

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES ON PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL  
LEARNERS IN LUVUVHU CIRCUIT, THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY**

BY

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## DECLARATION

I, Tshilidzi Diana Negota, hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “The impact of psychological services on high school learners in Thohoyandou, Thulamela municipality,” hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other institution, and that this is my own work in design and execution and that all reference material contained therein have been duly acknowledged.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my mother Ms. Sylvia Mushaathama Negota, my siblings Thendo and Khathutshelo Negota, my husband Dieu Merci Mazunda and my daughters Riley Mulweli Rambevha and Didian Mulalo Mazunda who have been my constant source of inspiration. They gave me the drive and discipline to tackle any task with enthusiasm and determination. Without their love and support, this dissertation would not have been possible.

## **ABSTRACT**

This research report is aimed at exploring the significance of psychological services on public high school learners at Luvuvhu Circuit. The main objective of this study was to identify the psychological services offered in public secondary schools and their significance, to identify the interventions in place in the Department of Education in South Africa and to explore the coping strategies used by the learners. This study was motivated by reports of the increase in the failure rate at public secondary schools due to social and psychological problems faced by secondary school learners in public schools. Public universities seem to have the appropriate psychological services in place for students to utilise (Lawrence, 2009), however, this does not seem to be the case for public secondary school learners who are faced with extreme developmental crisis. Therefore, the study seeks to involve stakeholders from the Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Health to assist in providing adequate psychological services to high school learners.

The research is qualitative in nature. It made use of Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling was applied and a sample of nine focus groups was ideal for the researcher because of the need to gather detailed information on the impact of psychological services offered to public secondary school learners at Luvuvhu Circuit. The sample was drawn from Grade 10 to 12 learners attending nine public secondary schools in the Luvuvhu Circuit. The collected data were analysed using Thematic Content Analysis. The four themes of the study that emerged were problems experienced by learners at public secondary schools, experiences of learners when seeking for psychological services at their public secondary schools and their effectiveness, experiences of learners regarding interventions from the government aiming or attempting to assist them with their problems and self-applied coping strategies used by learners.

The study findings revealed that learners face problems daily and these problems do not only affect their school performance, but also their social relationships. Without the assistance of the DOE in dealing with these problems, learners tend to deal with the problems on their own, employing less effective coping mechanisms to achieve some

form of relief from the problems that they experience. Therefore, the involvement of stakeholders from the Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Health (DOH) is essential to assist in providing adequate psychological services to secondary school learners if problems faced by learners are to be curbed before further damage to their psychological functioning. Schools need a collaboration of professionals that are ready to assist learners with any form of problem for the success of the country.

Key words: Coping strategies, Failure rate; Intervention

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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CBO	Community-based organization
CD	Conduct Disorder
DISA	Depression in Sweden Adolescence
DOE	Department of Education of South Africa
DOH	Department of Health
eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
HCT	HIV Counselling and Testing
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
LO	Life Orientation
LS	Life Skills
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
OCD	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
PHC	Primary Health Care
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
SADAG	South African Depression and Anxiety Group
SMH	School Mental Health
TVEP	Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Program
UHDC	University Higher Degrees Committee
WHO	World Health Organisation

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

Psychological services mean the acts of psychological assessment, diagnosis and intervention provided to a client (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2004). These services assist people in dealing with problems that range from short-term problems to severe recurring problems or conditions that affect the normal day to day function. Psychological services can be offered by different types of psychologists depending on the type of problem or the sort of help one seeks, which include clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists, industrial psychologists, forensic psychologists, school psychologists (also known as child psychologists) and many others. School psychologists focus on the well-being of children from infants to adolescents by improving the mental health of children as an important objective (Skuse, Bruce, Dowdney & Mrazek, 2011). For this study, problems faced by secondary school learners will take centre focus.

Beginning secondary school is an overwhelming experience for any adolescent. Çebi (2009) states that high psychological distress among secondary school learners is one of the reasons for poor academic performance and serious mental health problems. Literature confirms this by providing the following statistics: in any given time of the year, one in five adolescents will experience a mental health problem and one in three adolescents will have a diagnosable mental health issue (Miller, 2010).

Being a learner is a milestone for early adulthood which contributes to high levels of anxiety and mood disorders. These young people face difficulties of meeting new people, trying to find new friends, discovering who they are and where they stand in society and getting to adapt to a higher standard of learning in secondary school. In addition, secondary school life presents peer pressure which prompts learners to use drugs, consume alcohol, display delinquent behaviour and get involved in sexual activities. Together with the developmental demands of adolescence, unfortunately, this new life may be a source of new stressors (Dvorsky, 2013). Problems in career choice, subject selection, social and academic performance and more seriously, suicidal ideation, have been reported in studies. Unfortunately, only a portion of learners who face these

challenges get diagnosed and receive treatment. Majority of them internalize these mental disorders, taking with them to adulthood where mental disorders become mental illnesses, thus affecting their quality of life. According to Miller (2010), an adolescent who suffers from a certain mental disorder and does not get diagnosed and receive the required treatment stands a great risk of poor academic performance, substance use and/or addiction, poor economic status and suicidal behaviour.

As stated above, different mental disorders encountered during adolescence have serious consequences during adulthood. Adolescents with Obsessive Compulsive Disorders (OCD) will most likely experience difficulties in various spheres later in life such as the academic, social and occupational domains which is more likely to persist throughout life. Adolescents with Conduct Disorder (CD) are likely to challenge the law, get involved in risky and delinquent behaviour such as theft, vandalism or other crimes which may lead them to prison. Adolescents with depression are in a great risk of committing suicide either sooner or later in their lifetime (Miller, 2010).

Considering the evolving stages and challenges of development that secondary school learners face, it is alarming to discover that only a proportion of them receives some form of intervention given the intensive outcomes that accompany mental disorders and illnesses. Learners are in grave need of knowledge, skills and support if they are to successfully meet challenges that come with developmental changes. It is the goal of psychological services to provide learners with services which promote and enhance their psychological health, learning, and social and career development (Skuse, Bruce, Dowdney & Mrazek, 2011). However, there are challenges that contribute to receiving psychological services in response to the problems they face. Public health in several countries has committed to providing psychological support to learners through a combination of other services such as physical health services. Thus, the aim of the study was to explore the significance of psychological services on public secondary school learners in Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela Municipality.



## **1.1 Background of the study**

Improving psychological services accessibility and utilization is a major concern for public health around the world. Since the year 2015, several psychological services have been launched in schools including anti-depression programmes.

### **1.1.1 International perspective on the significance of psychological services**

According to Garmy, Jacobson, Carlson, Berg and Clauson (2015), there has been a growing awareness of the increase in psychological problems among adolescent girls since the late 1990s which led the council in Stockholm to charge the Center for Public Health with developing a school-based intervention to prevent stress and depressive symptoms. Similar findings have been made for Native Americans and learners in the public sector, where accessibility to psychological services is rare and can be achieved through a combination of other services such as health services in the school clinics or tribal Indian service (Lazarus, 2006). Further evidence supports that school psychologists in the United States of America should begin implementing a more public health, prevention-oriented model in the schools as recommended by the speakers of the School Psychology Futures Conference in 2002 (Hirman, 2010). Parmer (1960) concurs with the findings produced in other international studies. He proclaims that the demand for psychological services in Columbia and in the schools of Columbus exceeds the means, meaning that the need to implement Psychological services in schools exceeds the expenditure of implementing the services.

