

**TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES IN MANAGING SEXUAL HARASSMENT
AMONG LEARNERS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, SESHEGO CIRCUIT,
LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

by

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that I 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.

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KEY TERMS DESCRIBING THE TOPIC OF A DISSERTATION

This study, titled '**Teachers' Experiences in Managing Sexual Harassment Among Learners in Secondary Schools, Seshego Circuit, Limpopo Province**', was conducted with the purpose of probing the experiences of teachers in dealing with sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The study took place in selected schools in a rural/semi-rural area, where high incidences of sexual harassment had been recorded. The study was undertaken in an effort to address the problem and identify why this was occurring as well as what teachers and school management were doing or could undertake to reduce and even stop this scourge.. The researcher made use of qualitative research to identify and study in depth the phenomenon and yield insight into and understanding of the problem. Findings from the study revealed disparities in teachers' understanding of sexual harassment and this contributed to the separate way sexual harassment is handled when reported. The study revealed that teachers do not proactively prevent sexual harassment at these schools, nor are there any corrective measures in place for the different levels of offences.

KEY TERMS:

Sexual harassment, Puberty, Proactive measures, Sexualised behaviour, Teachers experiences, Adolescence, Puberty, Sexual violence, Learner to learner harassment, Sexually offensive behaviour.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Almighty God, who strengthens me through the power of his Holy Spirit to be able to finish the good work He started in me.

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment among learners is a pervasive problem in secondary schools that is common, especially during the learners' adolescence. An increased prevalence of sexual harassment among learners starts concomitantly with the onset of puberty. The accompanied developmental changes trigger learners to typically engage in activities such as opposite sex companionships or their desire for romantic relationships, which increases the risk for more deviant sexualised behaviour perpetrated towards fellow learners. Because unwelcomed sexual attention inevitably occurs during puberty, teachers often do not pay the attention necessary to identify and address sexualised behaviour among learners. In this study, sexual harassment is conceptualised under the umbrella of unwanted and unwelcomed sexual attention that ranges from verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment perpetrated between learners. Against this background, this study was conducted with the purpose of exploring the experiences of teachers in dealing with sexual harassment among learners. The researcher made use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the main theoretical framework undergirding the study and also as a theoretical lens with which experiences were probed and understood.

In accordance with the qualitative nature of the study, a case study was used as a suitable strategy. It allowed the researcher to conduct an enquiry into the teachers' real-life experiences by giving them an opportunity to report their experiences. The choice for the use of a case study was supported by the fact that the study was located within the interpretive paradigm. A purposive sampling method was used to select four teachers from each of the four secondary schools. Only teachers with at least four years of teaching experience participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at the four different secondary schools with the 16 teachers.

Findings from the study revealed disparities in teachers' understanding of sexual harassment and this contributed to teachers' individually interpreted ways sexual harassment is handled when such occurrence is reported to them. The study also revealed a worrisome categorisation of the forms of sexual harassment that

teachers mostly deal with. Most physical forms of sexual violation are dealt with by the teachers, while any other forms of sexual harassment that do not involve violence are merely reprimanded, without any punishment being given to the perpetrators. Teachers experience a number of barriers and challenges in addressing sexual harassment between learners. The schools do not seem to have any policies or clear structures in place that enable teachers to take proactive measures against sexual harassment in their schools.

The researcher recommends that in dealing with sexual harassment among learners training sessions and workshops should be offered to all teaching staff. The training sessions should challenge the role of power dynamics, gender norms, sexual education sensitivity and harmful cultural stereotyping that permeate the school environment, which is a gateway to condoning and normalising certain acts of sexual harassment. It is also imperative that school managers develop clear discipline strategies that teachers can use to create a healthier teaching and learning environment.

KEYWORDS: Sexual harassment, sexualised behaviour, adolescence, puberty, learner to learner harassment, sexually offensive behaviour.

KAKARETŠO

Tlaišo ka thobalano gare ba barutwana ke bothata bja kakaretšo gape bja go tlwaelega mo dikolong tša sekontari, kudu nakong ya go tšwa mahlalagading ga barutwana. Ditiragalo tšeo di golago tša tlaišo ka thobalano gare ga barutwana di thoma gotee le go thoma ga boswa. Diphetogo tša kgolo tšeo di akaretšago le kgahlego ya dikamano tša marato di dira gore barutwana ba dire ditiro tša segwera le batho ba bong bja go fapana le bja bona, seo se oketšago kotsi ya maitshwaro a thobalano ao a dirwago go barutwana ka bona. Ka ge šedi ye e sa amogelegego ya thobalano ntle le kgonono e direga nakong ya boswa, barutiši gantši ga ba hlokomele tlhokego ya go utolla le go šogana le maitshwaro a thobalano gare ga barutwana. Le ge barutiši ba swanetše go kgatha tema ye kgolo go lwantšha maitshwaro a go se be botse mo sekolong, gantši ba hlokomologa goba go tšea bofefo maitshwaro ao a hlolago tlaišo ya thobalano, ao ba a tšeago go ba a amana le barutwana bao ba thomago go ba le 'dihomouno tša go gola' gomme ba bangwe ba re ke go 'raloka'. Se se ka dira gore go e be 'setlwaedi' sa ditiro le dikgaruru mo tikologong ya sekolo. Mo thutong ye, tlaišo ka thobalano e akaretšwa ka fase ga thekgo ya šedi ya go se nyakege gape ya go se amogelege yeo e tlogago go tlaišo ya thobalano ya molomo le yeo e sego ya molomo go ya go ya mmele yeo e dirwago go barutwana. Kgahlanong le botšo bjo, thuto ye e dirilwe ka nepo ya go nyakišiša maitemogelo a barutiši a go šogana le tlaišo ya thobalano gare ga barutwana. Monyakišiši o šomišitše teori ya lenaneo la ekholotši la Bronfenbrenner bjalo ka tlhako ya teori ye e fago thekgo nyakišišo le gape bjalo ka pono ya teori yeo maitemogelo a nyakišišwago le go kwešišwa.

Go ya ka mohuta wa boleng wa nyakišišo, go šomišitšwe mokgwa wa nyakišišo ya go tsenelela bjalo ka mokgwa wa maleba. O dumelela monyakišišo go botšiša ka maitemogelo a bophelo bja nnete bja barutiši ka go ba fa sebaka sa go bega maitemogelo a bona. Kgetho ya go šomiša nyakišišo ya go tsenelela e thekgilwe ke gore thuto e theilwe go mmotlolo wa tlhathollo. Mokgwa wa go dira mohlala wo o nepišago o šomišitšwe go kgetha barutiši ba bane go tšwa go tše dingwe le tše dingwe tša dikolo tša senkontari tše nne. Ke barutiši fela bao ba nago le maitemogelo a mengwaga ye mene ya go ruta bao ba kgathilego tema mo thutong. Mokgwa wa go botšiša dipotšišo wo o beakantšwego le wo o se wa beakanywago le barutiši ba 16 o dirilwe go dikolo tša sekontari tša go fapana tše nne.

Dikutollo go tšwa go thuto di tšweletša phapano go kwešišo ya barutiši ya tlaišo ka thobalano gomme hlathollo ye ya motho e kgathilego tema ka mekgwa ya go fapana ya tlaišo ya thobalano e swarwago ka gona ge tiragalo yeo e direga. Thuto e tšweletša gape tlhopo ya go belaetša ya mekgwa ya tlaišo ya thobalano yeo barutiši ba šogana go le yona. Ba šogana kudu le mekgwa ya tlhorišo ya thobalano ya mmele, mola mehuta ye mengwe ya thobalano yeo e sa amego dikgaruru e no kgalwa, ntle le go fa mosenyi kotlo. Barutiši ba itemogela mapheko a mmalwa le ditlhohlo ka go šogana le tlaišo ya thobalano gare ga barutwana. Dikolo go bonagala di se na dipholisi goba dibopego tša go kwagala tšeo di kgontšhago barutiši go tšea magato a ka pejana kgahlanong le tlaišo ya thobalano dikolong tša bona. Ba bonagala ba tšea magato fela, ge e le gore ba a tšea, go botša barutwana gore maitshwaro a bona ga se a maleba. Monyakišiši o šišinya gore go swanetše go ba le tshedimošo le tlhahlo tšeo di abelwago barutiši ka moka dikolong gore ba kgone go laola tlaišo ka thobalano gare ga barutwana, Thuto yeo e swanetše go lwantšha maemo a taolo ya bong, kwešišo ya thuto ya thobalano le dikgopolo tša setšo tša go se amogelege tšeo di lebanego le tikologo ya sekolo, yeo gantši e hlohleletšago mekgwa ye mengwe ya tlaišo ka thobalano. Baetapele ba dikolo ba swanetše go tšweletša melawana ya taolo yeo barutiši ba ka e šomišago go hlama tikologo ya go ruta le go ithuta ye e bolokegilego.

MaNTŠU a MOTHEO: Tlaišo ka thobalano, maitshwaro ao a lebanego le thobalano, mahlalagading, moswa, tlaišo ya morutwana go morutwana, maitshwaro a go se kgahliše a thobalano

OPSOMMING

Seksuele teistering onder leerders is 'n omvattende en algemene probleem in hoërskole, veral gedurende die leerders se adolessensie. 'n Verhoogde voorkoms van seksuele teistering onder leerders begin saam met die aanvang van puberteit. Die gepaardgaande ontwikkelingsveranderinge en 'n begeerte vir romantiese verhoudings veroorsaak dat leerders gewoonlik betrokke raak by aktiwiteite soos om geselskap te soek by die teenoorgestelde geslag, wat die risiko vergroot vir meer afwykende seksuele gedrag teenoor medeleerders. Aangesien ongenooide seksuele aandag noodwendig gedurende puberteit voorkom, gee onderwysers nie altyd die nodige aandag daaraan om geseksualiseerde gedrag onder leerders te identifiseer en aan te spreek nie. Hoewel onderwysers 'n groot rol moet speel om seksueel offensiewe optrede by die skool te onderdruk, ignoreer hulle dikwels gedrag wat seksuele teistering uitmaak of maak dit af as onbelangrik. Hulle beskou hierdie gedrag gewoonlik as gedrag wat geassosieer word met leerders se nuwe "ontwikkelende hormone" en sommige verwys daarna as "speel". Dit kan ongewenste optredes en geweld in die skoolomgewing "normaliseer". In hierdie studie word seksuele teistering gekonseptualiseer onder die sambreel van ongewenste en ongenooide seksuele aandag, wat wissel van verbale en nie-verbale teistering tot fisiese seksuele teistering onder leerders. Hierdie studie is teen hierdie agtergrond uitgevoer met die doel om die ervarings van onderwysers te ondersoek wat seksuele teistering by leerders moet hanteer. Die navorser het gebruik gemaak van Bronfenbrenner se ekologiese stelselteorie as die hoof teoretiese raamwerk wat die studie ondersteun en as 'n teoretiese lens waaronder ervarings ondersoek en verstaan is.

In ooreenstemming met die kwalitatiewe aard van die studie is 'n gevallestudie gebruik as 'n geskikte strategie. Dit het die navorser in staat gestel om die onderwysers se ervarings in die regte lewe te ondersoek deur vir hulle 'n geleentheid te gee om hulle ervarings te deel. Die keuse van 'n gevallestudie is ondersteun deur die feit dat die studie binne die vertolkende paradigma geleë is. 'n Doelbewuste steekproefnemingsmetode is gebruik om vier onderwysers te kies uit elk van die vier hoërskole. Slegs onderwysers met minstens vier jaar se onderrigervaring het deelgeneem aan die studie. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met 16 onderwysers is gedoen by die vier verskillende hoërskole.

Die bevindings van die studie toon strydighede in onderwysers se begrip van seksuele teistering en hierdie individuele interpretasie het bygedra tot die verskillende maniere hoe seksuele teistering hanteer is wanneer dit aan die onderwysers gemeld is. Die studie het ook 'n kommerwekkende kategorisering getoon in die soorte seksuele teistering waarmee onderwysers meestal te doen het. Hulle hanteer gewoonlik fisiese vorms van seksuele oortreding, terwyl ander vorms van seksuele teistering wat nie geweld behels nie slegs tereggewys word, sonder enige straf vir die oortreders. Onderwysers ervaar 'n aantal hindernisse en uitdagings om seksuele teistering onder leerders te hanteer. Dit blyk dat die skole nie enige beleide of duidelike strukture in plek het om onderwysers in staat te stel om proaktiewe stappe te neem teen seksuele teistering in hulle skole nie. In plaas daarvan lyk dit of hulle slegs reaktiewe stappe neem, indien enige, om leerders te vertel dat hulle gedrag ontoepaslik was.

Die navorser beveel aan dat in die hantering van seksuele teistering onder leerders, opleidingsessies en werksinkels aan alle onderwyspersoneel aangebied moet word. Die opleidingsessie moet die rol van magsdinamika, geslagnorme, sensitiwiteit oor seksuele opvoeding asook skadelike kulturele stereotipering binne die skoolomgewing uitdaag, wat die goedpraat en normalisering van sekere dade van seksuele teistering. Dit is ook noodsaaklik dat skoolbestuurders duidelike dissiplinestrategieë ontwikkel wat onderwysers kan gebruik om 'n gesonder onderrig- en leeromgewing te skep.

SLEUTELWOORDE: Seksuele teistering, geseksualiseerde gedrag, adolessensie, puberteit, leerder-tot-leerder-teistering, seksueel offensiewe gedrag.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAUW	American Association of University Women
CoC	Code of Conduct
DoE	Department of Education
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NSSF	The National School Safety Framework
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SASA	The South African School Act
SGB	School Governing Bodies
SBST	School-Based Support Team
SMT	School Management Team
US	United States
WHO	The World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

School is a learning environment designed to be a safe space, where teachers help nurture and foster learners' physical, emotional and academic development to maximise their learning opportunities. The National School Safety Framework (NSSF) South Africa (2015:8) describes schools as a holistic environment, where children acquire and improve their theoretical knowledge and work with each other. According to Cowan, Vaillancourt, Rossen and Pollitt (2013:2), learners can reach their highest potential and contribute to their community significantly when their school environment is safe, orderly and welcoming. However, safety in South African schools has been a significant concern for parents, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other stakeholders, as incidents of violence have been rife in South African schools (Department of Basic Education, 2015:7). Learners spend a large proportion of their time at school, where the curriculum is intended to develop the necessary skills for learners to succeed in life and become productive citizens. However, sexual harassment at school between learners has become a major concern and it infringes on the learners' safety and peace of mind.

Sexual harassment is rampant in secondary schools, which is "a well-known secret" that occurs in public schools (AAUW, 2011:20; Stein, Marshall & Tropp, 1993:1). Sexual harassment between learners takes place in the classrooms, the toilet facilities, on the schools' playgrounds, or even in front of a teacher. However, despite their regular occurrences and perpetrators' blatant behaviour, these incidents can go unnoticed or be totally ignored by the teachers. Stein, Marshall & Tropp (1993:1) described sexual harassment as violence that is often tolerated in the school environment and there is little or no adult intervention; teachers sometimes label these incidents as flirting or an acceptable developmental part of adolescents' growth. Anagnostopoulos, Buchanan and Lichty (2009:521) described learner-to-learner sexual harassment as "subtle" and they state that "teachers often find it challenging to distinguish between which behaviour constitutes sexual harassment and what is playful teasing or flirting". Therefore, teachers tend to ignore such behaviour, especially when it is only verbal harassment and "intervene only in more severe forms of

harassment while the more subtle ones go unchecked”.

However, what teachers do not seem to recognise is that sexual harassment can leave lasting physical, mental, emotional and behavioural symptoms in the lives of the victims (Eom, Restaino, Perkins, Neveln & Harrington 2015; Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd & Marttunen 2016). Learners who have been victims of sexual harassment by a peer at school have reported that they experienced a decrease in their performance at school, sometimes bunking classes, or being absent from school out of fear of further harassment, achieving lower grades in school subjects and general truancy (AAUW, 1993; Farhangpour, Maluleke & Mutshaeni, 2019; Fineran & Bennett, 1998; Usui & Blevins 2021). The consequences of being a victim of harassment are that the experience is likely to have a negative impact on the learners’ ability to learn. It can also have a range of other debilitating effects on their personality. It affects their academic performance at school and beyond. They often fail to acquire good grades, which may limit their career choices, stopping them from furthering their education at university or technical colleges and as a result of this, they may not be able to get well-paying jobs (Farhangpour, Maluleke & Mutshaeni, 2019; Fineran & Bennett, 1998). Wet (2009:5) illustrated that an excellent educational experience would enable learners to thrive and succeed; this is an educational environment where learners’ rights are valued, respected and actively supported and upheld by all learners and educators.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) conducted substantial research on learners’ experiences of sexual harassment at various elementary and high schools, defining sexual harassment as unwanted and unwelcome behaviours of a sexual nature, perpetrated towards another learner and infringing the learners’ right to learn (AAUW, 2011:20). This definition also agrees with those provided by other scholars (Du Plessis, Fouché & Van Wyk, 1998:418; Oosthuizen & De Wet, 2004:76). Stein, Marshall and Tropp (1993:1) defined sexual harassment as any form of unwanted attention perpetrated towards another person. Chiodo, Wolfe, Crooks, Hughes and Jaffe (2009:247) described sexual harassment as unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention, which may be verbal, non-verbal, or physical harassment targeted towards a learner and thereby making the educational environment a hostile and threatening one for the learner.

The commonly used term in these definitions is “unwanted and unwelcome”. As a result

of this “unwanted and unwelcome” sexual attention perpetrated towards fellow learners, sexual harassment infringes on learners’ constitutional and fundamental human rights, enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, specifically referring to the right to human dignity (Section 10), the right to freedom and security of the person (Section 12), the right to basic education (Section 29), the right to a safe environment (Section 24) and the right to privacy (Section 14) (RSA, 1996a). Sexual harassment in the classroom in terms of Section 9 of the Constitution expressly states that learners must be treated equally and have access to a schooling environment that is free from all forms of sexual harassment, irrespective of how it presents itself.

Learner-to-learner sexual harassment can occur in the form of verbal harassment, which typically includes sexual jokes, offensive comments about sexuality, or derogatory sexual remarks. Non-verbal harassment may consist of showing someone pornographic material, exposing a genital region, explicit graffiti and unwanted sexual behaviour. Physical harassment may include unwanted touching of sensitive body parts, such as breasts and buttocks, unwelcomed kissing, pinching sexually or coercing another learner into unwanted sexual behaviour (Skelton, 2008:10).

Considering the developmental perspective, sexual harassment among learners is deeply rooted in their biological and social developmental changes. Buhrmester and Furman (1987:1102) noted that learners have a great need for intimacy and belonging during their adolescence. According to Fineran and Bennett (1999:626), sexual harassment is a common way of adolescents associating with each other. The AAUW (AAUW, 2011:21) emphasised that sexual harassment behaviour and victimisation usually begin during the adolescent stage, but they tend to increase in prevalence during puberty, while learners are in secondary school (AAUW, 2011:21).

The transition from primary to secondary school, which occurs around the onset of puberty, places learners in an environment of peers across different age groups. The start of puberty underlies not only the development of their sexuality, but it is also the stage when their reproductive organs develop. Boys and girls begin to mature and visible physical differences emerge, such as changes in their physical size as well as development of secondary sexual characteristics and the maturation of their physiological mechanism. However, the timing of these biological changes may differ from learner to learner, which can impact how peers may respond to another peer’s

visible secondary sexual characteristics. Hormonal changes facilitate them engaging in new experiences and seeking new sensations (Goldstein, Lee, Gunn, Bradley, Lummer & Boxer, 2020:14). “Understanding pubertal timing is the debut of sexual initiation and romantic interest in the other sex because of gravitation towards the opposite sex” (Crone & Dahl, 2012:645). Girls who develop early are “more likely to receive sexual attention and may associate themselves with older peer groups and start dating relationships”, which tends to “coincide with the emerging perpetration and victimisation of sexual harassment” (Shahabuddin, 2008:256).

Meyer (2008b:557) revealed that behaviour that constitutes sexual harassment is often interpreted as “normal social interaction among adolescents” as a result of teachers failing to see the pervasive nature of the problem or to address it when it occurs. In a series of focus groups conducted with teachers in the United States (US) on bullying and sexual harassment, some teachers stated that it was futile to intervene in perpetrated sexual harassment among learners because learners are “cruel” (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein & Espelage, 2013:440). In that same study, some teachers stated that sexual harassment happened between adults in the workplace and was not a problem learners experienced among themselves (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein & Espelage, 2013:440).

Schwartz (2000:67) described learner-to-learner harassment as an extensive issue often overlooked by the educators, while it has adverse effects on learners and the general climate of the school. These findings agree with Mabusela’s (2006:55) findings at a semi-rural secondary school in the Eastern Cape Province. The study indicated that some educators “turned a blind eye to blatant acts of sexual harassment”; for example, when a learner complained to a teacher about being sexually harassed by a peer, the teachers would ignore such an accusation. Teachers may pretend not to see it, so that they would not need to act even if the harassment occurred in front of them during class sessions.

Numerous international studies have shown that sexual harassment among learners is often trivialised by teachers, especially if the harassment does not involve physical aggression or violence. Teachers often see it as “normal behaviour” among adolescent learners, although ignoring it may actually reinforce the occurrence of harassment (Larkin, 1995; Ringrose & Renold, 2011; Robinson, 2012). This may signify that only

the most severe forms of sexual harassment, such as rape and sexual assault, are labelled and given immediate attention. In contrast, the more covert forms of sexual harassment, like derogatory remarks and unwanted sexual gestures or physical contact, are regarded as being less concerning by most teachers. According to Grube and Lens (2003:175), teachers' attitudes towards sexual harassment of learners may be based on their lack of understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment. It could also be based on their own reluctance of having to deal with a subject that is taboo in many traditional homes, including their own cultural backgrounds.

Benbenisty and Astor's studies (2005:56) demonstrated that sexual harassment in schools is a form of violence that has theoretical roots, which are connected to other forms of sexual violence and anti-social behaviour. A recent study conducted in South Africa showed that learners who are victims of sexual harassment by a peer at school often start to engage in risky behaviour as a consequence of having become victims. They may then indulge in or abuse alcohol, or use illicit drugs, which will lead to severe health problems in adulthood (Mabetha & De Wet 2018:2). Because of the rate of harassment and violence observed as taking place at South African public schools, it is not only learners who have started to feel unsafe, but teachers now also perceive their place of work as a dangerous place. Hence, "their priority is not teaching but survival" (Niekerk, 2003:169). In 2006, the then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor (2006:9) warned that "if we allow violence, abuse and drugs to become a familiar and accepted part of schooling, our future is lost". When deviant behaviours, such as sexual harassment, are trivialised or ignored in a learning environment, it creates a climate where other anti-social behaviours also emerge. This can lead to an established pattern of deviant or even dangerous or criminal behaviour of these learners in adulthood.

Historically, perpetration of sexual harassment has been typically associated with boys, while girls are the victims, but research has proven that both boys and girls are perpetrators and victims of this behaviour. For example, Benbenisty and Astor (2005:58-59) and Skelton (2008:13) revealed that boys experience more sexual harassment from their male peers than girls. The American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (as cited in Blakemore et al., 2009) found that 79% of male learners and 81% of female learners between Grade 8 and Grade 11 have

reported experiences of peer-to-peer sexual harassment. Similarly, Felix and McMahon (2007) found that 85% of female learners experienced sexual harassment at school and 15% of those learners experienced repeated victimisation, while 84% of male learners experienced sexual harassment at school, including 16% reporting chronic harassment. A study conducted in the Free State Province in South Africa by Jacobs and Wet (2017:6) revealed that Grade 8 to Grade 12 boys experience more physical and non-verbal sexual harassment by their peers than girls; however, girls experience more verbal sexual harassment than their male counterparts. The study reported that demography and school size determine what type of sexual harassment learners tend to be exposed to and which gender is most often victimised.

Many studies have demonstrated that sexual harassment among and between learners has become a reality in many schools across the globe, making the school environment unsafe, hostile and intimidating. A survey conducted in Canada also demonstrated that sexual harassment is a rising problem both within and outside the school environment. It revealed that out of 1800 learners across 23 high schools, over 50% of girls reported being victims of sexual comments, gestures and unwelcomed sexual touch by a peer, while 30% of the learners, both boys and girls, reported being sexually harassed during their first year at secondary school (Canadian Press, 2015:2). The study further revealed that sexual harassment among learners puts a psychosocial strain on the learners' health and negatively affects the school environment/climate and learners' academic progress.

An inquiry conducted in England and Wales about child-related sexual violence revealed that most sexual harassment at schools is peer-related (Ward & Rodger, 2018:2). This can be explained by learners spending more time at school with each other than with their teachers. This applies especially to learners who stay at the school hostel, which increases the likelihood of them being sexually harassed by their peers. A study done in Finland among secondary school learners aged 14 to 18 years revealed that learners are exposed to sexual harassment at school, "where 9.6% of boys experience unwanted sexual attention and 3.0% of boys experience sexual coercion. In contrast, 37.8% of girls experience unwelcome sexual attention and 11.8% experience sexual pressure" (Kaltiala-heino, Savioja, Fröjd & Marttunen, 2018:52). A national study on sexual harassment carried out among high school learners in the US

revealed that “46% of girls and 22% of boys reported experiencing sexual harassment in the form of unwelcome sexually loaded comments, gestures or jokes”. It also stated that “13% of girls and 3% boys mentioned being subjects of unwanted touching”. The study further revealed that “3.5% girls and 0.2% boys were forced to perform a sexual act” at school (Hill & Holly, 2011:6).

Thus, teachers’ experiences of having had to manage sexual harassment in schools will be able to contribute meaningfully to information on how to address the pervasive problem of sexual harassment among learners. Exploring teachers’ experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners will also illuminate what teachers understand as being sexual harassment and reveal possible weaknesses in the school environment regarding this problem. Teachers’ attitude towards the problem of how to handle sexual harassment in school will impact how and when teachers choose to intervene in the incidents they witness at school. In addition to this, teachers’ experiences in managing sexual harassment will elucidate what forms of sexual harassment they address and what measures are used at school to prevent sexual harassment taking place among learners, which is the core to containing the problem.

Adolescence is a stage in which relationships are vital as adolescents are defining themselves and establishing their self-esteem (De Wet, 2009). Teachers can help learners to manage and nurture these relations because they are the only agents of change at school that can teach learners an appropriate way of behaving around their peers while shaping their emerging adulthood. Various researchers have focused on the prevalence and the effects of sexual harassment among peers (Brown, Biefeld & Elpers, 2020; Eom, Restaino, Perkins, Neveln & Harrington, 2015; Farhangpour, Maluleke & Mutshaeni, 2019; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020; Jacobs & Wet, 2017; Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd and Marttunen, 2016; Usul & Blevins, 2021; Ward & Rodger, 2018), but less attention has been given to teachers’ experiences in managing this behaviour.

The study by Farhangpour, Maluleke and Mutshaeni (2019:29), which was conducted in Limpopo, South Africa, revealed that sexual harassment is one of the negative incidents that happen in secondary schools. The focus of their study was on the emotional and academic impacts of sexual harassment on learners, while the current study focused on semi-rural secondary school teachers’ experiences in managing sexual harassment

observed in Seshego.

1.2 STUDY RATIONALE

Sexual harassment among learners can become normalised when teachers do not take swift action against it the moment they notice it taking place. Many studies indicate that some teachers are unable to recognise sexual harassment among learners when it is perpetrated and some believe it is normal behaviour that should be treated as a “rite of passage”, since the learners are adolescents (Charmaraman, Jones, Stein & Espelage, 2013; Meyer, 2008b; Usul & Blevins, 2021). However, teachers are critical role players in preventing this violence. Therefore, it is important to understand their experiences in managing this violence and revealing how each teacher or school authority approaches the problem. This study aimed to identify the threshold of what counts as sexual harassment in various schools as well as the barriers that prevent teachers from addressing this behaviour among learners.

South African scholars have defined sexual harassment in various forms, including the prevalence of educator-to-learner sexual harassment, focusing on girls being victimised (Deane, 2003; George 2001; HRW, 2001; Prinsloo, 2006); peer-based sexual harassment in various schools (Brown et al., 2009; Deane, 2003; Mabusela, 2006); sexual harassment and the constitutional right of the victim (Prinsloo, 2005, 2006); consequences of peers’ sexual harassment (HRW, 2001; Jacobs & Wet, 2017); the gendered nature of harassment and sexual violence (Brookes & Higson-Smith, 2004; Jacobs & Wet, 2017; Mabusela 2006; Morrell, 1998, 2002). However, in South Africa, there seems to be a lack of data concerning teachers’ experiences of managing sexual harassment among learners at secondary schools; yet teachers play an important role in challenging the perpetration of sexual harassment among learners.

Seshego is a semi-rural area in Limpopo Province, populated mainly by black South Africans. A recent study by Farhangpour et al., (2019:5-6) reported that “Limpopo’s rural secondary school learners are not immune to the victimisation by peers’ sexual harassment”. The study stated that “learners who have been a victim of sexual harassment tend to become less active in class, joined gang groups, developed suicidal thought, became depressed and some had to repeat a grade”. Exposure to sexual harassment has been reported to have a negative impact on learners’ emotional well-being and their academic performance.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The South African School's Act (SASA) 1996 (Act 84 of 1996) section 8-9 states that it is the constitutional duty of teachers to ensure learners' safety at school by enforcing the established school Code of Conduct (CoC) for learners, thereby ensuring that every learner knows that it is their legal obligation to adhere to the prescribed CoC. This CoC ensures that learners practise a culture of respect, tolerance and cooperation, so that every learner can enjoy effective teaching and learning in a safe environment. Teachers have to act in a '*loco parentis*' role during normal intramural or extramural activities at school (RSA, 1996b).

Although sexual harassment is prevalent among learners in secondary schools, research has shown that teachers often ignore this behaviour, perhaps because there is a general misunderstanding of the term sexual harassment. They tend to only attend to behaviour that involves physical and sexual violence rather than covert forms of abuse such as "sexual name calling or offensive comment about body parts" (Rahimi & Liston, 2011: 801), whereby they make the perpetration of sexual harassment among learners even more invisible. Teachers' misunderstanding of the encompassing definition of sexual harassment may lead to them ignoring such violence or even blaming the victim for being weak or making themselves vulnerable (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Rahimi & Liston, 2011).

Sexual harassment is harmful, but perpetrators are rarely punished. Instead, victims and bystanders are often socially punished by their peers for reporting it (Brown, Biefeld & Elpers, 2020:171). Researchers have revealed that learners do not report sexual harassment victimisation anymore because most teachers trivialise it and therefore they believe that reporting such transgressions would not make a difference (Brown et al., 2020; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020). Therefore, the culture of not reporting and the silent or outspoken acceptance surrounding this unacceptable behaviour among learners may normalise it in schools.

Netshitangani's (2019:28) study, investigating the nature of school violence, emphasised that when eliminating violence, such as sexual harassment, at school, all factors that contribute to the violence must be considered because violence affects both males and females and it is committed by both. This study was based on the

assumption that teachers have the core role of containing the problem; so their experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners will reveal how and when they choose to intervene in incidents of sexual harassment among learners they witness at school. Therefore, exploring their experiences in managing sexual harassment in the school environment is essential to understanding the complexity of the problem and how they can indeed play a role in this mitigation. A sexual-harassment-free environment can be a reality at school when policies that foster constitutional values are consistently implemented in the school environment. Constitutional values such as mutual respect, respect for human dignity, integrity, justice and equality at school could help create a more conducive school environment free from harassment and violence in any form it may present itself. Prevalence of sexual harassment begins in Grade 7 and continues until late high school in Grade 12 (Rinehart, Espelage & Bub, 2020). This research sought to explore various teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools from grades 8 to 12.

1.4 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

A research question should be feasible, interesting, novel, ethical, relevant and manageable (Ratan, Anand & Ratan, 2019:16). The research question directs the investigation of the study, so that a clear goal can be focused on and achieved. The following are this study's research questions.

1.4.1 Main research question

What are teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners?

1.4.2 Research sub-questions

- a) What forms of sexual harassment among learners do teachers mainly address in secondary schools?
- b) What barriers do teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?
- c) What challenges do teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 The aim of the study

The aim of the study was to identify the forms of sexual harassment among learners that teachers mainly address in secondary schools and to identify the challenges and barriers that teachers are facing when addressing sexual harassment among learners at school from Grades 8 to 12.

1.5.2 The objectives of the study

- a) To identify the forms of sexual harassment among learners that teachers mainly address in secondary schools.
- b) To investigate the barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools.
- c) To investigate the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment in secondary schools.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study allowed secondary school teachers in Seshego to describe their experiences regarding sexual harassment among learners at school. Findings from the study uncovered teachers' response towards managing sexual harassment and revealed the barriers and challenges teachers experience when addressing these problems. Teachers need to be able to understand what sexual harassment among learners is, versus what can be regarded as normal adolescent conduct that does not include sexual harassment. The findings of the study could influence school policy developers to design sound school-based strategies by providing teachers and schools with better and more information on what behaviour constitutes sexual harassment and how teachers should address it in secondary schools. Findings from this research should be shared with the Department of Education (DoE), circuit managers, district offices, support staff and other teachers within the district. It is further hoped that the school organisations, teachers and different social structures within the schools could be provided with information as to how to avoid sexual harassment occurring and becoming normalised in schools (and beyond) when no actions are taken against it. A study of this nature could help the DoE realise the importance of putting in place a

structure that empowers learners to seek the help and intervention they need when they have been a victim of sexual violation or harassment at schools; especially in semi-rural or rural schools where sexual violation is shrugged off by adults.

1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The subject of sexual harassment was first documented in 1908 (Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Godd & Omenold, 1988). It was legally recognised and labelled as a problem in the 1970s, when research had been undertaken by Farley (Farley, 1978). The term sexual harassment gained greater awareness already when research was conducted after feminists had expressed their concerns publicly about the unequal treatment of women in the workplace in the 1960s. Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow (1988, 1995) proposed a three-factor structural model of sex-offensive behaviour, which are gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. This three-factor structural model was originated from Till's (1980) qualitative analysis of sexual harassment experiences of college women, which was categorised into five types of sexual harassment, namely gender harassment, seductive behaviour, sexual bribery, sexual coercion and sexual imposition. Based upon this work, Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow (1988, 1995) developed a three-factor model of offensive sexual behaviour, which most researchers used to conceptualise as what sexual harassment was about. Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow (1995) proposed that the behavioural construct of sexual harassment was composed of a three-factor structural model, but that this is conceptually distinct from other models, including gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. The conceptual framework for this study was drawn from Fitzgerald, Gelfand and Drasgow's (1995) work.

1.7.1 Forms of sexual harassment

Gendered harassment: Fitzgerald et al. (1995) defined this kind of harassment as harassment mostly perpetrated towards women. It includes behaviour that degrades people's gender and sex roles, and it may be in the form of verbal and non-verbal behaviour that conveys insults, degrading or threatening sex discrimination and intimidating acts that create a hostile or harsh environment for the victim. Examples may include sexual epithets, slurs, taunts, the display or distribution of obscene or pornographic materials intended to insult, degrading remarks that are gender-related and jokes that connote superiority of own gender. In an academic setting such as

schools, gendered harassment may be in the form of sexist comments and outrageous stunts, especially if the targeted victim expresses their sexuality in a way that does not conform to the majority of the population at school (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Unwanted sexual attention: Unwanted sexual attention occurs when unsolicited or unwanted sexual intentions and desires are directed towards another learner; such actions could be prolonged staring, inappropriate touching of another learner's body, a proposal for sexual activities and comments relating to the sexual part of the learner's body. The harassment includes all kinds of unwanted sex-related attention that may be verbal, non-verbal or physical, usually offensive and unreciprocated, making the environment uncomfortable for the recipient (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Sexual coercion: The legal concept for this harassment is *quid pro quo*; it is sexually related cooperation in return for employment or being granted a special favour from someone superior by exerting either psychological or physical pressure on an individual to get sexual cooperation from them. This includes policing others for sexual favours, threatening an individual or physically touching an individual to get sexual cooperation from them (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

This study focused on learner-to-learner sexual harassment. Since the learners in this study were adolescents, unwanted sexual attention is believed by many to be inevitable among them as their sexual gravitation may be communicated in an offensive way. This makes the school environment uncomfortable for the victims and often also for the other learners. Sexual harassment will be conceptualised under the umbrella of all unwanted sexual attention that ranges from verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual overtures. This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner (1994, 2000) provided a theoretical framework whereby the processes that shape individual development can be examined. The ecological systems theory emphasises the importance of considering multiple levels of influence on human development. These influences include one's family, school, peers and the wider community, which play a role in impacting the lived experiences of human development, irrespective of how small or big the influence is on the individual.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory consists of the following systems: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem and (e) chronosystem. The ecological system starts in the immediate environment, such as the home, the learner's family and school, which are the primary settings for that person's growth. Bronfenbrenner referred to it as the first level of the ecosystem. The first level, as the foundational setting of the ecosystem, interacts with every other level of the ecological system, which include the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem, which can either promote, impact or hinder an individual's development, depending on the quality of the interactions.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory which is the framework used in this study, was suitable in that it provides a lens with which exploring teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners can be identified. It looks at individuals holistically, channelling a basis for understanding people's beliefs, perceptions, experiences, actions and inactions. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system takes into consideration larger structures in the ecological system, especially when it comes to understanding an individual or the role they play in various circumstances or life situations. A detailed exposition of empirical literature on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system as the main theoretical framework, which undergirds the study, will be presented in Chapter 2.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

A research methodology provides research strategies and instruments that are used for collecting and analysing data. It includes how a study will be carried out, with whom and where. The methodology chosen by the researcher determines how a phenomenon under study will be explored. Yin (2013:17) illustrated that a research design is a roadmap to obtain answers or derive a conclusion to the initial research questions. A research design is the master plan of what is to be carried out. This includes how data will be collected, the precise techniques that will be utilised in the study, and a detailed description of how the data will be analysed. Higson-Smith and Bless (2011: 63) defined a research design as a defined layout that guides the researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting the data collected. The research design, research methods, data analysis and the measures taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness and ethical standards that guided this study will be discussed

briefly. A detailed discussion of this section will be presented in Chapter 3.

