address:	35981849@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Research Topic:	The experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities
Type of qualification	Masters'
Number and type of schools:	All Schools
District/s/HO	15 Districts

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

04/04/2023

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below are met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

ADDENDUM C – APPROVAL LETTER FORM DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION (DBE) (continued)

1. The letter would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
2. The District/Head Office Senior Manager/s must be approached separately, and in writing, for permission to involve District/Head Office Officials in the project.
3. Because of the relaxation of COVID 19 regulations researchers can collect data online, telephonically, physically access schools, or may make arrangements for Zoom with the school Principal. Requests for such arrangements should be submitted to the GDE Education Research and Knowledge Management directorate.
4. The Researchers are advised to wear a mask at all times, Social distance at all times, Provide a vaccination certificate or negative COVID-19 test, not older than 72 hours, and Sanitise frequently.
5. A copy of this letter must be forwarded to the school principal and the chairperson of the School Governing Body (SGB) that would indicate that the researcher/s has been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.
6. A letter/document that outlines the purpose of the research and the anticipated outcomes of such research must be made available to the principals, SGBs, and District/Head Office Senior Managers of the schools and districts/offices concerned, respectively.
7. The Researcher will make every effort to obtain the goodwill and cooperation of all the GDE officials, principals, and chairpersons of the SGBs, teachers, and learners involved. Persons who offer their cooperation will not receive additional remuneration from the Department while those that opt not to participate will not be penalised in any way.
8. Research may only be conducted after school hours so that the normal school program is not interrupted. The Principal (if at a school) and/or Director (if at a district/head office) must be consulted about an appropriate time when the researcher/s may carry out their research at the sites that they manage.
9. Research may only commence from the second week of February and must be concluded before the beginning of the last quarter of the academic year. If incomplete, an amended Research Approval letter may be requested to conduct research in the following year.
10. Items 6 and 7 will not apply to any research effort being undertaken on behalf of the GDE. Such research will have been commissioned and be paid for by the Gauteng Department of Education.
11. It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain written parental consent of all learners that are expected to participate in the study.
12. The researcher is responsible for supplying and utilising his/her research resources, such as stationery, photocopies, transport, faxes, and telephones, and should not depend on the goodwill of the institutions and/or the offices visited for supplying such resources.
13. The names of the GDE officials, schools, principals, parents, teachers, and learners that participate in the study may not appear in the research report without the written consent of each of these individuals and/or organisations.
14. On completion of the study, the researcher/s must supply the Director: Knowledge Management & Research with one Hard Cover bound and an electronic copy of the research.
15. The researcher may be expected to provide short presentations on the purpose, findings, and recommendations of his/her research to both GDE officials and the schools concerned.
16. Should the researcher have been involved with research at a school and/or a district/head office level, the Director concerned must also be supplied with a summary of the purpose, findings, and recommendations of the research study.

The Gauteng Department of Education wishes you well in this important undertaking and looks forward to examining the findings of your research study.

Kind regards

.....
Dr. Gumani Mukatuni
Acting CES: Education Research and Knowledge Management

DATE: 04/04/2023

2

Making education a societal priority

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management

7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001

Tel: (011) 355 0488

Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za

Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

ADDENDUM D – LETTER OF INVITATION

Enquiries: Mr NJ Marais

Reference: Masters Research –

Social Work Reference number: 8/4/4/1/2

Attention: XXXXXXXXXXXX

From: Mr NJ Marais

Master's Student Department of Social Work – University of South Africa (UNISA)

Subject: Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear Sir / Madam

Research Topic: *The experiences and challenges of school based social workers in rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.*

I am Nicho Marais, student number 35981849, currently enrolled at the University of South Africa (Unisa) as a master's student within the Department of Social Work. I hereby request your permission, assistance and support in allowing me to interview the social worker of your school as a member of the target population of the above mentioned study.

The research is to be conducted by myself under the supervision of Dr. AG Adlem, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Work of UNISA. The ethical clearance number from the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee (UNISA) to undertake the study, is:
35981849_CREC_CHS_2023.

To assist you in granting approval of this request, I have attached the following documents to inform you of the intended study:

- Participant information sheet;
- Approval letter from the Gauteng Department of Basic Education;
- Request to participate in the study;
- Consent to participate in the study; and
- Interview guide.

Please inform me of your decision and on granting this request, I will contact the social worker to establish his or her willingness to participate in the research and to set up an appointment for the research interview.



NJ MARAIS

NJ Marais

Researcher



AG Adlem

DR AG Adlem

Supervisor

ADDENDUM D – LETTER OF INVITATION (CONTINUEUD)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research title: The experiences and challenges of school based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

Researcher: Nicolaas Jacobus Marais

Ethics clearance reference number: 35981849_CREC_CHS_2023

Research permission reference number (if applicable): DBE 8/4/4/1/2

Dear Prospective Participant

Title: The experiences and challenges of school based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities.