### **1.1.2 African perspective on the significance of psychological services**

Stewart (2014) acknowledged that there are few studies that link resilience with health promoting schools, that is, few studies focus on promoting health including mental health in schools (Stewart & Wang, 2012), and this evidence can provide the necessary platform for expanding related projects in the developing world, for example, in Africa. The statement is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Adewuyi, Taiwo and Olley (2012) which revealed that there is a need for introducing psychological support services in the schools of Nigeria.

### **1.1.3 South African perspective on the significance of psychological services**

The South African government has pledged to put the rights and needs of South African children first since the beginning of democracy in 1994. However, ill-health still seems to be a challenge for many children living in South Africa who can otherwise help the country grow and prosper. In order for South African learners to achieve academic success and reach their full mental capacities, they must be healthy, attentive and emotionally secure (Department of Health and Basic Education, 2010).

In 2010, President Jacob Zuma, the former President of South Africa, committed the government to reinstating health programmes in public schools. Amongst these health programmes are, The Health Promoting Schools Initiative, The Youth and Adolescent Health Policy, National Strategic Plan on Human Immune Virus (HIV), Sexual Transmitted Infections and Tuberculosis, HIV Counselling and Testing (HCT) Policy Guidelines, Immunisation Policy, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy Guidelines aimed at addressing the effects of apartheid and underdevelopment that the country was facing in the post-apartheid era. All these school health services are currently delivered by designated School Health Nurses who form part of the Primary Health Care (PHC) staff component. These programmes may assist the learners on a particular level, but only few learners are aware that they exist; therefore, majority of learners may be unable to seek such assistance when they need them. Furthermore, the programmes offered by the school nurses may assist them in presenting the problem, but do not counteract pressing and underlying psychological problems.

The children of South Africa continue to face poverty-related illnesses such as childhood infectious diseases and malnutrition e.g. diarrhea, tuberculosis, AIDS/HIV and malaria. These challenges become a concern when the affected children cannot access optimal health and development due to poverty and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Violence and injuries constitute a further cause of premature deaths, and disability to children is also evident. Thus, children face many health, social, emotional and other challenges that impact negatively on their well-being and development (Motsoaledi & Motshekga, 2010).

The South African education sector should not only focus on the academic potential of a learner but also on the contributing factors towards their performance. Some of the

contributing factors could be due to lack of psychological health services in schools that deal with emotional and other psychological conditions that children may be faced with. This research is based on the underlying assumption that school development and the quality of education is the responsibility of those involved in education in collaboration with the Department of Health if schools are to be effectively supported and empowered. Psychologists play a crucial role in supporting and empowering the learners who face health and developmental challenges in their academic lives (Moolla & Lazarus, 2014).

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The main problem is that the country's future is at stake due to the decrease in pass rates and an increase in the failure rate of learners produced by secondary schools in South Africa. Most learners are victims of bullying and discrimination. In addition, learners fall prey to social problems such as domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, peer pressure and high learner dropouts. This can be observed in our local secondary schools, where a large number of learners are caught expressing violent behaviour against fellow learners and teachers. In most cases, learners who show violent behaviours are victims of abuse themselves. This is largely observed on learners in their higher levels of secondary school which are grades 10, 11 and 12 and these social problems are clear signs that learners encounter psychological problems.

Psychological problems can be attributed to this fast-paced society, where parents spend less time monitoring their children and more time securing financially for their children's future. This causes learners to fall prey to delinquent behaviours such as alcohol abuse and drug use. The consequence of these behaviours is that it puts their chances of attaining education at stake, with most of them either missing school or dropping out. Media such as eNCA have taken note of this and compiled records of such instances.

According to eNCA, more than 40 percent of learners in South Africa drop out of school between grade one and grade twelve in South Africa, ("Internet pioneer", 2015), while the student dropout is also more than 40 percent around the world (Lagana, 2004).

The 2015 matric exam national pass rate in South Africa has dropped to 70.7%. The Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga announced that this was down from the 75.8%

achieved in 2014 (Quintal, 2016). The continuous decline in the pass rates seems to be parallel with the increase in social problems faced by learners in secondary school, which is a clear indication of the lack of psychological services provided to the adolescents.

This cycle of psychological and academic problems ultimately develops into further psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and other anti-social behaviours which may continuously affect their performance at school. For instance, without the help of Primary Health Care (PHC) nurses or psychology professionals providing psychological services, and thus combating psychological problems such as the ones mentioned above, there will be problems in the education fraternity. Due to failing of grades, some students may end up becoming perpetrators or victims of bullying, their self-esteem and self-concept is damaged; they become dropouts and ultimately become a danger to society.

Most schools in rural areas, including those in Luvuvhu circuit, lack formal psychological services which would help combat social and psychological problems faced by these learners, including their families and the community . It is for this reason that this study sought to explore the significance of psychological services in efforts to combat the problems as discussed above.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

The motive behind this study was influenced by the growing decline in the pass rate of learners which can be observed by looking at a couple of studies that have gathered literature on the utilization of psychological services at higher tertiary institutions. A few studies focus on the effectiveness of psychological services in secondary schools which are mostly found in suburban and some private schools such as studies conducted by Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla and Sylvester (2014) and Moolla and Lazarus (2014) which were conducted in Western Cape, one of the developed provinces in South Africa. This study sought to close the gap in relation to the literature obtained from suburbs versus that in rural areas. Few related researches have been conducted in the rural areas of South Africa, that is, Limpopo, such as the only study conducted by Mashau, Steyn, van der Walt and Wolhunter (2008) which focused mostly on the support offered to teachers and little inclusion of the support given to learners. The reason for this gap

may be the fact that many public schools located in rural schools do not have psychological services provided for the use of learners and the schools seem neglected. Therefore, this study was conducted in the Thohoyandou area (where Luvuvhu Circuit is) which is a rural area.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study**

Transition from primary school to secondary school on its own presents many challenges for learners which then affect their school performance. According to Nancy (2005), learners experience many social challenges, including forming new friendship networks while disrupting previous ones. Learners are also faced with adaptation challenges where a learner may struggle to adapt to a new standard of learning, a new environment and finding the precise locations within the premises as well as adapting within the new social networks of friends and peers. These challenges, if not identified and dealt with, may cause long-term effects such as school dropouts, academic performance decline and poor mental health.

Secondary school learners are faced with many challenges which include teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, secondary school dropout, high failure rates, identity crises and bullying, it is therefore, clear that psychological services that could be offered at secondary school level can help learners who suffer from these challenges.

The therapeutic and support services allocated to schools not only focus on individual and interpersonal well-being that we typically think of when we think of “psychology”, but it also focuses on how the psychologist can facilitate the development of the school and assist to improve the educational system of the generally. Therefore, stakeholders that are envisaged to benefit from the recommended psychological services to be provided at secondary school include learners, Department of Education, families, the community and secondary stakeholders.

Professional psychologists can help learners deal with their challenges and their special needs from a different point of view than do teachers. Therefore, learners will benefit by gaining more efficient coping strategies obtained directly from a professional source and

an expert in that field. Receiving psychological help is important because it decreases the long-term negative effects of mental health problems (Topkayaa, 2013).

With the improvement of pass rates achieved by the implementation of psychological services provided to the learners that help them deal with their psychological problems, the Department of Education gains recognition of well-utilized resources and will be able to save more resources in the following year with less students having to use the educational resources twice. This improvement also reflects on the larger domain, the country. When pass rates increase, the country's work force rate also improves.