1.9.1 Research design

In this section, the researcher briefly discusses interpretivism as paradigms within which the study was located. This is followed by discussing the use of a qualitative approach as an appropriate method for exploring teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners. Lastly, the use of a case study as a suitable research strategy is explained.

1.9.1.1 Interpretive paradigm

This study was designed to explore teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners in various secondary schools. To achieve this research, the researcher must understand the phenomenon from individuals' perspective in their everyday context. The interpretive research paradigm was helpful in this context because it investigates how people perceive and understand their world. The researchers become part of meaning-making as they interact with the participants (Phothongsunan, 2010:1). Interpretive researchers approach their studies in a flexible manner, obtaining participants' recall of their own experiences, either of a particular group or culture (Nguyen, Cao Thanh & Thi Le Thanh, 2015:25). This means that it can accommodate various perspectives and versions of reality from participants' viewpoint. According to Willis (2007:194), multiple perspectives are garnered from various people and from different groups with different worldviews. Morehouse (2011:12) asserted that engaging and accepting numerous views in interpretivism leads to a richer and deeper understanding of a phenomenon.

The researcher used the interpretivist paradigm because it yields insights and understanding of behaviour or action. It explains participants' actions from their point of view or perspective. It does not dominate the participants' comments as it uses research instruments, such as open-ended interviews (Scotland, 2012:4). The researcher has to gain an empathic understanding of human behaviour experiences, feelings and the meaning they give to everyday life. Phothongsunan (2010:4) asserted that the strength of the interpretive paradigm comes from its naturalist approach because it is participatory and inclusive. The researcher is able to examine the whole scenario in a natural setting, thereby obtaining the ideas and feelings of those being interviewed or observed, which also enables the interactive creation of ideas that

participants are unaware of (Chowdhury, 2014:3). Ikram and Kenayathulla (2022:46) asserted that the strength of the interpretive paradigm comes from its naturalist approach. The researcher visited the schools for the purpose of gathering information and gaining insight into the lived experiences of teachers who teach in Seshego.

1.9.1.2 Qualitative research

Creswell (2013:4) stated that qualitative research is used to explore and derive the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a problem. According to Horne (2018:29), researchers use the qualitative research method when they want to reach an in-depth understanding of participants' opinions, attitudes and beliefs, typically involving conversation and observation of participants in their natural settings. Punch (2009:310) asserted that qualitative data are rich and in-depth because the researcher has the opportunity to interact with participants and capture data through the process of paying attention to what they say and how they say it. Boeije (2010:21) stated that the purpose of the qualitative approach is to describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people attach to their experiences. Therefore, the researcher selected the qualitative research method to explore teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment, which presents a wide array of realities on this specific subject of inquiry. This was in a context in which such reality exists in a nuanced way, so information is expressed in words rather than statistics to make sense of the world and people's experiences. Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtler (2006:143) described the characteristics of qualitative research as "studies carried out in a natural setting", "questions are designed to explore, interpret, or understand a problem or social context", "the researcher takes on an interactive role and gets to know participants and their social context" and "data are reported in a narrative form". These authors also stated that "hypotheses emerge after the researcher begins data collection and these are modified throughout the study as new data are collected and analysed". Considering these characteristics, this approach was helpful for the current study because it enabled the researcher to interact closely with the teachers by getting to know them before collecting data. This process also allowed the teachers to express their own opinions, perceptions and experiences about the phenomenon under study in their natural setting at the four selected secondary schools in Seshego. A qualitative research approach was the most suitable design to allow the researcher to focus on

identifying teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners.

1.9.1.3 Case study

A case study design is suitable when a researcher aims to make an inquiry into an area that is relatively complex. Using this strategy, the researcher gained insights into sexual harassment and an understanding of the meaning teachers attach to it. The use of a case study as a research strategy in this study was premised on the fact that the views of teachers needed to be garnered regarding their experiences in managing sexual harassment at secondary schools and the challenges and barriers they are faced with in secondary schools. According to Bhattacharjee (2012:40), a case study is an in-depth investigation of a problem in one or more real-life settings over time. Yin (2003:2) described case studies as a method that allows complex social phenomena to be understood; it also enables researchers to retain the originality of life events in a holistic and meaningful manner. McMillan and Schumacher (2010:229) described a case study as a comprehensive examination of a case, which could be a group of people, a school or an individual separated for research, where the researchers engage with the participants so that information can be collected from multiple sources within the context to understand a problem. Case studies offer the advantage of flexibility and adaptability. In this way, researchers can tailor their approach to the research question and ensure that the study design aligns with the objectives of the research (Nhan, 2020). The case study design proved helpful because the researcher was able to probe the problem under study. The design generated rich and detailed insights and allowed the researcher to discover what was not known before. A single case study was used for the study, although four different secondary schools were included. Creswell (2013) emphasised that a single case study method explores phenomena that people experience over time through a detailed intensive data collection method from different sources and reports its findings in themes and descriptions.

1.9.2 Research methods

This section introduces the contextual background of the four schools that were selected for the study and the criteria for selection and sampling of participants. Thereafter, the researcher discusses the data collection instrument used to collect the data from participants. Data analysis and the procedures used to analyse the

data are briefly discussed.

1.9.2.1 Selection of participants and sampling

Bhattacharjee (2012:65) defined a population as the people or items with characteristics one wishes to study. Shukla (2020:1) described a population as a set of all the units with similar traits, whose findings from the research can be generalised. The schools chosen as research sites are all public schools in a semi-rural area, they are surrounded by informal settlements and rural areas. Most of these schools are not well-resourced and they lack facilities such as libraries, a computer lab, sports fields and school halls. Some of the selected secondary schools have mobile classrooms, which are dilapidated, and some classrooms are overcrowded with learners using broken tables or chairs.

The researcher chose this area to conduct the study in, because these secondary schools are situated in a disadvantaged area with mainly black African learners and different socio-economic backgrounds attending the schools. Schools in rural areas often report problems of violence among learners in school, learners arriving late for school, truancy, delinquency and a lack of proper school governance. There are mainly black African teachers employed at these schools. Seshego is divided into eight different residential zones and each zone has at least one or two secondary schools in its zone. The researcher decided to include at least four different zones and selected one school in each of these four zones to participate.

The targeted population for this study comprised a total of 105 educators from the selected four secondary schools in Seshego. The population of teachers in the study included teachers of different ages, gender and cultural background. All of them were teachers in secondary schools in the Seshego circuit: they could also be members of the school management team, or the disciplinary committee. Both male and female teachers were included.

Shukla (2020:3) defined a sample as the units selected from the population from which data are collected instead of all units of the population and their findings are generalised in the context of the entire population. A sample can also be described as the actual unit selected for observation (Bhattacharjee, 2012:65). The sample for this study consisted of 16 teachers, which included members of the school management team, school-based support team, subject teachers, disciplinary committee and both

male and female teachers. All participants took part in this study on a voluntary basis. Four schools in the Seshego circuit were included in the research and four teachers per school (16 teachers) were interviewed for the study.

Crossman (2017:257) defined a purposive sample as a non-probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of the population and the purpose of the study. Laerd (2012:58) explained that this type of sampling is the selection of units to be studied, which relies solely on the researcher's judgement.

This research used purposive sampling to choose which teacher was to be interviewed, but only teachers with at least four years of teaching experience were chosen to participate in the study, as the researcher believed that those with at least four years' teaching experience would have interacted more with learners and would have witnessed or experienced cases of learner-to-learner sexual harassment.

1.9.2.2 Instruments and data collection techniques

Data were collected using personal interviews with teachers who voluntarily agreed to be part of the study. Since a social phenomenon cannot be understood outside its context, teachers were interviewed in their own natural settings in the schools. Boyce and Neale (2006) described interviews as a qualitative research technique that involves questioning participants. This involves the researcher asking questions and having conversations with each individual participant to encourage them to express their points of view concerning the research problem. According to Young et al. (2018:11), "Interviewing relies on an interactive method in which mutual learning occurs between the interviewer and the interviewee. It also allows the interviewer to focus on the interviewees' perspective of what is important, thereby revealing additional problem areas, which the interviewer might not have considered".

In this study, the data collection method was in the form of semi-structured interviews. De Vos et al. (2011:122) noted that researchers use semi-structured interviews when they want to enquire and fully comprehend participants' beliefs about a particular problem or topic under study. Young et al. (2018:2) described semi-structured interviews as a question interview guide that enables flexibility because the interviewer can ask additional questions if a new line of enquiry develops during the interview.

Semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews enable the researcher to ask the

participants a series of questions. The researcher was able to interact with the participants and probe for further answers. The face-to-face interview sessions provided the researcher with the opportunity to observe participants' body language and have eye contact with them. Further discussion on justification of this approach is provided in Chapter 3, where the researcher elaborates on what was done before and during the interview sessions. The interview questions asked during the interview are provided in Chapter 3.

1.9.2.3 Data analysis and interpretation

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:52) reported that data analysis involves organising the data collected in such a way that the researcher can identify similar patterns and themes and analyse how the themes and patterns relate to each other. The thematic data analysis is one of the most common forms of qualitative research analysis. The researcher used a thematic analysis approach in analysing the data collected. This includes identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning or themes within qualitative data. Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove, (2016:103–108) described four phases in theme development used in qualitative and thematic analysis, which are “initialisation”, “construction”, “rectification” and “finalisation”. These phases were all adopted when developing the themes and subthemes for the study.

The “initialisation” phase consists of transforming all data collected into textual information. For this study, data were collected using face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The researcher also audio-recorded all interview sessions after consent had been granted by the participants. A recorder was used so that all responses could be captured and retained for replay in case the researcher missed some information during the interview. A manual transcription of participants' responses was done for data analysis.

The “construction” phase consisted of coding the transcribed data and labelling redundant data to avoid situations whereby data collected could have become disorganised and distorted.

The "rectification" phase involved the researcher verifying the developed themes' certainty and relating the developed themes to existing literature before the data collection started.

The "finalisation" phase involved writing a storyline to answer the research question. The thematic analysis helped the researcher to interpret and makes sense of the data in answer to the research questions. Further discussions of this approach are provided in Chapter 3.

1.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSFERABILITY

To ensure the reliability of qualitative research, trustworthiness is crucial: it is the evaluation of the data quality, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1994) and cited by Jones (2012:56). The aim of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support the findings in a study that are "worth paying attention to" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:152). Guba and Lincoln (1994:107) stated that trustworthiness consists of four elements, namely credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability.

1.10.1 Credibility

According to Polit and Beck (2014:34), "credibility is the confidence that the research method reveals the truth. The findings and techniques used to establish credibility include prolonged engagement with participants, persistent observation, peer-debriefing and member-checking". To ensure credibility, the researcher used semi-structured face-to-face interviews for the data collection. The researcher also pilot-tested the questionnaire, which is what Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utriainen & Kyngäs, (2014:4) recommend in order to test if the interview questions are suitable for obtaining rich data that answer the research questions before the data collection process begins.

Further discussions are provided in Chapter 3.

1.10.2 Conformability

Conformability can also be referred to as the researcher's objectivity. It is the degree to which findings for a study are consistent and could be repeated with similar participants and derive at similar findings. To achieve conformability, an audit trail of what was done was kept (Polit & Beck, 2014:34). Notes and recordings of each interview were also kept in order to give access to follow-up questions. Further discussions to ensure conformability are provided in Chapter 3.

1.10.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time. This implies that the study's findings would be the same if the study were to be conducted at another time. The researcher ensured that the same data collection methods were applied consistently throughout the research process and by also keeping a trail of what happened during the study including what decisions were made, what changed, who was interviewed and what was observed.

1.10.4 Transferability

This is the extent to which findings from the study are “helpful to persons in other settings in a way that those who never participated in the study could relate to findings from the research and its applicability to their situations” (Polit & Beck, 2014:58). This was achieved by the researcher making sure that the findings from study reflect the participants' point of view and never the researcher's biases, motivation or perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2012). Further discussions on transferability are provided in Chapter 3.

1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the College of Education's Research Committee at Unisa (see Appendix I) and adhered to the supervisor's guidance to ensure integrity. The researcher obtained permission from the Limpopo DoE (see Appendix J) to visit the schools and collect data as well as permission from the school principals (see Appendix E) and consent from the participants prior to the commencement of the study (see Appendix H). Throughout the entire research process, the researcher ensured the participants' anonymity, confidentiality and privacy. All participants were aware that their participation in the study was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

1.11.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a written statement requesting participants for their voluntary agreement to participate in a study before it commences. It “explains what the study is all about” (Neuman, 2010:105). Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:201) described informed consent as “a contract between the researcher and the participants; the researcher must provide the participants with what will be asked of them, how the data will be used

and if there could be any consequences to them, including understanding their right to access to their information". Participants have to sign the consent to take part in the research because it is an ethical principle that they should be informed about the research. Therefore, the researcher made sure that all participants were aware of their rights and that they would receive the results of the study they would be participating in, as well as making an informed decision if they wanted to be part of the research. The informed consent entailed information about the intent of the study, how data were to be collected from participants, how the data will be used and reported, the potential risk of the study, how their privacy and confidentiality will be protected and supported, their right to withdraw or to refuse participation, contact details of the researcher if there were any concerns raised. All signed consent forms are treated with the utmost discretion and stored away in a safe place.

1.11.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Bhattacharjee (2012:147) stated that "to ensure anonymity and confidentiality; the researcher was not allowed to divulge information to the public or identify participants' information with their data". Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:211) described participant confidentiality as a situation where the "data given by the participant has to be de-identified and the identity is kept confidential". This means that the researcher does not name or mention details about the participants that would give away their identity. Pseudonyms or numbers were allocated to participants to hide their identities. Also, no video recordings were made during the interview in order to keep the participants' identities anonymous. All information was treated in strict confidence and used for academic purposes only. All raw data is kept confidentially in a secure and password-protected place.

1.11.3 Prevention of deception and coercion

Participants were aware that their "participation in the study was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any unfavourable consequences" (Bhattacharjee, 2012:147). There were no direct benefits to individual participants taking part in this research, so they did not feel enticed to participate in the study.

1.11.4 Privacy

The researcher protected the participants' privacy by not using recording devices without their consent and the information they provided was not shared with others without their permission. Names or other forms of identification did not appear on any of the data records. A coded method was used to keep track of which participant's name belonged to which set of data. Lists containing the real names and pseudonyms/numbers allocated to the participants were not identified along with the recorded tapes, notes or transcripts from the study.

1.11.5 Respect for cultural differences

Since the study took place in semi-rural secondary schools, the researcher believes that culture is a pivotal part of the community in this area. Thus, the researcher respected participants' cultural views and perspective within the context of their community system.

1.12 LIMITATION AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

a) This study consisted of 16 teachers from four schools, which is a small proportion of more than 300 teachers in Seshego circuit. The reason for choosing this small number of participants was that it was a qualitative study that aimed to gather in-depth information of participants' experiences and perspectives and rich data. However, because of the small sample, findings from this study may not be generalised to the entire population in the district.

b) The topic of teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among secondary learners is a sensitive topic. As a result, some teachers did not want to take part in the study, excusing themselves because of their cultural and religious beliefs. However, most Life Orientation teachers, disciplinary team members, some school managers and a number of the younger teachers were comfortable enough to participate in the study.

c) The study was conducted in a culturally conservative area; therefore, the topic of sexual harassment was entirely uncomfortable for older teachers who have more teaching experiences or some conservative religious teachers who find talking about "sexual" matters offensive. Hence, they declined to participate in the study.

d) Teachers with more experience, such as HoDs, principals or vice principals, did not have the time to participate in the study, although they would have been the most likely to provide information rich in the context of this study.

e) The delimitation of study was that it did not cover the learners' actual experiences of sexual harassment among themselves. Including learners' experiences of sexual harassment among themselves may have broadened the parameters of the research and deflect from reaching the stated research goals.

1.13 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In the quest to understand various teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools, it is important to consider the contextual meanings given to interrelated concepts in which the study is anchored.

Sexual harassment: This refers to all forms of unwanted, non-consensual sexual behaviour that can be verbal, non-verbal or physical and that a perpetrator keeps repeating, which the recipient sees as offensive or threatening to their well-being. It often exceeds the victim's coping strategy, and it is normally unreciprocated, making the school environment hostile or intimidating. Unwanted sexual attention occurs when explicit sexual intentions or desire are directed towards another learner. Such actions could include prolonged staring, inappropriate touching of another learner's body part, proposal for sexual activities, pestering a peer for sexual intercourse or sexual comments towards another learner's body parts (for example, the breast, the buttocks, the face or the legs). In this study, learners are either perpetrators or victims of sexual harassment. Peer sexual harassment is unwanted sex-related behaviour or attention occurring in the school environment that often happens among adolescents (learners) within the same age group. It is offensive, making the school environment hostile, uncomfortable and threatening.

Teachers: These are people who teach learners in the classroom and systematically work towards improving learners' understanding of a learning area. They are the only adults a learner interacts with daily, aside from their parents, other family members and their community. The National Education Policy Act, 27 of 1996 identifies seven role functions for a teacher. These roles are not static, and teachers must try to accommodate the learners' needs when teaching. Although teachers are instrumental

in imparting knowledge and skills to learners, they can also function as role models, advocate for safe school environments, guide learners and protect them from offensive, threatening, inappropriate or sexually harassing behaviour.

Experiences: Experiences can be defined as the practical knowledge or skills acquired by a person because of their exposure to a job or activities for a longer period (COBUILD Advanced Online English Dictionary, 2022). In this study, experiences refer to knowledge acquired because of the years teachers have been employed in the teaching service and of how they manage sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools.

Learners: The SASA (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996b) and the DBE (2011) define learners as “a person receiving education or obliged to receive education at a school”. The National Policy Act 27 of 1996 (RSA, 1996c) defines learners as any person enrolled in an educational institution, either private or government owned, who is receiving theoretical or practical knowledge. A learner is a person being taught various subjects at school or learning a skill (COBUILD Advanced English Dictionary, 2022). In this study, a learner is referred to as an adolescent who is currently enrolled in the secondary schools.

Adolescence is a transition from childhood to adulthood, which occurs during the ages 10 to 19. During these phases of life, adolescents experience rapid biological changes in their bodies and establish various patterns of behaviour. Macleod (2011:52) stated that adolescents are “neither a lad nor an adult”, but they are both simultaneously. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) refers to adolescents as persons who are between ages of 10 and 19, respectively. Since this study took place in secondary schools, most learners fell between the age ranges of adolescence. Therefore, the researcher used the term “adolescent” to refer to “learners” who are still receiving education at secondary school. These words are used interchangeably throughout the study.

Puberty: This is a period of visible biological changes in a child’s life as they are becoming adults; examples of physical changes are girls developing breasts, acne, pubic hair and boys developing a deep voice and the appearance of pubic and facial hair. The COBUILD Advanced Online English Dictionary (2022) defines puberty as a stage when adolescents’ secondary sexual characteristics emerge, and sexual

glands become functional and capable of having offspring. While puberty is the onset of adolescence, it is also the driving force for the prevalence of sexual harassment at school (AAUW, 2011:21).

Semi-rural: This is an area on the outskirts of town. The land composition is mostly for residential and some agricultural use, therefore it experiences less heavy traffic, noise and pollution. Informal settlements and rural areas are dispersed throughout its location. Semirural residents have access to social amenities and services such as water, electricity, municipal services malls, shops, health services and schools.

Rural area: This is an area with low population density, where the land is mostly used for agricultural purposes. There are virtually no social amenities such as water, electricity, municipal services malls, shops, hospitals available for its inhabitants, who may have to travel significant distances to access some of these services.

1.14 OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Research overview

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the research and the contextual knowledge of various national and international studies. The studies were about sexual harassment among learners at school. It included the background, aims and objectives, the problem statement, and the research questions. It outlined the purpose of the study, as well as its aims, objectives and significance. The research design and methodology were also explained.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter will review literature about the experiences of sexual harassment among learners and teachers. It will examine the extent of literature on the challenges in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools as well as barriers that prevent teachers from intervening in sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The literature review will be guided by the aims and objectives of the study. This chapter will also provide a conceptual framework of sexual harassment and the theoretical framework that informed the current study.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter will focus on the research design and methodology, data collection and instruments, data analysis, the study's population and sampling methods, and the ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Research findings and analysis

This chapter will present the findings from the research data collected, as well as the data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter will present the discussion of the findings, as well as the conclusions and recommendations. Contributions, limitations and suggestions for further studies will also be provided.

1.15 CONCLUSION

The researcher has presented a detailed background and introduction to the study, conducted among teachers in secondary schools in the Seshego District and how they manage sexual harassment among learners at school. This chapter further expanded on the devastating consequences sexual harassment may have in the lives of learners even beyond secondary school. The researcher also offered a contextual background through looking at studies conducted on sexual harassment in schools, both locally and internationally and justified why the study is important to be done in Seshego. The researcher contends that to the best of her knowledge that no prior study has examined the teachers' experiences regarding how they manage sexual harassment among learners.

The researcher briefly expanded on the rationale for conducting the research and justified the reasons for conducting this study in Seshego. The aim and the objectives of the study were formulated in line with answering the research problem. The significance of the study was also defined, as well as an exploration of the conceptual framework, which underpinned the study and the research methodology. The researcher justified the reasons of the chosen research design and methods for answering the research question and attaining the objective of the study. Lastly, the chapter reported how the researcher will ensure trustworthiness and transferability of

the qualitative research and the ethical consideration during the data collections.

The following chapter focuses on national and international literature on sexual harassment among learners and also expounds on the conceptual framework of sexual harassment. The researcher will argue the theoretical roots of sexual harassment among adolescents from a developmental perspective and will also unpack the developmental-contextual factors to understand sexual harassment during adolescence. This is followed by various literature on teachers' experiences of sexual harassment among learners before expounding on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system as the main theoretical framework that undergirded the study.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the introduction and the background of the problem of sexual harassment among learners and how teachers' perceptions are important in curbing the problem among learners in secondary schools. This chapter focuses on the overview of literature reviews, based on reported sexual harassment among learners. It presents an understanding of what sexual harassment is all about, what sexual harassment among learners is about and the conceptual framework of sexual harassment. It also examines the developmental perspective of sexual harassment in adolescence, the biological and social change contextual perspectives of sexual harassment, teachers' experiences and the barriers teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment, concluding with a summary.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Scholars around the world have yet to find a single definition of sexual harassment. None of the existing literature has established clear-cut boundaries on what sexual harassment includes because of the diverse legal, sociological, psychological and feminist perspectives from which the issue has been examined, making it a challenge to derive at a distinct and objective definition of sexual harassment (Gillander-Gådin & Stein, 2019; McMaster, Connolly, Pepler & Craig, 2002). Some of the behaviour that has been defined as sexual harassment is similar to behaviour that "criminal law regards as sexual assault"; for example, behaviour like "an attempt to pull off someone's clothing or to force a kiss on another person", which constitutes sexual harassment has also been "regarded as criminal sexual assault". Some researchers also use derogatory comments on others' gender as sexual harassment, while other scholars consider it "sexist harassment" (Gillander-Gådin & Stein, 2019:2). However, researchers agree that sexually harassing behaviour is unwanted by the victim.

Wet and Palm-Forster (2014:110) described sexual harassment as abusive behaviour that can be repetitive and range from a mild to an extreme form of unwelcomed sexual attention and violence. Herbert (1992:2-3) defined sexual harassment as "unwanted and unreciprocated behaviour towards people". Gruber and Fineran (2016:2) defined

sexual harassment as aggressive or mean-spirited behaviour that creates power imbalances.

The U.S. Department of Education (2010:2) defined sexual harassment as “unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which may include unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature”. The South African Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (RSA 2000:4) defined harassment as:

... based on sex, gender or sexual orientation as unwanted conduct, which is persistent or serious and demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences and which is related to (a) sex, gender or sexual orientation; and (b) a person’s membership or presumed membership of a group identified by one or more of the prohibited grounds or a characteristic associated with such groups.

According to this definition, sexual harassment is an unwanted conduct against persons, regardless of their gender or biological sex, which shows that both “male and female”, “men or women”, “boys or girls” could be a target of victimisation or perpetrators of this violence. Doty, Gower, Rudi, McMorris and Borowsky (2017:2) argued that sexual harassment can be perpetrated by males or females and is not only a way of oppressing women.

2.3 SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG LEARNERS

Sexual harassment among learners is sometimes referred to as bullying. However, scholars have emphasised that it is important to distinctly differentiate between “bullying” and “sexual harassment” because learners who have been a victim of sexual harassment and reported their experiences to teachers do not always receive help from teachers as teachers may not have labelled such behaviour as sexual harassment and therefore, they do nothing to stop the violence (Charmaraman et al., 2013, Meyer, 2008).

Meyer (2008:557) stated that bullying is an intentional injury inflicted on another individual repeatedly and over time, while sexual harassment is a planned or non-intentional unwanted behaviour directed towards an individual or no specific target that interferes with receiving equal education. Bullying occurs throughout childhood and is

not necessarily sexual; the bully may pick a victim for any or no reason. In contrast, the perpetration of and victimisation through sexual harassment typically begins in adolescence during the ages of 10 to 12 but increases in prevalence as learners enter puberty in secondary school (AAUW, 2011:21).

Researchers unanimously suggested that sexual harassment is prevalent among secondary school learners (Ashbaughm & Cornell, 2008; Duffy, Wareham & Walsh, 2004; Gruber & Fineran, 2007; Hill & Holly, 2011; Kaltiala-Heino, Savioja, Fröjd & Marttunen, 2016, 2018). Studies conducted in North America, Europe and countries in the developing world have demonstrated that sexual harassment and sexual violence are commonly reported to have taken place between secondary school learners at rates of between 40% and 85% (AAUW, 2001, 2011; Chiodo, Wolfe, Crooks, Hughes & Jaffe, 2009; Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006; Felix & McMahon, 2006; Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamira, Lemani & Machakanja, 2003; Landstedt & Gillander Gådin, 2011; Lichty & Campbell, 2012; Lundin & Wesslund, 2016; Ormerod, Collinsworth & Perry, 2008; Skoog, Bayram-Özdemir & Stattin., 2016).

International studies have revealed that one-third to two-thirds of secondary school-going adolescents have been victims of sexual harassment (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2011; Dahlqvist, Landstedt, Young & Gadin, 2016; Kaltiala-Heino, Savioja, Fröjd & Marttunen, 2016). For example, Blakemore et al. (2009) cited that the AAUW Educational Foundation studies found that 79% of boys and 81% of girls from Grade 8 to Grade 11 have experienced sexual harassment at school perpetrated by a peer. Similar findings were also found in Felix and McMahon's (2007) study, which reported that 85% of female learners experienced sexual harassment at school, of which 15% experienced repeated victimisation. A total of 84% of male learners experienced sexual harassment at school, of which 16% reported chronic harassment.

A study conducted in Finland among secondary school learners aged 14 to 18 revealed that both male and female learners are exposed to sexual harassment at school. As for boys, 9.6% experienced unwelcome sexual attention and 3% sexual coercion. For girls, 37.8% experienced unwelcome sexual attention and 11.8% sexual coercion (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2018:52). Bendixen, Daveronis and Kennair (2018:6) reported that non-physical sexual harassment among Norway's secondary school

learners is rampant among boys and girls and it has a negative effect on the overall well-being of learners. A national study on sexual harassment carried out in secondary school learners in the US revealed that 46% of girls and 22% of boys reported experiencing sexual harassment in the form of unwelcome sexual comments, gestures or jokes. In comparison, 13% of girls and 3% of boys mentioned being subjects of unwanted touch. The study further revealed that 3.5% of girls and 0.2% of boys had been forced to perform a sexual act (Hill & Holly, 2011:6).

A cross-country comparison study was conducted in Israel between Chilean, Jewish and Arab learners. The aim was to show the effects of ethnic and cultural affiliation on the prevalence of sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. According to the findings, Chilean learners reported - more than Jewish and Arab learners - that a learner took or tried to take their clothes off for sexual reasons, and more Chilean learners also stated that a learner touched or tried to touch or sexually pinch them without their approval. In contrast, fewer such incidences were reported among Arab and Jewish learners (López et al., 2018:13). A cross-country comparison study was conducted between Johannesburg, South Africa and Chicago, US, to estimate the prevalence of sexual harassment between peers and violence among secondary school learners. It showed that in South Africa, both male and female learners (79%) indicated having been a victim of sexual harassment by a peer at school and 78% of learners indicated perpetrating the violence on a peer at school. In comparison, in Chicago, 83% of learners indicated having been a victim of sexual harassment by a peer at school, while 74 % indicated perpetrating the violence on a peer at school (Fineran, Bennett & Sacco, 2003:394).

Wet and Palm-Forster's (2014:120) study, conducted in the Free State in South Africa with Grade 8 to Grade 12 learners, revealed a contradicting result about sexual harassment among learners compared to the findings of other researchers. The study showed that boys experienced more verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment by their peers than girls and that there was a statistically significant (on a 99% confidence level) number for non-verbal and physical peer sexual harassment at school. In a study conducted in rural secondary school pupils in Gweru, Zimbabwe, educators perceived that sexual harassment was one of the harassments learners experienced among peers at school (Shoko, 2012:84). Taking cognisance of the findings of these studies, one could conclude that sexual harassment is prevalent

among adolescents, regardless of ethnic groups, cultural affiliation, race, or socioeconomic status of the learners.

Sivertsen, Nielsen, Madsen, Knapstad, Lønning and Hysing (2019:1) defined sexual harassment in schools or educational institutions as unwanted sex-related behaviours that the recipients see as offensive, beyond their coping strategy and threatening the recipient's well-being. According to this definition, behaviour can only be sexual harassment when the recipient does not welcome or want it and it continues persistently, thus creating a hostile or abusive environment for the recipient. Unwanted sex-related behaviours include unwelcome verbal and non-verbal acts, an undesired physical behaviour or touch that the recipient finds challenging to handle and which is unreciprocated. The consequences of being a victim of sexual harassment are that it creates problematic reactions, such as anger, depression, trauma, and psychological anxiety and powerlessness (Buchanan, Settles, Wu & Hayashino, 2018; Fitzgerald, Swan & Magley, 1997; Langer, 2017). Also, sexual harassment affects the recipient by seeing their body, weight and shape in a negative light, often causing eating disorders (Buchanan, Bluestein, Nappa, Woods & Depatie, 2013) and reducing their sense of safety (Donnelly & Calogero, 2018). Poor mental health and even resulting mental illness were also found among learners who had been victimised by their peers (Gyawali, 2020).

The U.S. Department for Education and Civil Rights (2008:6) stated:

“... sexual harassment among adolescents could manifest itself in the form of unwelcome conduct, such as touching of a sexual nature; making sexual comments, jokes, or gestures; displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings, pictures, or written materials; calling learners sexually charged names; spreading sexual rumours; rating each other's on sexual activity or performance; or circulating, showing, or creating e-mails or Web sites of a sexual nature.”

Research has shown that teachers sometimes believe that there is no such occurrence as learners' sexual harassment, and they attribute sexual harassment only to adult-to-child sexual abuse, while some teachers believe that sexual harassment refers only to such actions among adults in workplaces and not something learners experience among themselves (Charmaraman et al., 2013:441). Most teachers are “familiar with

bullying and have received prior training at the workplace on how to manage bullying among learners”; however, teachers may not understand “which actions are sexual harassment for which they are also responsible to intervene” and what is bullying (Charmaraman et al., 2013:441).

According to the extant literature, learners may experience sexual harassment by their peers, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical.

Verbal sexual harassment includes the following:

(a) belittling each other because of differences in gender (b) offensive and unwelcomed sexual insinuation towards a learner (c) spreading sexually connoted hearsay about learners or reports about their private sexual activities (d) homophobic name calling (e) learners grading or degrading each other’s part of the body (f) unwelcomed sexually connoted name calling; (g) learners being harassed through sexually-phrased phone calls or messages and pictures on social media; (i) learners being pressurised to date a peer (Allen, Young, Ashbaker, Heaton & Parkinson, 2003; Felix & McMahon, 2007; McMaster et al., 2002; Timmerman, 2004).

Non-verbal harassment includes the following:

(a) unwelcomed sexual invitation by a peer through notes or letters; (b) learners expressing gestures, signals or posture with sexual connotation; (c) learners’ exposure to pornography; (d) learners being “flashed” or “moonied at”. (Allen et al., 2003; Felix & McMahon, 2007; McMaster et al., 2002).

Physical harassment includes the following:

(a) learners being caressed/touched sexually; (b) offensive and unacceptable undressing of a learner by a peer; (c) learners being policed by a peer for sexual activities; (d) unrequested kissing (Allen et al., 2003; McMaster et al., 2002).

Research has shown that teachers may find it challenging to label some of the aforementioned inappropriate behaviours as sexual harassment and these may then be overlooked by teachers or interpreted as “normal” social interactions between learners or rough play, which may lead to teachers often failing to address sexual harassment as violence that can be problematic (Conroy, 2013:341).

2.4 THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The subject of sexual harassment has already been documented in 1908 (Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Godd & Omenold, 1988). However, legally recognised and labelled as a problem in the 1970s, when significant research was undertaken by Farley (Farley, 1978), the term sexual harassment had already gained wider awareness after feminists publicly expressed their concerns about the unequal treatment of women in the workplace in the 1960s.

Fitzgerald et al. (1988, 1995) proposed a three-factor structural model of sex-offensive behaviour, which were gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. This three-factor structural model originated from Till's (1980) qualitative analysis of sexual harassment experiences of college women, which was categorised into five types of sexual harassment: gender harassment, seductive behaviour, sexual bribery, sexual coercion and sexual imposition. Fitzgerald et al. (1988, 1995) later developed a three-factor model of sex-offensive behaviour, which most researchers used widely to conceptualise how sexual harassment can be defined.

Fitzgerald et al. (1995) proposed that the behavioural construct of sexual harassment consists of a three-factor structural model, but that it is conceptually distinct from other forms of sexual harassment: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion. This distinction reveals the "peonage of sexual harassment since pattern behaviours" are described as "unwelcome", creating an "intimidating", "hostile", or "offensive" environment, in which there is a power imbalance between two people (the aggressor and the victim). According to the forms of sexual harassment, different categories of sexual harassment have been identified, including "*quid pro quo*" sexual harassment and a "hostile environment".

2.4.1 Categories of sexual harassment

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC, 1980) guidelines for the legal framework of sexual harassment are used around the world, are "*quid pro quo*" and "hostile environment".

2.4.1.1 The quid pro quo

This form of harassment is used by an exercising authority, where a reward is granted

or denied by acceptance or denial of sexual advances (Prinsloo, 2011:183). Prinsloo (2011:186) further stated that teachers are prone to a misuse of the power invested in them in an educational setting and the relationship between a learner and education should be treated as fragile. Terrance, Logan and Peters (2004:480) illustrated it as an act of sexually harassing behaviour between someone superior and a lesser-ranked person, such as the hierarchical difference between a teacher and a learner. Fineran and Bennett (1998:57) mentioned that *quid pro quo* applies when a person in a position of power (teacher) makes decisions that affect a (victim) learner's grade, based on sexual cooperation.

It is a way of offering sexual bribery in return for a promise, or it can even be a threat of harm if a proposal for sexual activities is not given in to. For example, teachers can either explicitly or implicitly make sexual requests to; or receive advances from learners, which can be met either with acceptance or rejected sexual requests. This will determine whether or not the learner will fail or pass. *Quid pro quo* does not need to be repetitive to be known as sexual harassment; there is a power imbalance between the harasser and the victim that involves sexual advances.