My name is Nicolaas Jacobus Marais. I am doing a research study with Dr. Anri Adlem, a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Work at UNISA, towards a Master's Degree in Social Work at the University. We are inviting you to participate in the above-named study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could enable the researcher to achieve the following outcomes:

- To develop an in-depth understanding of the preparedness, attitudes, experiences and challenges of school social workers rendering welfare services to youth sexual minority groups.
- Based on the perspectives school social workers, to proffer recommendations on how existing strategies of social work intervention at schools can be enhanced to assist with the rendering of intervention services to youth sexual minorities or groups.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in the proposed study because of your direct experience in rendering welfare services to youth sexual minority groups, which will be investigated. Considering your direct experience regarding these services, you are deemed to be well positioned to share the most useful or relevant information based on the research goals. The information that you provide will not be based on hearsay. The researcher will obtain research data from several participating school social workers. Before selecting participants, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from UNISA and permission to conduct the proposed study from the National department of Basic Education. Permission was obtained from the National Department of Basic Education's Psycho-Social Services for school based social workers to participation in the study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

You will be required to participate in two interview sessions. The first interview session will be for about an hour, will be recorded (with your permission) and the researcher will also make notes. Interview questions

will be open-ended questions, which will allow you to respond as you wish. The second interview, during which the researcher will eventually present the research findings to you to get your comments on its accuracy, will also be for about an hour.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you decide to take part, you will be given the proposed study's information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time from participating in the research and without giving any reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you participate in this study, the researcher undertakes to share research findings and recommendations in the form of strategies for social work intervention to address intervention services to youth sexual minorities. It is envisaged that these strategies will be used by stakeholders such as social workers, schools and relevant government departments.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

The risk of participation in the proposed study is medium but manageable. The researcher will take all necessary steps to ensure that no participant is exposed to harm, by adhering to the ethical principles of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity of all participants. Debriefing services will be made available to all participants throughout the study. Attached is a letter from a social worker who will be offering debriefing should this be required.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The researcher commits to comply with the Protection of Personal Information Act (no. 4 of 2013). Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give; this measure refers to anonymity. Instead, your responses will be given a code number or a pseudonym; you will only be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings; this measure refers to confidentiality.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for ensuring that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will only be available to people working on the study unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for a prescribed period of five years in a locked cupboard/ filing cabinet at my social work practice's office for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years,

hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

The proposed study, for which the researcher will have to source funds for is being conducted for academic purposes. Therefore, participants will not receive payment for participation in the study, but the researcher will ensure that participants do not incur any costs as far as possible for interview purposes. Interviews will be conducted at the participant's preferred places (school, home, or workplace settings) or alternatively via social media platforms like Microsoft Teams or Zoom.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Human Sciences, UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Nicolaas Jacobus Marais on 0828498564 or at 35981849@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible to participants soon after the completion of the data analysis process and will be incorporated in the final report.

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact me at 0828498564 or 35981849@mylife.unisa.ac.za or the study supervisor: Dr Anri Adlem via adlemag@unisa.ac.za; or alternatively the head of the Research Committee, Prof HM Williams via willihm@unisa.ac.za or on telephone number 0124294269

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for your willingness to participating in this study.

Kind regards



NJ MARAIS

Nicolaas Jacobus Marais

ADDENDUM E - CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

RESEARCH TITLE: THE EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF SCHOOL BASED SOCIAL WORKERS RENDERING INTERVENTION SERVICES TO YOUTH SEXUAL MINORITIES.

Researcher: Nicolaas Jacobus Marais

I, (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

- I have read (or had explained to me) and understand the study as explained in the information sheet.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).
- I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.
- I agree to the recording of the interview.
- I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (Please print)

Participant Signature..... Date:

Researcher's Name & Surname(Please print)

Researcher's signature Date:

ADDENDUM F – LETTER FROM THE DEBRIEFER

Mr NJ Marais

RE: ACCEPTANCE FOR PARTICIPANT DEBRIEFING SERVICES

To whom it may concern:

This letter follows your request for debriefing assistance towards your research participants. It is with pleasure to inform you that I accept your request and would be of assistance to you. I am willing to assist your research participants with debriefing services at no cost where needed.

I am a qualified and registered social worker holding a Master's degree in Social Work. I have a good understanding of counselling services and debriefing. My registration number with the SACSSP is [REDACTED].

I have 10 years' experiences practicing as a social worker. I do understand the ethical responsibilities involved in your research study as it is linear with the code of ethics in the social work profession.

You are requested to kindly ensure that there is at least a weeks' notice give to me before you begin with the data collection process to ensure I avail myself should debriefing be required. Your prospective participants need to schedule appointments with me for debriefing which will only be conducted after hours.

Wishing you all the best in your research study.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

11/01/2023

ADDENDUM G – EDITOR LETTER

DR J LOMBARD
RESEARCH REPORT CRITICAL READING, LANGUAGE & TECHNICAL EDITING

Cell: 078 116 8018
e-mail: berto@woodcarving.co.za

136 Erich Mayer St
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EDITOR'S LETTER

EDITING OF MSW DISSERTATION: MARAIS, NICOLAAS JACOBUS (s/no 35981849)

This is to certify that I have critically read and edited Mr Nicho Marais' dissertation for the degree Master of Social Work (MSW) at UNISA, entitled:

The experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

The following aspects of the dissertation were edited:

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Sentence structure
- Logical sequencing
- Consistency of layout
- Consistency of referencing and in-text references
- Consistency and completeness of reference list

The responsibility to do the corrections and implement my comments and suggestions correctly, remains that of the student.



DR J LOMBARD
29 November 2023

The experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

by N J Marais

Submission date: 12-Dec-2023 10:03AM (UTC+0200)

Submission ID: 2256633976

File name: Dissertation_Turnitin_Final.docx (1.37M)

Word count: 128656

Character count: 759436

The experiences and challenges of school-based social workers rendering intervention services to youth sexual minorities

ORIGINALITY REPORT



Exclude quotes On

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Exclude bibliography On