The family of the learners receiving psychological help gains new coping strategies administered to the learner by the school psychologist. The family is also relieved of the problems that were affecting them secondarily through the distressed member of the family receiving psychological support.

The community from which learners receive psychological support breaks away from a violent society towards a more productive society with more of its members acquiring skills on how to combat most of the pressing issues that affect the community in general.

The problem-solving strategies offered by school or educational psychologists can be transferred from one generation to the next, thus becoming a long-term profit or an inheritance for secondary stakeholders.

### **1.5 Aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to explore the significance of psychological services on learners at public secondary schools of Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela unicipality.

### **1.6 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this research study are:

- To identify problems faced by learners at public secondary schools;
- To identify the psychological services offered at public secondary schools and their effectiveness;
- To identify the interventions put in place by the Department of Education in South Africa;

- To determine the coping strategies used by the learners.

### 1.7 Research questions

- What are the problems faced by learners in public secondary schools?
- What are the psychological services offered at school? If available, are the psychological services effective?
- What are the intervention programs placed by Department of Education in South Africa?
- Which coping strategies do learners use when dealing with problems?

### 1.8 Delimitations

This study included learners in grades 10 to 12 from the public schools located in Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela municipality. The study included learners regarded as normal and not those who attend special schools. Therefore, learners from special schools were excluded from the study.

### 1.9 Operational definitions of concepts

The following concepts appear often throughout the course of the study, it is therefore important to understand their meaning:

- **Learner:** means someone who is learning something (Collins, 2012). In this study a learner refers to any person in grades 10, 11 and 12.
- **Psychological services:** means the acts of psychological assessment, diagnosis and intervention provided to a client (Health Professions Council of South Africa, 2004). For the sake of this study, psychological services refer to any form of psychological help provided by any nominated staff member or group to deal with psychological problems faced by learners.
- **Secondary school:** for the purpose of this study, a secondary school means a level from grade ten (10) to grade twelve (12).

## **1.10 Division of dissertation**

Chapter 1 gives an introduction of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the significance of psychological services at secondary schools.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology used to conduct the study.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the findings of the study.

Chapter 6 summarises the findings of the study, makes recommendations for future research and finally draws a conclusion.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

This study sought to investigate the significance of psychological services at public secondary schools. As most studies focus on the problems faced by teenagers, there is a knowledge gap regarding the problems faced by learners at a school setting and whether there is a need for psychological intervention. This topic is necessary as it uncovers the frustrations that learners face and also outlines the barriers towards the academic achievements of an impacted learner. The outcomes of this study may serve several stakeholders as outlined later in the upcoming chapters.

The next chapter reviews the literature on the significance of psychological services at secondary school.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

Although being an adolescent is the most active and healthiest stage in an individual's life, it however, poses many challenges as the teenager progresses through the most emotionally demanding and physically challenging stage of development (Garmy, Jacobson, Carlson, Berg & Clauson, 2015). Michelson, Sclare, Stahl, Morant, Bonin and Brown (2016) concur with the former authors when they aver that adolescence is most susceptible stage of development. During this stage of development, social and academic pressure becomes intense and contributing to the greatest determinant of learners' progress and success. Because most of the adolescents' lives are spent in secondary school grounds as learners, a lot of the activities that take place at school affects the learners' lives. Social pressures are presented to the learners, pressure from peers known as peer pressure is determined by learners' self-esteem, self-confidence and self-identity. Academic pressures are presented by the learners' academic deadlines and expectations. Other school-related challenges include learning difficulties, mistreatment from unprofessional educators and inadequate support from educators. These pressures form the bases of most challenges faced by the learners in secondary school and contribute to the learners' emotional problems.

Michelson et al. (2016) stipulate that most of the onset of adult mental disorders begin at adolescent stages. The most common mental problems such depression and anxiety are usually triggered by events that take place during the adolescent years of an individual's life. Michelson et al. (2016) further explain that adolescents who face problems will most likely perform poorly in their academics and social lives. Michelson et al. (2016) and Foo, Tam and Lee (2012) agree that these adolescents are most likely to engage in substance abuse, sexual activities and self-harm. Foo et al. (2012) emphasized self-harm as being a major concern for public help with adolescents who face problems.

Despite the social and academic challenges, De-Villiers (as cited in Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla & Sylvester, 2014) stated that learners face difficult situations outside the school premises. These situations include poor socio-economic background, poor housing and poor parental support in learners' school activities and education. Learners

are also faced with household challenges from either their parents, siblings or their guardians which include violence, trauma, and many different types of abuse, neglect, and different kinds of overwhelming responsibilities. Some communities encompass high levels of violence and abuse which affect the learners staying in those communities. Learners may be affected by poor grooming foundation by their parents or guardians, improper foundation of learning, developmental disorders and poor work ethics (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

Researchers have gathered that support for learners may improve their overall well-being. Thorburn and Day (2016) for example, discovered that adolescence, specifically early secondary years, is the age in which nurturing and motivation is necessary for academic progression. Garmy et al. (2015) also described health promotion according to the Ottawa Charter which includes introducing a supportive environment to the learners in order to give them a better chance of making healthier choices. It is therefore crucial that support services are integrated within the school system to ensure that the learners successfully overcome all challenges that threaten their education and to improve the standard of learning by the learners. This strategy therefore, improves the learners' social, academic and psychological well-being.

## **2.2 Problems experienced by learners in secondary schools**

Some of the problems faced by learners may be restricted to the environment in which they interact with. A school, whether public or private, is an environment that strongly influences a learner's academic success and academic accomplishment (Basch, 2011). Learners at the development stage of adolescence face problems that are different from any of the other developmental stage, meaning that problems can be age specific. Most learners in secondary school face problems such as stress (which include self-image and workload stress, test anxiety, exhaustion), bullying, conflict with a teacher or principal, peer pressure and many other problems (McWhinney, 2003). However, there is a slight difference between learners who attend private schools and those who attend public schools. For the interest of this study, we will look more closely at problems affecting learners, especially those who go to public schools.

There are plenty of public schools located in low-income areas and these schools present bigger gaps in terms of achievement as compared to high income areas. This gives an impression that these areas are being neglected by the Department of Education (Mashau, Steyn, Van der Walt & Wolhuter, 2008). The researcher has also observed that the achievement of learners in some of the public schools located in the Vhembe District present with lower pass rates as compared to private schools in the same district. Many schools located in low-income areas/ rural areas which are mostly public schools cater for the poor learners who cannot afford schools in high income areas or the private areas.

Learners in public schools face many barriers to their academic success including exhaustion coupled with other demands such as home chores, responsibilities, and some of these learners walk for long distances to school which makes them to be exhausted by the time they have to be attending their classes (Mashau, Steyn, Van der walt & Wolhuter, 2008). Poverty is a reality for most of the learners at public schools. According to Wiseman (as cited in Bojuwoye, Moletsane, Stofile, Moolla and Sylvester, 2014), poverty is the greatest determinant of learners' academic achievement, mostly because poverty is associated with stress and hardship. Learners from poor backgrounds are faced with challenges that include poor health and poor socio-economic resources. Barriers to learning and attaining the maximum achievement to the learners are associated with poverty and include lack of proper nutrition which presents itself as a pervasive challenge, lack of proper sanitation at home and sometimes even at the schools and lack of proper clothing which is also a challenge for learners from poor backgrounds. These problems interfere with learner's social and academic life. Bojuwoye et al. (2014) assert that school support services may take charge on behalf of the government where families are unable to provide where needs be.