Adrian's (2016:3) study on preventing sexual harassment in Mozambique's schools exposed that some male teachers threatened to fail learners (girls) if they did not accept their sexual requests. This further illustrates that teachers instil fear in subordinate learners to satisfy their own sexual desire. Mabetha De Wet's (2018:10) study that was conducted in Gauteng, South Africa, among school-going adolescents (aged 10–19 years) reported that educator-to-learner sexual harassment is a reality at schools. The findings revealed that solicitation for sex was found by teachers who have sex with female and male learners, without using condoms.

Another study done in various secondary schools in Potchefstroom, South Africa by Brown, Hines and Coles (2009:14) revealed that teachers solicited sexual advances from learners; some learners reported that they were raped or sodomised by their teachers. Findings from the study also revealed that some learners claimed to have sexual intercourse with educators on a regular basis when requested; however, educators defended that sexual advances were mutual with learners. Prinsloo (2011:187) argued that because there was an unequal relationship between a child and an adult, teachers should be held accountable for illegal sexual activity with a

minor.

2.4.1.2 Hostile environment

A hostile environment is fostered in an educational environment when a person (teacher or a peer) exhibits sexual harassing behaviour towards another, making the environment intimidating, hostile and almost impossible to constructive learning (Fineran & Bennett, 1998:57). Gruber and Fineran (2007:629) noted that a hostile environment limits a learner from having an equal learning opportunity because of another person's unwelcome sexual conduct, be it verbal, physical or non-verbal. Terrance, Logan and Peters (2004:480) stated that behaviour that constitutes a hostile environment is diverse and can be repetitive over a long time.

The United States Office of Civil Rights (OCR) defined a hostile environment as including "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours and other verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature by an employee, by another student, or by a third party". The OCR stated that this "is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive to limit a learner's ability to participate in or benefit from an educational programme or activity, or to create a hostile or abusive educational environment" (DoE, 1997:120).

According to these definitions, a hostile environment can be created by anyone, regardless of their hierarchy in a working or educational environment. However, scholars have agreed that determining behaviour that constitutes a hostile environment can be difficult. Ekore (2012:4360) concurred that behaviours that create a hostile environment in an educational setting may not be regarded as hostile in a working environment.

Baird, Bensko, Bell, Viney and Woody (1995:80) suggested that behaviours that create a hostile environment will depend on how the individual person perceives a behaviour as "unwanted" or "unwelcomed", and whether they are persistent and go beyond their coping strategies. Examples of behaviour that creates a hostile environment include the following: persistent request for sexual activities, unwelcome sexual advances, derogatory use of language/jokes that is directed towards another, sexual vulgarities, and the display or comments about offensive graphic sexual clothing or body (Conte, 1997:54).

2.4.2 Forms of sexual harassment

Gendered harassment: Fitzgerald et al. (1995) explained this kind of harassment as harassment mostly perpetrated on women; it includes behaviour that degrades people's gender and sex roles, and it may be in the form of verbal and non-verbal behaviour that conveys insult, degrading or threatening sex discrimination and intimidating acts that make an environment hostile or harsh. Examples may include sexual epithets, slurs, taunts, the display or distribution of obscene or pornographic materials intended to insult, degrading remarks that are gender-related and jokes that connote superiority of own gender. In an academic setting such as schools, gendered harassment may be in the form of sexist comments and outrageous stunts, especially if the targeted victim expresses their sexuality in a way that does not conform to the majority of the population at school (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Unwanted sexual attention: Unwanted sexual attention occurs when unsolicited or unwanted sexual intentions and desires are directed towards another learner: such actions could be prolonged staring, inappropriate touching of another learner's body, a proposal for sexual activities and comments relating to the sexual part of the learner's body. This harassment includes all kinds of unwanted sex-related attention that may be verbal, non-verbal or physical, usually offensive and unreciprocated, making the environment uncomfortable for the recipient (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Sexual coercion: The legal concept of this harassment is *quid pro quo*; it is sexually related cooperation in return for employment, being granted favours or good marks given at school from someone superior. It is exerting either psychological or physical pressure on an individual to get sexual cooperation from them. This includes policing others for sexual favours, threatening an individual or physically touching an individual to get sexual cooperation from them (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

Sexual harassment has primarily been studied as discrimination and aggression against women and girls and was conceptualised as reproducing unequal gender roles, even when men are victims of this violence. Among adolescents, sexual harassment has been studied as gender-based discrimination. Many studies have examined sexual harassment among the adult population. However, sexual harassment does not originate in adulthood, which means in order to combat it among

adults, there is a need for greater attention to be drawn to the adolescent population (Crowley, Cornell & Konold, 2021:1).

Sexual harassment among learners is motivated by a transitional developmental phenomenon (puberty), which may lead to an extension of aggressive behaviour influenced by emerging sexual desires and increased socialising in mixed-gender peer groups when social and behavioural skills are still under construction (Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd & Marttunen, 2016b:1194). Learners in secondary schools are adolescents; and unwanted, not asked for or encouraged sexual attention, is inevitable among them as their sexual gravitation may be communicated in an offensive way, making the school environment uncomfortable for other learners.

2.5 A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Researchers have observed a trend in the types of victimisations occurring from early childhood to adolescence. In early childhood, relational victimisation is more dominant and is typically direct and obvious because children are still learning the social skills to interact with each other (Shahabuddin, 2008:199). Also, young children tend to use more direct forms of verbal and physical aggression, which slowly reduce as they grow older (Shahabuddin, 2008:243). Sexual harassment typically happens during the onset of puberty and is accompanied by biological and physical changes (McMaster et al., 2002:92).

Researchers have observed that sexual harassment among learners is a “normal part of adolescent development” that is deeply rooted in biological and social developmental changes, meaning that sexual harassment among learners is widespread, especially during the early adolescence stage, age 10 to 14, because biological changes during puberty seem to lead to an increase in victimisation during this stage. This form of sexual harassment may continue until the late adolescence stage, probably up to Grade 12. However, sexual harassment should never be accepted as being normal or socially appropriate because of its impact on the victims and its association with other aggressive behaviours (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2016, 2018; McMaster et al., 2002; Rinehart et al., 2020).

2.5.1 The biological changes

McMaster et al. (2002:92) illustrated that puberty is a defining moment for adolescent boys and girls and this biological transition may increase sexually harassing behaviour. According to Hill and Holly (2011:7), sexual harassment begins during adolescence but increases in prevalence as learners enter puberty. The raising level of hormones in a person marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence; these hormones do not only have an effect on the learners' developing bodies but also influence the brain's behavioural functions of an adolescent until the onset of adulthood (Peper & Dahl, 2013:135). Biological changes occur as a result of puberty. Puberty is a hormone-driven biological process that leads to the development of visible physical differences between boys and girls such as body size, changes in facial structure, development of secondary sex characteristics such as breast formation and pubic hair as well as changes in behavioural, emotional and intellectual development. Research has found that girls reach puberty earlier than boys; girls start their menarche between 10 and 12 years, while late-maturing girls' menarche is between 12 and 13 years of age, compared with boys who attain puberty between 12 and 14 years of age (Caissy, 1994:78). During puberty, sex hormones increase, which leads to adolescents to having a new sexual interest in other peers, which might not be expressed appropriately. Shahabuddin (2008:201) illustrated that biological maturation allows adolescents to experience new social behaviours in the peer group, such as exploring dating relationships, associating with opposite sex peers and mingling with older peers.

Research has indicated that adolescents who have developed visible secondary sexual characteristics either earlier or later than their other peers may be victimised because of their visible differences (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2016, 2018; McMaster et al., 2002; Rinehart et al., 2020). Shahabuddin (2008:244) stated that girls who reach puberty earlier than their peers are conspicuous within the peer group, which highlights their emerging sexuality and boys may respond to the visible secondary sexual characteristics with sexually harassing behaviours (Skoog et al., 2016:3). In contrast, early maturation of boys is not associated with victimisation; rather, the physical changes in early maturing boys have been described in a more positive manner, such as increased height, strength and dominance. However, both boys and girls who mature late are at risk for victimisation because their developmental lag is visible and a potential point of vulnerability among peers (Shahabuddin, 2008:244).

Several international research studies have shown that girls are more often subjected to sexual harassment by their peers (AAUW, 2001; Bendixen & Kennair, 2014; Landstedt & Gillander Gådin, 2011; Lichty & Campbell, 2012; Skoog et al., 2015). For example, a recent study by the AAUW found that there is sexual harassment prevalence among high school learners and girls are likely to be harassed more often than boys. Harassment ranges from 56% affecting girls versus 40% of boys; this gender gap holds true for both in-person harassment (52% versus 35%) and electronic harassment (36% versus 24%) (AAUW, 2011:11).

A study by Skoog, Özdemir and Stattin's (2016:3) revealed that girls are at a greater risk of sexual harassment than boys, linking puberty timing in girls and the role which sexual harassment plays among these learners, leading to depressive symptoms in adolescence. Their study reported that most girls experience puberty earlier than boys of the same age. The physical differences make these girls stand out and being more popular than their late-maturing peers who do not yet show the sexual characteristics during puberty, such as breast development and an hourglass body shape. Sexually active girls will mostly "hang out" with boys during puberty; boys may see them as sex objects or "asking for it". Hence, the earlier girls develop and are described as "looking sexy" and are believed to be sexually active, the more likely peers are to sexually harass them.

However, both genders could be perpetrators or victims of sexual violence. Male adolescents engage in sexual harassment first to show their peers they are masculine, and they aim to reinforce their masculinity to subordinate femininity; however, when female adolescents engage in sexual harassment, it does not necessarily mean they want to highlight their femininity nor subordinate the masculinity of their peers (Rinehart, Espelage & Bub, 2020:14). Salomon (2020:7) emphasised that not only is sexual harassment culturally normative, but it is also common within the micro-context of the school, especially norms tolerating sexual harassment of girls. Previous studies revealed that some teachers blame girls as being sexually precocious and making themselves vulnerable to sexual harassment (Charmaraman et al., 2013).

2.5.2 Social developmental changes

During the adolescence stage, social networks and peer interactions become more complex and sophisticated as opposite-sex friendships become more common and the prevalence of sexual harassment becomes “inevitable” (Shahabuddin, 2008:201). Learners begin to interact and network with a mixed gender peers crowd, which generally occurs in high school rather than in primary school. During this stage, learners inevitably interact socially more often with mixed gender peers than before.

McMaster et al. (2002:103) emphasised that developmental changes occurring in the social context of adolescence may be linked to the increase in sexual harassment because learners begin to spend more time interacting with cross-gender peers at school. It is also possible that adolescents who are most stressed by the developmental challenge of cross-gender interactions resort to sexually harassing behaviours. Research has shown that boys are less prepared than girls in managing cross-gender interactions at school and as a result of this unpreparedness, they tend to use harassing behaviour more often than girls' peers (Buhrmester & Furman, 1987).

Fineran and Bennett (1997) found that high school learners are twice as likely to experience sexual harassment by a peer known to them than by an unknown peer. Studies have shown that adolescents explore romantic relationships in a friendship group context rather than a dyadic context (Connolly, Furman & Konarski, 2000; Furman & Wehner, 1994). During the early phases of adolescence, when their social skills are still developing, especially regarding the question of how to show love or a romantic interest in a peer, they tend to show it through sexually harassing behaviour to draw attention to themselves (Apell, Marttunen, Fröjd & Kaltiala, 2019:2). The underlying assumption of the social developmental changes is that people learn through interacting with each other, and they communicate how they feel about each other in the process. However, that theory argues that sexual harassing behaviour occurs because of adolescents' inability to appropriately and adequately communicate their sexual and romantic feelings.

The social developmental change is a phase every adolescent goes through. If this phase is not managed well by teachers, learners may develop an established pattern of sexually harassing behaviour to communicate their sexual interest to another learner, even when have outgrown the adolescence stage.

The biological and social developmental changes in adolescents create an emanation of sexual harassment among learners and specifically to cross-gender harassment among predominantly heterosexual learners. Pubertal maturation and mixed-gender peer groups' interactions can result in increased motivation and opportunities for cross-gender sexual harassment, while same-gender harassment among learners cannot be associated with puberty because it is not sexually motivated (McMaster et al., 2002; Schnoll, Connolly, Josephson, Pepler & Simkins, 2015). McMaster's (2002:93) study of peer-to-peer sexual harassment in early adolescence indicated that same- and cross-gender harassment are two separate constructs as cross-gender harassment is characterised mainly as sexual harassment, while same-gender sexual harassment is portrayed as a form of aggression against peers' social status or an attempt to gain popularity among peers.

There are limitations in using the developmental perspective in understanding sexual harassment among adolescents. One limitation of the biological changes of sexual harassment among adolescents is that it rests on the assumption that boys are primary perpetrators of sexual harassment, and that girls are mostly the victims because of increased cross-gender harassment. This may be related to the earlier pubertal onset, which captures the interest in the opposite sex, whereas boys experience verbal aggression and hostility that is common among early adolescent male social groups.

However, research has found that girls are increasingly self-reporting that they are perpetrators of sexual harassment (AAUW, 1993; Bendixen et al., 2018; Felix & McMahon 2007; Gillander et al., 2019; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2018; Rinehart et al., 2020; Wet & Palm-Forster, 2014). This may suggest that biological changes may not be the only reason why adolescents engage in sexual harassment. The underlying assumption of the social changes is that sexually harassing behaviour occurs because of learners' inability to appropriately communicate or express sexual and romantic feelings to peers. Teachers may thus hope or assume that these learners will develop the appropriate communicating skills as they grow older into adulthood, which will result in fewer cases of sexual harassment (Poster, 2015:386).

It has to be noted, though, that the reverse has been the case because there are still well-socialised adults who perpetrate sexual harassment and sexual violence. This suggests that the social changes do not fully explain adolescents' sexual harassment.

This proves that it is imperative that teachers help learners to establish and nurture appropriate ways of interacting socially with their peers, especially the cross-gender peers. This can be achieved by promoting norms for non-harassing ways of relating to one another as sexual harassing behaviour can be stabilised during the adolescence stage (McMaster et al., 2002:104).

2.6 A DEVELOPMENTAL-CONTEXTUAL PERSPECTIVE

Although research has shown that sexual harassment is violence that is harmful to adolescents, there is no theoretical framework to ground the study on sexual harassment with the adolescent population. The developmental-contextual perspective recognises the importance of school and peers during the adolescence period, as this factor helps explain the integration of biological and social contextual factors of sexual harassment during adolescence (Lerner, 1993, 1995). Therefore, a framework such as developmental contextualism is helpful for such a study because it explains development within the context of a school environment and peers' influences.

2.6.1 The school/classroom environment

The school environment is one of the main socialising contexts for adolescents that could influence their developmental changes. Early adolescence marks the age when learners are going through puberty and developing an interest in romantic experiences. Transitioning from primary school to secondary school places them in an environment where they meet different age group peers, experience physical changes in classroom sizes and sometimes, they are required to move from one classroom to another for lessons, experiencing rapid cognitive and neurological changes (Goldstein, Lee, Gunn, Bradley, Lummer & Boxer, 2020:3). There is also less teacher supervision and monitoring, but more autonomy in secondary schools, which may be overwhelming for early adolescents.

The school environment is one of the places where sexual harassment tends to be perpetrated mainly because of crowded classes, which may increase inadequate attention to norms and values at the school. Although not all schools are the same, some schools may become permissive or tolerant to certain behaviours, leading to inappropriate norms being accepted in the school's environment, while other schools can have strict policies, which they adhere to with zero tolerance to any form of

violence in the school. This can depend on the demography, socioeconomic environment and location of the school. Crowley, Cornell and Konold (2021:2) noted that the school's climate plays a major role in not only reducing behavioural problems among adolescents, but also in shaping the behaviours and values of the adolescents.

A school climate refers to the quality and character of school life: this climate includes norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally and physically safe (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009:182). According to Marshall and Tropp (1993:1), teachers often trivialise sexual harassment as "flirting" or "no big deal". When a school climate becomes more permissive to norms tolerating sexual harassment, there tends to be more harassment in the school environment. Also, when teachers interpret and understand sexual harassment as a normal part of adolescents' development, teachers tend to suggest to learners that they too may be sexually harassed as they have seen other learners being victimised, as well as perpetrating this behaviour and receiving no admonishment or any other punitive consequences (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Crowley, Cornell & Konold, 2021; Gillander Gådin & Stein, 2019; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020; Meyer, 2008b; Rahimi & Liston, 2011; Usul & Blevins, 2021). Stein et al. (1993:15) mentioned that learners become mistrustful of teachers who have failed to intervene and protect them from this violence.

Crowley et al. (2021:2) characterised a positive school climate as an authoritative one, where there is not only a strict but a fair disciplinary structure, and one that allows adolescents to freely report any form of sexual harassment victimisation, which serves as a protective factor against the negative impact of sexual harassment. Crowley et al. (2021:2) also emphasised that a positive school climate increases positive outcomes for the school, including reduced peer victimisation, improved academic performance and a reduced impact of any sexual harassment on learners' well-being.

The school environment as an important context in adolescents' experiences should "meet their developmental needs through age-appropriate support, supportive teacher relationships and instructional practices that keep them academically motivated and orientations associated with academic success" (Goldstein et al., 2020:4). If such conditions are met at the school, adolescents are then "more likely to succeed and

experience fewer relational aggression or sexual harassment”.

The school environment as a socialising context can also become an unsafe place when behaviours that constitute harassment are ignored, creating a hostile environment for adolescents. Not only does it encourage a continuous pattern of violence in the school, but it also establishes a pattern of acceptable violence outside the school environment. It is important that the school authority should adopt a policy and ensure that it is implemented in all schools. Such a policy should educate teachers and learners about the serious consequences of sexual harassment, and it should be enforced in order to prevent endorsing sexual harassment in the school environment and beyond (Goldstein et al., 2020:5). During adolescence, perceptions of support from the school and the family are crucial in adolescents’ development and well-being.

2.6.2 Peer influences

The peer network is significant to understanding the phenomenon of adolescents’ sexual harassment. Not only does sexual harassment occur among and between adolescents at school; it can happen in the classroom, the school toilets and on the school’s playground. It often occurs in public places of the schools and cafeterias, where there is an audience of peers (AAUW, 2001; Lichty & Campbell, 2012). The developmental literature suggests a number of explanations for adolescents’ particular sensitivity to peer influence, which is related to the socio-cultural, psychological and biological changes that typically accompany pubertal maturation.

2.6.2.1 Socio-cultural factors

Peer relationships are an important part of adolescents’ development and as such, they are relatively susceptible to peer influence (Goldstein et al., 2020:3). Although family is the main socialising context in early and middle childhood, peers become an increasingly important context for development as children enter the adolescence stage. They then experience a normative shift in which they spend increasing amounts of time with their peers, either by staying late at school or going out with friends and thus, they spend less time with their families. The peers’ opinions become more important to them than those of their families because they become more sensitive to their peers’ influences and opinions, which comes with puberty maturation (Blakemore & Mills, 2014; Larson & Richards, 1991). Brown (2004:363) emphasised that “peer influence is the hallmark of adolescents’ psychosocial functioning”. Also, the “effects

of peers' influence are stronger during adolescence than in adulthood" (Larson & Richards, 1991:284).

However, not all adolescents allow their peers to influence their decision-making and behavioural choices. Many adolescents have a relatively balanced way in which they relate to peers in determining behavioural and social choices they make, while others rely heavily on their peers' influences. This includes the willingness to follow their peers even when they know that this is not necessarily what they "should" be doing, which could negatively impact the adolescents' development and make them susceptible to engaging in risky behaviour (Goldstein et al., 2020; Larson & Richards, 1991).

The social context and acceptance among peers play a pivotal role in adolescents' lives as they influence their behaviour and begin to socialise at school. These adolescents may feel the "pressure of copying the lifestyles, values and interest of peers at school" (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007:1531). This is likely to escalate as they spend more time with their peers. "Adolescents use the influence they have on peers to control one another and foster solidarity and uniform behaviour within their group, which enables them to develop and maintain a unifying identity that distinguishes them from other peers" (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007:1531). Brown et al. (2020:5) illustrated that "adolescents who have witnessed or been a victim of sexual harassment rarely report it and if they do, they are socially punished by their peers for reporting it". Research using Social Network Analysis found that "adolescents who reported perpetrating high rates of sexual harassment at school belonged to friend groups of peers who also perpetrated sexual harassment and endorsed it as well" (Jewell, Spears Brown & Perry, 2015:593). Based on this analysis, peer influence in adolescence increases individuals' sensitivity to peer pressure. This influence drives adolescents to do "what they ought not to do". Peer influence is a significant aspect of individuals that "greatly contributes to their receptiveness to peer-based harassment, violence and behavioural problems" (Goldstein et al., 2020:3).

2.6.2.2 Physiological factors

The essential task for an adolescent is to be "naturally motivated to develop knowledge and skills capable of functioning independently to establish their individuality" (Crone & Dahl, 2012:642). One of the main changes in adolescence is the tendency to lean on peers mostly for social interactions. Adolescents' increasing

dependence on peers to validate them may “facilitate the transition from a child’s dependence on parents or an adult’s relative to independence”; however, “closeness and bonding with parents does not necessarily decline nor diminish in adolescence, but closeness with friends increases, while emotional autonomy from parents also increases” (Crone & Dahl, 2012; Larson & Richards, 1991).

On the one hand, research has shown that adolescents whose families approach their children’s changing developmental need for autonomy in an appropriate manner and show a level of support, tend to be involved in greater amounts of positive activities and engage in fewer risky behaviours (Cablova, Csemy, Belacek & Miovsy, 2016; Flamm & Grolnick, 2013). On the other hand, when adolescents do not receive the appropriate developmental support from their families at home, they often turn to peers and friends to fill in the void in their relationship with their family. They may also go to extra lengths to impress their peers or to simply fit in (Goldstein et al., 2020:4). One of the major changes during adolescence is a “psychological shift from own-oriented behaviour to peer-motivated behaviour; they tend to have a stronger desire for acceptance by their peers. These changes help the formation of social relationships and functioning in peer groups” (Crone & Dahl, 2012:642).

Blakemore and Mills (2014:3) illustrated peers’ influences in a self-reporting evaluation of adolescents aged 13 to 17, which showed that peers’ positive opinions influence adolescents’ feeling of social and personal worth, while peer rejection makes them feel worthless. The adolescents and children aged 10 to 13 years reported that peers provided companionship, stimulation and the support they need. Goldstein et al. (2020:4) mentioned that “adolescents’ influence in engaging in sexual harassment depends on their close friendships or peer groups. If their friends engage in behaviourally problematic actions, there is an increased tendency that individual adolescents will also follow such behaviour”.

2.6.2.3 Biological changes

Puberty in adolescents has been associated with a stage where there are numerous changes taking place in an adolescent’s brain that impact their cognitive control, and their affective and social processing (Crone & Dahl, 2012:638). The puberty hormones cause simultaneous changes in adolescents’ brain structure and function; the brain function and structure mutually influence each other; these changes also make the

adolescents' brain sensitive to rewards and sensation-seeking (Goldstein et al., 2020; Shulman, Smith, Silva, Icenogle, Duell, Chein & Steinberg, 2016). "Sensation-seeking could be the adolescents' involvement in substance abuse, breaking the law, relational aggression, sexual harassment and many other anti-social behaviours" (Goldstein et al., 2020:3). While rewards include them "feeling admired, accepted by their peers, having a romantic relationship and early sexual experiences" (Crone & Dahl, 2012:640), some of these experiences may also "lead to risky actions that they believe will lead to the expected rewards".

Crone and Dahl (2012:645) proposed that the hormonal levels during puberty contribute to adolescents taking risks. First, it creates the "desire to acquire a higher social status among their peers" and second, it creates the "tendency to seek intense and affective experiences, especially to gain their peers' admiration". Shulman et al. (2016:114) asserted that rewards and sensation-seeking are the "driving force to their vulnerability and impulsive, reckless behaviour, especially when they are under the influence of peers or making decisions to obtain rewards". Chein, Albert, Brien, Uckert and Steinberg, (2011:7) reported that adolescents' risky behaviour is motivated by their peers' influence, which "leads to the brain activating its socio-emotional region, motivating them to take riskier decisions than what most adults would do".

These studies show that adolescents experience developmental challenges that are common and not unique to them, while this stage can be quite overwhelming for them, especially because they go to school, and they spend more time with their peers. Peer relationships are one of the "most important part of adolescents' development and they can also be detrimental to their development if not nurtured well". Goldstein et al. (2020:15) asserted that the school setting is not only important for adolescents' experience, but also for their development. This is where adolescents can be taught positive peer relationships. It is important that the school authority and teachers provide the necessary interventions that improve the schools' climate, while also educating adolescents about healthy ways of interacting with peers in order to reduce the perpetration and victimisation through sexual harassment among them at school. Brown and Braun (2013:151) mentioned that adolescents who have "cultivated the habit of positively relating with their peers have a far healthier social, academic and psychological outcome than peers who struggle with peer relationships".

2.7 TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

Sexual harassment among learners is often ignored or trivialised by teachers, especially if the harassment does not involve any physical aggression and violence. Many teachers see it as “normal” behaviour among adolescent learners and by trivialising or ignoring such behaviour, they are condoning it and reinforcing the incidence of harassment (Larkin, 1995; Ringrose & Renold, 2011; Robinson, 2012). Some teachers believe it is almost “invisible, subtle in nature” (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009:530). The Norwegian public media “recognised the concerns of adolescents regarding sexual harassment in schools and how these learners perceive teachers’ supposed lack of intervention when girls and boys are sexually harassed by peers” (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020:29). In a series of focus groups conducted with teachers on bullying and sexual harassment in the US, some teachers believed that it was the responsibility of learners to manage their own behaviour and that teachers “can only do so much to prevent sexual harassment” (Charmaraman et al., 2013:441). Many studies indicated that teachers were unable to recognise sexual harassment as they had different perceptions as to what sexual harassment among learners was all about (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Meyer, 2008b; Rahimi & Liston, 2011). Some teachers believed it futile to intervene when there was any perpetration of sexual harassment among learners because “kids are cruel” and “name calling will never stop” (Charmaraman et al., 2013:440).

A recent study in Norway revealed that teachers are seldom involved in preventing the occurrence of sexual harassment among secondary school learners in schools (Gillander et al., 2019). Teachers in Australia partaking in studies that took place in six schools perceived that sexual harassment was “a common part of adolescents’ growth, especially boys, as it showed a relationship with boys’ growth process”, describing it as “awkwardness” and “childishness” and that “it should not be called sexual harassment” (Robinson, 2012). Anagnostopoulos et al. (2009:541) reported that teachers tended to be confused about how they could intervene, especially in male-on-female learner sexual harassment as they saw this act as a natural part of male adolescents’ sexual development, when the targeted female learners did not show signs of distress, discomfort, or anger. However, teachers’ lack of response led to learners feeling that the teachers were condoning such violence. In South Africa, many teachers in public schools perceived schools as having become a “dangerous place,

so their priority was not teaching but surviving” (Niekerk, 2003:169). An extensive study conducted at a secondary school in the Free State, South Africa, to evaluate teachers’ perception of the scope of learners’ level of misdemeanours and crime at school, revealed that teachers agreed that sexual harassment occurred on a “very regular” or a “regular” basis at schools. However, there was an unwillingness among learners to report it and the “contributing factor to the refusal to report cases of sexual harassment was that teachers replied to such reports with comments, such as “You are overreacting”, “That’s the way life is”, or “What do you expect when you wear clothes like that?” (Niekerk, 2003:171–174).

A study conducted in Zimbabwe in the Gweru District in five randomly selected rural secondary schools with a sample of 55 educators (Shoko, 2012:86-87), showed that there were different perceptions according to the sex of the educators regarding sexual harassment among learners. One teacher retorted that the term “harassment” was new in the Zimbabwean vocabulary and also cautioned that “teachers should not take every new idea that is foreign to the local culture as truth”. The analysis of the study indicated that none of the male teachers perceived sexual harassment as a form of peer harassment, while 41.66% of the female teachers viewed it as a common form of peer harassment. One teacher in the study believed that there was nothing wrong with boys touching girls’ breasts at school because “it is culturally accepted for boys to do so and a way in which young learners start dating relationship”, also emphasising that “not everything practised in African culture is old fashioned, even if it constitutes harassment”.

Rahimi and Liston’s (2011:802) study revealed that teachers have different perceptions of what sexual harassment is among learners. The study revealed that teachers believed that boys’ “inappropriate behaviour towards girls” did not constitute sexual harassment, especially if the boy did not see it as inappropriate but was just “playing”. A “girl’s perception of such behaviour should be discredited”, implying that the “boys’ perspective on harassment should be used as justification as to whether sexual harassment was perpetrated or not”. Charmaraman et al. (2013:441–442) emphasised that “teachers might have an internalised gender ideology that minimises sexual harassment perpetrated by boys as normative, which is likely to prevent them from intervening to prevent it”. Also, when teachers dismiss

sexual harassment among learners or treat boys and girls differently, learners report greater peer victimisation and less willingness to seek help for themselves or other peers, being convinced that they would not receive any support from the teachers. Rahimi and Liston's (2011:802) findings about teachers' perception of sexual harassment revealed that "teachers did not have an accurate understanding of what sexual harassment among learners was". In fact, "they could not define what sexual harassment was, perhaps because the teachers' education did not provide much information on it and the only way to address sexual harassment was to revisit teachers' common presumption of what constituted sexual harassment" among learners.

2.8 BARRIERS TEACHERS EXPERIENCE IN THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG LEARNERS

Sexual violence, including sexual harassment among adolescents, has been a "global problem for a long time. It has the repercussion of short and long-term health problems and is a violation of human rights" (World Health Organization, 2017:7). In a school context, research on children and adolescents who were victims of sexual harassment at school by a peer, "emerged in the 1980s" (Grube & Lens, 2003:174). The reason why there has been "a lack of attention to this behaviour is the belief that sexual harassment is normal for teens" (Wet & Palm-Forster, 2014:112). According to Fineran and Bennett (1999:626), it is an "expected element of adolescent behaviour". Therefore, "prevention of sexual harassment among learners is still in its infancy" (Draugedalen, Kleive & Grov, 2021:2).

Researchers have documented the endemic rate, and the negative consequences peer sexual harassment has had on the victims' lives (AAUW, 1993; Dahlqvist et al., 2016; Eom et al., 2015; Farhangpour et al., 2019; Fineran & Bennett, 1998; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2016; Skoog et al., 2015, 2016; Usui & Blevins, 2021). In addition, researchers have emphasised the critical role teachers play in preventing sexual harassment and victimisation among learners. Teachers are the most important potential protective factor that can shield learners against sexual harassment, and they are the only adults that can interact with learners at school on a daily basis as they have the opportunity to identify high-risk learners involved in sexual harassment (Doty et al., 2017; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes,

2020).

Research using convenience samples of high school learners in the US found that 72% of sexual harassment occurred on school property and that 68% of sexual violence also occurred on school property (Turner, Finkelhor, Hamby, Shattuck & Ormrod, 2011). A study conducted in South Africa with school-going adolescents revealed that “one-third of the learners have been a victim of ongoing sexual harassment by a fellow learner at school” (Mabetha & Wet, 2018:3). A similar pattern was found in a case study reflecting sexual harassment occurring in a South African secondary school, where the study reported that teachers were not sure how to intervene in cases of sexual harassment happening among their learners at school (Makhasane & Mthembu, 2019).

These findings demonstrate that while teachers have the opportunity to intervene directly and prevent sexual harassment among learners on the school premises, in most cases, they do not recognise that they should intervene, are unsure as to what to do, or even believe that they should not intervene. Research has shown that teachers do not respond effectively in cases of sexual harassment among learners at school for many different reasons, which may show a lack of common understanding, perhaps lacking guidelines for teaching staff related to intervening in cases of sexual harassment among learners (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Firmin et al., 2019; Gillander et al., 2019; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020; Lloyd, 2019; Makhasane & Mthembu, 2019; Meyer, 2008b; Rahimi & Liston, 2011). These misperceptions or barriers, identified by Meyer (2008b), will be discussed in the section on the lack of institutional support from administrators; the lack of formal education on the issue; the overwhelming role of a teacher; an inconsistent response from colleagues; fear of parental backlash; and community values.

2.8.1 Lack of institutional support from administrators

The school administrators are often people in leadership, whose leadership role influences the school climate either positively or negatively. Examples are the school principal, vice principal and school governing bodies. In a school environment, the school principal has a powerful influence on how any cases of sexual harassment should be handled at that school. Therefore, the principal’s priorities and attitude towards various issues permeate the school and shape its culture. Teachers in

Meyer's (2008b:561) study emphasised that “school administrators’ leadership styles, their personal values and professional priorities influence how they implement policy and shape teachers’ action or inaction at school. Teachers felt that they were not supported by their administrators when aiming to end sexual harassment among learners. Teachers voiced that school administrators had a strong and clear response towards harassment that involved physical violence, but in terms of verbal or any other form of psychological torment learners may be experiencing by a peer, teachers felt administration did not want to become involved with those issues (Meyer, 2008).

All of the teachers in Charmaraman et al.’s (2013:442) study revealed that “there had been a lack of consistent, mandatory and administrative support when it came to managing sexual harassment at school”. This correlates with another study stating that “anti-social behaviour tends to increase among learners when teachers have a negative institutional support perception towards managing harassment, which leads to less adult monitoring” (Harel-Fisch et al., 2011:640).

2.8.2 Overwhelming role of a teacher

Teachers articulated that their job as teachers was already time-consuming and stressful, which tended to prevent them from intervening and aiming to stop sexual harassment (Meyer, 2008). For example, teachers in Charmaraman et al.’s (2013:440) study reported that they were hesitant to intervene and try to stop sexual harassment among learners because of their priority role of being a teacher and their lack of time to observe what the learners were doing. This is consistent with the findings by Draugedalen, Kleive and Grov (2021:5) in Norway, which identified various barriers to prevention of harmful sexual behaviour at schools. Teachers across the focus groups emphasised a common concern of already having “too many tasks as a subject teacher” and because of this “enormous responsibility, they often decide which problems are most serious or life threatening at any given time”. In the meantime, differentiating between cases of sexual harassment often leads them not to follow up on all cases. Teachers in Canadian secondary schools, who taught in an urban district in Meyer's study (2008:560), also expressed their concerns of already being “overworked” and “overwhelmed” due to the pressure to “cover curriculum requirements”, which sometimes led to them ignoring problematic behaviour. In a focus group conducted in three high schools in New Hampshire in the US to examine

teachers' own barriers to intervening in situations of learners' dating violence, sexual violence and sexual harassment happening on school premises, teachers stated "not having the time to respond to every form of harassment" because they were already "overwhelmed by a number of other responsibilities that took priority over helping learners in cases of sexual violence and harassment" (Apell, Marttunen, Fröjd & Kaltiala, 2019:6).

2.8.3 Teachers' education and training

Teachers' tertiary education usually focuses on the academic part of their profession and provides "little or no knowledge about learners' delinquency, especially in cases such as sexual harassment among learners and how it should be handled". Many teachers still do not believe that learners sexually harassing other learners was sexual harassment. Others believed that there was a perpetration of sexual harassment among learners, but they were either unsure as to how to respond to it, and/or which actions result in sexual harassment in which they were expected to intervene (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Edwards, Rodenhizer & Eckstein, 2020; Rahimi & Liston, 2011; Shoko, 2012). Meyer (2008b:560) reported that the Teacher's College did not prepare them for sexual harassment among learners, "maybe that is why I was not aware of it, because it was not part of my training, and it had never really been brought up as an issue of concern". In Edwards et al. (2020:8), many teachers reported concerns about the negative impact of intervening and not having the time or ability to help learners in cases of sexual harassment, dating violence and sexual violence perpetrated between learners. This shows a lack of knowledge of this phenomenon that could have been gained from their tertiary education before being hired as teachers. It also "underscores the importance of teachers' workshops and training to reduce these barriers". Teachers often report accessing education on how to handle sexual harassment on their own because "training provided at school was too limited and did not have much effect"; in fact, some "training comprised only hand-out material that did not educate them on how to prevent sexual harassment" (Charmaraman et al., 2013:442).

2.8.4 Inconsistent response from colleagues

In order to overcome sexual harassment incidents occurring among learners at school, teachers have to work together towards achieving a common goal. Inconsistent

responses from colleagues regarding sexual harassment is one of the barriers teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners. Teachers in Meyer's (2008:563) study expressed that they "could not defend certain actions against learners regarding sexual harassment when other teachers were doing nothing to address those same issues or when there were inconsistent reactions among teachers in enforcing certain school rules and regulations". In Lloyd's (2019:9) research, which was carried out in seven schools in England and aimed at understanding the enablers and barriers to preventing and responding to harmful sexual behaviour among adolescents in schools, teachers expressed that when there is "disparity in responses between teaching staff in the way various teachers respond to harmful sexual behaviour among learners, teachers report they feel unable to respond, even if they want to, because they do not feel supported by other teachers". Teachers felt that inconsistency in responses by other teachers undermined their ability to challenge harmful norms.