Bojuwoye et al. (2014) stipulate that many learners in public schools lack a proper basic foundation and knowledge, mostly in subjects related to basic numeracy and literacy. The researcher can attest to this knowledge by referring to the grade 12 results that show a low pass rate in low income areas such as Limpopo. According to Bojuwoye et al. (2014), learners in public schools also present with challenges such as poor study strategies and

techniques, poor motivation to work and development disorders. In addition to that, the below problems form part of their lives.

### **2.2.1 Stress associated with normal school activities and developmental changes**

Not only is waking up during the early hours of the morning stressful for any goal-orientated individual but being at the school environment is much more stressful for learners. Pajkossy (2014) explains that daily activities or hassles are much stressful than a once off negative event. Young adults are faced with overwhelming activities in which most of them are highly competitive such as sports performance, academic performance and even social interactions amongst the learners. Huli (2014) states that learners are confronted with competition stress to excel in all their school activities. In many schools, being a top achiever in sports and academics has its rewards and contributes highly to the learner's self-images. However, performing poorly in sports and academics may have negative impacts on the learners' self-image, leaving the learner feeling isolated and distressed (Van den Berg & George, 2011). Moreover, a learner's self-image and self-esteem is determined by the level of competency towards their overall school performance, be it sports, academics and social interactions. Correspondingly, the learners' social interaction can be affected by the learners' poor self-image. This vicious cycle will later cause intense levels of stress and causing inability to cope.

Van den Berg (2011) explained that during the adolescent period, the body undergoes changes. The self-image of an adolescent is altered when the individual fails to accept physical change. Inability to accept body changes can also affect the learners' academic performance, social interactions and the mental health which includes depression, anxiety and disruptive behaviour.

Stress is not only limited to the learner's self-image and self-esteem; learners are also confronted with a problem of making life altering choices. Huli (2014) agrees by explaining that the period in the adolescents' life is a decisive period which sets a stage for the individuals' future. This is when they have to choose subjects that should align with the careers that they wish to follow. Subject choice making can be stressful because matching the subject with the career may contradict with the level of performance for the subject course. For example, a learner may wish to be a Doctor and may need to choose

Mathematics and Science as major subjects, but if the learner has been struggling to pass Physical Science in lower grades, this may pose a lot of stress upon the learner.

Learners can face problems that are somewhat personal and not limited to the school environment. Problems that cause stress to the learners may vary from learner to learner and are determined by the personality type, character traits, environment, socio-economic factors and other factors. Some of these factors include financial difficulties, having a job, having a chronic illness, parental divorce, poverty, losing a loved one or death in the family, addiction, conflicts with friends, fellow learners, caregivers or teachers, bullying, peer pressure, abuse and also different types of fear: anxiety, worries and unrealistic expectations (Essel & Owusu, 2017). These problems may affect their eating and sleeping habits, health, elicit substance abuse, motivation to learn and have a negative impact on their well-being.

### **2.2.2 Peer pressure**

Adolescence is the stage in which teenagers are discovering their identities and sense of morality. This stage is molded by society and the environment where they play a role to instill positive values and ethics. Besides society, peers play a large role to this development since children of this age find a sense of commonality towards each other (Boujlaleb, 2006). In simple terms, peer pressure is the influence of behaviour from members of the same peer group. Peer pressure occurs in all stages of life but it plays a significant role during adolescence since this is an 'identity discovery' stage. Many researchers focus on the influence of peer pressure on the development of adolescents, but only few researchers explore the affective impact of peer pressure from the adolescent's point of view, that is how social pressures make adolescents feel and the reasons for them succumbing to peer pressure.

During identity search, the adolescent's social status and common crowd is uncertain, and seeking validation and acceptance from others becomes important. Adolescents seek acceptance and admiration. They are highly concerned about making impressions to peers and how others validate and see them, for this reason, adolescents are more prone to succumbing to peer influences and expectations.

Peer pressure is not a simple term of conformity, but it describes the daily encounter of unpleasant feelings of burden, battles of the mind to what is right to oneself and what is right to the crowd of interest. The term places a teenager into a position of either self-sacrifice and be accepted or self-respect and become an outcast, making this a difficult space to be in. The main drive behind conformity is the fear of being secluded, ridiculed and being rejected. The teenagers aim at this stage is to avoid feelings of loneliness and loss and aim to achieve feelings of admiration, acceptance and inclusion from important peer groups. The fear of being isolated and not achieving acceptance is associated with anxiety, this means that learners who refuse to conform are faced with isolation and therefore feelings of anxiety (Manzoni, Lotar & Ricijaš, 2015).

Consequently, if this stage is not carefully monitored, anxiety may persist in later stages, that is if the adolescent refuses to conform, but if the individual accepts conformity, more worrisome results come to play, such as substance addiction, delinquency and poor academic performance. Therefore, collaboration of parents, teachers and society leaders is important in adopting and seeking relevant interventions that will carry the adolescent or learner through this critical stage (Boujlaleb, 2006).

### **2.2.3 Anxiety**

Anxiety forms part of any individual's life, it is a normal reaction to stressful and alarming situations. Weems and Brown (2009) explain that it is the most common psychological disorder among adolescent learners all over the world. The type of anxiety that is stressful but still permits the individual to perform certain tasks can be viewed as positive, it becomes problematic when the individual cannot perform their tasks at the individual's ability. Learners experience anxiety more often than recognized by their teachers and parents. They are loaded with overwhelming workload and strict deadlines and this build up can create anxiety that may be viewed as negative instead of positive. Negative anxiety can be traced in learners during their secondary school years as they try to adjust to the academic and social pressures within the school environment (Hess, 2014).

Most learners face academic and or social anxiety. They spend most of their time preparing for tests, writing assignments, doing oral presentations and writing exams. All these academic activities maintain a strict deadline that may or may not be suitable for a

learner. When the learner is not coping under these academic pressures, problematic academic anxiety occurs (Chen, Chou, Tzeng, Chang, Kou, Pan, Yeh, Yeh & Mou, 2015). Social anxiety takes place when the learner is dysfunctional under social activities such as working in teams or groups or communicating with the teacher in times of help seeking. Social anxiety can elicit academic anxiety due to the inability to work on certain academic activities that may need assistance (Dobson, 2012).

Being a learner also means being in a daily competition amongst other learners and academic achievement is an important key to personal fulfilment. Bihari (2014) agrees by stating that the world is in a vast competition that requires one to exhaust all one's efforts to attain success. This means that the learners try by all means to avoid academic failure. Unfortunately, avoiding failure creates an unbearable pressure and extreme anxiety to oneself and therefore psychological maladjustments. In contrast, Khemka and Rathod (2016) maintain that the failing of any academic activity such as a test has promoted constructive anxiety and may have positive consequences, such as motivational effects on the learner. This means the learner may strive to perform better in the coming tests than they did previously. However, this motivational impact depends on individual traits of learners, some learners may improve and some may breakdown or self-destruct.

#### **2.2.4 Teacher-learner conflict**

Being a learner means that you interact with a teacher, forming lasting relationships to gain knowledge from the expert teacher. Learners and teachers share a relationship that is inevitable. They both rely on this relationship to improve their living conditions, be it as long-term or short-term goals. In some cases, learners have a positive relationship with their teachers and in some, learners have a negative relationship with their teachers. When a negative relationship exists, this goes to show that there is conflict between the teacher and the learner. In the present days, conflict is an adverse factor to teaching and learning (Varga, 2017). When conflicts go unsettled, they create an undesirable atmosphere in the classroom. When a learner conflicts with the teacher, this creates an uncomfortable learning environment for the learner and restricts the learner from seeking assistance from the teacher. This unfavourable environment becomes expensive for the learner to learn. Lasting conflicts can have an impact on the working success of both the

teacher and the learner. Ozgan (2015) states that when a learner conflicts with the teacher, it is common that the learner may disrespect the teacher and thus disrupt the entire class. This not only affects the well-being and attitude towards the studies of learners, but also other learners' attitude and academic focus.