2.8.5 Fear of parental backlash

Parents and caregiver are an integral part of adolescents' lives. They shape adolescents' behaviour, beliefs and social lives. Doty et al. (2017:4) emphasised that "positive parenting behaviour, positive modelling, parental involvement and support are likely to be a protective factor against learners experiencing sexual harassment that interferes with school". Meyer (2008:564) stated that teachers felt that "issues with parents always impact how certain behaviour is addressed at school". For example, teachers felt that "parents often work against certain behaviour that the teachers are teaching the learners at school, with the parents modelling disrespectful behaviour towards the teacher or challenging the school's rules". While "not all parents work against certain moral behaviour, this is influenced by the community where the school resides". This emphasises that learners would not feel it is important to embrace certain appropriate behaviour taught at school when the parents did not consider some inappropriate behaviour as harassment.

2.8.6 Community values

Community values are part of values that are incorporated into an adolescent's way of life and these values have a direct influence on the school's culture because "interpersonal relationships with families and the community at large are created within

this context, which will influence the school's culture". Teachers in Meyer's (2008b:565) study emphasised that the "values and expectations of the community where the school resided were significant factors that shaped what could and could not happen in their school".

2.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used as a theoretical framework for this study. This approach focuses primarily on how the "ecology" impacts an individual, for example, the context or environment and its emerging interactions. This means that individuals influence the people and the institution of their ecology and vice versa is also true (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

In this study, this framework or approach was helpful for exploring teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is explained in more detail below.

2.9.1 Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory

This theory was developed to understand human development and how the environment has impacted developing individuals. Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that "the ecology environment is like a nested structure, each inside the next and the innermost is the developing individual". He summed it up as "the result of human development equal to humans plus their environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). According to this theory, the "ecological system should not be examined in isolation, but one should rather explore the changes in the system and how those changes affect human beings who live and grow up in the environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1975:439). He also pointed out that humans' development ecology should be "examined in the context of how a developing individual and the changing micro and macro environment connect" (1975:439).

Bronfenbrenner emphasised that the ecological system provides a theoretical framework whereby the processes that shape individual development can be examined, for example, by organisations such as schools or places like homes can be a context of the system that shapes human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2000). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was suitable for this study because it is a framework in which teachers' experiences about managing sexual harassment

among learners could be examined. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory proposed the following systems: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystem, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem and (e) chronosystem.

2.9.1.1 The microsystem

This system consists of a person's immediate environment; it is the starting point of every human being. Bronfenbrenner (1979:22) defined this ecosystem as a “pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced over time by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics”. According to Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000:116), the “microsystem’s importance cannot be understated in individual development because it consists of people with whom the individual has day-to-day interactions, for example, people within the home, such as family, caregivers or people outside the house, with whom the individual has regular or constant contact, such as school, crèche, gym or colleagues at the workplace”.

Teachers are part of the microsystem. They engage daily with the learners inside the school, and they have daily contact with their colleagues at work. This interpersonal interaction has a more significant influence on how they perceive and how they will manage cases of sexual harassment between learners at school, as and when it occurs.

2.9.1.2 The mesosystem

This is the second level in the ecosystem theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) summed it up as “a system of microsystems”. It connects two or more systems in a microsystem in which an individual is actively engaged; for example, the mesosystem illustrates how an individual links school with work and gym (Crawford, 2020:2). Bronfenbrenner demonstrated that this system widened when an individual stepped into a new setting and then these systems might work against each other and diminish (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). “Interaction of each system setting is vital in the mesosystem; it creates a synergy in which an individual is caught up” (Crawford, 2020:2). The school and different structures that work together at school comprise a mesosystem with a teacher and thereafter, typically in the workplace, there may be professional and personal conflicts of values or principles of how to deal with learner-to-learner sexual harassment among staff members.

2.9.1.3 The exosystem

The exosystem is an ecological setting much like the mesosystem, however, an individual is not actively involved in it but experiences its influences and is also influenced by it (Bronfenbrenner, 1975, 1979, 2005). Crawford (2020:3) described the ecosystem as a system that an individual would not be able to have control over. Aucamp, Steyn and Van Rensburg (2014:50) mentioned that “the exosystem might include broader structures, such as the judiciary system, community structures and support networks”. In the context of this study, teachers may not be able to have control over school policy or how it is implemented and supported by the school’s leadership and their colleagues regarding managing sexual harassment at schools.

2.9.1.4 The macrosystem

This system creates a pattern of interaction between all systems, from micro to exosystems, by embracing cultures and subcultures that spring from economic, social, political and legal spheres of life (Bronfenbrenner, 1975, 1979). He further stated that the “macro systems are the blueprint of the society” (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:1645). Aucamp, Steyn and Van Rensburg (2014:50) mentioned that the macrosystem influences and affects individual microsystems. In this study, the macrosystem can be seen as laws and bylaws authorised by the authority, for example, the Department of Basic Education procedures on how sexual harassment among learners should be handled.

2.9.1.5 The chronosystem

The chronosystem incorporates timing into factors that influence the ecosystem of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). It is also known as a system that questions human development as it embraces change and time in system levels for a period of time. The chronosystem of a school may consist of yearly, quarterly or daily changes that may occur in various structures and activities of a school, which significantly impact the school environment, teaching and non-teaching staff members. In the context of this study, sexual harassment among learners is a problem that occurs and can be cumulative for a period of time, depending on the age of the school, the school authorities may or may not have provided teachers with any orientation about how to deal with such problems or enlightened them about how to recognise sexual harassment among learners.

2.9.2 Application to the field of study

The theoretical framework discussed above was applied to the secondary school teachers in Seshego, whose experience in managing sexual harassment was studied. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (2005) emphasised that an individual cannot be studied in isolation, nor can a conclusion about an individual perception be detached from their environment, but understanding individuals interrelates with their environment. This theory emphasised that a person is the product of their interaction with the environment where they find themselves.

Teachers come from different backgrounds with various cultural and religious beliefs. Thus, their perceptions of sexual harassment among learners may differ; one teacher may see it as an act of harassment, while another may perceive it as "playing or teasing". Therefore, teachers' individual perceptions or worldviews about what constitutes sexual harassment among learners may differ and the way they intervene to incidents of sexual harassment may not be the same. Bronfenbrenner (1979) also emphasised that structures in the ecosystem can significantly impact individual development, which individuals have no control over. These can shape an individual's action or inaction. Schools as a working place form part of the ecosystem that the teachers may not have much control over. In other words, teachers can also become passive to cases of sexual harassment if they are working in a school where no proactive actions are taken against learners who are perpetrators of sexual harassment.

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system (1979), teachers are malleable within the social milieu of their environment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is, therefore, helpful in providing a basis of understanding regarding the teachers' experiences with managing sexual harassment among learners.

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research has documented that there is widespread occurrence of sexual harassment among the adolescent population. Many studies have revealed sexual harassment among learners as gender-based violence (Brown & Salomon, 2019; Charmaraman et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 2020; Meyer, 2008; Netshitangani, 2019; Rahimi & Liston, 2011).

However, studies have also proved that sexual harassment among learners is linked to a large extent to learners' development occurring during puberty, which may lead to learners exhibiting aggressive behaviour, influenced by their emerging sexual desires and increased socialising in mixed gender peer groups, especially since their social skills are still immature (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2016, 2018; McMaster et al., 2002; Rinehart et al., 2020).

Learners in secondary schools are at an age when they are experiencing puberty, and puberty hormones trigger learners to typically engage in activities such as opposite sex friendships and romantic relationship that increase the opportunity for sexually orientated exploration and also sexual harassment. Various researchers have documented that being a victim of sexual harassment often leads to problematic reactions, such as anger, depression, trauma, psychological anxiety and feelings of powerlessness (Buchanan et al., 2018; Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Langer, 2017).

Perpetration of sexual harassment has often been downplayed by both teachers and learners, stating that "it is no big deal", it is "a way of being the centre of attention", or "they are trying to be funny", or it is "a way of trying to date someone". However, it has an "emotional impact that often leads to making the learning environment uncomfortable and hostile for the victims and other learners and compromising the equal chances of learning" (AAUW, 2011:17). By ignoring behaviour that are acts of sexual harassment, the violence continues to be legitimated and reinforced among learners. Learners will be "misguided about appropriate and acceptable opposite sex relationships, which may likely lead to dysfunctional ties in adult relationships" (Ramphela, 1997:1190), and "it is not surprising that South African children and adolescents have been caught up in the cycle both as victims and perpetrators of violence".

Several research studies have shown that sexual harassment is perpetrated by both boys and girls and that both genders are affected by its victimisation. Regardless of the gender or intent of the perpetration of sexual harassment, "this violence needs to be recognised as harmful because it contributes to negative mental health outcomes of victim" (Fineran et al., 2003:399).

Teachers play a major role in addressing and suppressing – or ignoring and condoning – unhealthy relationships between learners at school. However, studies

have revealed that often teachers do not know what sexual harassment is all about among learners and behaviour that constitutes sexual harassment is frequently tolerated or even ignored. The assumption by these teachers that unwanted sexual attention is “a normal interacting way among learners in adolescence” may normalise the violence in the school environment. Fineran et al. (2003:399) argued that this assumption should be challenged and corrected by all teachers. Human Rights Watch (2001:20) explicitly stated that “the South African school system has normalised violence and harassment in the school environment because violence and harassment remain unchallenged by authorities”.

Studies have also emphasised the importance of teachers’ ongoing need for training, based on learner-to-learner sexual harassment at school, as teachers play an essential role in the reduction or avoidance of sexual harassment among learners either directly or indirectly (Brown & Salomon, 2019; Meyer, 2008; Rahimi & Liston, 2011; Shoko, 2012).

Although there have been many studies conducted in South Africa exploring sexual harassment and its consequences among learners in various schools (Brown et al., 2009; Fineran et al., 2003; Jacobs & Wet, 2017; Mabusela, 2006; Netshitangani’s, 2019), there seems to be a lack of research data on teachers’ experience of managing sexual harassment among learners. Their experiences in managing sexual harassment in the school environment will help to identify teachers’ perceptions and also the complexity of the problem. It will uncover the challenges and barriers they face when addressing the problem or when they chose not to address sexual harassment among learners at school. Therefore, it was imperative that this research explored this topic at secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit.

The following chapter will discuss in detail the research design and methods used, outlining how the process of data collection unfolded and how the analysis of the collected data was handled. The researcher will also discuss the measures that were applied to ensure trustworthiness and transferability of the study and the ethical considerations that were followed throughout the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the research methodology used for gathering the study's data. The research methodology is a critical component as it provides a detailed description of how the research explored the phenomenon under study. This includes how data were collected, the techniques utilised in the study, the detailed description of how data were analysed and the ethical consideration that guided the research process. This study sought to describe teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners and to identify the challenges and barriers they face when confronted with issues of sexual harassment among learners. Therefore, it was imperative that the researcher use a research methodology and approach that would capture and reflect the phenomenon under study as truthfully as possible and yield the insights and understanding of the problem as accurately as possible.

This chapter presents the interpretive paradigm, the importance of this inquiry method in research and the reason for locating the study within an interpretive paradigm. Thereafter, the chapter will introduce the research approach and defend the decision to use a qualitative approach as an appropriate method for inquiring and exploring teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners. The chapter presents the research design used for the study and the reason why a case study was useful for the phenomenon under study. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was the theoretical framework used for the study and this chapter defends the theoretical framework as the foundation that provides a basis for exploring teachers' experiences regarding managing sexual harassment among learners.

The researcher presents how participants were selected, the data collection strategies, the research setting and the contextual description of each participating school and why they were chosen. The chosen data analysis method, the approach to the interpretation and the findings of the study are also discussed. The researcher also discusses the measures followed to ensure trustworthiness and transferability. The final part concludes with an overview of what was dealt with in the chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A paradigm can be viewed as a belief that guides a study. Olsen et al. (2012) defined a paradigm as a framework or structure that guides scientific or academic ideas. Kuhn (2011:25) mentioned that “a paradigm is a conceptual framework scientists use to solve problems being examined”. Guba and Lincoln (2014:105) asserted that researchers are guided by the paradigm they chose ontologically and epistemologically. This study was conceptualised under the interpretive paradigm.

3.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

Pulla and Carter (2018:9) stated that when a researcher is interested in “studying human behaviour, interactions and social relationship, building an in-depth understanding of people's lives, the research method suitable for such study would be the interpretive research paradigm”. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm was best suited for this study as it yields insights and understanding about a social phenomenon. Creswell (2007:11) defined interpretivism as “a specific way and method of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants”. This denotes that interpretivism is a method of inquiry in which the researcher “listens and identifies the core of a phenomenon that people experience and describes the phenomenon in a way that reflects participants’ experiences as truthfully as possible”. Gray (2014) mentioned that the interpretivist views the world as a “complex component and should not be reduced to observable laws”. Instead, one should “get to know the reason behind a reality”. Ikram and Kenayathulla (2022:41) stated that “interpretivism is to construct meaning by understanding the world and human behaviour”. Kumatongo and Muzata (2021:18) explain that “there is no one-way pattern to knowledge, nor is there knowledge that exists without humans’ reasoning ability rather, they create their reality based on what they have experienced”.

Ikram and Kenayathulla (2022:41) further explained that the “ontological assumption of interpretivism is that truth cannot be universally known by adopting permanent unquestionable standards or methods because the truth is constructed through multiple realities and interpretations”. Rehman and Alharthi (2016:55) stated that “truth and reality are created, not discovered”. This means that the validity of a phenomenon or problem can only be extracted and understood by people who have experienced it.

Collins (2019:54) argued that “interpretivism rejects the notion that the meaning of experiences exists in the world independently of human consciousness”.

Sexual harassment is a problem that exists and thrives among learners in the adolescence stage, where often, sexually inappropriate behaviour is perpetrated towards each other. Sexual harassment can be a reflection of a school’s inappropriate culture, or it can have devastating consequences on the school’s culture if there are no adequate measures taken against inappropriate behaviour at the school. Researchers have shown that because of the complex nature of this behaviour, teachers do not always intervene in sexually harassing behaviour among learners, nor do so in a consistent manner. One teacher may overlook the conduct that constitutes sexual harassment to another teacher; therefore, sexual harassment may be perpetrated and continuing unpunished, or sexually harassing behaviour may even be tolerated and passively normalised. Researchers using the interpretive paradigm recognise that social phenomena are situated in specific contexts and that those contexts shape the meanings that individuals attach to them. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm has proven to be helpful in exploring teachers' experiences of managing sexual harassment among learners.

The research process includes that first, a researcher identifies and gains a greater understanding of human experiences as described by those who experience them. The aim of an interpretive research is “to gain an empathic understanding of human behaviour and experiences, feelings and the meaning they give to everyday life” (Pulla & Carter, 2018:13). Teachers in this study at the selected schools have daily experiences with learners, and they see what learners are doing when it comes to sexual harassment between learners. Interpretivism enables researchers to understand the phenomenon from the teacher's perspective in their everyday context. Interpretivism allows the researcher to describe the reality of a study because it accommodates different factors that the study exposes, such as the internal and external barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners. It also allows the identification of other variables surrounding the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment.

The researcher used the interpretive paradigm because it yielded insights and understanding of action and inaction towards a certain behaviour. In this case, the

researcher focused on the problem as a whole rather than considering a specific part of the problem. Therefore, the researcher asked questions that inquired how various teachers responded to and managed sexual harassment among learners in the school environment. According to Kumatongo and Muzata (2021:42), interpretivism assumes that people's reality may differ because people differ. Research participants are more likely to give opinions based on their own viewpoints or personal values. Harrison (2014) mentioned that there is no single truth anywhere, but multiple versions of reality based on human subjectivity are woven together and presented as a product of truth. Therefore, the “interpretive researcher takes an objective position of writing what they have seen and observed, so that interpretations are based on the original nature of the social reality teachers have witnessed” (Pulla & Carter, 2018:9).

The interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to gather rich and detailed information from participants by exploring in-depth experiences, enabling the researcher to make new discoveries. Myers (2008) argued that interpretivism generates a high level of validity because it enables the researcher to gather a reasonable amount of data based on participants' perspectives and describes all identified variables, so that the whole truth can be told. The interpretive paradigm enables the researcher “not to derail from the purpose of the study and head towards generalisation because the interpretive researcher is more focused on answering the main research question by fully exploring and understanding participants' perspectives, intentions and actions” (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020:42).

Ikram and Kenayathulla (2022:46) asserted that the “strength of the interpretive paradigm comes from its naturalist approach”. The researcher can “examine the whole scenario in a natural setting and take note of the body language of those being interviewed; it is participatory, inclusive, facilitates a human form of communication and is not only limited to understanding humans, but it can also profoundly understand objects, natural environments, or social events”. Therefore, the researcher took an active role in the research process, which included the researcher–participant relationship and by engaging in a dialogue with the participants to understand their perspectives and experiences. The researcher was the only active participant in collecting and analysing the data, which allowed the participants to feel comfortable. The researcher collected data from teachers at four identified secondary schools. The data collection was on the schools' premises, so that observations could take place.

Interpretive researchers aim to “reveal views, opinions and perspectives that emerge from the study rather than giving a definite answer to the main research question and the researcher becomes a participant and observer in the research setting” (Pulla & Carter, 2018:13). The researcher was able to capture and reflect on the teachers' experiences of how they manage the problem under investigation as truthfully as possible and describe it in-depth as accurately as possible. The disadvantage of using interpretivism is that it is subjective in nature which creates a room for bias; however, because of the nature of study the researcher co-constructed knowledge together with participants. This enables the researcher to fully understand the phenomenon under study, and being able to be objective through reporting participants' opinions based on their viewpoints or personal values.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach to a study is the foundation upon which a research design is rooted. A research approach is “a strategy the researcher applies in searching for knowledge or answers about a particular problem by choosing a plan that makes data collection, analysis and interpretation possible”. This approach was based on the philosophical assumption it will bring into the study (Grover, 2015:1). In this study, a qualitative research approach was used.

3.3.1 Qualitative approach

The use of a qualitative research approach ensures a deep inquiry process of garnering understanding of the problem under study. Mohajan (2018:24) defined qualitative research as “a form of social action focusing on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences to understand the social reality of individuals”. Qualitative research is an orderly, planned inquiry into a social phenomenon within its natural setting. The phenomenon may include behaviour, action, relationships, or events about an individual, group of people or organisation. The researcher remains the primary data collecting instrument of the qualitative research approach (Teherani, 2015:669). Willig and Stainton (2017:9) mentioned that the uniqueness of qualitative research is the “effort to understand a situation rather than to measure it; it entails an in-depth understanding of the nature of a setting, which may include behaviour action, inaction or pattern of interaction of people, a group of people or an individual”. According to Horne (2018:29), a researcher uses the qualitative research method to

“understand participants’ opinions, attitudes and beliefs, typically involving conversations and observations of participants in their natural settings”. Mey (2022) asserted that qualitative data are rich and in-depth because the researcher can interact with participants and capture data through paying attention and empathetic understanding. This implies that qualitative researchers study a problem in its natural setting and describe the meaning people make from such a situation, using various methods involving interviews, observations and interactions. Leedy (2010) asserted that qualitative research helps researchers understand how the world is created and how people make meaning from the phenomenon they experience.

Willig and Stainton (2017:9) stated that the purpose of the qualitative approach is to “describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them by giving voice to the participants and allowing their understanding to be foregrounded”. Therefore, when a “why” or “how” question to a prevalence or occurrence of a phenomenon needs to be examined, qualitative research will be the appropriate method. Pulla and Carter (2018:13) stated that qualitative research is not only suitable for collecting non-numerical data, but instead, it is a theory-generating activity. The researcher starts with a topic or question that needs to be answered, which may be the “how, where, when, who and why” questions. The researcher then goes through the data collecting process and proceeds to review and analyse the data. This ongoing process reveals information that can generate more questions to be answered.

Denzin and Lincoln (2014) asserted that the final product of qualitative research is richly descriptive of what a researcher has discovered about a problem. The strength of qualitative research is its “ability to provide raw but rich data and detailed descriptions of participants’ experiences, beliefs and perspectives as the researcher and the participants both engage in uncovering the phenomena under study” (Patton, 2015:25). Charmaz (2014:2) reported that the strength of qualitative research is the “ability to explore a phenomenon deeply to generate new insights and develop theories”. Qualitative research presents a wide array of realities on a particular subject of inquiry in a “context in which such reality is nuanced, so information is expressed in words rather than statistics to make sense of human behaviour and social interactions”. “Qualitative research typically uses open-ended questions, interviews, observations and other techniques to gather data that can be analysed thematically or through

content analysis” (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:24).

Qualitative research has some of the following characteristics as described by Hammersley and Atkinson as cited by Mohajan (2018:17):

- a) Research is conducted in 'real life' rather than in a controlled or experimental setting and deals with “real life” problems and how people experience them.
- b) Since studies are conducted in a natural setting, researchers can directly collect data from participants through interviews.
- c) Qualitative research establishes a holistic perspective of a research problem. Questions are designed to explore, interpret, or understand a problem or social context.
- d) The researcher takes an interactive role by getting to know participants and their social context through direct encounters.
- e) Hypotheses emerge after the researcher begins the data collection and these are modified throughout the study as new data are collected and analysed.
- f) Data are reported in a narrative form.

Considering the characteristics mentioned earlier, the decision to adopt qualitative research was taken in this light. The findings of this research study were derived from the researcher’s personal interactions with the participants during the one-on-one interviews. Participants were able to express their experiences, views and interpretation they give to the phenomena within the comfort of their schools’ settings. Qualitative research aims to understand the meanings, experiences and attitudes of individuals or groups in their natural settings. Mkandawire (2019) asserted that the qualitative research design accesses the participants’ opinions, behaviour, attitudes and interactions.

One key feature of qualitative studies is that they take into account individual experiences and their interpretation given to such experiences (Pulla & Carter, 2018:13). Alharahsheh and Pius (2020:42) pointed out that qualitative research “facilitates enquiring about the views of research participants to understand a phenomenon under study; the process entails finding out quality responses throughout the research process rather than achieving generalisation”. McNabb (2013:35) mentioned that using qualitative methodologies of collecting information provides rich, in-depth knowledge that is easy to understand and analyse.

The qualitative research approach is a methodological approach that focuses on exploring and understanding complex social phenomena. The aim was for the researcher to generate rich, detailed descriptions of the experiences, perspectives and behaviours of participants. The researcher was able to interact with the participants to get to know their understanding of sexual harassment, assess their experiences of sexual harassment among learners and find out how they manage sexual harassment in cases where these incidents happened at school. The researcher was able to probe further into responses that needed more clarification, especially because sexual harassment is a sensitive topic, and teachers were hesitant and careful about what they would talk about. The qualitative research approach helped the researcher gain an understanding of teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among secondary school learners in the four secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit in a more nuanced way.

Mohajan (2018:144) attested that qualitative researchers use visual and textual materials or oral history such as interviews, open-ended questionnaires and journalised data observations to obtain, analyse and interpret data. Fisher and Guzel (2023:260) reported that data generated from qualitative research are “non-quantified data, which can be gathered utilising physical one-on-one or online interviews”. Researchers can also observe participants, which can be achieved physically (one-on-one) or through online observation (Kozinets, 2020). This qualitative study was conducted in four secondary schools at the Seshego circuit, where the data was collected through one-on-one interviews. The qualitative research method enabled the researcher to interact closely with the teachers and collect rich, non-numerical data by allowing them to express their own opinions, perceptions, perspectives and lived experiences about the phenomenon under study in their natural setting.

The researcher was also able to observe participants on the school premises as she believes that observation is equally essential when exploring sensitive topics. Pulla and Carter (2018:13) stated that through observation, researchers can collect data, especially when it involves “interpreting the complexity of human behaviour and interactions among individuals in their social or natural environments”. The researcher observed participants' body language and their countenance towards answering the interview questions and whether they felt comfortable to answer some questions and

others that they 'brushed off' quickly. The researcher was able to gain a) an empathic understanding of participants' perspectives; b) a bigger picture of what they said through their non-verbal behaviour; and c) a description of the interpretation attached to the phenomenon under study as accurately as possible.

Qualitative researchers are concerned with gaining an in-depth understanding of the complexity of human behaviour, which may include behaviour action, inaction or patterns of interaction among groups of people or individuals and their interpretation and understanding of a phenomenon from an individual point of view, where such realities occur, rather than using the quantitative approach. The qualitative research method was best suited for the study because it provided thick descriptions of human perspectives, experiences and interpretation of a phenomenon they experienced. Such accounts could be captured best using semi-structured one-on-one interviews.

3.3.2 The role of the researcher

A qualitative researcher plays the primary role in conducting the study, collecting and analysing data and interpreting and reporting the findings of a study they undertake. Since qualitative researchers are human beings, it is inevitable for perceptions and biases to have an influence over the interpretations. According to Yulita et al. (2023), the qualitative researcher as a human instrument has the task of making sense of the data and reflect participants' perspectives. Researchers' conclusions must be grounded in the experiences and perception of their participants. As the primary collector of the data for this study, the researcher established rapport and trust with the participants to encourage open and honest responses.

The researcher approached this study with an open mind, so as to not drive the interview process towards a preconceived idea and achieve predetermined findings. Since the researcher was responsible for ensuring the trustworthiness and rigour of the data interpretation process, she approached the collected data with an open reflexive mindset, by communicating the findings of the study in a manner that used participants' voices which reflected their perspectives and experiences.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the master plan of what is to be carried out; it includes "how the study will be carried out, with whom and where; the design of a research study involves

the overall approach to be followed and detailed data about the study” (Mohajan, 2018:7). Yin (2013:17) illustrated that a research design is “a roadmap to get answers or derive at a conclusion to the initial research questions”. The research design includes “all the pivotal parts of the study that enable the researcher to address the research questions posed and achieve the set research objectives”. Higson-Smith and Bless (2011:63) defined a research design as “a defined layout that guides the researcher in collecting, analysing and interpreting the data collected”.

3.4.1 Exploratory Case Study

An exploratory case study design was used for this study. This research design is commonly used in a qualitative research method, as it enables the researcher to have an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon within its real life context under study. In this case the study explored four different schools in the same circuit with similar contextual backgrounds. An exploratory case study was appropriate because participants’ experiences could not be manipulated since the researcher could explore multiple realities, thereby enriching the understanding of the phenomenon under study. According to Yin (2018:18), a case study is exploratory when it investigates a real- life problem, especially when the boundaries of the investigated problem and its context are not clearly evident.

Mohajan (2018:11) described case studies as a method that helps one understand complex social phenomena; it also enables the researcher to “retain the originality of life events in a holistic and meaningful manner”. A case study is helpful when studying an individual, group of people or organisations “in the context of the process, interactions or phenomenon, which allows an in-depth holistic understanding of what is being examined” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017:11). Yin (2014:16) stated that when a study poses a question that focuses on “how” or “why” and the researcher has little or no control over the problem being studied, a “case study research method is exponentially helpful”.

Merriam stated that “a case study is useful when a researcher wants to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation, and the meaning people involved attach to it. The interest is the process rather than the outcome, in context rather than being specific, discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1998:19). Hancock and Algozzine (2017:24) described a case study as “a comprehensive examination of a case”, which

could be a group of people, school or an individual “separated for research over time, engaging with participants, so that information can be collected from multiple sources within the context to understand a problem”. This means that a case study examines and analyses a phenomenon by assessing actions and beliefs in the social context in which they thrive.

Ritchie and Lewis (2013) also commented that a case study accommodates multiple perspectives of a specific study context. In light of this, the approach was helpful for this study because it allowed the researcher to assess life experiences holistically, while it also enabled the researcher to accommodate different perspectives, which might lead to discovery. A researcher can employ multiple forms of data collection when using a case study design, which ranges from interviews, either audio- or video-recorded, observation, focus group interviews, journals, field notes or other relevant instruments (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017:24). Although a case study is usually associated with qualitative studies, (which means that findings from the study cannot be generalised to a wider population) it helps one to understand the unit studied as a whole, which means findings from the case study can be generalised to the unit studied.

The exploratory case study research design was helpful for the study because the researcher was able to examine real life problems and gain an in-depth understanding of a situation: in this case the meaning or sense teachers made of sexual harassment among secondary school learners. The study explored and obtained an in-depth holistic understanding of the problem. In the search for new insights into the context of the study and the perspectives of the participants, an exploratory case study illuminated the teachers' experiences, perspectives and problems regarding the problem under study. The exploratory case study design allowed the researcher to discover information that was not known before the study began.

A single-case study was used in the study. According to Yin (2014), a single-case study is used when the phenomenon of interest is unique, rare and complex and requires detailed examination. Hancock and Algozzine (2017:24) stated that a case study is useful when a problem or phenomenon under study relates to developing an in-depth analysis of a “case” or a “bounded system” and if its purpose is “to understand an event activity or process of one or more individual”. A single-case study is a research design

that involves the in-depth analysis of a single individual or group, intending to understand their behaviour, experiences, or phenomena related to their lives or context. In this case, the single group referred to teachers at the four selected secondary schools.

Creswell (2013:120) emphasised that a single-case study method explores the phenomenon that people experience over time through a detailed intensive data collection method from different sources in the study and report its findings in themes and description. Multiple forms of data collection range from interviews, observation, journals and field notes. Denscombe (2011:30) stated that “the logic behind concentrating efforts on one case rather than many is that there may be insights to be gained from looking at an individual case that can have wider implications and importantly that would not have come to light through the use of a research strategy that tried to cover a large number of instances – the survey strategy; the aim is to illuminate the general from the particular”.

The single-case study helped the researcher to focus on teachers at secondary schools. The researcher collected information from teachers of various levels of expertise within the Seshego Circuit. This provided rich and detailed findings, which will be used to inform the DoE. The advantage of a single-case study is that it provides a rich and detailed understanding of the case and allows researchers to identify patterns and themes that may not have been apparent in a larger sample.

3.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was used as a theoretical framework for this study. It is a framework that explores the dynamic interplay between individuals and their environment. This approach focuses primarily on how individuals interact with their ecology and how its emerging interaction impacts an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the importance of considering multiple levels of influence on human development, such as family, school, peers and community, as all of the systems play a role in impacting the lived experiences of human development, no matter how little influence they had on an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). According to Bronfenbrenner, “an individual's development is influenced by the people, places and institutions that surround them”, which he referred to as “ecological systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). “Just like

Chinese boxes fit inside each other”, people’s environments interconnect and interact with one another to influence the individuals’ development as described by Germain and cited by Crawford (2020:2). The ecological system starts from the immediate environment, such as home, family and school, which is the primary setting for that person’s growth. Bronfenbrenner referred to it as the first level of the ecosystem. The first level, as the foundational setting of the ecosystem, interacts with every other level of the ecological system, which can either promote or hinder an individual's development, depending on the quality of the interactions. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasised that larger structures in the ecosystem significantly impact individuals’ development, which individuals have no control over, and which can shape an individual's behaviour and worldview.

The theory emphasised the need for a holistic approach to understanding human behaviour as an ecological system in which individuals find themselves. Its interconnection with other systems directly affects the psychological growth of an individual over time. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) emphasised that persons are the product of their interactions with the environment in which they find themselves.

In terms of this study, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) was helpful as a framework for exploring teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among secondary school learners because it examines the ecological system and how environmental changes affect an individual. Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework emphasises that an individual cannot be studied in isolation, nor can a conclusion about an individual’s perception be detached from their environment, but one has to understand that individuals interrelate with their environment. In this case, teachers come from different backgrounds, either cultural, religious, socioeconomic or ethnical backgrounds have transformed them individually.

This elucidated that their perceptions of sexual harassment among learners differ, and this could influence how they act against it; one teacher may see such an act as harassment, while another may perceive it as “playing or teasing”. Also, based on the different backgrounds, one teacher may feel uncomfortable in handling cases of sexual harassment and, as such, finding themselves incapacitated in handling or talking against sexual harassment, while another may be comfortable and confident in

handling and acting against sexual harassment.

Likewise, the teaching environment in which the teachers find themselves may influence how and when they intervene the cases of sexual harassment when they occur. Sexual harassment among learners can only thrive in an environment where it is not perceived as violence. Some schools may be passive towards sexual harassment, while another school may have zero tolerance for behaviour that constitutes sexual harassment. Teachers as individuals are part of the ecological system and schools form part of the ecological context that shapes an individual. The way teachers intervene and manage cases of sexual harassment among learners can also depend on the environment in which they find themselves. Bronfenbrenner (2005) described individual influences on people and the institution of their ecology. Vice versa influences are equally true.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) provides a basis for understanding people's beliefs, perception, experiences, actions and inaction. The system also takes into consideration various external circumstances and larger structures in the ecological system that sum up a person, especially when it comes to understanding an individual or the role they play in various circumstance of life situation. The theory provides valuable insights that can help professionals understand the complexities of human development and design interventions that promote positive outcomes for individuals in various contexts. In this context, the Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory was helpful in underpinning this study.

3.6 RESEARCH METHODS

3.6.1 Sampling methods

The population for this study comprised all teachers in secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit. As it was impractical to interview all teachers, a sample of these teachers had to be drawn for this study. A sample is the selected unit with similarities to the total population. For example, Shukla (2020:3) defined a sample as the units selected from the population in which data are collected, instead of all units of the population and their findings are generalised in the context of the entire population. A sample can also be described as the actual unit selected for observation (Bhattacharjee, 2012:65). Mohsin (2021:11) described a sample as "the smaller number of participants selected from a population". The researcher chose a non-

probability sampling technique, so only teachers with at least four years of teaching experience at a secondary school were targeted. Berndt (2020:1) stated that qualitative researchers frequently use the non-probability sampling method because qualitative research uses smaller numbers than quantitative research. Mohsin (2021:13) described the non-probability sampling method as “a non-random selection technique as every population unit does not get an equal chance to be selected for the study”, while the researcher's “subjective judgement” is used for the selection. Within the non-probability sampling approach, the researcher used a purposive sampling method.

Purposive sampling is a selective and judgemental technique that allowed the researcher to focus only on the participants who could provide relevant and reliable data concerning the study. Mohsin (2021:30) mentioned that in purposive sampling, the researcher “approaches and chooses samples with a predefined purpose in mind; that is, not every unit of the sample who would be available will be included in the study, but rather only those who meet the predefined criteria”. Crossman (2017:257) defined a purposive sample as “a non-probability sample, selected based on the population's characteristics and the study's purpose”. Laerd (2012:58) explained that this type of sampling is “the selection of units to be studied, which relies solely on the researcher's judgement”.

The researcher chose purposive sampling for the study because some teachers would have richer information about the phenomenon than others. Therefore, they are more likely to provide the researcher with more insights and understanding of the study. Only teachers with at least four years of experience and above participated in the study. Teachers with the minimum of four years' experience would have interacted more with the learners and would have witnessed or experienced cases of learner-to-learner sexual harassment in the secondary schools.

3.6.1.1 Specific samples

A population is a collection of a specified group of people or entities, such as organisations, geographical areas, or institutions. Bhattacharjee (2012:65) defined a population as “people or items with characteristics one wishes to study”. Shukla (2020:1) described a population as “a set of all the units with similar traits, whose findings from the research can be generalised”. The population of a study is “people

who meet the particular requirements specified for the research investigation” (Mohsin, 2021:10). Population refers to people of common characteristics that are of the researcher's interest from which a sample can be drawn and to which results of the intended study could be generalised. A population may include the numbers of specified people or units the researcher wishes to study, the geographical boundaries and the similarities, traits or characteristics of people or entities the researcher wishes to study. A population can be defined in different ways, depending on the research question and the scope of the study. It is imperative that researchers specify and define a study's population clearly. From the defined population, a sample is drawn, and the researcher is able to generalise its findings to the appropriate group. The population of this study comprised a total of 105 educators from the selected four secondary schools in Seshego. Teachers chosen for this study represented different ages, gender and cultural groups. The sample for this study consisted of 16 teachers who comprised members of the school management team, school-based support team, subject teachers, disciplinary committee and both male and female teachers, who all participated on a voluntary basis. The research took place in the secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit and four teachers per school were interviewed, thus a total of 16 participants.

3.6.1.2 Research setting

According to Babbie (2016:84), a research setting is “the place where the research is conducted, the people or participants involved and the period in which the research is conducted”. Leedy and Ormrod (2019:149) stated that a research setting includes “physical, social, or cultural context in which a research study will be conducted”. It includes the location, context and conditions in which the data are collected. A research setting consists of the natural, controlled and virtual settings in which data are collected or analysed. Natural settings are conducted in the real world, for example, in venues such as schools, or communities. In controlled settings, the researcher has greater control over the studied variables. Virtual settings are online or digital environments, such as social media platforms or online surveys and video conferencing.

The schools chosen as the research sites for this study were all public secondary schools in a semi-rural area, surrounded by informal settlements and a rural

area. All four schools were under-resourced and did not have facilities such as libraries, computer labs, sport fields, or school halls. Some of the mobile classrooms were dilapidated and some classrooms were overcrowded, with learners using broken tables or chairs. The researcher chose the secondary schools in this area because it is a disadvantaged area, and the schools had mostly black African learners with different socioeconomic backgrounds attending the schools. Schools in rural areas often have a problem of violence among learners, and learners arrive at the school late in the mornings, there is truancy, delinquency and a lack of proper school governance. The schools also employ mainly black African teachers, which means there is no racial diversity that could have increased the diversity of the study's background. Seshego is divided into eight different residential zones and each zone has at least one or two secondary schools. The researcher decided to include at least four different zones and chose one school in each zone. Below is the contextual description of each school, as well as an overview map of Seshego and Polokwane and the geographical location of the four schools that participated in the study.

Contextual description of the schools

The descriptions are based on the circumstances at the time of the study.

School A

This school is located in Zone 5. The geographical location of the school is semi-rural, but it is surrounded by informal settlements and a rural environment. Most of the learners come from the rural area and the informal settlements. Many of the learners come from child-headed homes because they are orphans, or their parents are working on a distant farm. Many learners come from single-parent families and a few from nuclear families. There are 696 registered learners and 21 teachers in this school. The languages of instruction (LOLT) are English and Sepedi, but the school only has Sepedi-speaking learners and very few learners are not native speakers, but they are acquainted with the area's dominant language. The school is a non-fee-paying public secondary school, offering feeding nutrition programmes for the learners.

School B

The school is located in Zone 4. It is a public secondary school located in a developed

residential area, but its geographical location is still semi-rural. Therefore, it admits learners from rural areas and informal settlements surrounding the site. Learners come from child-headed homes, single-parent families and nuclear families. Most learners' parents have casual jobs, such as housekeeping and farm work and most rely on government's social grants. There are 589 registered learners and 31 teachers in the school. The LOLT are English and Sepedi. The school is a non-fee-paying school, offering feeding nutrition programmes for learners.

School C

The school is located in Zone 2. It is a public non-fee-paying secondary school. It is located in an area very close to a park and two kilometres away from another secondary school. The school is surrounded by residential houses, spaza shops and a butchery. The geographical location of the school is semi-rural, but learners come mostly from the surrounding rural areas and informal settlements. The school has 1013 registered learners and 32 teachers. Registered learners come from child-headed families, single-parent families and a few learners come from nuclear families. The school has a feeding nutrition programme and the LOLT are English and Sepedi.

School D

The school is located in Zone 1. It is a public non-fee-paying secondary school located in an area very close to Shoprite U-Save and four kilometres away from another secondary school and 200 metres away from a primary school. The geographical location of the school is semi-rural. Learners come mostly from the rural areas and informal settlements. It has 620 registered learners and 22 teachers. Registered learners come from child-headed families, single-parent families and few learners come from nuclear families. The school has a feeding nutrition programme and the LOLT are English and Sepedi.



Figure 1: An overview map of Seshego and its environs

Adapted from Seanego & Moyo (2013) (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.pce.2013.08.008>)

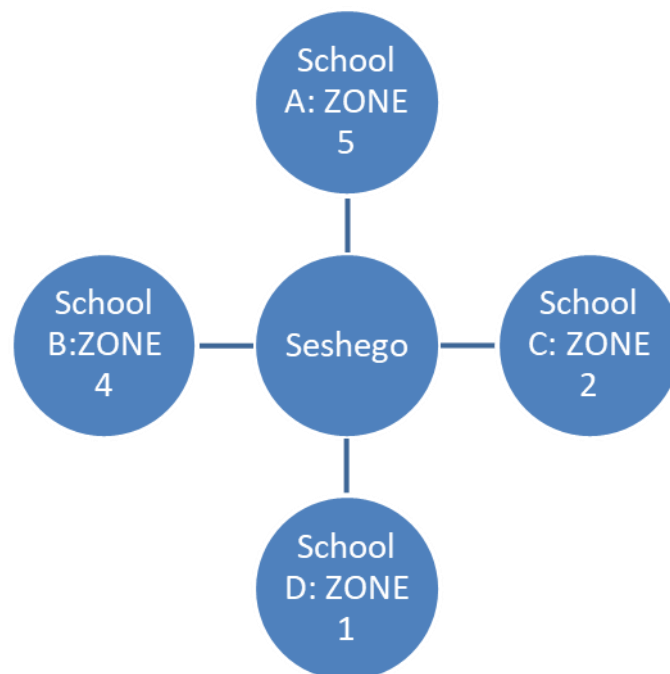


Figure 2: Geographical location of schools that participated in the study

3.6.2 Data collection methods

Data collection is the manner in which information is gathered by using the appropriate

data collection tools (Mey, 2022). A qualitative researcher collects information about a problem under study in a careful manner through personal interviews, focus groups or observation. A qualitative researcher uses a small number of participants as the source of information. Oun and Bach (2014:253) noted that the data collection process is the most integral part of qualitative research because the process defines the quality and communicativeness of the entire research. Hancock and Algozzine (2017:8) concurred that the "quality of qualitative research depends on how effectively a researcher utilises the data collection methods to collect data relative to the research question under study". In-depth face-to-face interviews were used to collect the data in this study.

3.6.2.1 In-depth interviews

An interview is a research method that allows people's experiences, perceptions and attitudes to be gathered. Based on the flexibility that comes with in-depth interviews, interviewing can be done in a place that is safe, where the participants feel comfortable to express their opinions and where distractions are limited. This increases the potential of attaining high-quality information from the participants. Barrett and Twycross (2018) described interviews as a qualitative research technique that involves questioning participants and the researcher conversing with an individual participant to express in an in-depth manner their point of view concerning the research problem, so that the participants' perspectives or experiences can be garnered.

As a valuable tool for understanding people's experiences and perceptions, interviews rely on an interactive method in which "mutual learning occurs between the interviewer and the interviewee". It also allows the interviewer to "probe deeper into the interviewees' responses, focus on their perspectives, clarify meaning and gather additional information of what is essential, revealing problems that the interviewer might not have considered prior to the start of the study" (Young et al., 2018:11).

Griffiee (2005:36) stated that "interviewing is a popular way of gathering qualitative research data" because it is perceived as "talking" and talking is "natural". Babbie (2016:186) concurred that interviewing is all about asking participants questions to obtain information. An interview can either be conducted in person, face-to-face or telephonically. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured. The type of interview used will depend on the research question and the study's goals.

Since the invention of internet technologies, in-depth interviews can also be conducted via email, where participants' responses are attainable, instead of immediate responses during face-to-face interviews (Aborisade, 2013; Fritz et al., 2016). Kaufmann and Peil (2020:243) mentioned that researchers can also use Mobile Instant Messaging interviews (MIMI), utilising WhatsApp to interview participants. With the growing popularity of social media and the convenience that comes with it, as well as the versatile potential to interview people irrespective of the distances, face-to-face interviews can be replaced with audio-visual ones. Audio-visual interviews can be conducted using social media such as "Facebook", "Twitter", "Skype", "Zoom", "Webcam", "MySpace" and a host of other online options for collecting data (Aborisade, 2013). However, for the purpose of acquiring data for this inquiry, considering the sensitivity of the study and the geographical location where the study took place, electronic interviews were not considered suitable for acquiring rich and detailed data. Therefore, the researcher made use of face-to-face interviews, which provided both parties with the opportunity of establishing a rapport with each other, and for participants to become more comfortable with the researcher.

3.6.2.2 Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview is a method of gathering information from selected participants by asking pre-planned questions that address the research question to which follow-up, probing questions are added. De Vos et al. (2011:122) mentioned that researchers use semi-structured interviews to enquire and fully comprehend participants' beliefs about a particular problem or a topic under study. Adams (2015:494) reported that semi-structured interviews are beneficial when researchers want to explore a phenomenon that requires inquiring participants' independent thought, without having other people listening to the interview.

Young et al. (2018:2) described semi-structured interviews as "pre-planned questions in the form of an interview guide, which enables flexibility because the interviewer can ask additional questions if an interesting, new line of enquiry develops in the interview". According to Bernard (2011:180), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to expand the horizons of the problem under study; the researcher can probe more into participants' experiences and attitudes or ask more follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. Adams (2015:493) noted that when conducting a semi-structured interview, researchers often use follow-up questions, for

example, 'why' and 'how' to enquire more about the problem or topic being explored. This gives the researcher ample opportunity to unravel unforeseen hidden issues or attain rich and new in-depth information.

Oun and Bach (2014:254) stated that a "semi-structured interview provides the researcher with the opportunity to discuss experiences in detail, but within the boundaries of the topic, creating an open balance between the rigidity of structured interviews and the lack of a guideline of unstructured interviews". This allows a personalised and dynamic interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Barrett and Twycross (2018) advised that semi-structured interviews should be conducted in a way that captures the core element of the phenomenon under study, while also allowing participants to express themselves freely and acknowledge their perspectives in the discussion.

Considering the topic under study, the researcher had to hold empathic conversations with the participants to gather in-depth information on a one-on-one basis during the interview. The semi-structured interviews were advantageous because they enabled the researcher to ask probing questions. The researcher was able to extract participants' independent thoughts and acknowledge their perceptions, beliefs and perspectives.

The researcher chose face-to-face interviews because this approach encourages open communication. The researcher was able to get to know; and relate to participants before booking an appointment with them for the interview sessions. Face-to-face methods enabled the researcher to establish rapport with participants, while participants also gained trust towards the researcher. Establishing rapport with participant gave the researcher the advantage of participants providing a comfortable, conversational atmosphere within the school environment to conduct the interviews.

Before the commencement of the interview, the researcher explained the aim and purpose of the study, as well as the benefits the findings could provide to the participants to find solutions to the scourge of sexual harassment in schools. They were also informed that the interview was going to be recorded with their permission, but that their anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. Furthermore, they were informed that if they were to feel discomfort because of the sensitivity of the study, they could withdraw from the interview at any time without any consequences. Because of

the sensitivity of the topic and the geographical environment of the schools where this study was carried out, some teachers excused themselves from this study because they did not want to talk about sexual harassment. Their cultural beliefs are that it is taboo for adults to talk about sex, or sex-related matters. The researcher only interviewed teachers who voluntarily and willingly participated in the study. Appointment dates and times were negotiated between the researcher and the prospective participants. The participants' informed consent letters were signed by them before the interviewing sessions started. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher asked for permission to audio-record it. Audio recording allowed the researcher to check that all the information had been noted down correctly and fully. All participants were relaxed and comfortable during the interviews. Each interview session took a minimum of 30 minutes, but because some participants diverted a bit from the posed questions and revealed some extra information, some interviews took 50 to 60 minutes to complete.

The semi-structured interview approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to probe further into responses provided by the teachers that needed more clarity. The personal face-to-face individual interviews allowed the researcher to observe the participants' body language to see if they were comfortable with the questions asked.

The following questions were asked:

- a) What is your understanding of sexual harassment?
- b) What are your experiences of sexual harassment among learners?
- c) What forms of sexual harassment among learners do teachers mainly address?
- d) How do teachers manage sexual harassment among learners?
- e) How do you respond to incidents of sexual harassment among learners you witnessed or that was reported to you?
- f) What barriers do teachers experiences in addressing sexual harassment among learners?
- g) What challenges do teacher experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners?
- h) What measures are in place at school level to prevent sexual harassment from thriving in the school?

3.6.3 Data analysis

McMillan and Schumacher (2010:52) stated that data analysis involves organising the collected data in a manner, so that the researcher can identify similar patterns and themes and analyse how the themes and patterns relate to each other. Qualitative data analysis refers to the researcher analysing textual data. This typically involves several steps, such as “coding the collected data, searching for meaning, description of the social reality through identified themes or patterns and drawing conclusions based on the analysis” (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove, 2016:103).

Thematic data analysis is one of qualitative research's most common forms of analysis. This involves the systematic examination and interpretation of non-numerical data collected through the appropriate data collection instruments to identify patterns, themes and subthemes, which can then be used to develop theories and gain a deeper understanding of the research question. Buetow (2010) described themes as the headlines of data analysis, containing codes that have a common point of reference regarding the subject of inquiry used in presenting results and telling the storyline of a topic. The researcher used the thematic analysis approach in analysing the data collected. The thematic analysis emphasises identifying, analysing, coding and interpreting patterns of meaning or themes within the qualitative data. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes and use them to address the research question.

Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016:103–108) described four phases in theme development used in qualitative research and thematic analysis, which are: “initialisation”, “construction”, “rectification” and “finalisation”. These phases are illustrated in a diagrammatic representation and discussed in detail below. The researcher will also discuss how these four phases of theme development in the thematic analysis were applied to develop the themes and subthemes for this study.

The four phases of theme development in qualitative and thematic analysis

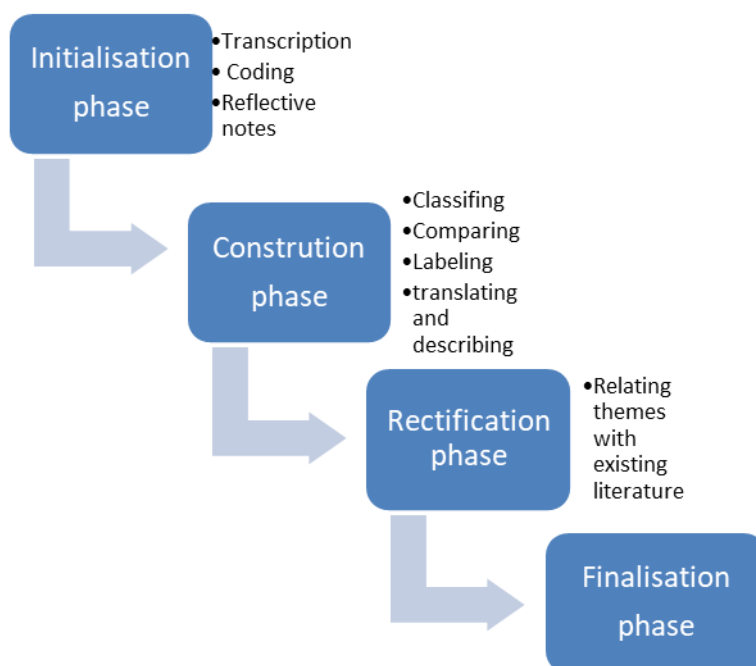


Figure 3: The four phases of theme development in qualitative and thematic analysis

Adapted from Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016:103)

The **initialisation** phase, as described by Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen and Snelgrove (2016:103) consists of transforming all data collected into textual information. The purpose of doing this is to be able to read and re-read the transcribed data, so that the researcher understands the data collected, is able to highlight issues identified and to describe trends of participants' perspectives by using their direct quotations. Data collected may include audio recordings from the interview, photography, video recordings, observations and field notes (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The next step in the initialisation phase is coding. Coding is the initial stage of the development of a theme. Researchers use their intuition to reduce the amount of raw data collected by transforming them into a relatable level of insight relevant to the research question (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The final step in the initialisation phase is writing up a reflective note. Vaismoradi et al. (2016:105) noted that writing notes enables the researcher to “reflect on what was done so far; it also helps the researcher remember what had been identified so far and make meaning of the data collected”.

The researcher examined the interview scripts, notes and recordings and

systematically organised them until they were understood. Then the researcher transcribed the audio-recorded interviews into a written version. Participants' views, opinions, tone and gestures documented from the observation by the researcher were written on a reflective note. After each interview, the researcher reflected on what was said. This helped the researcher not only to reflect and question what had been said, but also to keep an audit trail and substantiate trustworthiness.

The **construction phase**, as described by Vaismoradi et al. (2016:104), consists of researchers using their creative ability to classify the transformed data (code) into similar categories. For example, suppose a code has more than one possible classification. In that case, the researcher categorises it in a class that best suits it — comparing which group of data continues to appear repetitively and, in multiple situations, enables labelling. Labelling redundant data is crucial as they can become a theme. Vaismoradi et al. (2016:105) described a label as “a conceptual word and as something that presents the participants' story”. Aronson (1994:2) stated that a label is “usually generated from reading the transcribed data, which includes feelings identified by the researcher during the interview”. In addition, translating and describing the label is important because it enables data analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). The researcher read the transcribed data and verified the transcribed data with what was tape-recorded to ensure that the data accurately reflected what the participants said. This process enabled the researcher to become familiar with the transcribed data before the process of coding and interpreting the data began. The researcher used her creative ability to classify the transformed data (code) into similar categories. Codes with similar categories were grouped and if a code had more than one classification, then the researcher categorised it in a class that best suited them. The codes produced patterns, which were categorised accordingly under themes. Each theme was given a title with the intention of establishing teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners.

The **rectification phase**, as described by Vaismoradi et al. (2016:106), involves that researchers have to “increase their sensitivity towards theme development”. Vaismoradi et al. (2016:106) describe this stage as the “verification process”, which involves the researcher re-evaluating and re-appraising the data analysis. This can be achieved by researchers immersing themselves in the data analysis and also

conversely distancing themselves from it, so as to rigorously examine the data process during the transformation of data to themes.

The researcher verified the certainty of the themes by relating the developed themes to existing literature before the data collection started. The researcher also ensured that the themes connected with subthemes and could be used to explain the problem being studied (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). At that stage, the researcher's motive was to make meaning from the whole process of data analysis to theme and subtheme development, so that the storyline would reveal the data analysis process. The researcher chronicled and presented the findings to produce an account of data that revealed information about the phenomenon under study.

The **finalisation phase** is the last stage of theme development in thematic analysis. It reveals the process of the whole data analysis, data saturation and the connection of themes to subthemes. It involves the researcher using their “creative ability to create a coherent and plausible story from the collected raw data in which themes and subthemes are described and connected” as described by Pratt and cited by Vaismoradi et al. (2016:107). The researcher developed a storyline that provided a holistic view of the research topic: teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among secondary school learners in Seshego. The researcher stayed true to participants' perspectives by ensuring the developed themes revealed only the participants' views, enabling the researcher to present a rich and detailed account of the phenomenon under study. The storyline portrayed participants' perspectives, and it was “based on the whole of the data collected rather than isolated parts of data” (Vaismoradi et al., 2016:107).

3.7 TRUSTWORTHINESS, TRANSFERABILITY AND CREDIBILITY

To ensure the reliability of qualitative research, trustworthiness is crucial; trustworthiness is the evaluation of the data quality. The aim of trustworthiness in qualitative research is to support that the findings in a study are “worth paying attention to”. Trustworthiness consists of four elements: credibility, conformability, transferability and dependability, as described by Lincoln and Guba and cited by Junjie and Yingxin (2022:13).

3.7.1 Credibility

According to Adler (2022:435), credibility is the confidence that the research method reveals the truth of the findings. The techniques used to establish credibility include prolonged engagement with participants, persistent observation, peer debriefing and member-checking. To ensure credibility, the researcher used semi-structured interviews, the most suitable data collection method to answer the research questions. Elo et al. (2016:4) recommend pilot-testing or pre-interviews to test if the interview questions are suitable for obtaining rich data that answer the research questions. To ensure that the interview questions were ideal for collecting rich data, a pilot test of the interview questions was done before the data collection process began. The researcher met with two volunteers on the school premises to test if the questions intended for the interviews were clear and if the language used to formulate the questions was appropriate. The researcher was able to assess if the volunteers' answers to these questions were applicable to the study and if they had the required knowledge to be able to answer what was asked. The researcher made some language adjustments to the interview questions where this was needed. During the interview sessions, a credibility strategy was used through prolonged engagement with the participants, where an extended communication period was established through face-to-face interview interactions.

3.7.2 Confirmability

According to Edgerton (2012), confirmability refers to the objectivity or neutrality of the data collected. Therefore, confirmability can also be referred to as the researcher's objectivity. It is the degree to which findings from a study are "consistent and can be repeated and are not based on the researcher's bias" (Adler, 2022:432). To enable confirmability, the researcher ensured that the study's findings reflected the participants' responses. This was operationalised by reading the transcribed data, also replaying and listening to the recorded interview sessions to ensure that the transcribed data accurately reflected what the participants said. It also included highlighting issues the participants identified and described by using the participants' own quotations. Reflective notes and recordings of each interview were kept in order to provide access to follow-up questions and a detailed audit trail of what was done. Reflective notes helped the researcher to reflect on the data collection process. These notes also helped the researcher to question and map the whole research process.

The recordings were stored in a safe place, where only the researcher has access to playing the recordings again. This enabled the researcher to give attention to data saturation and study the data collection from a new angle.

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time. These findings “would be the same if a similar or comparable participant in the same or similar settings were to be interviewed for another research” (Polit & Beck as cited by Adler, 2022:435). The researcher provided a detailed description of the methodology, the research participants, the research setting, as well as the data collection instruments. The provision of such details will assist future researchers in replicating this study. The researcher also ensured that an identical data collection method was applied consistently throughout the research process and kept a trail of the research process, including what was observed and what was added. The report of findings also provides a point of reference for future researchers, who would be looking at replicating the study in a similar context.

3.7.4 Transferability

This is the extent to which findings from the study are “helpful to persons in other settings in a way that those who never participated in the study could relate to findings from the research and its applicability to their situations” (Polit & Beck as cited by Adler, 2022:435). This can be achieved by a researcher making sure that the findings from the study “reflect the participants' point of view and not the researcher's biases, motivation or perspectives” (Adler, 2022:436). The researcher applied the duty of good faith and being impartial when conducting the research. The researcher did not use her personal experience or feelings to influence any of the results or the findings from the study. The researcher’s approach to the data collection was at all times keeping an open mind and allowing the data collected to guide the conclusions of the study.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher obtained permission from Unisa's Ethics Review and Clearance Committee (see Appendix I) and adhered to the supervisor's guidance to ensure integrity. In addition, the researcher received approval from the Limpopo DoE (see Appendix J) and the circuit offices to visit schools and collect data. The researcher also

obtained permission from the schools' principals (see Appendix E) and the consent forms were given to potential participants before the interview sessions (see Appendix H). The researcher ensured the participants' anonymity, confidentiality and privacy during and after the data collection by not divulging personal information provided or identifying the participants' information together with their data. Participants were aware that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the interview without having to give a reason.

3.8.1 Informed consent

Informed consent is a written statement requesting participants' voluntary agreement to participate in a study before it commences; it usually explains what the study is about (Neuman, 2010:105). For example, Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:201) described informed consent as a contract between the researcher and the participants; the researcher must fully provide the participants with what will be asked of them, how the data will be used and if there will be any consequences, including understanding their rights to access to their information. Participant must sign the informed consent letter to take part in the research.

It is an ethical principle that the research participants should be informed about the research. Therefore, the researcher provided participants with complete and transparent information about the study they were asked to participate in, which allowed them to make an informed decision if they wanted to be part of the research. The researcher provided the participants with information about the topic as well as the intended purpose and aim of the study and how the data was to be collected, used and reported. The researcher also informed them of any potential risk, how their privacy and confidentiality were going to be protected and that they had the right to withdraw or refuse participation, as well as the researcher's contact details if there were to be any concerns. Informed consent letters were given to prospective participants before the interviews were conducted and all signed consent forms were treated with the utmost discretion and stored away in a safe place.

3.8.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Bhattacharjee (2012:147) reported that to ensure participants' anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher should not divulge any identifying information to the public or identify participants' information with their data. Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:211) described participant confidentiality as meaning that although the researcher knows the participant, the data given by the participants should be de-identified and the identity should be kept confidential. Considering that sexual harassment is a sensitive topic, the researcher created an environment in which participants felt free to express themselves, while they were assured that their anonymity was protected. This meant that the researcher respected the participants' rights and did not name them; nor mention details participants would like to keep private during or after the audio-recording. Pseudonyms were allocated to participants to hide their identities during data collection. Also, no video recordings were done during the interviews to keep the participants' identities anonymous. All information was treated in strict confidence and used for academic purposes only and all raw data was kept confidential in a secure place.

3.8.3 Prevention of deception and coercion

Participants were made aware that their participation in the study was "voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any unfavourable consequences" (Bhattacharjee, 2012:147). There were no direct benefits to the individual participants, so they did not feel enticed to join the study. They were not coerced in any way to participate in interviews; they voluntarily decided to participate or not. All participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study without giving any reasons.

3.8.4 Privacy

The researcher protected the privacy of participants by not using recording devices without their consent and the information they provided was not shared with others without permission. Names or other forms of identification did not appear anywhere in the data analysis. Codes were allocated to participants to identify their details instead of using their names.

The data containing the real names and pseudonyms/numbers allocated to the participants were not identified along with the recorded tapes, the reflective notes, or the transcripts from the study.

3.8.5 Respect for cultural differences

Since the study was conducted in semi-rural secondary schools, the researcher assumed that culture would play an important role in people's lives and in the community. Cultural beliefs are an essential aspect of identity and play a significant role in shaping how one interacts with others and perceives the world around one. Cultural beliefs are a pivotal part of the Seshego community, which may also directly or indirectly influence the schools' milieu. Thus, understanding and respecting cultural beliefs is essential. The researcher respected participants' cultural views and perspectives within the context of their community system as the research was conducted in the local secondary schools within the identified community.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an in-depth overview of the research methodology that was used for the study. It explained the research paradigm and the interpretive paradigm as well as the choice of interpretivism as the best method of inquiry for this particular study because the researcher was listening to and reflecting on participants' lived experiences. It further explained the qualitative research approach and design, which were chosen for the study because the researcher was able to interact physically with the participants at the chosen four schools. Participants were able to connect with the researcher on a deeper level through the face-to-face interview method that was used during the data collection. The semi-structured interviews provided the researcher and the participants with the opportunity to discuss in detail the study's stated problem and to look introspectively beyond the boundaries of the topic.

The selection of research participants and the description of the selected four schools were also outlined in this chapter. Purposive sampling was used to select a total of 16 teachers. Only teachers with at least four years of experience and above participated in the study. One secondary school was chosen in each of the four zonal areas of Seshego. Thematic data analysis was chosen to analyse the collected data: the various stages of how the thematic analysis was used in analysing the raw data collected to develop patterns for meaning or themes were explained. The four phases

of the theme development were done using thematic analysis as described by Vaismoradi et al. (2016). This helped the researcher to identify themes, link them to their subthemes and use them to address the research question.

The following chapter will focus on data presentation, presenting the verbatim quotes and the findings from the interviews conducted with the participants. The researcher allowed the collected data to guide the discussion and interpretation and related the findings to relative literatures consulted, as well as the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the methodology used to answer the research questions and obtain data on the topic “Teachers’ experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners”. It provided a detailed description of how components of the research methodology were used to explore the phenomenon under study. This included how data were collected, the precise techniques that were utilised to accomplish the objectives of the study, a detailed description of how the data were analysed and the ethical considerations that guided the research process. This chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation of the findings from the study.

4.1.1 Research questions

The aim and objective of the study were to describe teachers’ experience in managing sexual harassment among learners from Grades 8 to 12 and to investigate the challenges and barriers teachers are facing when addressing sexual harassment among learners at school. In order to achieve this, the researcher posed the following questions:

Main research question

What are teachers’ experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners?

Research sub-questions

- a) What forms of sexual harassment among learners do teachers mainly address in secondary schools?
- b) What barriers do teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?
- c) What challenges do teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?

In order to answer these research questions, the researcher used the case study research design. The case study research design enabled a thorough examination of the problem, which led to discovering what was previously unknown. The case study approach was beneficial in gaining an insight into teachers’ experiences and

investigating the problems teachers encounter when trying to prevent or address sexual harassment among learners. The researcher conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to gather data from teachers, which encouraged open communication with them and allowed the researcher to observe them during the interviews. The responses from the participants during the interview sessions led to the researcher probing deeper into what disciplinary measures, if any, were taken at the schools to prevent experiences of sexual harassment among learners. The additional probes led to further information that had not been anticipated before the research started.

This chapter firstly presents the participants' demographics and secondly, their individual interview codes. Thirdly, the emerging themes and subthemes that arose from the study are presented: this section also presents the analysis of the data and its interpretation. The findings from this study are substantiated with information from the literature review of various scholars by discussing and relating them to the verbatim interview findings from this study's participants. The researcher analysed, interpreted, and will discuss the findings with the aim of achieving the objectives of the study by describing teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The final part of the chapter concludes with the overall summary of the findings.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit. Seshego is a semi-rural area, which consists primarily of a black African population. The circuit has more than 18 secondary schools situated in eight different zonal areas in Seshego and environs. The researcher chose four secondary schools from these separate zonal areas and interviewed four teachers each from the four secondary schools. A total of 16 participants were interviewed.

Interviewed participants were purposefully selected from the chosen four secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit. Participants were purposefully selected as teachers with at least four years of teaching experience would have interacted more with learners and would have been more likely to have witnessed or experienced cases of learner-to-learner sexual harassment in these secondary schools. It is important to note that the number of teaching years' experience stated by these teachers are cumulative and

this does not necessarily reflect their service rendered in only one school.

Based on the sensitivity of the topic, the ages of teachers were not considered for selecting participants because many older teachers were raised in a different era and were culturally “sensitive” and so they were not comfortable to discuss sexual matters or sexual harassment with anyone. Therefore, any voluntary qualifying teacher with at least four years of experience, regardless of their age, was considered for the study. Male and female teachers with various years of teaching experience from the senior phase and the FET phase participated in the study. Four members in managerial positions, such as principal and vice principal also voluntarily participated in the interviews that were held on the premises of each school. A total number of 11 male and five female teachers participated in the study. The demographic details in Table 1 represent the participants from each school, which include the participants’ gender, the years of teaching experience and the roles and responsibilities of each participant at their respective school.

Table 1: Summary of participants' demographic details

Participant and School	Gender	Teaching Experiences	Roles and Responsibility
School A			
Participant 1	Male	9 years	Subject teacher and SBST member
Participant 2	Male	4 years	Subject teacher
Participant 3	Male	4 years	Subject teacher
Participant 4	Female	17 years	Subject teacher
School B			
Participant 5	Male	6 years	Subject teacher
Participant 6	Male	23 years	Subject teacher and SBST member
Participant 7	Female	12 years	Subject teacher
Participant 8	Male	35 years	Principal
School C			
Participant 9	Male	36 years	Principal
Participant 10	Female	28 years	Subject teacher
Participant 11	Male	7 years	Subject teacher
Participant 12	Female	30 years	Vice Principal
School D			
Participant 13	Male	35 years	Subject teacher and member of the disciplinary committee
Participant 14	Male	9 years	Vice Principal
Participant 15	Female	8 years	Subject teacher and SBST member
Participant 16	Male	4 years	Subject teacher

Participants' individual interview codes

The table below indicates the codes the researcher used to anonymise the data obtained from the participants. The interviews were conducted at a pre-arranged time with the selected participants on the school premises. All participants were given a number as per the sequence in which they were available for interviews. The first two upper-case letters before the number denote the participant and the last lower-case letters after the numbers indicate the school. Table 2 below provides a step-by-step explanation of the codes.

Table 2: Codes and their interpretation

Explanation of codesPA:

Participants

1-16: Individual Interviews from number 1-16

PA1 to PA16: Participants' Individual interviews from number 1 to 16

a, b, c, d denotes School A, B C, or D

School A

PA1a to PA4a: refers to participants' individual interview 1-4 school A

School B

PA5b to PA8b: refers to participants' individual interview 5-8 school B

School C

PA9c to PA12c: refers to participants' individual interview 9-12 school C

School D

PA13d to PA16d: refers to: Participants' individual interview 13-16 school D

4.3 EMERGING THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

In analysing the data to arrive at the themes and subthemes in Table 3, the researcher first familiarised herself with the data collected through the semi-structured interviews by reading and re-reading the transcribed data. The researcher carefully identified information with similarities and connections to identify the themes and subthemes. Five themes emerged, which were used to produce a storyline that gives a holistic view of the study's phenomenon. For the storyline to be enriched, the researcher used participants' verbatim quotations and captured these in italics, aiming to portray their perspectives. The researcher also ensured that the themes connected with the subthemes and could be used to explain the problem being studied.

Table 3: Identified themes and subthemes

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
Teachers' perception of sexual harassment among learners	Varying understanding of sexual harassment. Experiences of sexual harassment. Managing sexual harassment.
Forms of sexual harassment teachers address	Physical sexual harassment Verbal sexual harassment
Barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment	Incapacitated teachers Cultural and religious beliefs Socioeconomic factors Lack of safety
Challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment	The short skirt phenomenon Lack of teachers' support for each other Exposure to social networks & media Lack of knowledge among learners Lack of support from authorities
Measures to prevent sexual harassment	Vague Code of Conduct, not consistently implemented

4.3.1 Theme 1: Teachers' perception of sexual harassment among learners

The study revealed that sexual harassment among learners is still a serious and growing occurrence that learners perpetrate towards one another at the schools. Some teachers believe that learners regard inappropriate acts towards each other as playing or trying to draw the attention of another person. The first theme indicates how teachers understand sexual harassment and how they think of their own roles in managing cases of sexual harassment taking place on the schools' premises. The following three subthemes emerged from the analysis of Theme 1: "varying understanding of sexual harassment", "experiences of sexual harassment" and "managing sexual harassment". These subthemes are discussed below with selected verbatim extracts from the interviews. Verbatim quotations were sometimes translated to increase the understanding of the participants' expression.

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1: Varied understanding of sexual harassment

The study explored teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among learners. During the course of the interviews, it became apparent that teachers have different levels of understanding what sexual harassment is, based on what they experience.

Question: What is your understanding of sexual harassment?

PA14d: *"It is when you impose a particular behaviour on a person; in this case, it would be sexual behaviour, inappropriate touching and inappropriate sexual conversations."*

PA8b *"Sexual harassment is unwelcoming behaviour towards the opposite sex and it can be in different forms, physical and emotional. It can also be a form of verbal ... as long as you are doing something that the other learner does not accept, then that is sexual harassment."*

PA3a: *"My understanding of sexual harassment would be that that ... Where one behaves in a specific manner that makes the other person uncomfortable, like sexual advances ... like a learner touching another in a wrong way or saying things out of line."*

Views from participants PA14d, PA8b and PA3a indicate that these participants

understand what sexual harassment is. Participants mentioned that sexual harassment is unwanted or unwelcomed sexual attention, which is not only limited to unwanted physical harassment but also involves the non-verbal and verbal harassment. In most cases, teachers tend to overlook unwanted non-verbal and verbal incidents and do not see them as harassment. Conroy (2013:341) described sexual harassment as unwanted or unwelcome sexual attention that could be verbal, non-verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature that cause a hostile environment, making it impossible for learners to benefit fully from the educational programme provided at school. Sivertsen et al. (2019) defined it as unwanted sex-related behaviours that the recipient sees as being offensive or as threatening the recipient's well-being beyond coping. According to this definition, behaviour can only be sexual harassment when the recipient does not welcome it or want it, thus creating a hostile or abusive environment for the recipient.

Unfortunately, it seems as if not all teachers recognise most sexual harassing behaviours as violence and tend to overlook such incidents, or they “shrug them off” as daily “normal” interactions between learners. Teachers’ understanding of sexual harassment is diverse as only some teachers choose to see the physical, verbal or non-verbal form of sexual harassment as violence. The following responses highlight such varied understanding.

PA1a: *“Sexual harassment is an act that may be unfair or not comfortable, it can be verbal or physical, for example, nasty comments about peers’ looks.”*

PA2a: *“Sexual harassment is the display of explicit sexual behaviour towards another person without their consent, making them feel uncomfortable.”*

PA12c: *“Sexual harassment, according to me, when one is being touched inappropriately he or she doesn’t feel comfortable ... According to me, this is how sexual harassment starts because if you can allow touching one another in that way, it leads to something else.”*

These answers show that some teachers have the basic knowledge of the sexual harassment definition as an unwanted or unwelcomed sexual attention perpetrated

from one learner towards another, making the learner feel uncomfortable. However, the researcher realises that there are various ways they conceptualise sexual harassment. PA12c mentioned only physical conduct of a sexual nature as being sexual harassment. Charmaraman et al. (2013) stated that teachers sometimes find it easier to label an act as sexual harassment when someone has been physically touched inappropriately rather than any other form of sexual harassment that may occur among learners. PA1a mentioned both inappropriate physical and verbal conduct of a sexual nature as sexual harassment. This might also mean that the non-verbal form of sexual harassment perpetrated by one learner towards another learner may not matter as much to them.

However, PA2a expressed that sexual harassment is only a non-verbal approach towards another learner. Rahimi and Liston (2011:801) stated that teachers have different perspectives towards how they perceive sexual harassment among learners and this perception hinders them from attempting to address incidents that constitute sexual harassment.