The success of a learner and a teacher is at best possible if their relationship is a positive one. The positive relationship between a teacher and a learner can contribute positively towards the learners' well-being, therefore the academic performance and achievement, that is, learners behavioural and academic adjustment to the school environment can be predicted by the learners' adjustment to the relationship that they share with their teachers (Barch, 2015). Some research has discovered that the teacher-learner relationship may also affect the learners' social well-being.

### **2.2.5 Bullying**

Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) define bullying as the difference of power and control between the aggressor and the victim. Bullying, which is aggression to another, can be physical for example, harassing, punching, hitting, and kicking. It can be verbal such as swearing or verbal offense. Bullying can be emotional for example, spreading rumours or constant gossiping about the victim. It can also be psychological, for example, social exclusion. In other words, bullying is violating ones' rights and ones' freedom.

Bullying is prevalent in many secondary schools regardless of the geographical location of the school, be it rural or suburb based. Some learners are victims of bullying on a day-to-day basis. When bullying goes unresolved, it can have dire effects on the academic abilities and experience of the learner. Victims of bullying may respond in different ways, one way is avoidance which becomes dismal when the learner avoids going to school and becomes absent much often than normal (Sesar, Dodaj, Simic & Sesar, 2016). Some learners may respond in a violent manner which may include injuring or even killing the bully, thereby placing their academics and future careers in jeopardy. Some learners may respond by a decline in self-esteem, when the learner was confident before and a loss in participation begins to show (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). In extreme



cases, the learner being bullied may respond by committing suicide, this is a sign of a long-lasting desperate need to escape from the situation.

In contrast, bullies engage in such behaviours in response to situations of their own that they cannot handle, for instance, bullying can be a sign that the learner is perpetuating the bullying that occurs at home, that is, it may happen that the learner bully is also being bullied or abused by a caregiver or sibling at home. Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) assert that bullies may respond by bullying others or by engaging in serious criminal activities later in their lives or even abuse their partners and offspring. This goes to show that serious psychological interventions should be undertaken to help both bullies and victims of bullying before it is too late.

### **2.2.6 Child maltreatment (Child abuse)**

One of the common problems faced by children is abuse. While bullying is unpleasant, child abuse is not only unpleasant, but it consumes the mind of the child. This is a more pressing issue because the main source of protection becomes the main perpetrator, it could be any adult that is in the close circle of the child, in most instances the child is related to the adult or lives close to them. It could be a parent, a close relative, a neighbour, the house helper etc. meaning that it becomes difficult for the child to break out of the abusive relationship because the child depends on the abuser for some needs to be met. Most perpetrators of child abuse are troubled themselves and have experienced abuse and neglect in their childhood and this cycle continues until the victim obtains some help before they become perpetrators (Skuse, Bruce, Dowdney & Mraxek, 2011).

Child maltreatment is any form of physical, sexual or emotional maltreatment or neglect to a child or children. In South Africa, a child is anyone below the age of 18 years old. This means that any harm to a teenager or learner is also categorized as child maltreatment. Child abuse is any short-term failure on the part of a parent or caregiver to prevent the emotional, physical sexual harm, exploitation or death from occurring on the child of interest (Abbasi, Saeidi, Khademi, Leila, Hoseini, Zahra & Moghadam, 2015).

Child maltreatment may occur in large time intervals, but it takes place over a large period (a number of years) as long as interaction between the abuser and the child continues. The number of years that a child wedged in an abusive relationship relates to extent of psychological damage that the child attains. According to Skuse et al. (2011), the consequence of child abuse is physical, emotional and behavioural impairment. Adolescents who experience abuse tend to develop unhealthy patterns of attachment which is also related to difficulties in forming healthy romantic relationships. Poor academic performance, inability to form social relationships, depression, substance abuse and suicide are also consequences of child maltreatment.

### **2.2.7 Addiction to substances**

Most adolescents are exposed to and involved in the use of substances. There are various substances that adolescents are exposed to, including alcohol, tobacco and cannabis (Dennis, White & Ives, 2009). Young people indicate reasons for substance use as for pleasure, to fit in with their peer groups, to cope with painful experiences and traumatic incidences and to alleviate tension as well as to relieve stress associated with their normal day to day lives (Skuse et al., 2011).

The use of substances becomes a problem to adolescents when they are fully dependent on the substance and cannot function their normal day to day activities such as attending classes at school and participating in sports, without having to use the substance in question. This is a problem because during advanced dependence to substance use, effects of use become noticeable physically contributing increased levels of shame, low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy and loneliness. This eventually introduces a cycle of intense use with the intention to escape from these feelings experienced. At such stages of addiction, the learner becomes imprisoned and institutionalized by substance use unless serious interventions take place (Morrison, 1990).

Skuse et al. (2011) highlight that many adolescents who misuse drugs have some predecessor problems before that of substance addiction, such as family issues (parental conflict or divorce, child maltreatment, bereavement etc.), deeply rooted social problems (bullying, peer pressure, challenges with physical development etc.), problems with the justice system and undiagnosed learning difficulties.

Consequences of substance dependence in adolescents is associated with impaired mental functioning which then affects interactions and relationships within the family, at school with teachers and peers and also affect the adolescents' academic performance. Adolescents get involved with delinquent behaviours and other high risk behaviours that further impact their lives. Despite mental impairment, substance addiction has been known to contribute to mortality rates due to suicide, accidents and substance overdose (Skuse et al., 2011).

### **2.2.8 Interparental conflict**

When there is conflict between parents, children suffer. Although there is a greater body of research that focuses on the teacher-learner conflict with regards to adolescent future maladjustments, interparental conflict has also been studied over a number of years and by many researchers. Many researchers agree that interparental conflict has lasting effects on the child's psychological functioning. However, it is important to note that the effect of interparental conflict on the child may vary according to the degree of interparental conflict and the extent of damage between the parent-child relationship (Herold, Aitken & Shelton, 2007)

It is hardly impossible to avoid conflict spill-over from parent-parent relationship to parent-child relationships. Spillover of emotion is likely to occur from parents to children. A body of literature suggests that parents involved in aggressive and struggling marital relationship are likely to be hostile towards their children and less responsive to their needs. In addition, distressed parents tend to be detached or less interested in the lives of their children and tend to forget occasions taking place in their children's lives (Skuse et al., 2011). On the other hand, children who tend to witness physical violence between their parents will experience more intense adaptational problems later in life than children embroiled in parental concealed hostility (Rhoades, 2009).

Future maladaptation responses to interparental conflict are a result of fear and helplessness. More often, when children witness disputes between parents, they feel responsible and blame themselves for the arguments. The threat to damage on the wellbeing of the family system is also internalised by children, which in turn causes sadness, guilt, shame and anxiety. Feelings of guilt and shame become converted into

low self-esteem and low self-worth in later stages of life and the children tend to be detached from their parents and less dependent to their parents for emotional support (Rhoades, 2009).