4.3.1.2 Subtheme 2: Experiences of sexual harassment among learners

For the second subtheme that emerged from the participants' varying understanding of sexual harassment, the researcher probed participants by asking them to provide examples of incidents of sexual harassment they experienced. Teachers stated that both boys and girls are perpetrators of sexual harassment. They explained that learners "*see nothing wrong in inappropriate touching of another learner*" or saying, "*sexually nasty things about another learner*". Although teachers also mentioned that sexual harassment is almost tolerated as a norm among learners in the school environment, they also attribute the occurrences of sexual harassment among learners to the emerging pubertal hormones during adolescence. Another belief among some teachers is that there is a sense of "*entitlement boys have over girls*".

PA6b: "The challenge is adolescents are just careless and not even aware they are abusing each other. They think they are playing with each other. Suppose one girl comes to report a boy. They just apologise without showing a sense of remorse. Sexual harassment often happens, it's like a game to them. For example, calling a girl by her private part and also a girl responding by calling the boy by his private part as if nothing is wrong with that."

PA16d: *“My experience of sexual harassment among learners is you might find out that boy learners usually hug and they do this without the female learners’ consent and sometimes you find out that a female learner is complaining that ‘this boy hugged me and I don’t want to be hugged’. Another form of sexual harassment that is common is touching. The confusing part about this one is when you ask the boy ‘why are you doing this to her?’ or playing with her breast. He will say ‘we play like that and she does not complain. I don’t know why she is in a mood today’. Another one is attacking each other verbally in a sexual way; for example, shaming each other’s body image; for me that is sexual harassment.”*

PA12c: *“Okay, yes ... They think they are playing because when they are confronted by their hormones, they think it’s a play. Now, they do it every day, they don’t ... even in public they do it ... the other girl was crying the other time that this boy came at her back and touch her butt; she was crying because she was told at home no one must touch you that way, because they start by touching that way, it escalates. Sometimes you find when you walk around the school, you see them sitting inappropriately in the school ... A girl and a boy sitting on top of each other, then you wonder what are they thinking and another thing is hugging, nowadays they like hugging and kissing and this can be sexual harassment when both parties do not agree to that. Sometimes you come across them coming to report each other ‘she hugged me’, ‘I don’t know why she is hugging me like that’; that is what is happening.”*

Teachers indicated that both boys and girls could be both perpetrators and victims of sexual harassment from a peer at school. This notion is supported by previous studies that have also demonstrated that not only boys are the perpetrators of sexual harassment, but girls also increasingly self-report that they are perpetrators of cross-gender sexual harassment (Bendixen et al., 2018; Gillander et al., 2019; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2018; Rinehart et al., 2020b). Teachers attributed pubertal hormones as the cause of sexually harassing behaviour as boys and girls touching each other’s private body parts inappropriately. This finding confirms the view of Hill and Holly (2011:7) and McMaster et al. (2002:92) (see 2.5.1) that sexual harassment begins in adolescence, but it increases in prevalence as learners enter puberty. According to the developmental perspective, sexual harassment among learners is seen by many as

the “*normal*” part of adolescent development that is deeply rooted in biological and social developmental. During puberty, sex hormones increase, which may motivate adolescents to have sexual interest in another peer that might not be expressed appropriately. McMaster et al. (2002:92) illustrated that puberty is a defining moment for adolescent boys and girls and this biological transition may increase sexually harassing behaviour. The literature in Chapter 2 (2.5.2) showed that during puberty, the prevalence of sexual harassment becomes “*almost inevitable*” among adolescents. Researchers have reported that the increasingly visible biological differences between boys and girls as their sex hormones increase and the adolescents’ social network and interactions during this stage become more complex and sophisticated. Opposite sex friendships also become more common, which may motivate adolescents to have sexual interest in another peer that might not be expressed appropriately (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2016, 2018; McMaster et al., 2002; Rinehart et al., 2020; Shahabuddin, 2008).

However, merely excusing sexual harassing behaviour because of the puberty hormones may encourage some teachers to overlook unacceptable display of learners’ sexual interest towards peers. Statements such as “*they (learners) think they are playing*” as expressed by PA6b and PA12c, seem to indicate that perhaps teachers assume learners do not recognise their inappropriate sexual behaviour as being violence against their peer, even when it is not welcomed or makes another peer feel uncomfortable. Some teachers may assume that learners are just ignorant of more appropriate behaviour around their peers, while their sexually harassing behaviour seems to them (and some teachers) like normal day-to-day interactions between learners in the school environment. In the same vein, another teacher remarked:

PA2a: “*Girls are mostly harassed by boys, the reason why is because they feel entitled to girls, also the hormones influence the behaviour of sexually harassing each other.*”

PA2a: *I have had girls reporting ‘touching my butts, breasts and kissing’. I have also seen them doing this.*”

The biological and social developmental changes as an emanation of sexual harassment among adolescent is specific to cross-gender harassment, especially among predominantly heterosexual learners. It solely rests on the assumption that

boys are the primary perpetrators of sexual harassment and girls are mostly the victims. However, Conroy (2013:349) argued from a feminist lens that sexual harassment across gender should not be narrowly viewed as an inability to express sexual interest in peers appropriately, especially in secondary schools where learners interact with mixed sex peer groups. Instead, adolescents may also emulate the assertion of male dominance over females in the outside world to their female peers to reinforce their dominant notions of gender and power in the school setting (Conroy, 2013). It has to be noted that this study was carried out in a patriarchally dominated community, where males enforce their masculinity to subordinate their female counterparts. Perhaps, pubertal hormones may not be the only reason why learners harass each other, especially between cross-gender situations and that some copied dominance of one gender over another (role modelling taking place in society) might have penetrated into the school environment. However, irrespective of the motive of it taking place, sexual harassment has a negative emotional impact that can lead to the learning environment becoming uncomfortable and hostile for all learners, thus compromising any equal chances of learning.

4.3.1.3 Subtheme 3: Managing sexual harassment among learners

In response to having asked teachers to recall their experiences of sexual harassment among learners and their varying understanding of what sexual harassment is, teachers seemed to be divided in the way they manage or ignore sexual harassment at school. Teachers expressed that managing sexual harassment at school is a challenge as it seems to happen “*every time, every minute either in the classes or on the school ground or in the tuck shop*”. Because of the overwhelming occurrences of inappropriate sexual behaviour the learners indulge in, not all teachers make an effort to address the incidents when they occur or when they see them happening. Teachers claimed that they address sexual harassment based on their assessment of the incidence and the perceived seriousness of the incidence. Because of the different perceptions held by the teachers, the researcher divided the data analysis of this subtheme into two parts. The first part of the data analysis describes how teachers manage incidents of sexual harassment when “*minor harassments*” occurs, as they refer to them; the second part of this analysis is when sexual harassment involves “*physical violence*”. An exposition of the subthemes is given below.

PA8b: *“Learners do not see anything wrong in inappropriate touching, but when reported, we sit them down, talk to them, scold them and show them the consequences of that.”*

PA12c: *“I think we may be overlooking sexual harassment because in the olden days, you don’t see hugging and kissing in public and sitting on top of each other of the opposite sex, so now if this is happening so much, it is possible we as educators are not doing enough. You see, sometimes I tell security don’t leave them playing around the school ground after school, when they are not doing anything, because you will not know what they will do. If you leave them in classes, anything can happen. Now, as for us teachers, we manage sexual harassment by speaking to them, we don’t allow them embarking in classes not doing anything when other learners are going home.”*

PA4a: *“Unfortunately, it is not manageable, and it won’t be, although I do talk to my learners, but because of puberty, boys and girls develop sexual feelings and they want to explore those feelings by touching inappropriately. For example, I noticed in our tuck shop at the spaza shop, learners stack up themselves and they don’t make lines. Boys use that opportunity to touch girls’ butts or put their hands inside the girls’ skirt, but unfortunately, if learners do not come forward to report, what must I do? We as teachers, we do not attend to sexual harassment the same way. For example, if I tell the teachers in my staffroom ... as you can see the tuck shop is located almost inside the staff room ... see colleagues, I have noticed this this and this is going on in the tuck shop. According to someone, should we just put our lunch aside and go and see what the learners are busy doing? ... That will be the responses of another educator! So, I told myself, I will relax and wait for someone to come forward to report it, then I can voice out what I have noticed in the spaza shops.”*

These responses reflect teachers’ perceptions of incidents of sexual harassment being called “*minor*” and they manage it by speaking to the perpetrator about possible consequences of what they are doing, without any real consequences being spelled out. This means that whenever “*minor*” incidents of harassment happen or are reported, at best, teachers have a talk with the perpetrator. “*Minor*” sexual harassments are

categorised by these teachers as unwanted kissing, touching, hugging, rubbing, boys putting their hands under the girls' skirts, verbal sexual abuse, sexual jokes and sexually degrading jokes. Teachers' responses indicate that they find it far more convenient to ignore such harassments than to have to act or even "*interrupt their lunch*". There also is no uniformity on how sexual harassment is judged or categorised and addressed by these teachers. Some teachers ignore these incidents, while others notice it but intervene only if absolutely necessary and when it is reported. These findings are complemented by the study conducted by Meyer (2008:562), where teachers stated that they received no support from the schools' management and that there were no clear guidelines or any consistency among teachers and the way they handle sexual harassment which does not involve physical violence. Wet (2009:3) explored the effectiveness of complaint procedures of handling and dealing with sexual harassment when a complaint was lodged in South African schools, according to the circular from the DoE (2002).

The study reported that the complaint procedure of handling and dealing with sexual harassment was not adequate in addressing or preventing peer sexual harassment, but sexual harassment needs to be prevented proactively. Sexual harassment can be prevented proactively only when there is a human rights culture in the schools, where everyone is respected, and this is being practised by teachers and learners within the school environment. Without such all-embracing respectful culture in place, sexual harassment will thrive. This can only happen when all teachers and the school's management are equally committed to eradicate sexual harassment. Teachers must therefore have the courage and the willingness to get involved in stopping it.

Literature indicates that teachers are hardly ever involved in preventing the occurrence of sexual harassment among secondary school learners. Some teachers believe it to be the learners' own responsibility to manage their behaviour and that "teachers can only do so much to prevent sexual harassment" (Charmaraman et al., 2013). The way teachers perceive and interpret incidents of sexual harassment will determine their willingness to take action to stop such behaviour. If teachers regard sexual harassment as a "normal way of interaction between adolescents", they may not intervene appropriately to stop the occurrence of such inappropriate behaviour (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009:521).

Teachers in the current study reported how they manage incidents of sexual harassment when it involves physical violence:

PA5b: *"... I remember two incidents where in front of all of us, I mean educators, there was once a female learner really really really in front of peers, she was touched inappropriately. It was disturbing, honestly speaking, this disturbed the whole school. We invited both parents for the disciplinary hearing and the offender even brought a lawyer in this office through the parent. Despite bringing a lawyer ... because we have a working policy at this school, we managed to suspend him, yes, for seven working days. It was a milestone for our school."*

When probed what was meant by *"touched inappropriately"*, one participant responded that the learner was *"touched in her private part"*. These statements seem to illustrate that physical sexual violations between learners are not tolerated and actions are taken against such learners. These include holding a disciplinary hearing and when found guilty of sexually harassing a peer, the perpetrator is suspended for a week. Some perpetrators may even see such suspension as a reward, having time off from school. Another teacher from another school explained this further.

PA3a: *"We call them aside and talk to them. Then if ... I see I can't handle this ... when we're talking about serious sexual harassment ... that is when we include the higher powers and also call the parents. Now we have a problem. This one needs to be dealt with, but if it's the smaller sexual harassment, like example picking of the skirt, touching and so on, we just call them aside and talk to them"*.

Teachers have categorised incidents of sexual harassment that need disciplinary hearings as *"serious sexual harassment"*, which are different from those that are minor and might not have serious, or even no consequences for the learner. Serious measures tend to be taken against reported *"serious forms of physical violence"* against a learner. Gillander Gådin et al. (2013) indicated that frequent occurrences of sexual harassment in a school increase the risk of normalising unacceptable behaviour and then sexual harassment is seen as acceptable, thereby allowing the threshold for what counts as sexual harassment to elevate. This indicates that categorising sexual harassment into minor and major levels of violence, without the appropriate measures

taken to deal with it on a “*minor level*” may not only indicate frequent occurrences of such inappropriate behaviour, but it also leads to the normalisation of unacceptable behaviour.

PA14d: *“It’s weird to be sexually harassed. To us teachers, sexual harassment is a ‘rape’ and it ends there. The nitty gritty ... it’s part of the adolescence stage, they are exploring. For example, touching my breast, kissing and running away. No No No No! It’s a stage, they are exploring, I can’t do anything, I did not see anything. But some teachers try to engage the learners about it and talk to them.”*

This shows that the recognition of sexual harassment as violence has moved to a level, where teachers are already more desensitised, which creates an environment that cultivates and tolerates sexual violence, and sometimes even one in which perpetrators become role models. These responses show that teachers have their own individual interpretations of sexual harassment among learners and that they also respond differently or not at all. Teachers in the study conducted by Allnock and Atkinson (2019:13) also reported that sexual harassment is part of the learners’ everyday lives. This confirms that sexual harassment can become normalised; not because it happens every day, but because supposed “minor” harassment is not regarded as harassment and teachers’ categorisation of harassment that needs their intervention has moved to serious levels of violence (Gillander Gådin et al., 2013).

The teachers in this study claimed that they were talking to and reprimanding perpetrators of sexual harassment and that this is how they manage sexual harassment among learners, except for the extreme forms of harassment that involve violence and lead to disciplinary hearings. Teachers tend to be reactive rather than proactive against sexual harassment between learners. This may indicate that there is either no prescribed proactive measure in place in these schools to deal with sexual harassment, or teachers may “not want to get involved” in something that they themselves would not know how to deal with if it were to happen to them.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Forms of sexual harassment teachers mainly address

The second theme that emerged during data analysis comprises the different forms of sexual harassment teachers experience among learners. From this theme, the following subthemes emerged and are discussed below: (i) physical sexual harassment

and (ii) verbal sexual harassment.

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 1: Physical sexual harassment

The data gathered from participants indicate that physical sexual harassment is rampant among these learners. Teachers report that learners, both boys and girls, touch each other's sexual body parts and some learners even deliberately become sexually explicit to each other in front of other learners in class. In another school, two learners were actually found being intimate with each other (having intercourse) on the school grounds. Teachers also stated that not all sexual harassment is reported by the learners, even when it happens in full view of them; Some teachers stated that they wait for learners to report these incidents before they intervene and determine if it warrants having a disciplinary hearing.

PA3a: "From my experiences, we focus more on ones we feel that they are too extreme,...for these minor ones, we say 'no don't do that again', but when it's the major ones caught red-handed doing it, now there has to be a disciplinary hearing to solve the problem. We have teachers who laugh and say, 'don't do that again' and it becomes something bigger. For example, two of our learners are found in a compromising position, although they have been reprimanded and there was a hearing on that and so on, but we should not wait for them to be caught with their pants down in a compromising position because we would have allowed an environment that supports that kind of a behaviour."

PA16d: "The ones we usually address is the reported ones that occur between different gender, I mean male and female ... mostly the male learners are the perpetrators of most cases. For example, a certain female learner came to us reporting that ... 'I was just sitting on my own and this male learner came, started rubbing me and rubbing me on my thighs and touching me'. This is the kind of harassment we face ... boys harassing girls. Also during casual days, girls wear sexually explicit clothes that are in style."

PA12c: "When someone has been touched. Verbal, we don't normally consider it sexualharassment".

PA5b: "To be honest, the reported ones, those are the sexual harassment we address mainly ... the physical form of harassment ... learners report extreme forms of sexual harassment and there is a disciplinary hearing for that. But our life orientation teachers help to manage other sexual harassment and discourage it, too."

Most teachers are aware of the physical form of sexual harassment that is rampant among their learners, but there is a common view among them that they address only the *"reported sexual harassment and sometimes they are extreme"*. This may lead to the question as to why only some sexual harassment cases are reported and others not. Sexual harassment is largely tolerated in these schools and accepted as *"normal"* by the teachers and the learners, despite the damaging effect that the victims of sexual harassment and assault will suffer after the incidents. Most school-going adolescents have experienced that perpetrators are rarely punished for their misconduct (Brown et al., 2020:5). The findings also indicate that the victims and bystanders are often socially punished by peers for reporting any such incident. Hill and Holly (2011:7) identified that learners believe sexual harassment is a *"part of school life and not a big deal"*.

Numerous researchers, as discussed in Chapter 2 (2.7), have shown that sexual harassment among learners is often trivialised by teachers, which allows the teachers the belief that they do not need to intervene. If the harassment did not involve physical aggression and violence, then teachers often see it as *"normal"* among learners as they are adolescents (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 2020; Grube & Lens, 2003; Larkin, 1995; Ringrose & Renold, 2011; Robinson, 2012). This may signify that only the most severe forms of sexual harassment, such as rape and sexual assault, are easily labelled and given immediate attention, although they are no longer harassment but criminal actions. In contrast, according to PA12c, *"verbal ... we don't normally consider it sexual harassment"*. Therefore, more covert forms of sexual harassment, such as derogatory remarks, name calling and unwanted sexual gestures, or sexual jokes are not usually recognised by teachers or seen as being anything that needs to be discouraged (Gillander et al., 2019:12).

4.3.2.2 Subtheme 2: Verbal sexual harassment

The data revealed that few teachers regard derogatory sexual remarks as harassment and as such, no proper disciplinary measures are taken against the perpetrators.

PA1a: *“We talk to them to discourage verbal sexual harassment, such as nasty comments about body parts.”*

PA9c: *“Learners call each other [names] with private parts. It is more common and they see nothing wrong with it and they can’t show remorse for that.”*

PA8b: *“This morning, I was teaching creative art and we were actually outside, then one learner, a boy, throws a paper at another learner, a girl. Her response to him was sexually disgusting. I actually did not hear the conversation, but later the boy came to my office to report what had happened outside when we were doing creative art. ... I call the girl in and ask her ‘Why did you say this to him?’ She said ‘I said what I said because I don’t want him to bother me again.’ But I ask her, ‘Do you really chose to say that nasty nasty word?’ She went on to say that she has anger issues and when she is angry, no one can stop her, even if a teacher tries to separate her ‘I can even push the teacher away.’ But I try to talk to her and discourage her from saying such disgusting words in school and also discourage the boy from beating her after school because the boy was very angry.”*

This illustrates that learners harass each other verbally, although few teachers admit that they have addressed verbal sexual harassment with learners by talking against it and discouraging such behaviour. This raises the question of whether teachers are ignoring, or not willing to address, verbal forms of sexual harassment. Studies have reported that the statistics of sexual harassment incidents do not reveal the actual rate of prevalence in secondary schools and their findings have shown sexual harassment to be either under-perceived or underreported (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Edwards et al., 2020; Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020; Grube & Lens, 2003; Jewell et al., 2015; Rahimi & Liston, 2011; Shoko, 2012).

Some teachers believe it is futile to intervene when there are incidents of sexual harassment among learners because “name calling will never stop” (Charmaraman et al., 2013:440). Teachers in Allnock and Atkinson’s study (2019:12) stated that derogatory verbal sexual harassment is “part of school life” and that learners who have spent more than two years in a school are less likely to seek help from teachers as

they have become accustomed to secondary school life and desensitised to derogatory sexual harassment. Allnock and Atkinson (2019) confirm the perspective held by PA9c in this study that “learners call each other with private parts, it is more common, and they see nothing wrong with it and they can’t show remorse for that”. “Verbal harassment involves words related to genitals, the body and suggestions or demands for sexual favours” (Bendixen & Kennair, 2014). The findings of this study concur with those of McMaster et al. (2002:92) that both boys and girls can be victims of verbal harassment by a peer; however, this harassment can be motivated either by sexual interest or an expression of verbal aggression against each other.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners

The third theme that emerged during the data analysis focuses on the barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners. The following subthemes emerged and are discussed below: (i) incapacitated teachers, (ii) cultural and religious beliefs, (iii) socioeconomic factors and (iv) a lack of safety.

4.3.3.1 Subtheme 1: Incapacitated teachers

Teachers complained that they lack the knowledge of how to handle cases of sexual harassment. As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.8.3), teachers’ education and training seem to be lacking any reference to learners’ inappropriate behaviour, especially regarding any sex-related issues and this was seen as a barrier to teachers attempting to prevent sexual harassment among learners. Some teachers in this study believed that sexual harassment among learners is an ongoing occurrence and should thus be a serious concern, but they also stated that therefore, teachers need (more) training and workshops, so that they can learn how to deal with learners concerning this issue. Male and female teachers expressed that they do not interpret all incidents of sexual harassment in the same way and that they feel challenged when it happens to a learner whose sex is opposite their own. Many teachers expressed the need for a social worker to be employed by the school because the social worker could then deal with all these issues. Most teachers believed that the reason why learners do not report incidents of sexual harassment to them is because of a lack of privacy and confidentiality.

PA1a: “As teachers, we lack resources to teach learners against sexual harassment. We also need workshops to empower us to deal with this

daily issue of sexual harassment...empowering primary school teachers about sexual harassment is equally important as sometimes they turn blind eyes towards it and the baggage of violence comes to the secondary school.”

PA3a: “A social worker at school will be of great help because sometimes we call the police and the police says we can’t report this ... just talk to him. We have wasted a lot of time. We are not equipped or trained to do all that. At least give us ammunition to fight this battle. For example, when an incident happens, although what they did is wrong, we still have to bear in mind the privacy of the learners. Now, whenever we see them, we say ... it is that one. We probably don’t know how to deal with the situation and it becomes a stigma, that is the one who does 1, 2, 3. This will be the name of the learner for the whole year, so you see this stops learners from reporting sexual harassment because if they go and report it, it becomes something everyone talks about.”

PA14d: “I don’t have the expertise to deal with sexual harassment. I am not the management, it’s the work of the management. As a male teacher, am not comfortable with dealing with that, so for example, you are a woman, being a woman, you can sit the learner down and talk about the issue. Myself, I can’t do that, so they just come in here and ... I have to make a decision. Sometimes I just make a decision for the fact that I have to act, otherwise you could have addressed the issue and later filled me in that 1, 2, 3 happened and this is what we did. Just to be in the know when another one comes, then I know how to address 1, 2, 3.”

PA16d: “Learners are afraid of telling these issues to teachers. They start to think that this teacher is coming to the class, I don’t know what he is thinking about me, if I make one mistake, he may end up getting angry and say those things I told him to everyone. That is why I am saying that social workers are needed at school, so that learners can go to report these issues with the confidentiality they deserve. Social workers are trained and there is privacy and confidentiality with them.”

PA5b: “As teachers, we are not doing enough. Learners do not report

sexual harassment because of confidentiality of what they said to the teacher of what happened. As teachers, first and foremost, we need to be capacitated, the Department needs to bring a programme that will develop teachers along the issues of sexual harassment. The Department needs to bring stakeholders, such as nurses, social workers, police. They need to come to our school, community and start talking about sexual harassment.”

Teachers confirmed that they experience challenges when they try to deal properly with sexual harassment at school, which indicates that they need training. These findings were supported by Meyer (2008:560), discussed in Chapter 2 (2.8.3), who stated that teachers complained that their educational degrees did not provide information about how to handle incidents of sexual harassment among learners. Edwards et al. (2020:8) stated that teachers reported their lack of ability to help learners in cases of harassment. They see it happening at school and feel overwhelmed by other responsibilities, or they have other priorities to take care of rather than helping learners.

Teachers in this study stressed the need for having a social worker in their schools because they feel learners do not trust them to keep information private; some teachers feel learners' privacy will be compromised because teachers tend to talk about what was reported with each other. This could be another reason why most incidents are probably underreported before they become sexual assault. The findings of this study concur with those of Allnock and Atkinson, (2019:12) that learners find it difficult to report sexual harassment to their teachers as they are not always trusted, but that the schools should appoint someone with a pastoral responsibility, who is independent from the teachers and trustworthy to handle such cases. This study is supported by the views of a number of other authors (Allnock & Atkinson, 2019; Edwards et al., 2020; Meyer, 2008).

4.3.3.2 Subtheme 2: Cultural and religious beliefs

Teachers mentioned that they come from different cultural backgrounds and do not respond to or address sexual harassment in the same way as their responses are based on different religious and cultural backgrounds. During the course of the data collection, some teachers excused themselves from this study because they did not

want to talk about sexual harassment, or anything related to sexual topics. Some teachers were also not comfortable to address any sex-related matters with learners due to their own cultural or religious beliefs. Based on the geographical environment of the schools, where this study was carried out, it is taboo for adults to talk to about sex, any sex-related matters, or sexual orientation with children.

Teachers stated that it is the Life Orientation teachers at school who are mostly involved in addressing sexual harassment and not even all of them are comfortable with talking about the subject. Thus, because of their own hesitancy and maybe embarrassment, they try to ignore cases of harassment, and leave vulnerable children to have to cope with the incidents on their own.

PA13d: "Some educators are culturally or religiously conservative, the word sex or any word that relates to sexual, sex and sexuality are disturbing to them. Because of that they excuse themselves and leave other teachers, who are comfortable in addressing sexual harassment, to do so. In other words, not all teachers are hands-on addressing sexual harassment."

PA3a: "We have teachers who feel they can't intervene because of cultural or religious beliefs, so they call other teachers to deal with it for them and they step aside. It is a 'taboo' for older people to talk about sex-related matters. They find it taboo for an adult to talk about sex or any sex-related matters with these learners."

PA5b: "Remember, it's a taboo for an older person to talk about sex or any sex-related matters with these learners, I mean culturally. You will find another teacher asking a learner 'What do you want me to do? Because I don't know how to address this person, so in order to get you satisfied, tell me what to do.'"

PA11c: "We teachers are different. We do not address sexual harassment the same way, based on different religious and cultural backgrounds. You see, we teachers are not helping when we say kids will be kids, boys will be boys. In a way, I think we are contributing to this sexual harassment thing because we are not reprimanding it at all. So yeah, I think we do have a negative impact on what needs to be done, we are not doing what should"

be done.”

These teachers felt that cultural and religious beliefs of teachers could be a strong barrier that can play a role in the lack of addressing sexual harassment. All these teachers agreed that it is culturally wrong for older people to talk about sexual issues with children. In line with these views, Nambambi and Mufune (2011) wrote that many African cultures regard talking about sex with children as a taboo and therefore, many teachers cannot freely discuss any sex-related issues with learners. Another concerning factor, according to these participants, is the fact that their religious beliefs can be a further barrier to addressing sexual harassment, as religious beliefs are a pivotal part of these communities' values that permeate the school and shape the school culture. The findings of this study confirm those of Makiwane (2010), who reported that some churches and communities are very conservative and therefore, sexual discussions are forbidden. This, in turn, leads to gross ignorance on the topic of sexual harassment among the congregants and thus also among religious teachers. It is highly concerning that teachers will therefore rather not talk about the issues or to the learners about the problems, but at the same time condone that learners become involved in sexual activities.

Teachers stated that the community values in the schools that are situated in the region play a major role in how teachers take notice of and respond to sexual harassment. This observation confirms the view of Meyer (2008), who reported that community values play a major role and that they affect the schools' culture.

PA7b: “The barriers are that we teachers come from different tribes, different religions and even the rural environment we find ourselves in play ... are factors with how teachers respond to sexual harassment among learners. Some teachers are too conservative, so they brush it off, some teachers are too sensitive.”

These teachers felt that not only their own religious and cultural beliefs were a significant factor in how sexual harassment is acknowledged or responded to, but the values of the community the school is situated in will also shape the culture of the school. Cultural and religious beliefs restrict or negatively affect teachers and schools within Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. Teachers fall within the microsystem. They engage with people daily inside and outside their own families and have daily contact

with their colleagues at work. Their interpersonal relationships with colleagues and families are created in this context and thus, they actively receive and transmit values in the broader context (see Chapter 2, 2.9.1.1). Schools fall within the mesosystem, where they create a synergy in which an individual is caught up (see Chapter 2, 2.9.1.2). Community values, cultural and religious beliefs fall under the exosystem in which an individual or institution experiences its influences and is also influenced by, which in turn influences the schools' culture (see Chapter 2, 2.9.1.3). Cultural and religious beliefs of individual teachers and the community where the school resides seem to be significant factors that shape what will and will not happen in the schools (Meyer, 2008).

4.3.3.3 Subtheme 3: Socioeconomic factors

Teachers stated that the socioeconomic status of the learners' families contributes to the barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment. Most of the learners from the four schools, where the study was carried out, come from the rural area and informal settlements, where there is no access to electricity and water. Some learners come from the Seshego vicinity. Parents are not always available when they are requested to come to school. Most of the learners' parents have casual jobs, such as housekeeping and farm work and most families rely on their government social grants. Some learners also come from child-headed families, where morals and behaviour taught at school may not be reinforced at home. The interviewed teachers believed that the parents' lack of finance or their poverty very often go together with neglect of their children, sometimes even forcing children to indulge in sexual acts to "earn some money". Teenage pregnancies are frequently observed, where teenagers are hoping to be able to survive on the future child grants.

PA1a: "We have kids coming from different homes, some learners come from poor homes, some from informal settlements, where parents engage in violence and division of war at home, so sometimes learners say it's normal to be sexually harassed. Also, there are parents who encourage their children to engage in sexual activities. Parents are failing us to re-enforce the morals we teach at school."

PA15d: "Socioeconomic issues contribute to this problem. Parents are not very involved in the life of their kids. For example, if I tell a kid to call their

parents to come to school and address some issues, the parents usually give excuses they are working on farms ... we have learners from informal settlements, the majority are child-headed families ... I am the one recording the pregnancy stats for pregnant learners. When you hear their stories, learners are pregnant because they stay alone, some because they are orphans, some because their parents are working on far away farms”.

PA11c: *“At times, you know you want to engage with the parents of these learners who are perpetrators, they are not cooperating or interested even to come to school, they give the excuses of their work or other things.”*

PA5b: *“Socioeconomic factors are also contributing to this issue; some girls are selling their body for money, so they do not see anything wrong with being sexually harassed or sexually harassing others.”*

According to these teachers’ perspectives, one can conclude that socioeconomic factors as an external influence on the school environment have a direct influence on the school milieu. They also create an additional barrier for teachers when they should address sexual harassment at school. Parental involvement, which is an essential element in learners’ lives, helps learners to uphold values and morals that lead to their overall well-being. In Chapter 2 (2.8.5.), Doty et al. (2017) emphasised that positive parenting behaviour, positive modelling, parental involvement and support are likely to be a protective factor against learners exhibiting sexual harassment that interferes with learning at school. However, these teachers confirmed that there was a lack of parental involvement in and guidance of their children’s lives for a number of reasons. Either they are working far away (or they are absent parents), which is detrimental to these learners’ lives as they rely on them to teach them what is right and wrong. This view was confirmed when teachers in Meyer's (2008b:567) study reported that the harsh realities of poverty and violence that exist within the social realities of many communities permeate all aspects of the schools and serve as obstacles in addressing sexual harassment.

Socioeconomic factors negatively affect teachers and the schools, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system. The microsystem’s socioeconomic factors affect

families' dynamics and the home, while the mesosystem's socioeconomic status hampers parents and teachers meeting because of absent working parents. The macrosystem's socioeconomic factors influence all other systems, from micro to exosystems, which spring from the economic, social, religious and cultural spheres of life. Thus, this study supports the findings of Doty et al. (2017) and Meyer (2008).

4.3.3.4 Subtheme 4: Lack of safety

Teachers stated that they experience a lack of proper security at school, which is a major concern for them. Most of these teachers claimed that learners are able to bring weapons to school without the teachers or school management being aware of it. A head teacher reported that one of their learners brought a gun to school to defend herself against attacks. Thus, safety matters refer to the learners' safety as well as that of the teachers. Teachers stated that more needs to be done by the DoE regarding the safety of teachers while they are on the school premises or even on their way home or to school.

PA3a: "We have incidents, where weapons are found on learners. If the community or the school environment were safe, teachers won't be scared because I went to school for this, to build and to help them ... I will put my learners first, but with my safety at the back of my mind. I am helping learners, but I am cautious and you're not giving yourself fully because you don't want to go all the way every time, or else you will hear someone saying 'this one' ... he is always in our business. When you're walking home, they will stab you, we're basically on our own and the Department is not helping".

PA10c: "Every day is a challenge in the school environment; we are living by God's grace. We hope the Department should be doing more on safety, making our teachers protected because you hear stories from other schools that teachers are killed or beaten all the time and ... you don't want to talk to these learners because ... someone may take it wrong."

PA11c: "If you remember the story of a teacher in NorthWest who was stabbed by a learner in the class and that cost him his life, so to reprimand these learners who are unruly, who are actually thugs, you as a teacher are afraid of your life. As teachers, we are afraid of these kids because of

what they are capable of doing outside the school, most especially where we are based in Seshego, kids here are actually very unruly, they have groups in which they go at night to steal ... they fight with dangerous weapons ... so at times you are afraid they may come to your house or find you walking on the road and they attack you. So yes, I can say we fear for our lives, so therefore you leave some situation as it is."

PA8b: *"Learners are able to bring weapons to school, teachers have to be careful of our learners. Let me give you a classical example of what happened in our school. I was forced to face a learner (a girl) who was defending herself with a gun at school. According to her, the previous day she was ill-treated when she was going home by a group of boys and she said she wanted to protect herself the following day, so she took her father's gun to school ... during break, I was invited to come to the class because this girl was carrying a gun. When I arrived in the class, this girl was holding the gun. I invited her ... very politely to the office, she responded positively, came to the office. My approach was not to judge her, but to ask her what happened, Why are you holding a gun?' She explained what happened the previous day, so I called the police and they confiscated the gun. That's an extreme example of weapons that can be at school by our learners."*

Teachers are sometimes afraid of learners because of what they are capable of doing inside and outside the school. Based on the area of the study, Seshego, teachers reported that many learners are unruly and some are actually thugs and capable of violence. These teachers also stated that they have found dangerous weapons that the learners brought to school, for example, knives or even a gun.

These views are similar to those expressed in the study by Mokutu (2000:12), stating that violence begets violence and that violence in schools is a reflection of the society where young children grow up. Regarding sexual harassment, teachers admitted that they *"are not doing enough for our learners because we are not safe"*. Because of the rate of violence being experienced and observed in South African public schools, many teachers now perceive their place of work as a dangerous place. Hence, their priority is not teaching but survival (Niekerk, 2003). In another study done in rural South African schools, teachers reported that violence at schools has had an effect on their

morale, which has also led to low their productivity and a lack of motivation to support learners all the way (Singh & Steyn, 2014:88). It is also interesting to note that the female learner's gun was confiscated, but that nothing was done regarding that learner's past experience or future safety.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners

The fourth theme that emerged during the data analysis comprised the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners. From this theme, the following subthemes emerged and are further discussed below: (i) the short skirt phenomenon; (ii) the lack of teachers' support for each other; (iii) the learners' exposure to social networking and the media; (iv) the lack of knowledge among learners; and (v) the lack of support from the authorities.

4.3.4.1 Subtheme 1: The short skirt phenomenon

Teachers complained about the short school uniform skirts learners wear to school as being one of the challenges they experience in preventing girls being sexually harassed by boys. Teachers believed that these short skirts are a motivation for boys who want to experiment and touch what they see and feel. The other challenge about the short skirts as a phenomenon is that teachers also complained that short skirts could be used as a weapon to provoke and harass male teachers when a learner is interested in the teacher. Teachers stated that sexual harassment initiated by a learner to a teacher is also a burning issue that deserves more attention. The researcher divided the data analysis of this subtheme into two parts. The first part of the data analysis reflects teachers' perspectives on how short skirts are a "stimulant" and can be a challenge they experience in preventing girls becoming sexually harassed by boys. The second part analysis reflects learners using their short skirts to provoke, entice or harass teachers.

PA9c: "Inappropriate lengths of skirts, which girls wear to school, attract boys. Boys touch them inappropriately because of that and parents are not supportive when you tell them that the skirt that their child is wearing is too short."

PA4a: "We should blame our girls, these yellow bones who wear a short skirt to school. There was this boy, then this girl who was wearing a short

skirt and this boy bent down to look under her skirt and I yelled 'What is it that you are doing?' I advise girls to always wear pantyhose when they wear short skirts, please, because boys are just boys and as you look at them, their 'things' are working."

PA8c: "I have seen an incident, where one young learner, a boy, went to meet a girl and said, 'Can you touch my penis, I beg, I have seen your panties, while you are seated with your legs open, please can you just touch my erected penis?' To me, this is sexual harassment from the side of the boy. What causes that? The way the girl was seated stirs up emotions all over, but to tell you the truth, the way she was seated was not proper. who sits like this (participant uses his legs to demonstrate how the girl was seated), although we have to scold the boy that not every panty should give you an erection."

PA7b: "Emm, personally, let me start with the dress code. You find a girl wearing a very short school skirt and when they sit, automatically their skirt is going to be shortened, now what about the boy who sits next to that girl or the boy sitting in front of the girl, where he has to interact with the girl behind him. When he looks at the back, he is met with a flash that he is not equipped to deal with ... I think the harassment of learners starts there because this thing of saying it's a free country, wear what you like, we are indirectly oppressing the young boys. In as much as the girl's hormones are ready, his hormones are ready too and there is no education around it, no workshops, nothing to educate boys that when you see this or when your body is doing like this, this is what you should do. And when they act on what their body tells them, we shout at them ... 'Hai! You are a pervert.' Whereas they are in the same situation as girls. As they grow, things change, but in school ... the boy child is being victimised."

PA11c: "Short skirt is a 'treat', in as much as we don't train how boys should react to a 'treat', they are salivating, waiting to bounce on the treat. For example, during casual day, learners come with sexually explicit outfits. We still have boys with the hormones that will react to such outfits. If we don't start fixing these little things ... we think it does not play any

role, then we will have bigger problems.”

Teachers are convinced that short skirts are an erotic stimulus and especially so when girls do not sit properly, decently, in class. Teachers confirmed that boys respond to short skirts improperly, stating that there is no education around how boys should manage their emerging sexual feelings. This finding is similar to the study conducted by Neville-Shepard (2019:9) that teachers view dress codes as a way of ensuring that male learners are protected against temptation and female learners against attracting unnecessary sexual attention. The study also revealed that prohibiting certain attire within the educational system only further objectifies females. Teachers in Raby (2010:334) expressed that “girls should dress in a way that the school morale climate is whole”. Rahimi and Liston (2011) argued that the misconception on how teachers perceived sexual harassment led to them blaming girls for letting sexual harassment happen to them as they are their sexual gatekeeper responsible for keeping themselves from being harassed. This implied that the boys’ perspective on harassment should be the indicator of whether the behaviour should be accepted. Rahimi and Liston’s (2011) perspectives were also illustrated in studies where teachers told female learners “It is your fault”, “What did you expect when you dress like this”, “It is not a big deal” (Charmaraman et al., 2013; Gruber & Fineran, 2016; Rahimi & Liston, 2011). According to the research data, teachers mean well, and they are trying to protect learners when they say girls should dress properly and not expose parts of their body, which could cause mixed sexual emotions. However, these perceptions are double standards because it places the reason for harassment on clothes rather than on the harasser. Covering all parts of their body does not make the female learners unsusceptible to sexual harassment. There have been cases in the schools and outside the school walls, where well covered girls became a victim not only of sexual harassment but also of sexual violence. When the school authority suggests that exposure of particular parts of a woman’s body, such as thighs and legs, have the potential to make boys feel eroticised, they are implying that they cannot avoid treating an immodestly dressed woman as a sexual object (Neville-Shepard, 2019).

However, teachers’ emphasis on educating young boys to be able to control themselves when they see girls’ body parts that can cause them mixed emotions, could be an essential orientation that needs urgent attention in the secondary schools. This may be an educational gap that is not addressed in the schools that has to be filled so

as to minimise violence in society. Teachers also expressed their views regarding teachers becoming the harassment victims of learners wearing short skirts.

PA8b: "I am very worried about the type of attire girls wear to school. I think this attire, the way they dress; you know that this person is up to something. One thing we see with girls is the way they sit; these young girls just sit, open their legs and start playing with their legs like this (participants uses his legs to demonstrate what a girl with a short skirt does in class) and they do this to teachers, most especially the young teachers when they are attracted to them, some go to the extent of not wearing anything underneath. That's another sexual harassment too, which is not mainly recognised by everyone, mainly because they are teachers, they are mature, they cannot be pushed into something by a learner, but that is harassment, it's a challenge. I have seen it in class ... not only to teachers, but also to fellow learners."

PA2a: "Sexual harassment between learners and teachers is a burning issue, which deserves attention. I mean sexual harassment initiated by a learner to a teacher. As a young teacher in this profession, I have seen girls doing certain things. I mean, girls will do certain things to teachers to sexually invite them, I mean attire, gestures, body language."

Teachers confirmed that sometimes girls use short skirts as a medium to intentionally harass young male teachers they are attracted to by sitting and opening their legs in class. Studies have mostly explored learners as victims of sexual harassment or assault either by a peer or a teacher, but the perspective of teachers as victims of sexual harassment in schools has largely been ignored. Also, there is lack of literature on the effects of sexual harassment on teachers' overall well-being. Adolescents also infringe adults' sexual boundaries, which makes the dynamic between the teachers and learners' relationship in countering sexual harassment difficult (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020:29). This finding is similar to the finding in a study done by Mabuza, Makhanya and Nkambule, (2020:32): "As a male teacher, I think the kids look at the age and then look at us as being capable of being their boyfriends and they even try to seduce us to make sure they draw attention." The traditional way commonly used by female learners is sitting in the front row, opening their legs wide enough to show their genitals to male teachers (Buseh, 2004).

“It is a paradox that teachers, who are looked upon as potential agents for change and strengthening children’s rights through education, at times get their own rights infringed by the children whose legal literacy they are supposed to enhance” (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw & Trysnes, 2020:29). However, teachers becoming a victim of sexual harassment by learners has consequences for the teacher, the perpetrator and the whole classroom climate. The teacher may become extra cautious and critical towards the learner and as a result, only the lesson outline would be taught and guidance required would not be incorporated into the lesson, leaving other learners deprived of their right (Mabuza, Makhanya & Nkambule, 2020).

4.3.4.2 Subtheme 2: Lack of teachers’ support for each other

Teachers complained that there is a lack of support for each other among teachers in working against sexual harassment taking place among learners. These teachers claimed that it is almost impossible to achieve a common goal if they are divided and do not consistently support each other when it comes to dealing with reported sexual harassment among learners. In Chapter 2 (2.8.4), inconsistent responses from colleagues were discussed as a factor in finding effective ways to prevent sexual harassment among learners.

PA2a: “We teachers don’t support each other to forbid certain behaviour. For example, I call a certain learner to order and you find out that the learner went to report you to another certain teacher and the teacher tells the learner, ‘You know what, that one is mad.’ and even gives validation to the learner to continue doing that. We will never win the battle of sexual harassment.”

PA3a: “There is no collective effort among teachers to help; this also contributes to inconsistency in doing or maintaining what you believe works.”

PA9c: “There is a lot of favouritism in the school environment. For example, a certain girl came to report and said, ‘A certain boy touched my breast.’ So, I called the learner out in the staff room; another teacher will say no no, not this one, he can’t do that and they say ‘Hey you, girl, you are lying! Now tell the truth’. Now there is a division among the teachers.”

PA16d: “Lack of teamwork among teachers. It does happen that a learner

*comes to a teacher to complain, but because the teacher is working alone!
... A teacher does not know how to raise the issue up until the incident
happens again and again, so yes, I am saying lack of unity and
cooperation among us teachers."*

Teachers not supporting each other, but actively contradicting their instructions is a contributing factor that teachers experience in trying to prevent sexual harassment among learners. Therefore, learners may not trust teachers as truly wanting to help them when they are a victim of sexual harassment as every teacher has their own version of what action needs to follow and what constitutes harassment, which divides the teaching staff. It becomes more complicated for teachers to address any reported problem when they take sides between learners and the victim cannot receive the justice they deserve because there are teachers doubting the reported incidence or are even attacking the victim. A united and consistent stand against any kind of harassment (whether sexual or non-sexual) enables an environment in which learners feel they can trust teachers and know they will be treated fairly when such incidents occur (Charmaraman et al., 2013). The findings from this study confirm the views of teachers in Lloyd (2019) and Meyer (2008), who mentioned that when there is disparity in the responses between teaching staff regarding how teachers respond to sexual harassment among learners, teaching staff suggest that they felt unable to respond, even if they wanted to, because they did not feel supported by the other teachers, and they felt that inconsistency in supporting each other caused division and incapacitation. Thus, this study supports Lloyd (2019) and Meyer (2008) (see Chapter 2, 2.8.4) regarding the lack of teachers' support for each other.

4.3.4.3 Subtheme 3: Exposure to social networking and media

Teachers in this study blamed social networks and the media for playing such a prominent role in the lives of learners regarding what they observe in these media of harassment. They say learners have so much access to information through television and social media and they want to experiment with what they have seen. Teachers claimed that television and cellular phones are contributing factors to sexual harassment as regular exposure to these media without adult supervision gives learners access to explicit sexual content, pornography and age restricted programmes.

PA3a: "I think learners' exposure to social media and pornography messes up the hormones of a child."

PA12c: *“Our learners are exposed to TV and social media, so they can access so much information maybe before teachers can address some issues. They already got so much about it.”*

PA15d: *“Television, when we address, for example, learners kissing in front of us teachers, they don’t see any problem with it. They don’t adhere to the age restriction of the television programmes ... so they want to practise what they feel.”*

PA 7b: *“Parents allow the television to babysit their children, imagine a child who comes from a single-mother home, working in a retail store; she does not have time for the kids, she comes home tired, she is busy getting the meal ready for dinner in the kitchen, then what do the kids do? They are busy watching what they are not supposed to be watching on TV, while their mother is busy cooking.”*

Social networks and media are external factors that contribute to the challenge teachers experience when they try to prevent sexual harassment among learners and there is nothing they can do to reduce such media exposure. Learners’ possession of cellular phones allows them to have a lot of privacy when they wish to access sex-related content that they are not emotionally prepared to handle and this can cause them to want to experiment on their peers at school. Collins et al. (2011) revealed that most adolescents spend their leisure time on various media and internet searching for latest entertainment, fashion, video games and a lot more; however, this may also expose them to sex-related activities.

Adolescent’s exposure to social media increases their likelihood of watching inappropriate content, but they could also become exposed to cyber bullying, sexual harassment or privacy invasion (Krcmar & Cingel, 2016:2).

4.3.4.4 Subtheme 4: Lack of knowledge of sexual harassment among learners

Teachers complained about the lack of knowledge among learners of what sexual harassment is; and that lack of knowledge is a contributory factor, preventing sexual harassment. They stated that most learners do not regard inappropriate touching, unwanted kissing and inappropriate sexual jokes as sexual harassment, but only

believe that rape is sexual harassment. Teachers emphasised the great need for better education around sexual harassment, although they are unlikely to offer such education themselves, as they are loathe to talk about sex-related matters to learners.

PA2a: *“Learners’ lack of knowledge of what sexual harassment is all about makes them perpetrators and victims of this violence. If you ask them what is sexual harassment? They say it’s rape.”*

PA15d: *“I am teaching business studies ... we have unprofessional conduct in business studies; sexual harassment is part of unprofessional conduct, so usually when I teach learners about sexual harassment, they think sexual harassment is forced sex. They don’t think touching or making inappropriate sexual jokes is sexual harassment.”*

PA16d: *“Well, I think learners do not fully understand what they are doing. Yes, learners need more knowledge; they need to be empowered about sexual harassment, most of our learners do not understand when a learner doesn’t want you to touch or hug them and they still continue to do that to that person is the highest level of disorder in the school environment, they don’t know that.”*

PA6b: *“Some learners are in relationships and they are sexually active. The problem is that the girl doesn’t like what the boy is doing to her and the boy will say she is my girlfriend and when she agrees to be my girl, it’s part of the package. I always tell girls that ‘The challenge with you is that you are raped on a daily basis because you are not ready for that and there is a forceful penetration, but you girls say it is part of the package.’ It’s just that with this kind it is quite cagey and it’s difficult to entertain by teachers.”*

There is an obvious need to educate learners about what sexual harassment is. It seems that inappropriate sexual behaviour is a norm among learners and most learners are not aware that their behaviour can infringe another learner’s human rights. On the one hand, teachers stated that sometimes learners are not aware of the difference between appropriate touching and inappropriate touching, whereas behaviour may become harassment when the recipient does not welcome it or want it and it continues persistently, thus creating a hostile or abusive environment for the

victim. These views agree with the findings by Allnock and Atkinson (2019), where learners stated that sexual harassment is a normal and accepted way of life at school and unlikely to be disclosed or reported, except if there is physical sexual violence, such as rape or sexual assault.

On the other hand, one cannot assume that the lack of knowledge of what sexual harassment is leads to learners perpetrating unwelcomed and inappropriate sexual behaviour towards another peer. Studies have found that adolescents perpetrate sexual harassment not because they are not aware of it being wrong, but because they succumb to peer pressure. Literature (see Chapter 2, 2.6.2.1) states that many adolescents rely heavily on their peers' influence, including their own willingness to 'go along with' their peers, even when they know that this is not necessarily what they 'should' be doing, making them susceptible to engaging in risky behaviour (Goldstein et al., 2020). Adolescents who perpetrate sexual harassment usually belong to groups of friends who 'are doing it and they see nothing wrong with it' (Jewell et al., 2015).

4.3.4.5 Subtheme 5: Lack of support from authorities

Teachers stated that they lack support from the DoE and their presiding school authority. They complained that the rights of a child are more protected than the rights of the teacher; therefore, teachers are often afraid to act or take the proper steps concerning issues of sexual harassment and violence that may arise at school among learners.

PA14d: *"The education system and the government system is not fair; information can become twisted and you will be held accountable. I am telling you, there is always a fear of being implicated."*

PA11c: *"Another challenge is that in the school, for example, I myself as a young teacher or not being senior ... or not been in a managerial position, so sometimes when issues like these arose that may involve violence against another, you find out that you cannot take it any further or if you try to take it any further, you'll be actually asked who are you to actually do that? ... You find out that there is no support and you have witnessed that ... if there is no support from your managers, you will leave the issue hanging."*

PA5b: *“There is a weak policy coming from the Department of Basic Education that protects the learner more than the teachers; you know teachers are afraid to take the appropriate steps against sexual offenders at the school level because surely the policy that is applicable is to favour the learner at the expense of the teacher. Even parents at home, when you say something that addresses such behaviour, they are quick to bring a lawyer and the Department of Basic Education is also quick to act against the teacher. Remember, every teacher must protect the victim and not the perpetrator, but if you look at the Department’s policy, it protects the perpetrators more than the victim, so in itself, it’s a challenge. We are afraid to act.”*

Teachers believed that there is a lack of support from their own school’s management, other teachers and also the DoE and their presiding school authority regarding the handling of sexual harassment. Teachers indicated that because of the lack of support from the Department of Basic Education, they are unable to take the necessary action against sexual offenders at school and they feel that the department’s policy does not protect them enough, which means that they are afraid to act in certain cases. They also felt that if teachers were to have the school managers’ full support to act in cases of reported sexual harassment, they would have been in a better position to act accordingly. One can conclude that the lack of mandatory and consistent support for teachers by the authorities contributes to and enhances the challenges teachers experience in trying to prevent or even address sexual harassment among learners. The literature in Chapter 2 (2.8.1) indicated that inconsistent support from the school administrators, who are often people in authority, means that their leadership role influences the school climate either positively or negatively. The findings from this study confirm the findings of a study by Allnock and Atkinson (2019) who stated that teachers feel helpless when the school policy is not strong enough and when there are no consistent and effective consequences for sexual harm perpetrated at school. Teachers in Meyer's (2008b:561) study emphasised that school administrators’ leadership styles, personal values, professional priorities and how they implement policy shape teachers’ actions or inaction at school.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Measures to prevent sexual harassment

Teachers claimed that sexual harassment among learners is a rampant problem in the

school environment. They also believe that there are some rigid measures at the school designed to address this problem, which learners are also aware of. However, such measures do not seem to be applied in a consistent manner, if at all. Teachers also mentioned that some teachers verbally harass learners.

The subtheme section of this theme is divided into two parts. This is analysed as to why the CoC is not effective in prohibiting sexual harassment among learners and the second part describes why the measures at school level do not explicitly prohibit teachers verbally harassing learners.

4.3.5.1 Subtheme: Vague Code of Conduct

The study identified that schools have their own learners' CoC. In such a CoC, there is a list that says sexual harassment is prohibited in the school environment. However, these teachers complained that the CoC does not go into any detail about what sexual harassment is and therefore, it is not effective. Four teachers from four secondary schools expressed this as follows:

PA1a: *"We have a Code of Conduct that we must follow, but if you go to the principal and say 'Can you tell me the top five Code of Conduct [items] written without looking ... It's just written, it's not implemented nor maintained, only when 'the big thing' happens, it's then pulled out."*

PA14d: *"We have a Code of Conduct that we must follow, but we did not induct this, we just have them as a document. The learners are not aware of the Code of Conduct. We only pull it out when someone is in trouble, when we are trying to discipline ... a learner, so the induction of the Code of Conduct is very important."*

PA7b: *"The measures are too rigid; they are not flexible ... Are we going to deal with a learner who picks under another learners' skirt the same we deal with a learner who puts their hand in another learners' ... Is there a scale to say this is a minor, major sexual harassment? Sexual harassment is sexual harassment, irrespective of what it is. The moment we start categorising that, then a teacher will say this one is not important. Crime is crime, let it not be categorised. For example, a teacher will ask 'What did he do?' 'He peeps.' 'Oh, okay!! I thought he slept with her.' This is hindering solving the problem. We're stuck there, waiting for 'the big thing*

to happen', only then we act, until then we're chilling."

PA10c: "There is no policy that addresses sexual harassment at school, only talking and talking, nothing written down, it doesn't make sense, the Code of Conduct is not enough. I think all schools should have a policy and it should be discussed with parents that say NO to sexual harassment. It should explain what we call sexual harassment and it should be specified on the policy. The school governing bodies and parents all agreed knowing what sexual harassment is and this is what we agreed upon. 1, 2, 3 is sexual harassment and should be itemised. Then you see we will have a breakthrough; every parent has a copy of this, which makes everyone have an idea what we're talking about because people don't have an idea of what sexual harassment is all about."

It is important that each school should not only have a CoC, but also a policy that is very specific of what actions will be taken when incidents of sexual harassment occur. Participants complained that the measures are vague or too rigid, they do not go into details about what sexual harassment is and that makes it ineffective as a measure against sexual harassment at school. Participants also stated that the school CoC is not used as a proactive measure against sexual harassment, but rather as a reactive measure to show learners they have transgressed, which means it is only brought out when a learner has transgressed and is part of the disciplinary hearings.

The South African Schools Act's Guidelines for the Consideration of Governing Bodies in Adopting a Code of Conduct (SA: 1996c) state that the CoC should be a set of behavioural moral values, norms and principles, which the school as a whole should uphold and adhere to. The CoC should be used to cultivate a culture of mutual respect, tolerance and peace (sections 1.4, 1.9 and 2.3). According to the Guidelines, the CoC should be used to foster a culture of respect for all; as well as human rights at school, which both the educators and the learners uphold to create a safe learning environment. Therefore, a CoC is neither a proactive nor a reactive measure to prevent sexual harassment, but it should be a preventative measure. Drafting values and a desirable CoC is not enough to create a conducive learning environment. Instead, it should instil values in the hearts and minds of teachers, learners and their parents (Wet, 2009). The study revealed that far more discipline may be necessary to be used

to instil the correct behaviour and train learners to adhere to the school's CoC.

At the same time, it should be noted that teachers admitted that they, or their colleagues are also harassers.

PA12c: "Our Code of Conduct does not go into detail about what it means by sexual harassment, it only states 'No sexual harassment allowed in the premises'. Our Code of Conduct should not be vague. Sometimes you will find out that young teachers, the male teachers, say something to a learner and the learner does not feel comfortable about it. For example, 'Look how curvaceous you are.' It's not written anywhere that if you say such things, then it's sexual harassment. We as managers of the school, if they are not written anywhere, where it indicates that this person has sexually harassed this person ... so that is why we tend to regard other sexual harassment as not sexual harassment. We would think sexual harassment is when someone has been touched, verbally we do not consider it as sexual harassment."

PA4a: "It is unfortunate that the measures we have at school are not actively helping our learners, but not only the learner, but also restraining teachers from harassing the child, for example, a teacher telling a uniformed learner that 'Your butt is beautiful. I just want to get in between your legs.' Unfortunately, with this one, what can I do? A certain teacher and I went to knock some sense into the learner's head, but the learner went back to report us to that teacher and he started calling us witches and so on."

According to these findings, teachers have also been found guilty of verbally harassing learners. This is mostly done by sexually complementing them or having sexually inappropriate talks with learners. Teachers complained that when there are no specific measures at school level stating that having inappropriate sexual conversations with learners or complementing them sexually will be an offence if reported, no one will be held accountable for their actions. It was evident in this study that verbal sexual harassment is not only perpetrated by learners but also by teachers, who can be perpetrators and there are no measures at the schools to restrain or stop this kind of violence (SACE, 2011). The South African Council of Educators' code of ethics and professionalism explicitly states that "... an educator should refrain from any form of

sexual harassment (physical or otherwise) from learners”. According to SACE, it is evident that teachers are not supposed to sexually harass any learner in any form, either physically, verbally or non-verbally, which also shows that more needs to be done at the schools to prohibit sexual harassment in any form by teachers.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the data analysis and the findings of the study, which was conducted by making use of semi-structured interviews. The researcher presented the main and sub-questions of the study that needed to be answered in line with the aims and objectives of the study. The researcher used the case study design to be able to achieve the purpose of the study and provided a brief introduction of how the chapter was structured.

The researcher provided the participants’ demographics and the reasons why participants were purposefully drawn for the study. Sixteen male and female teachers from four schools selected in the Seshego Circuit participated in the study. The demographics of participants indicated the gender of each participant, their teaching years’ experience and the roles and responsibilities of each participant at the school. The researcher also provided the participants’ individual interview codes.

The researcher presented the emerging themes and subthemes that arose from the study. This section also presented the analysis of the data collected through interviews and the interpretations of the gathered data. Findings from this study were substantiated with literature reviews from various scholars having written on sexual harassment among learners by discussing and relating the findings with the verbatim interview transcriptions. Findings from the study revealed that teachers are aware that sexual harassment is a rampant and ongoing problem at their schools, but they are conflicted on whether and how to manage sexual harassment as teachers have different perceptions of what sexual harassment among adolescents is. Teachers have indicated that they would prefer having a social worker employed at the school to assist victims of harassment because learners do not report such incidents until sexual harassment becomes an assault. There is also an indication that there are no preventative measures in place to deal with the phenomenon at schools. The discoveries of the study were discussed in relation with literature discussed in Chapter 2 and new discoveries from the study were discussed within the relevant and recent

literature.

The following chapter will conclude the research by providing a detailed summary and the conclusions drawn from the findings, the implications and recommendations garnered from the study. Conclusions will be drawn from the identified themes in Chapter 4 and key findings will be highlighted. Implications and recommendations based on these findings will be given for relevant stakeholders and recommendation for future researchers, based on the topic of the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated teachers' experience of trying to manage sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit, Limpopo Province. The study identified what teachers understood as being sexual harassment and which forms of sexual harassment teachers mainly addressed. The study also identified the barriers and challenges teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. During data collection, the researcher identified that there were many shortcomings in the disciplinary measures taken at these schools that led to the researcher probing the teachers deeper about these measures that could have prevented sexual harassment from thriving at these schools. This had not initially been part of the focus of the study. However, this additional probe led to important findings that should lead to action by the relevant authorities.

In Chapter 4, the researcher presented a detailed data analysis and the interpretation of the findings regarding teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among learners. The results were derived from face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted with selected teachers at four secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit. Thematic analysis led to the discovery of several themes which were analysed in various subsections: (i) teachers' experience of sexual harassment among learners; (ii) the forms of sexual harassment teachers address; (iii) the barriers teachers experience when trying to address sexual harassment at the schools; (iv) the challenges teachers experience when aiming to prevent sexual harassment; and (v) the measures needed to prevent sexual harassment.

In this chapter, the researcher presents the summary of the chapters, followed by the findings pertaining to the subsections and themes. Subsequent to this, the researcher presents the recommendations based on the identified themes and the actions the various school authorities/stakeholders and the DoE should implement, as well as suggestions for future research.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, the researcher provided the introduction and background to the study, a structured summary of how the study was carried out, the problem statement and the contextual background through looking at studies conducted on sexual harassment in schools both locally and internationally. The researcher briefly expanded on the rationale for conducting this research. The main research question was stated as follows: What are teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?

Sub-research questions

- a) What forms of sexual harassment among learners do teachers mainly address in secondary schools?
- b) What barriers do teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?
- c) What challenges do teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?

The aims and objectives as well as the significance of the study were presented. The chapter provided an exploration of the conceptual framework that underpinned the study, as well as the research methodology. The reasons for having chosen the research design and methods for answering the research question and attaining the objectives of the study were explained. Trustworthiness and transferability of the qualitative research as well as the ethical considerations during data collection were discussed. The chapter concluded with a summary.

Chapter 2 presented the literature review. It started with the various definitions and understandings of sexual harassment, before dealing specifically with sexual harassment among learners. The researcher studied national and international literature reviews on sexual harassment among learners and the various ways it manifests itself among adolescents in schools. She unpacked the conceptual framework of sexual harassment and related this to the various forms of sexual harassment adolescents perpetrate among each other. She argued the theoretical roots of sexual harassment among adolescents' sexual harassment from a developmental perspective and also unpacked the developmental-contextual factors that could help one understand sexual harassment during adolescence. Teachers'

experience of sexual harassment among learners was also explored in detail. From the reviewed literature, major subthemes were discussed as barriers teachers experience when they try to prevent or address sexual harassment among learners. The major themes found in the literature were: (i) the lack of institutional support from administrators; (ii) a lack of formal education on the issue; (iii) teachers feeling overwhelmed; (iv) the inconsistent or lacking response from colleagues; (v) fear of parental backlash; and (vi) community values. The chapter concluded by expounding on Bronfenbrenner's ecological system as the main theoretical framework that undergirded the study.

Chapter 3 provided an overview of the research methodology, which explained the research paradigm chosen for the study and justified locating the study within the interpretive paradigm. Thereafter, the researcher introduced the research approach and then defended the decision to adopt a qualitative approach as the most appropriate method for inquiring and exploring teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among learners. The researcher presented the research design and provided the reason why a case study approach was useful for researching the phenomenon under study.

Chapter 3 also outlined the selection of the research participants and the description of the four chosen schools. A total of 16 teachers were selected using purposive sampling. Only teachers with at least four years of experience and above participated in the study. The researcher believed that in order to provide insightful answers to the phenomenon under investigation, they had to have had at least have four years of teaching experience. One secondary school was chosen in each of four Seshego zonal areas, resulting in four schools chosen altogether for the research. The researcher aimed to identify how teachers in semi-rural areas manage sexual harassment among secondary school learners and what challenges and barriers they face when they are confronted with incidents of such behaviour among learners at school. The 16 teachers from the four secondary schools were interviewed with the use of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews, which provided the researcher as well as the teachers with the opportunity to discuss in detail the problem of the study and look introspectively beyond the boundaries of the topic. The data analysis method as well as measures that were taken to ensure trustworthiness and transferability were discussed. Thereafter, the researcher detailed how issues pertaining to ethical

considerations were observed. The final part of the chapter concluded with a n overview and summary of what was dealt with in the chapter.

Chapter 4 presented the data analysis and the interpretation of the findings which had been collected through the means of the face-to-face semi-structured interviews. It included a brief report on the data collection process, the participants' demographic details and their interview codes. This was followed by the themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis.

The topics were: (i) Teachers' experience of sexual harassment among learners; (ii) the various identified forms of sexual harassment the teachers face; (iii) the barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment; (iv) the challenges teachers experience when they try to prevent sexual harassment; and (v) the measures taken to prevent sexual harassment at the schools. The analysis of the data and the interpretation of the analysed data were presented. The findings of the study were also substantiated by comparing them with the literature review on sexual harassment among learners by discussing and relating them with the verbatim interview transcriptions. The chapter concluded with a summary of the results dealt with in the chapter.

Chapter 5 offers the conclusions and recommendations, based on the analysis and findings of the data obtained. After the comprehensive summary of the previous chapters, this chapter provides a summary of the findings regarding each of the topics and themes. The chapter also provides recommendations to various stakeholders who have a direct influence on the schools, such as the circuit offices, the provincial department, the district department and the schools themselves.

Recommendations are also made based on the findings of the identified themes, with recommendations on each identified theme, so that every weakness and problem identified may be given attention to as they directly affect teachers and the schools as a whole. Suggestions for further research are made, and the limitations of the study are noted. The chapter concludes with final remarks on the study.

5.3 FINDINGS FROM THE IDENTIFIED THEMES

This section provides a summary of the findings which were discussed in detail in Chapter 4. The major findings of the study are presented through the lens of the

identified topics and themes.

5.3.1 Theme 1: Teachers' perception of sexual harassment among learners

This study revealed great disparities in teachers' perceptions of and /or understanding of sexual harassment. Some teachers were more knowledgeable, understanding sexual harassment as being unwelcomed and unwanted sexual attention that involve physical, verbal and non- verbal, inappropriate acts towards another. The study revealed that some teachers only have a partial understanding of sexual harassment, believing it to be the perpetrated act of learners harassing each other by inappropriately touching another learner at schools. Teachers agreed that learners did not understand that inappropriate and unwanted sexual conduct against a peer infringes on the other learner's right to a safe learning environment.

Some teachers attributed the high occurrences of sexually harassing behaviour among learners to pubertal hormones during adolescence making the learners susceptible to behaving inappropriately to the opposite sex. Other teachers thought that the high occurrences of sexually harassing behaviour among secondary school learners happened because "*boys believed that they had the right to girls' bodies*" and that was why girls were more often harassed. This was corroborated by the reviewed literature in Chapter 2 stating that pubertal hormones may not be the only reason why learners harassed each other, especially across gender, but rather also some learned "gender dominance" creating an oppressive culture, which might also have penetrated and been accepted in the school environment. This could also be a reflection of society in the rural areas, where dominant male roles still prevail.

The study also revealed that when teachers were asked how they manage sexual harassment, they categorised specific acts as "minor" and not really true harassment, while acts that involved physical sexual violence against a learner were seen as sexual harassment that needed immediate disciplinary attention. Minor sexual harassment, according to the teachers, included unwanted kissing, touching, hugging, rubbing, boys peeping under girls' skirts, verbal sexual abuse, sexual jokes and sexually degrading jokes. According to these teachers, they did not pay much attention to incidents of minor harassment and most teachers ignored them. However, some teachers talked to the perpetrators and tried to discourage such behaviour.

The study revealed that teachers do not proactively or actively prevent sexual harassment at these schools, nor are there any corrective measures in place for the different levels of offences. This led to teachers handling any cases of sexual harassment as they saw fit, which meant that some teachers addressed sexual harassment among learners when they saw incidents occurring, while others ignored them or only intervened when such a case was reported.

The findings revealed that disciplinary committees are meant to address sexual harassment based on the seriousness of the offence. When sexual harassment did not include any physical violence against a learner these teachers did not apply any uniform corrective measures against such a learner. This also meant that other learners were not shown what would happen if they were to transgress. Disciplinary hearings were only held to determine what steps should be taken against such learners when sexual harassment constituted violence. The researcher attributed this categorisation of violence, where no serious punitive measures were taken other than at worst the “suspension for one week” to a lack of specific guidelines. That is why there is categorising the offences into those that were serious and those that can be ignored, thereby creating an environment where violence thrives. The Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in public schools drafted by the DoE was unknown to most teachers.

Collaborating with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the researcher came to understand and learn through the lens of teachers' experiences of managing sexual harassment among learners that individual teachers' skewed or partial understanding of sexual harassment may not be the only element that has a direct impact on how they handle sexual harassment among learners or whether they intervene in incidents they have witnessed. Rather, the ability to curb sexual harassment among learners in the school environment also rests upon the schools' leadership/management, the schools' culture and whether discipline is strictly applied in the school or not. Teachers are part of their own environment's social milieu and are formed by it according to their values, religious belief and culture. Bronfenbrenner's ecological system provided the theoretical framework of this study, whereby the processes that shape individuals' development can be examined. Not only is an individual part of the ecosystem, but schools as these teachers' place of work form an important part of the ecosystem that teachers may not have control over. The schools, where these individuals are actively

engaged, also create a synergy in which an individual is caught up. An individual may not have control over the professional and personal conflict of values or principles of addressing learner-to-learner sexual harassment. A school environment that categorises the offences into those that seem important and those that can be ignored or attract only some comments from the teachers, or no punishment at all, cannot be overruled by an individual teacher, who has no authority to do that. The school authority has the social responsibility to create a safe and healthy environment, one that is conducive to effective teaching and learning for teachers and learners.

This study has illuminated the importance of fostering a disciplined, respectful human rights culture at these schools, which should be created and strictly adhered to in these school by all teachers and learners to create a safe learning environment. It also illuminated the importance of school authorities establishing clear and unambiguous disciplinary rules and measures for these schools, setting a zero tolerance for sexual harassment of any kind between learners, or teachers and learners, or vice versa.

5.3.2 Theme 2: Forms of sexual harassment teachers mainly address

The study found that there is a high prevalence of sexual harassment on these school premises, ranging from inappropriate physical harassment to verbal harassment. The most rampant form of sexual harassment is the physical harassment perpetrated between peers. Physical sexual harassment ranges from minor harassment to extreme forms of harassment. Teachers indicated that the extreme form of sexual harassment may include sexual conduct that involves violence (rape and assault) or severe victimisation and intimidation against another peer. Teachers also highlighted that despite the perpetration of sexual harassment among learners, there is a low reporting rate of harassment incidents, especially when they are seen to be minor harassments. Most of the teachers agreed that they waited for learners to report sexual harassment incidents before they intervened in such cases. According to teachers, the indication of a low reporting rate may be attributed to various reasons, which they indicated later in the study as the barriers and challenges they face in addressing and preventing sexual harassment among learners. This includes learners' lack of trust in teachers because of the lacking assurance of victim confidentiality or the learners' fear of victimisation by peers for reporting, as well as some ignorance among learners about what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. As many teachers are loathe to talk

about any sexual matters at school, wanting to leave the topic to outsiders (nurses, pastors, social workers), they do not teach the learners the difference between what is right and what is not. Parents of these learners also do not assist in this matter as they are either absent, or they share the teachers' cultural conviction that adults should not talk about anything of a sexual nature to children. This is worsened by the male dominance factor also playing a role, where parents often do not see anything wrong in a boy experimenting his sexual drive on a girl at school.

The study also revealed that the physical forms of sexual harassment were singled out as the most prevalent and these tend to be addressed, with most teachers referring these cases to the management of the school. The extreme forms of physical sexual harassment cannot be handled by a teacher and in most cases, disciplinary hearings will be held for such incidents. Most teachers did not believe that verbal sexual harassment was actually 'harassment'. Learners rarely report verbal forms of sexual harassment and because there are no measures taken against it and it is rampant among learners. Should it be reported to teachers, then they tended to talk to the learners and discourage them from saying such things. However, these teachers also indicated that they did not recognise most verbal forms of sexual harassment as any transgression, despite the devastating psychological consequences such harassment may have on the victim. While teachers understand that bullying is harmful, they do not seem to see verbal sexual harassment as a form of violence that must be stopped. Teachers agreed that there were no punishments or disciplinary measures taken against this form of transgression. Findings from this study revealed that not only is sexual harassment under-perceived by teachers, but it is also under-reported by learners. The threshold of what teachers regard as sexual harassment is very high, making the school environment a place that condones violence and normalises unacceptable behaviour. Teachers also did not seem to consider that such unacceptable behaviour at these schools and the lack of discipline will ultimately allow these learners to turn into undisciplined, uncontrolled and maybe even violent adults.

5.3.3 Theme 3: Barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners

The teachers mentioned various barriers they experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners. The researcher classified the barriers teachers experience to internal and external factors. Internal barriers incapacitate teachers and

their feeling of a lack of safety. External barriers are cultural and religious beliefs in their communities and homes and learners' socioeconomic factors.

The internal barriers are factors that teachers could overcome if the necessary help were to be provided to them. The study revealed that teachers are requesting more assistance from the DoE to help them overcome the barriers they face at school. They confirmed that there was a great need for more workshops and training so that all teachers would know how to correctly identify sexually inappropriate behaviour among learners in the school environment and learn how to deal with it in a consistent manner. Every teacher must be able to recognise which behaviour is correct and which one is not, regardless of their own gender or that of the learner. Teachers also expressed the need for social workers (or a nurse or a pastor) at school to assist them in cases where sexual harassment becomes violence. In most cases, learners reported some extreme sexual harassment that teachers did not know how to handle without creating a stigma for the affected learner. Therefore, teachers expressed the need for learners to have a trusted health worker available in the schools, one they can confide in within the school environment.

The findings of this study further revealed that incapacitated teachers may be one of the core reasons why learners are not reporting incidents of sexual harassment that happen to them at school. A feeling of a lack of safety is one of the barriers the study uncovered in addressing sexual harassment among learners. Teachers have highlighted that far more needs to be done about their safety at school, especially in Seshego, where there are many unruly and even criminally inclined learners operating together with local gangs. They stated that learners have been noted to come to school with dangerous weapons. Therefore, the authorities, school management and the teachers were not doing enough for learners because their safety is compromised at school. Teachers highlighted that the DoE would have to devise a plan as to how to ensure the safety of both teachers and learners at school.