The implications of children who witness interparental conflicts differ according to gender and age. Girls tend to experience more self-blame emotions and depressive symptoms than boys and boys tend to show anger and hostile responses. Adolescents tend to show academic difficulties and other emotional maladjustments. Generally, all groups of children will experience a variety of negative psychological outcomes such as increased anxiety, depression, hostility and anti-social behavior (Herold, Aitken & Shelton, 2007). Other developments in parental conflict such as divorce are likely to bring unpleasant changes in the life of the child such as moving to a different area and having to make new adjustments such as making new friends and forming new relationships with teachers and finding a balance between relationships from both parents, this may result in child anti-social behaviours (Skuse et al., 2011).

### **2.2.9 Adolescent bereavement by parent or sibling death**

The loss of a parent or sibling is one of the most distressing events in the life of an adolescent. Adolescents grieve the same way as adults do and this involves going through the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, then acceptance. According to Skuse et al. (2011), the normal grieving process should be not the more than four months, thereafter, increased risk in developmental disturbances is evident.

A longitudinal study conducted by Brent, Melhem, Masten, Porta and Payne (2012) assessed the outcomes of adolescent bereavement in terms of sudden death (accidental, murder or suicide) of a parent, loss of both parents, impact of loss on health and development and the age of a child during loss of parent or sibling. Outcomes revealed that the younger the adolescent during a sudden death, the greater the effects of psychiatric impairment on the child than the when the adolescent is much older. However, in terms of sibling roles, older siblings tend to be more affected by the loss more than the younger siblings with the assumption that older siblings take parental responsibilities in nurturing and providing for younger siblings and taking care of themselves (Skuse et al., 2011; Brent et al., 2012). It has also been documented that the loss of a mother has

greater implications on the child than does the loss of a father, although the loss of both parents of the child may result in greater developmental consequences. Also, research reveals that girls have a greater risk of developing depression in post bereavement than boys due to their emotional characteristics (Stikkelbroek, Bodden, Reitz, Vollebergh & Van Baar, 2015).

Death of a parent or sibling is associated with poorer health outcomes, decreased sense of self confidence to master tasks, depressive symptoms, withdrawal from other family members and poor educational attainment (Brent et al., 2012). Furthermore, parental bereaved adolescents are at risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), internalising disorders, conduct disorders, depression, reduced adaptive coping, low self-esteem and decreased hopefulness (Skuse et al., 2011). Later future consequences include poor parenting, poor social adjustment, low abilities to make efficient work and career planning leading to a poor social economic status and low self-efficacy (Stikkelbroek et al., 2015).

#### **2.2.10 Cognitive fatigue or exhaustion**

Exhaustion has also been found to form part of learners' day to day problems. Learners are engaged in activities that require them to expend too much energy and place extreme demands on their minds and bodies. Most schools in South Africa have even adopted the culture of having learners attend extra classes and winter/ holiday classes during the long recess especially for the older adolescents in senior secondary schools. Chen et al. (2015) avers that even the schools in Taiwan have adapted to this culture. The newly introduced extra activities become added demands and require extra energy. These demands may be too much for the mind and body to handle which may lead to exhaustion, and continuous exhaustion can lead to cognitive fatigue and burnout. Learners who experience cognitive burnout have a lower motivation to learn, they are less focused and more distractive, and some may even fall asleep during lessons. Chen et al. (2015) state that exhaustion is coupled with night sleeping disturbances, psychosocial problems, emotional disorders and affects the learner's health altogether.

Research gathered that adolescents need nine hours of sleep per night and only a few of them meet these standards. This then results to inadequate sleep leading to cognitive

fatigue. Liu, Allspach, Feigenbaum, Oh and Burton (2004) show that a decrease in individual wakefulness (the energy gathered from acquiring enough sleep) decreases individual performance on cognitive tasks such as taking a cognitive test. With more learners sleeping less and working more, not only is their mental health being affected, but their physical development is also at risk. Moreover, cognitive fatigue is detrimental to any individual decision making and judgement and for a learner, it does affect their academic performance and success (Sievertsen, Gino & Piovesan, 2016).

School authorities play a parenting role at school, they become guardians to the learners in the absence of parents. With the above-mentioned psychological problems experienced by learners in public secondary schools, one may ask, “As school authorities or guardians in the place of parents, what role are the schools playing to counter these problems and assist learners to attain a bulk of education at the best possible mental state?” The next section explores the psychological services offered in secondary schools where the main focus is on the availability of the services, the promotion of the available services, as well as the implementation of interventions, the effectiveness of the services and the accompanying challenges that come with accessing these services.

### **2.3 The psychological services offered in secondary schools**

Psychological services play a very important role in dealing with individual issues that affect one’s day to day life. However, these services are not readily provided to the population due to promotional barriers and challenges associated with accessing them.

Psychological services considered under a cluster of support services are services not necessarily academically based that assist the learner reach their full potential in their academics (Mashau et al., 2008). Examples include: school psychological services in which others may refer them to educational psychological services or positive psychological services, school social work services, remedial/special educational services such as Life Orientation (LO) and Life Skills (LS), career counselling services including peer helpers from higher education institutions, school feeding schemes, medical and dentistry schemes and accommodation services.

### **2.3.1 Promotion of psychological services**

School psychological services are monitored by a body of public educational organisations. Most of these organisations are non-governmental and a few are government-based, such as those hosted by South African Department of Health. A recent government report (Ministry of Health South Africa [ WHO-AIMS], 2007) states that the major NGOs operational and in assistance with government, are the “South African Federation for Mental Health, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) and other professional, consumer and advocacy bodies”

The NGOs and government organisations have been operational in the promotion of psychological services all around the country since 2002. However, only a few provinces such as the Western Cape Province has reported its involvement in the campaigns hosted by the NGOs. The Western Cape later hosted a promotion campaign in the secondary schools of the Western Cape known as Mind Matters in 2012. The Mind Matters campaign aims at promoting mental health and preventing and reducing the onset of mental illness and further focuses on empowering the learners on how to cope better in stressful situations and manage their lives effectively. The campaign called on the learners, teachers and the parents to be involved in the skills training campaign.

On the other hand, the South African Federation for Mental Health hosted its awareness campaign throughout the whole country, province by province in 2012, going to secondary schools and educating the learners about mental health and mental abnormalities. The South African Federation for Mental Health handed out cards with information regarding mental health and illness as a health education strategy (“Cape Mental Health”, 2012). Learners that received the health promotion are mostly from schools that do not offer psychological services. Schools that offer psychological services need to be assessed to find out whether the services offered are effective or even utilized.

### **2.3.2 Effectiveness of psychological services offered in secondary school**

After psychological services have been implemented, it is necessary to re-evaluate the services to figure out whether the support system has been successful or not. This procedure serves to improve the services where it is possible or to do away with the

certain intervention that has been put in place to sustain costs. This section investigates the effectiveness of psychological services in secondary schools internationally and national.

During the 1990s, Sweden was faced with a growing awareness of the increase in mental health problems among the girls. This led the state council into implementing a cognitive-behavioural programme to prevent stress and symptoms of depression. The programme called Depression in Sweden Adolescence (DISA) was implemented. DISA is a school-based preventative psychological intervention aimed at combating depression before it arises (Garmy, Jakobsson, Carlsson, Berg & Clausson, 2015). It initially targeted girls and then later included boys in secondary school. The programme trained school health personnel to be tutors for three days, where according to the Swedish Council on Health Technology Assessment (2010) “each session is designed around one of the following themes: getting to know each other (this is done within the programme rules), coping with stress, identification of negative thoughts, positive thinking, changing negative thoughts to positive thoughts, identifying negative thoughts, communication practice and maintaining well-being”.

The DISA programme as one of the psychology interventions in secondary school had a positive outcome which was revealed after a follow-up assessment with the learners involved with the program. The learners admitted that the programme had long lasting positive effects on their thinking and their social lives. From the follow-up assessment conducted by Garmy et al. (2015), the effectiveness of the DISA programme can be divided into three categories which are: the intrapersonal strategies in which the learners improved their self-confidence, direct thinking, stress management skills and positive behaviour. The second category is the interpersonal strategy in which learners gained social skills, including learning to work with others and being reliable and trustworthy to others. The third category is structural constraints where the learners learned about the benefits of remaining positive-minded and not negative-minded.

DISA is a clear example of one of the few effective psychological services that may be well-suited for South African public schools because it is a low budget programme, yet still efficient. As discussed earlier, there are a few psychological services in South Africa.



In a country dominated by violence and poverty, these types of strategies can go a long way.

In the Western Cape, psychological services are offered in the form of learner-teacher partnership to assist learners with their academic, social and emotional support. Bojuwoye et al. (2014) stated that support provided by the teachers include extra class instructions, advice and information about the skills they can use to combat their problems. Counsellors also make visits to the schools to offer brief counselling to learners. They also receive peer support to meet academic needs. The learners find the support services effective and claim that it made their learning easier and more productive since it addressed barriers to their learning and improved their self-esteem (Bojuwoye et al., 2014).

### **2.3.3 The implementation of psychological services at secondary school**

Psychological services at secondary schools are not widely implemented which is line with what has been stipulated by Basch (2011) indicating that the effective and well-structured school health programs have not been equally distributed to schools and leaders, educators and staff members who are responsible of taking care of these learners, or perhaps youth who are facing a variety of challenges in creating and developing school health programs. Furthermore, health services offered in some schools are usually on-site and provided by Primary Health Care (PHC) nurses that are part of the school staff component and school clinics. Some may offer a variety of health services which include after-school programs. There are just a few schools that offer wide-ranging health services inclusive of physical and psychological services and programs during and after school (Basch, 2011).

Some schools in rural Limpopo have begun implementing mental health programs and services. To introduce mental health services, Nduvheni (2017) reported that one school in Limpopo, in a village known as Manamani, has taken initiative to build an administrative block that will house staff rooms, sick bays and counselling offices in which they afford parents an opportunity to speak to their children if the children are facing some problems in schools, involved in classroom misconduct or any behaviour that interrupts with their academic performance. Although the idea of the initiative was to serve the learners from

a more extensive prospect, the researcher contends with the practice of placing parents in the position counsellors, this is because the only initiative taken is the change in context and not the change in intervention, that is, the same parent who struggled to help the learner at home is not likely to help the learner in a counselling room. However, with some improvements, the initiative of introducing psychological services and programmes in school may serve a great deal to the learners and may assist educators in counteracting some of the problems they encounter in class.

With some of the schools beginning to implement the psychological services, Basch (2011) suggests that the leaders in schools make use of the advice and recommendations that address the most effective way to develop and sustain mental health services and programmes provided in credible sources. In addition, making use of strategies that have already been proven to be effective guarantees a promising practice of health-related developments. Basch (2011) described the current situation in most schools as being negligent and not making use of databases that contain well-structured approaches available to them to influence them in their decision making and providing the most effective practices in their schools.

Basch (2011) proposed the criteria found in databases in which educators and the leaders of schools should consider when seeking guidance to implement health services in inclusive to psychological services; they are, diagnosing and curing physical problems (vision, asthma, dental problems, ear infections, physical activity and accidental injuries), testing and counselling procedures (teenage pregnancy, aggression and violence, inattention and substance abuse), provision of human rights (breakfast or lunch) and others with consideration of the area in which these problems take place.

Furthermore, school nurses should have a basic level of training on mental health and how to implement basic mental health interventions, especially with the common problems experienced by learners. This training should be provided as part of the curriculum. Unfortunately, even though nurses could be licensed to provide mental health services to learners, most schools in rural areas do not have full time nurses to provide the services. Perhaps mental health training should be extended to teachers, making

mental health as a subject of learning compulsory to all education students to ensure that there is no gap in providing basic mental health services to learners (Miller, 2010).

### **2.3.4 Challenges experienced when accessing psychological services**

There are various factors that can influence the degree to which avoidance factors affect professional help-seeking decisions amongst learners (Vogel et al., 2007). These factors include fear of expression, stigma and myths, attitude, informal sources, anticipated utility and risk, familiarity with formal mental health care, treatment fearfulness and self-esteem. These factors are discussed below.

#### **2.3.4.1 Fear of emotional expression**

Komiya, Good and Sherrod (2000) aver that fear of expression is predicted to be the main reason why individuals have negative attitudes towards seeking psychological treatment. Gilbert, McEwan, Catarino and Balao (2014) assert that individuals withhold their emotions to feel secure and maintain some control over their lives. When learners express their emotions, they step out of their comfort zone and enter an unknown territory where they are at risk of vulnerability. Le Doux (2013) provides a view by explaining that the difficulty of expressing emotions to someone else such as a therapist, depends on the individual's upbringing. What the individual care giver terms as appropriate will determine whether the individual finds difficulty in expressing feelings. Fear of having to discuss painful emotions is a reason that some individuals avoid seeking counselling (Komiya et al., 2000). Seeking help from another person often involves strong emotions, and learners may fear having to experience painful emotions (Vogel et al., 2007).

Learners may fear experiencing painful emotions. Studies have found that a sizable number of psychotherapy clients keep secrets from their therapists. The primary reason for clients' secret keeping was that their secrets were loaded with emotions, and they were afraid to express strong emotions in psychotherapy sessions (Komiya et al., 2000). Fear of expression is hypothesized to be a primary reason for individuals' negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help.

#### **2.3.4.2 Stigma and myths attached to psychological services.**

According to Smit (2015), stigma is the most common barrier to help seeking among adolescents with psychological problems. Learners seem to have an attitude towards the use of psychological services due to the stigma and myths attached to the services. Research indicates that social stigma is the most influential form of stigma that prevents people from seeking psychological help (Vogel et al., 2007). Social stigma is defined as the fear that others will judge a person negatively if she/he sought help for a problem. The social stigma attached to seeking professional help has been conceptualized as one of the most significant barriers to treatment and counselling (Vogel et al., 2007). According to Rickwood et al. (2005) fear of stigma also relates to fears regarding the confidentiality of professional services. Some learners in developed countries such as the United States of America feel that school counsellors' offices are often located in public locations such as near the cafeteria or the front entrance to the school, and that this is a barrier to going there. Learners also expressed fears that counsellors would not keep confidentiality with other lecturers and that their problems would be discussed in the staff room.

#### **2.3.4.3 Attitude towards seeking psychological services**

Negative attitude toward professional help-seeking is another barrier to seeking professional psychological help. Such negative evaluations derive from negative past experiences and from negative beliefs about seeking professional help such as beliefs that professional help is not useful (Smit, 2015). Past experiences of seeking help that were negative, particularly when the young adolescents felt they were not helped or that their problems were not taken seriously, were substantial barriers to future help-seeking intentions (Rickwood et al., 2005). Consistently, positive past experiences in relation to the success of the previous appointment with the psychologists is associated with positive future help-seeking attitude in adolescents (Smit, 2015).