The external factors, such as the communities' cultural and religious beliefs and the learners' socioeconomic factors are barriers that teachers can do very little about, but they are still factors they experience when trying to address sexual harassment among learners. Some teachers' cultural and religious beliefs stop them from talking about sexual matters or addressing sexual harassment. It was obvious from the findings of

the study that not all teachers intervene in cases of sexual harassment. They regard it as a taboo for an adult to discuss sexually related matters with minors. Unfortunately, these cultural and religious beliefs interfere with the attempts to eradicate sexual harassment at these schools, and even teachers teaching Life Orientation sometimes fall into the category of those who will not teach anything about sex. Therefore, not all sex-related topics in Life Orientation are addressed adequately in class. Teachers also stated that the cultural and religious beliefs of the schools' environment further permeate into "how things are done at schools".

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system emphasises that cultural and religious beliefs fall under the exosystem in which an individual or institution experiences its influences and is also influenced by it, which in turn, influences the culture of the school. Thus, cultural and religious beliefs could be a strong barrier that affects schools in rural and semi-rural areas, as culture is a pivotal part of a community's values. While these factors are still accepted as the ruling norms and values, very little will change in these societies, and misdemeanours, crime, teenage pregnancies and the disregard for equal human rights will continue or grow among the youth.

The socioeconomic status of the learners' family is another strong barrier that affects addressing sexual harassment at school. Teachers confirmed that parents are essential to 'making things work' at school; however, some learners come from child-headed homes, while others are from single-parent homes, and some have absent parents (away for work). Learners come from informal settlements and the rural areas surrounding Seshego. Since families' financial statuses differ widely, some parents cannot avail themselves when called to school in cases where their children are the offenders. Teachers also confirmed that learners come from different backgrounds and that parents often do not reinforce any of the morals or behaviour codes taught at school.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains that there are factors that an individual is caught up in; and that cannot be controlled, that can affect a person. These factors are linked to cultures and subcultures that are interlinked with economic and social spheres of life. The cultural and religious beliefs, families' value systems and the socioeconomic status of learners are external factors that have a major influence on teachers trying to identify, address and eradicate the sexual harassment among learners.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment

It was evident from the interviews held with teachers that they experience several challenges when they aim to prevent sexual harassment among learners. Teachers highlighted that the school uniform skirts that girls wear are in most cases too short, and these short skirts are often blamed by the perpetrators of harassment and by teachers as 'inviting' harassment. Teachers argued that the biggest challenge they face is that boys do not know how to respond appropriately when they see the sensual part of a girl's body, for example, thighs and panties, especially when girls are not sitting on their chairs in classes with their legs closed. The paradox about this challenge is that young male teachers complained that girls also use their short skirts as an 'invitation' for action. Teachers complained that girls sometimes sit with their legs wide open when they are attracted to their male teachers; and young male teachers are usually their target. Sometimes they do not even wear anything underneath their school skirt, just to get their teacher's attention. This study revealed that young male teachers are targeted for sexual overtures/harassment by girls. Even though within the context of this study, it is not clear how frequently this happens, but it is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Teachers also highlighted the lack of support for each other by their own colleagues when dealing with cases of reported sexual harassment. Teachers complained of a lack of consistent teamwork among teachers which can be attributed to their different views of what constitutes sexual harassment, which leads to division and incapacitation. This challenge has contributed to learners' lack of trust in their teachers to be given the fair treatment they deserve when they are victims of sexual harassment by their peers. Teachers also blamed the effect of media and social networks on learners who tend to be exposed to explicit content. This creates a challenge that contributes to teachers preventing these learners from acting out certain behaviours at school, especially toward the opposite sex. Teachers believed that most learners do not adhere to watching only age-appropriate, non-restricted programmes and they carry cellular phones, where they have access to information they are not yet supposed to be exposed to as adolescents. Teachers felt there was nothing they could do at the school level to overcome this challenge.

Teachers indicated that learners lack the knowledge about what sexual harassment entails and what should be their appropriate behaviour at all times. Teachers confirmed that many learners were unaware of the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching. It became evident during the interviews that most teachers claimed to have confronted their learners about acts that constitute sexual harassment towards another. However, this was obviously not enough, or incidents of sexual harassment would have reduced at the schools. Teachers agreed that there was still a great need for education about sexual harassment at school, so that all learners can benefit from a more disciplined and a safe environment and be able to receive a better education.

Teachers expressed that they lacked support from the DoE and their presiding school authority concerning clearer guidelines, training and consistent implementation of punitive measures to enhance preventative steps being taken against sexual harassment. They indicated that according to the rules set by the DoE, they were unable to take the necessary action against sexual offenders at the school level. They also felt that the school policy did not protect teachers enough to act and they were afraid that some learners and their gang-related friends or parents could well harm a teacher who did punish offenders. Teachers also indicated that the school managers' leadership style, personal values and lacking implementation of discipline at school prevented teachers from preventing sexual harassment among learners.

Teachers believed that if their school's management did not positively influence the school's milieu or culture to curb sexually harassing behaviour from thriving, or if teachers did not feel supported by their managers to act against certain incidents that were reported as sexual harassment, there was nothing they could do to prevent sexual harassment among learners.

5.3.5 Theme 5: Measures to prevent sexual harassment.

It became evident during the interviews that these four schools did not have corrective measures in place that the teachers could use to discipline learners, especially considering the frequent occurrence of offences regarding sexual harassment. Teachers emphasised that the disciplinary committee at school handled most cases of sexual harassment because learners reported extreme cases of physical sexual violence against a peer to management. In contrast, minor sexual harassment, such

as unwanted kissing, touching, hugging, rubbing, boys peeping under girls' skirts, verbal sexual abuse, sexual jokes and sexually degrading jokes are left to the teachers to deal with, who sometimes reprimanded these learners by talking to them and telling them to 'stop doing such things'. Teachers reported that they were aware of the school's CoC but that it was ineffective in preventing sexual harassment among learners. They believed that the school's CoC was vague and did not prohibit sexual harassment and did not specify which acts constituted sexual harassment. Most teachers agreed that the school's CoC was a document kept in the school's files, but it was never inducted; instead, it was only used as a point of reference when a learner committed a serious offence.

A few teachers stated that some of their own male colleagues were guilty of verbally sexually harassing learners by making inappropriate and unacceptable sexually loaded comments or complimenting learners on their bodies (butts, thighs, breasts). At the same time, most teachers believed that any verbally uttered sexual harassment was not a serious offence, especially if it was compared to a learner being physically harassed at school. However, they also believed that it was improper for a teacher to make any sexually loaded comments to learners. According to the ethics, laws and rules teachers have to abide by, they must actively discourage any sexual overtures between learners and teachers. Teachers emphasised the importance of the CoC, but also that it should become more specific and explicitly list which acts constitute sexual harassment and which behaviours are inappropriate, so that teachers and learners can all be held accountable for any forms of abuse or transgressions.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based on the findings of this study and address various weaknesses that were identified at the schools, such as a lack of governance and of strict discipline, a school culture that instead tolerates sexual harassment and unruly behaviour and inefficient school management. Further recommendations are made to the DoE.

5.4.1 Theme 1: Recommendations on teachers' perception of sexual harassment among learners

Schools ought to educate their teachers on how to correctly identify all acts that constitute sexual harassment and how any occurrence thereof can be managed, or

ideally, prevented. Such education or training should not be held once-off, but rather be conducted through regular training sessions, workshops and constructive dialogues to equip teachers with the necessary strategies and knowledge in dealing with sexual harassment among learners. It is also important that the schools do not only increase the teachers' knowledge regarding this topic, but also find ways on how to balance teachers' reluctance to become actively involved in the control and prevention of this scourge, while they feel uncomfortable with such action, based on their own cultural and religious beliefs. Teachers will only be able to teach learners how to behave appropriately if they themselves understand fully what such appropriate behaviour would be. Once teachers have gained such knowledge have also taught it to the learners, learners will have to be monitored to ensure that the necessary discipline is implemented and adhered to. Thus, the teachers themselves will have to be disciplined and apply discipline among the learners. While cultural values and systems are vastly important, they should never interfere with or rule over school disciplines and rules.

The findings identified that school management have not implemented proactive measures to prevent sexual harassment in their schools. Individual teachers cannot curb sexual harassment if the school management are passive regarding its occurrence and any punishment for transgressors. The school managers ought to develop clear discipline strategies that teachers can use to create a healthier teaching and learning environment. Implementing an own zero-tolerance policy for harassment and violence would help establish a conducive and safer learning environment for all.

Adopting the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in Public Schools, as drafted by the DoE, was meant to help the schools to not categorise sexual harassment into minor and more serious acts, as this can lead to so-called minor acts being ignored, which leads to the normalisation of such inappropriate behaviour and an overall lowering of moral standards at the schools.

To prevent sexual harassment occurring among learners at school, school managers will have to incorporate constitutional values into the school environment. Training learners to adhere to values such as mutual respect, respect for human dignity, integrity, justice and equality at school could help create a more conducive school environment. It will also assist schools and their teachers by creating the basis for turning adolescents into responsible, respectful adults once they leave school.

5.4.2 Theme 2: Recommendation regarding the forms of sexual harassment teachers mainly address

Teachers should pay far more attention to the power dynamics and inappropriate or even dominating behaviour in the school environment, which may be observable in the form of verbal and non-verbal sexual transactions between learners. Teachers should be more vigilant and challenge any heterosexist, homophobic or macho behaviour or any form of degrading language that may occur between learners (and teachers) if they wish to create a more inclusive and respectful environment at the school.

Teachers should also be more sensitive to their own use of language and refrain from any remarks, comments, or behaviour that may transmit or model verbal and non-verbal sexual harassing behaviour, whether they are interacting with learners or their colleagues in the school environment. Any form of reported, overheard or observed verbal or non-verbal sexual harassment should not be trivialised, but rather be attended to immediately ‘to stop it in its tracks’ and be dealt with according to the established policy of the school.

5.4.3 Theme 3: Recommendation on barriers teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners

To deal with sexual harassment among learners, teachers need to be better capacitated. First, they have to be able to understand what sexual harassment is, as well as all the aspects that are included under the term. Regular training sessions and workshops should be offered to all teaching staff to enhance not only their understanding of what constitutes harassment, but also its impact on the overall well-being and academic achievement of learners.

Since the cultural and religious beliefs of a teacher can serve as barriers, training sessions and workshops might create the necessary awareness of how certain cultural or religious beliefs could be a gateway to condoning and normalising certain acts of sexual harassment, potentially leading to crime. Training and seminars could challenge the role of power dynamics, gender norms, sexual education sensitivity and harmful cultural stereotyping that permeate the school environment. Training and seminars ought to educate and address all these factors, so that all the teachers and schools can work towards creating a safer and more respectful environment for all learners – and the teachers. The problem will not be solved if teachers “hide behind” not being

comfortable talking about the topic with learners, or being too scared about potential safety issues, as avoidance of the relevant actions will normalise and even worsen the situation. Teachers should ask themselves what they would be willing to accept as “normal behaviour” happening to them and what they would regard as harassment. If any such behaviour would not be a comfortable or acceptable experience for them, it should also not be something any learner would have to experience.

However, teachers' willingness to effectively deal with sexual harassment among learners will also depend on their own safety at work, especially in schools in semi-rural areas, where there are regular incidents of violence and even attacks on teachers. School managers may work with the DoE to address these concerns about the lack of good security at schools by providing security guards in the school environment; also, providing security equipment such as 24-hour surveillance cameras and metal detector scanners could help restrain learners from bringing dangerous weapons to school.

Learners who are primarily at risk of accepting sexual harassment or violation are those whose harsh realities of the hardship of life have hit their families. Teachers could identify such learners: for example, learners who come from child-headed families, orphans, and those living in informal settlements. Teachers could offer special life skill classes, teaching learners about their rights to privacy, respect and safety and how to enhance their own self-respect. With the assistance of a social worker, teachers could provide these vulnerable learners with ways how to cope financially and where to get help, instead of them falling prey to prostitution or other ways to survive. Every learner in these classes should at the end have a mindset of intolerance to sexual harassment or violence and replace it with respect for all.

5.4.4 Theme 4: Recommendation on challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment

Schools will have to find new approaches to overcome the challenges they face in preventing sexual harassment by having their management as well as all teachers work together to fight the battle against sexual harassment and any other forms of crime. It is crucial that school managers do more to support the teachers and create an environment free of sexual harassment by establishing and consistently implementing school policies that create an environment that prohibits sexual

harassment. This means that there must be appropriate consequences in place for perpetrators, holding any teacher accountable for a sexual harassment incident that was reported and not given the proper attention, as well as providing the appropriate interventions, such as counselling or referral to a professional counsellor, for victims of sexual harassment at schools.

Schools could also collaborate with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other relevant stakeholders to re-orientate learners and teach them the importance of not conducting any sexual harassment. This orientation may be an open and constructive dialogue, which should address issues of sexual harassment, inappropriate behaviours (either physical, verbal and non-verbal) that infringe another peer's right to a safe environment and how boys must control themselves when they see short skirts or another learner's exposed body part. Orientation must incorporate respecting other peers' constitutional human rights to dignity, emphasising that those rights must be respected both inside and outside the school's premises.

5.4.5 Theme 5: Recommendation on measures to prevent sexual harassment

The school's CoC should be seen as the ethos of the school, a guiding belief and principle that should play a crucial role in helping schools maintain discipline and create a conducive learning environment. The CoC is not meant to be a disciplinary measure to prevent sexual harassment from thriving in the school because it only deals with and prohibits bullying and substance abuse. Although all school CoCs clearly indicate that sexual violence and harassment are prohibited on the school premises, such a broad statement is not enough to deal with the various forms of sexual harassment. Rather, each school ought to draft a policy that comprehensively, but very specifically, deals with all sexual violence cases and harassment at school and how to deal with each type of case. This policy ought to clearly state what sexual harassment is, which actions constitute sexual harassment or inappropriate behaviour and what disciplinary action will be taken against offenders of sexual harassment and violence at the school.

Schools should aim not only for a punitive approach to sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour but should aim for a preventative approach to sexual harassment in the school environment. This will be crucial in creating a safe learning

environment, free from violence and harassment. This will also create a culture of equality, mutual respect, respect for human dignity, integrity and justice in the school environment in which teaching staff, learners and non-teaching staff will be able to function more effectively. These values must be incorporated in the CoC, which should be posted up in every classroom, as well as all other rooms and areas open to the learners to create visibility and continuous reminders. Not only will these values help create an environment that clearly states that no violence or sexual harassment will be tolerated, but it will also remind teachers to not use verbally harassing and inappropriate language to learners.

Teachers ought to proactively and consistently use discipline to teach these values and prevent sexual harassment among learners. Teachers must be able to implement the appropriate punishment to those who do not adhere to the school's values; or in cases where sexual harassment occurs, schools must apply to relevant prescribed measures by applying appropriate punishment as stated in the school's policy so that perpetrators and learners will realise that inappropriate behaviour will always have consequences, without exception.

5.4.6 Recommendation for policy developers at the national level of the DoE

There is a rampant level of sexual harassment in South African public schools, especially so in semi-rural and rural areas, where there are often no parental controls in place to guide learners. Although the DoE developed and issued the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in public schools, this policy is not implemented in the schools. Few teachers understand what sexual harassment constitutes and what actions should be taken to combat or prevent it. Disparities in the efforts of addressing sexual harassment at the schools show that there are no uniform corrective measures adopted at these school to curb sexual harassment or violence in the school environment. At national level, the DoE should implement a compulsory induction of the current policy at all provincial and district levels, so that every principal, teacher, SGB, SBST, learner and all members of the school's community will understand how to respond to sexual violence and harassment taking place on the school's premises. Since there is a high incidence of non-reporting of sexual harassment at school until it becomes sexual violence and teachers have attributed this low level of the incidences being reported to the lack of learners' trust in

teachers keeping the information confidential, the DoE should consider employing a social worker at these schools. Such a social worker (or a nurse) should work closely with the members of the school's community in cases where sexual harassment has turned to sexual violence either perpetrated by a learner or a teacher or another adult.

5.4.7 Recommendation for policy at the provincial level of the DoE

Besides considering amending the policy with sections that clearly specify the different types of sexual harassment and the punitive measures that should be taken in cases of transgression, the DoE on the provincial level should work closer with the districts to provide guidance and training in every school: this could be in the form of regular structured programmes aimed at capacitating all principals, teachers, SGB, SBST and members of the school community to be able to deal effectively with sexual harassment and violence at school. Training workshops should provide teachers and other stakeholders with more knowledge and lead to them understanding the difference between the various forms of sexual harassment at school and how school officials should handle the punitive measures.

Every member of the school community should be able to implement and work with the Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Sexual Violence and Harassment in public schools and every member should follow the procedures and implement the corrective measures for committed offences. Such training could be combined with other challenges experienced at these schools, such as teenage pregnancies, substance abuse, poverty leading to malnutrition or prostitution, neglect and other serious problems.

The DoE should also consider collaborating with the district offices, NGOs, social workers or other relevant stakeholders to educate teachers and learners on what sexual harassment is. Learners must be able to identify conduct that constitutes sexual harassment and become equipped to speak out against it. Training should also inform learners about the steps they should take and how to lodge a formal complaint against an offender at school and know their right to seek intervention and support provided by the school or the DoE if needed.

5.4.8 Recommendation at the district level of the DoE

The district should organise regular training workshops to educate teachers and the

school community on how to effectively deal with sexual harassment and violence. The district could also work with the schools to draft a preventative disciplinary strategy that they should use to refrain learners from sexual harassment. The district could also invite NGOs and other relevant stakeholders to help empower learners to recognise and object to sexual harassment in the strongest terms.. The district body should aim to educate learners to protect their rights to dignity, respect and a safe learning environment by empowering learners to seek interventions and support provided by the district when needed.

5.4.9 Recommendation for schools managers and governing bodies

With the support from the district, school managers should be alerted to adopt the government policy for preventing and managing sexual violence and harassment in their respective schools. Each school may decide also to work with the SGB, SBST, SMT, representatives of parents, a representative council of learners and other relevant stakeholders and draft their own school policy. Such a school-specific policy should be adapted to their specific needs, bearing in mind that the school policy should not contradict what is stated in the government policy in this regard. This should be a zero-tolerance policy regarding any forms of harassment, which must embrace the inherent right of equality and dignity as enshrined in the Constitution of the RSA. It should be written in the relevant official language as well as English, so that it will be understood by all. The policy ought to specifically address sexual harassment and violence at schools and clearly state what sexual harassment is and what acts constitute sexual harassment, as well as what disciplinary actions will be taken against offenders of sexual harassment and violence at the school level. The school policy has to be agreed upon and signed by the SMT, SGB, SBST, parents and the representative council of learners, so that there is a mutual understanding about how sexual harassment and violence will be treated at the school.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Based on the findings of this study, there were certain discoveries that the researcher had not anticipated. The researcher, therefore, makes the following suggestions for further inquiry:

- i. This study was conducted in four secondary schools with 16 participants. Quantitative research could be conducted in a different geographical location

with a more significant number of schools and participants to confirm the findings in the current study.

- ii. As participants in this study were teaching in a semi-rural area with a mono-racial population, the circuit where the study was conducted did not represent the different demographics of the South African population. Therefore, the study could be conducted in other areas across the different racial profiles at schools in the Limpopo Province or in other provinces.
- iii. Participants of this study were teachers in secondary schools. Future researchers can look into the participation of learners to provide findings on the lived experiences from learners' perspectives on what leads to sexual harassment being conducted among learners and how they feel about punitive measures at school.
- iv. Another area that requires future investigations is in relation to young male teachers as victims of sexual harassment by girls at secondary schools. Do learners (girls) display sexually explicit acts towards young male teachers? How do these teachers handle such situations and what are the consequences?

Another area that equally warrants further inquiry is the correlation between short uniform skirts (or other forms of exposed ways of dressing) and sexual harassment.

5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited not only to one province and one circuit, but also to only four secondary schools and 16 participants (teachers), which is a small proportion of teachers from the whole Seshego Circuit teacher population. Therefore, the findings from this study may not be generalised to the entire population in the district or beyond.

The topic of teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among secondary school learners is a very sensitive topic. As a result, some teachers did not want to take part in the study. Some teachers excused themselves because of their cultural and religious beliefs and this meant that only Life Orientation teachers or disciplinary team members, some school managers and a few subject teachers were comfortable to participate in the study.

The study was conducted in a culturally conservative area: the topic of sexual

harassment was entirely uncomfortable for older teachers who had more teaching experience; or some conservative, religious teachers who find talking about anything of a sexual nature offensive and declined to participate in the study. Other stakeholders such as the SGB, parents and learners, were not involved in the study, so the data represents only the perspectives of the teachers.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

The study sought to identify and describe teachers' experience in managing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools in the Seshego Circuit as stated in Chapter 1. To be able to obtain such information, the researcher chose qualitative research in the form of a case study to collect and capture the data and reflect the phenomenon as truthfully as possible and yield insights and understanding of the problem. Despite the sensitivity of the topic, the researcher was able to interview 16 teachers in four different secondary schools regarding their views and perspectives on their experience of the phenomenon under study. This study provided compelling evidence that there is a problematic lack of a comprehensive and unified understanding of what sexual harassment is all about. Teachers confirmed their limited understanding of sexual harassment and how to deal with any transgressions. As most 'minor' cases of harassment were often not reported and ignored by the teachers, at best leading to a reprimand, there was a serious absence of action to reduce such cases. Only perceived cases of serious physical harassment were reported and attracted some punitive measures. The study results also revealed that teachers do not proactively prevent sexual harassment because of a lack of a unified understanding and cooperation among them, leaving many cases of sexual harassment not reported to teachers, except for the severe cases. There were also no standardised or unified implemented corrective measures for the different levels of offences. This led to teachers handling cases of sexual harassment as they saw fit, which resulted in some teachers addressing sexual harassment among learners only if they saw the incident occur and believed they could/should intervene, while other teachers ignored it, and some teachers intervened only when it was officially reported. Teachers believed that there was not only limited knowledge among them regarding sexual harassment, but that there was also a lack of understanding of sexual harassment among learners. Teachers perceived that the lack of understanding contributed to rampant perpetration of harassment among learners, but they did not see that their lack of

consistent interventions had any role to play in the high incidence of sexual harassment.

Teachers blamed the barriers they experienced when addressing sexual harassment as caused by internal and external factors. The internal factors, such as teachers' lack of knowledge regarding sexual harassment and their perceived lack of safety, could be overcome if the DoE were to collaborate with different stakeholders to educate and protect teachers so that they could perform their duties in *loco parentis* at school. External factors such as cultural and religious beliefs and socioeconomic factors may not be easily overcome, but education around sexual harassment for both teachers and learners may be the necessary orientation for prevention. Teachers must be able to identify and intervene in cases of reported sexual harassment and learners must become able to recognise and stop any sexual harassment, while the school and its teachers and school management must look towards protecting the rights of all learners and teachers to respect, dignity and their right to a comfortable and safe learning environment.

Regarding the challenges teachers experience when trying to prevent sexual harassment among learners may necessitate them working closer with relevant stakeholders and drafting their own school policy that addresses their school's specific challenges of the prevention and management of sexual violence and harassment. Part of the discipline needed at schools should be a clear dress policy, stating the prescribed length of skirts for all female learners.

The researcher concludes that in order for teachers to manage sexual harassment and create a conducive learning and teaching environment, each school should adopt a preventative approach to sexual harassment in the school environment. Such a policy must ensure that it is clear, specific for the various forms of sexual harassment or any other form of transgression of the school's rules and CoC. Its purpose must be to create a culture of equality, mutual respect, respect for human dignity, integrity and justice in the school environment and a basis for the communication of sound values and discipline, which every learner and teacher must adhere to.

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APPENDIX A ETHICAL CLEARANCE



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2022/11/09

Ref: **2022/11/09/45235821/47/AM**

Name: Mrs AA Okelola

Student No.: 45235821

Dear Mrs AA Okelola

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2022/11/09 to 2025/11/09

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs AA Okelola
E-mail address: 45235821@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0788765895

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr B.M Moloto
E-mail address: masehbm@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 012 429 3429

Title of research:

Teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools in Seshego circuit, Limpopo province

Qualification: MEd Socio-Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2022/11/09 to 2025/11/09.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2022/11/09 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 will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



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3. 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 UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2025/11/09**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2022/11/09/45235821/47/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof Mpine Makoe
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za



Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

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APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Type of Interview: Semi- Structured

Purpose and Instruction

In my letter requesting this interview, I have indicated that I am currently undertaking a study titled **“Teacher experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary school at Seshego, Limpopo province”**. You have consented to this interview. The information obtained will be used only for research purposes and no names of participant schools or any identifying information regarding the school or yourself will be made known in the report. Do you have any questions before you start the interview?

May I audio record the interview, as it would help me to watch and listen to it again later and to make a transcript of the interview for data analysis purposes?

Interview Questions

- 1) What is your understanding of sexual harassment?
- 2) What are your experiences of sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?
- 3) What forms or examples of sexual harassment among learners do teachers mainly address in secondary school?
- 4) How do teachers manage sexual harassment among learners
- 5) How do you respond to incidents of sexual harassment among learners you witnessed or that was reported to you?
- 6) What barriers do teachers experience in addressing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools?
- 7) What challenges do teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners at secondary schools?
- 8) What measures are in place at school level to prevent sexual harassment from thriving in school?



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APPENDIX C REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LIMPOPO PROVINCE

APPENDIX C: REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION LIMPOPO PROVINCE

Request for permission to conduct research at Secondary schools in Seshego

Title of the research "Teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools at Seshego circuit Limpopo province"

Date: _____

Name of the person to whom you address the request: Representative from the Department of Education Limpopo province

Department of the person: _____

Contact details of person (tel and email address) _____

Dear Department of education Limpopo

I, Okelola Adedayo am doing research under the supervision of Boledi Moloto, a Doctor in the Department of Educational Foundations towards Med Socio-education at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Unisa Student Funding for the Master's and Doctorate program. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Teacher experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary school at Seshego circuit Limpopo province".

The aim of the study is to know teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners from grades 8 to 12 investigate which forms of sexual harassment teacher's address primarily at school and access the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The study will entail conducting interviews with 4 participants from 4 secondary schools in Seshego. The interview participants will be made up of 1 principal or vice principal, 1 Head of department, 2 Teachers, male and female teacher respectively. The targeted population for this research is teachers in secondary schools in the Seshego. A total of 16 participants (teachers) will be interviewed for the study. Only teachers with at least four years teaching experience will be chosen to participate in the study, the researcher believed that those with at least four-years teaching experiences would have interacted with learners more and would have witness or experiences cases of learners to learner sexual harassment.

The study will benefit teachers because it could reveal teachers' experiences of learner to learner's sexual harassment. It could also reveal what different teachers sees as a threshold of what count as sexual harassment in various schools and perhaps could also tell the barriers or challenges that prevent them from addressing this behavior among learners in schools; so as to minimize the risk of normalization of these unacceptable behaviors, and also increase awareness among teachers of what count as sexual harassment.

Minimum risks or discomforts are expected because the topic sexual harassment may be at times sensitive and contentious, it is expected that you might initially feel a possible discomfort. The fact that this study will be managed as confidentially as possible is an assurance that the participant may feel free to express themselves without fear of any negative consequences. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedures will entail meetings or workshops at these schools for the participants to present feedback and information after the study has been conducted.

Yours sincerely



Adedayo Okelola

2nd year Med Student

APPENDIX D REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CIRCUIT OFFICE



APPENDIX D: REQUEST TO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION CIRCUIT OFFICE

Request for permission to conduct research at Secondary schools in Seshego

Title of the research "Teachers experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools at Seshego circuit Limpopo province"

Date: _____

Name of the person to whom you address the request: Representative from the circuit offices Department of Education Limpopo province

Department of the person: _____

Contact details of person (tel and email address) _____

Dear Mr/ Mrs,

I, Okelola Adedayo am doing research under the supervision of Boledi Moloto, a Doctor in the Department of Educational Foundations towards a Med Socio-education at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Unisa Student Funding for the Master's and Doctorate program. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools at Seshego circuit Limpopo province".

The aim of the study is to know teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners from grades 8 to 12, investigate which forms of sexual harassment teachers address primarily at school and access the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The study will entail conducting interviews with 4 participants from 4 secondary schools in Seshego. The interview participants will be made up of 1 principal or vice principal, 1 Head of department, 2 Teachers, male and female teacher respectively. The targeted population for this research is teachers in secondary schools in the Seshego. A total of 16 participants (teachers) will be interviewed for the study. Only teachers with at least four years teaching experience will be chosen to participate in the study, the researcher believed that those with at least four-years teaching experiences would have interacted with learners more and would have witnessed or experienced cases of learners to learner sexual harassment.

The study will benefit teachers because it could reveal teachers' experiences of learner to learner's sexual harassment. It could also reveal what different teachers see as a threshold of what counts as sexual harassment in various schools and perhaps could also tell the barriers or challenges that prevent them from addressing this behavior among learners in school; so as to minimize the risk of normalization of these unacceptable behaviors, and also increase awareness among teachers of what counts as sexual harassment.

Minimum risks or discomforts are expected because the topic sexual harassment may be at times sensitive and contentious, it is expected that you might initially feel a possible discomfort. The fact that this study will be managed as confidentially as possible is an assurance that the participant may feel free to express themselves without fear of any negative consequences. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedures will entail meetings or workshops at these schools for the participants to present feedback and information after the study has been conducted.

Yours sincerely


Adedayo Okelola

2nd year Med student



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APPENDIX E REQUEST TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL



APPENDIX E: REQUEST TO SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Request for permission to conduct research at Secondary schools in Seshego

Title of the research "Teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools at Seshego circuit Limpopo province"

Date: _____

Name of the person to whom you address the request: Representative from the circuit offices Department of Education Limpopo province.

Department of the person: _____

Contact details of person (tel and email address) _____

Dear Mr/Mrs Principal Name

I, Okelola Adedayo am doing research under the supervision of Boledi Moloto, a Doctor in the Department of Educational Foundations towards Med Socio-education at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Unisa Student Funding for the Masters and Doctorate program. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Teachers experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools at Seshego circuit Limpopo province".

The aim of the study is to know teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners from grades 8 to 12, investigate which forms of sexual harassment teacher's address primarily at school and access the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The study will entail conducting interviews with 4 participants from 4 secondary schools in Seshego. The interview participants will be made up of 1 principal or vice principal, 1 Head of department, 2 Teachers, male and female teacher respectively. The targeted population for this research is teachers in secondary schools in Seshego. A total of 16 participants (teachers) will be interviewed for the study. Only teachers with at least four years teaching experience will be chosen to participate in the study, the researcher believed that those with at least four-years teaching experiences would have interacted with learners more and would have witness or experiences cases of learners to learner sexual harassment.

The study will benefit teachers because it could reveal teachers experiences of learner to learner's sexual harassment. It's could also reveal what different teacher sees as a threshold of what count as sexual harassment in various school and perhaps could also tell the barriers or challenges that prevent them from addressing this behavior among learners in school; so as to minimize the risk of normalization of these unacceptable behaviors, and also increase awareness among teachers of what count as sexual harassment.

Minimum risks or discomforts are expected because the topic sexual harassment may be at times sensitive and contentious, it is expected that you might initially feel a possible discomfort. The fact that this study will be managed as confidentially as possible is an assurance that the participants may feel free to express themselves without fear of any negative consequences. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedures will entail meetings or workshops at these schools for the participants to present the feedback and information after the study has been conducted.

Yours sincerely

Okelola A

Adedayo Okelola

2nd year Med student



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APPENDIX F PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date: _____

Title: "Teachers experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schools at Seshego circuit Limpopo province"

Dear Prospective Participant

I, Okelola Adedayo am doing research under the supervision of Boledi Moloto, a Doctor in the Department of Educational Foundations towards Med Socio-education at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Unisa Student Funding for the Master's program. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Teacher experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary school at Seshego circuit Limpopo province".

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of the study is to know teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners from grades 8 to 12, investigate which forms of sexual harassment teacher's address primarily at school and access the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. Findings from the study could uncover diverse teacher's experiences of sexual harassment and also reveal barriers and challenges they experience when addressing these problems.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you are someone who is directly involved in the educational system and educational stakeholder and will be able to provide rich information based on the topic of this research study.



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I obtained your contact details from the selected school database and district office after permission was granted from the relevant departments to participate in this research study. There will be 16 interviewee participants that will be involved in this research study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves a semi- structured interview that will audio recorded. The questions in the interview schedule will focus on the topic sexual harassment amongst learners. The duration for each interview will be approximately 20 minutes.

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 do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent adult form.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The study could influence school policy developers to design sound school-based strategies by elaborating more information on behaviour that constitutes sexual harassment among learners and how teachers could address it at secondary schools.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Minimum risks or discomforts are expected because the topic sexual harassment may be at times sensitive and contentious, it is expected that you might initially feel a possible discomfort. The fact that this study will be managed as confidentially as possible is an assurance that the participant may feel free to express themselves without fear of any negative consequences

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give.

Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Participants' confidentiality will be fully respected.



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HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet 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. Indicate how information will be destroyed if necessary. Hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no payment or any gift or incentive when participating in this study.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study or would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact **Okelola Adedayo** on **0788765895** or email **45235821@mylife.unisa.ac.za**. The findings are accessible for five years. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact please contact **Dr Boledi Moloto** on **021 429 429** or **0764940516** or email **masehbm@unisa.ac.za**.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study. Thank you.

Adedayo Okelola

OKELOLA



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APPENDIX G REQUEST TO THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES



APPENDIX G: REQUEST TO THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

Request for permission to conduct research at Secondary schools in Seshego

“Teachers experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary schoolsat Seshego circuit Limpopo province”

Date: _____

Name of the person to whom you address the request: Representative of the school governing

bodiesDepartment of the person: _____

Contact details of person (tel and email address) _____

Dear Sir/Mam,

I, Okelola Adedayo am doing research under the supervision of Boledi Moloto, a Doctor in the Department of Educational Foundations towards Med Socio-education at the University of South Africa. We have funding from Unisa Student Funding for the Master's program at bursary funds. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled “Teacher experiences in managing sexual harassment amongst learners in secondary school at Seshego circuit Limpopo province”.

The aim of the study is to know teachers' experiences in managing sexual harassment among learners from grades 8 to 12, investigate which forms of sexual harassment teacher's address primarily at school and access the challenges teachers experience in preventing sexual harassment among learners in secondary schools. The studywill entail conducting interviews with 4 participants from 4 secondary schools in Seshego. The interview participants will be made up of 1 principal or vice principal, 1 Head of department, 2 Teachers, male and female teacher respectively. The targeted population for this research is teachers in secondary schools in Seshego. A total of 16 participants (teachers) will be interviewed for the study. Only teachers with at least four years teaching experience will be chosen to participate in the study, the researcher believed that those with at least four-years teaching experiences would have interacted with learners more and would have witness or experiences cases of leaners to learner sexual harassment.

The study will benefit teachers because it could reveal how teachers manage learner to learner's sexual harassment. It could also reveal what different teacher sees as a threshold of what count as sexual harassment in various school and perhaps could also tell the barriers or challenges that prevent them from addressing this behavior among learners in school; so as to minimize the risk of normalization of these unacceptable behaviors, and also increase awareness among teachers of what count as sexual harassment.

Minimum risks or discomforts are expected because the topic sexual harassment may be at times sensitive and contentious, it is expected that you might initially feel a possible discomfort. The fact that this study will be managed as confidentially as possible is an assurance that the participant may feel free to express themselves without fear of any negative consequences. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedures will entail meetings or workshops at these schools for the participants to present feedback and information after the study has been conducted.

Yours sincerely

Okelola A

Adedayo Okelola

2nd year Med Student



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APPENDIX H CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY



APPENDIX H: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ 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 and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and 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.

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 audio 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...Adedayo...Okelola.....(please print)

Researcher's signature...**OKELOLA A**.....Date.....



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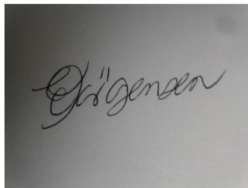
APPENDIX I CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

Certificate of Editing

Title Teachers' Experiences in Managing Sexual Harassment Among Learners in Secondary Schools, Seshego Circuit, Limpopo Province
Student Okelola Adedayo Adepeju
Degree Master Of Education in the subject Subject Socio- Education at the University Of South Africa

This certifies that the above document was proofread and edited by Erna Jörgensen and returned to the author on 29 October 2024.

The document was edited for proper English language, grammar, punctuation, spelling, inconsistencies, and overall style. The editor endeavoured not to change the author's intended meaning, and all amendments were tracked with the Microsoft Word "Track Changes" which the author had the right to accept or reject.



23 October 2024
Pretoria, South Africa
editorena@gmail.com
Tel +27 63 803 5589

APPENDIX J SIMILARITY REPORT

Similarity Report

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Summary