In addition, learners are less likely to seek professional help for alcohol or drug problems, eating disorders, depression and anxiety, making life-style changes, or coping with stress (Turner & Kathleen, 1999). This can be a result of learners being unable to acknowledge psychological problems than physical problems. In addition, Lawrence (2009) avers that

several cognitive and affective barriers reportedly reduce the likelihood of young people seeking professional psychological help for personal-emotional problems.

#### **2.3.4.4 Familiarity with formal mental health care**

An additional antecedent believed to impact students' attitudes toward the seeking of formal psychological services involves individuals' insufficient knowledge of mental health, misperceptions regarding psychological services along with lack of familiarity with professional providers (Aloud, 2004). Some learners do not seek psychological help because they do not have sufficient education about mental health. Many learners are not knowledgeable with regards to mental disorders and professional mental health sources which would otherwise discourage the learners towards seeking help for mental health problems. In addition, education with regards to the symptoms of mental health disorders and the benefits thereof would prompt learners towards seeking professional help in that regard (Smit, 2015).

Learners also perceive seeking professional help with regards to mental health as an unreliable and inappropriate way of dealing with personal and mental problems (Çebi, 2009). They also believe that seeking professional help does not work or will make problems worse. Issues such as lack of available information about psychological services, the location of the services, work hours, procedure, confidentiality policies and arranging money for services, may also discourage students to seek psychological help (Topkayaa, 2013).

Another factor that prevents one from seeking psychological help is not being aware of how to go about seeking psychological help (or knowing whether psychological services are available and where they are located). Some individuals do not seek psychological help because of their unwillingness to share their personal problems with an unfamiliar person. Hence, the belief that people can handle their problems on their own can prevent them from seeking and receiving psychological help (Topkayaa, 2013).

#### **2.3.4.5 Fear of treatment**

Treatment fearfulness is defined as a subjective state of apprehension that arises from aversive expectations about the seeking and consumption of mental health services

(Kushner and Sher as cited in Lawrence, 2009). Treatment fearfulness can come from a variety of sources such as fear of embarrassment, fear of change, fears involving treatment stereotypes, fears associated with past experience with the mental health service system, and fear of treatment associated with specific problem types.

Fear of embarrassment can also be regarded as social anxiety. Social anxiety is the fear of social situations and the interaction with other people that can automatically bring on feelings of self-consciousness, judgement, evaluation, and inferiority. Smit (2015) explains that there is also a misconception with the issue of treatment, where treatment may be associated with medical prescriptions, while treatment refers to psychotherapy which does not involve invasive treatments. Other stereotypes in association to treatment are those obtained from media where an individual would believe that mental health treatment involves invasion of the mind such as thought reading or hypnosis. Consequently, people develop fear of change. Hsi and Chung (2010) state that humans like comfort and are generally creatures of habit and the idea of breaking the habit often leads to anxiety, which is why many people do not change until the discomfort of their situation becomes greater than their fear of change. Lawrence (2009) further states that due to these fears, people avoid seeking treatment for their emotional problems.

Experiencing treatment will force people to get out of their comfort zones, re-experience past experiences, go through change and dig deeper into their specific problems. During the treatment, the patient is likely to experience anxiety and revoke past painful memories (Hsi & Chung, 2010). Thus, treatment fearfulness is the result of fear of anxiety, acknowledging painful memories and change.

#### **2.3.4.6 Low Self-esteem**

Self-esteem has been reported to be an important psychological barrier to seeking help from professional and nonprofessional sources such as family and friends. Hanna (2002) suggested that seeking help from others entails an implicit analysis of the costs and benefits to one's self-esteem. Seeking help from another to some degree means admitting that one cannot deal with the problem on one's own and, as such, can be an admission of inadequacy. Thus, a person may decide not to seek help in order to maintain a positive self-image. Help-seeking has been found to occur less frequently when a

participant is embarrassed to seek help. Thus, self-esteem has been found to be directly associated with general help-seeking for a problem described as serious (Hanna, 2002). Fear of embarrassment and feelings of inferiority or incompetence have been linked with help-seeking decisions (Addis & Mahalik, 2003).

#### **2.3.4.7 Character or personality traits**

Moreover, self-esteem can be linked to the individuals' character traits, for example, learners with a shy character are associated with low self-esteem and this affects their willingness to seek professional help for mental health problems. Therefore, character traits have an influence towards a learners' willingness to seek psychological help. It has been found that openness character and agreeableness extrovert personality have a great association towards mental health seeking behaviour (Smit, 2015).

#### **2.3.4.8 Anticipated utility and risk**

The role of a person's initial expectations about counselling can influence his or her decision about whether to seek professional help. In particular, the anticipated utility of risks associated with seeking counselling have been suggested as two of the most important influences on a person's decision to seek counselling (Vogel et al., 2005; Vogel & Wester, 2003). Anticipated utility refers to the perceived usefulness or lack thereof regarding seeking services from a counsellor. Vogel et al. (2005) have suggested that individuals who do not seek counselling services may have lower expectations about the benefits of seeking help than do individuals who seek such services. Anticipated risk, on the other hand, refers to an individual's perception of the potential dangers of opening up to another person (Vogel & Wester, 2003). By seeking help from someone, the person risks feeling misunderstood, judged, or even ignored and, thus, may choose not to seek help.

Vogel and Wester (2003) maintain that if the anticipated utility of seeking counselling is not outweighed by the anticipated risk, the individual may decide not to see a counsellor. Vogel, Wester and Larson (2007) also found that individuals who did not seek help for a problem were more likely to feel uncertain about whether they would benefit from seeking help. Similarly, Vogel and Wester (2003) found that the utility and risks expected from

seeking help strongly predicted attitudes toward seeking help. Furthermore, Vogel et al. (2005) found that utility predicted help-seeking behaviour, in general, whereas risk predicted help seeking for those who had experienced a distressing event in their life. Most adolescents view the greatest risk as leaking information or lack of confidentiality and they perceive professionals at the level of any individual who can be tempted to leak the information that they have provided in confidentiality to someone else, just like a friend could leak a secret to another friend (Smit, 2015). Thus, it seems that expectations may play a role in people's help-seeking decisions.

Without the intention and collaboration of adults such as parents or caregivers, teachers, including government, in close association to adolescents in need of psychological services, these challenges experienced when seeking help may hinder help seeking behaviour or the process of attaining help. In the next section, the researcher will look at how the government (Department of Education and Department of Health) plays a role in ensuring that learners receive the psychological services they need from schools and that it closely monitors the well-being of learners.

#### **2.4 The interventions provided by the Department of Education in South Africa**

This section explores the interventions or policies on health services and mental health services provided by the Government South Africa through the Department of Education and the progress of these policies with regards to the interventions in practice. The South African government has undergone drastic changes during the transition from the Apartheid regime to the Democratic system in 1994. The new democratic government introduced laws that focus mostly on the safety and well-being of its people. It introduced the Bill of Rights as a major system of protecting South Africans, including the most vulnerable and marginalized groups such as the women and the children of South Africa. The Government of South Africa has pledged to protect the rights of the children of the country with full support from the President. The government has placed the following interventions regarding health services in the schools of South Africa:



### **2.4.1 Health programmes in South Africa**

Schools are basic centers of learning and support. It is the context or ecosystem in which children spend most of their hours of the day. Therefore, these ecosystems are the bases of their grooming and upbringing. This implies that corrective behaviour, shaping and learning are mostly done in the contexts in which these adolescents are based, and that is in the school environment. It is thus essential that these learners receive proper care and support from the Government and the relevant role players. During 2010, the President of South Africa, Mr. J. Zuma, dedicated the government to promoting health programmes in public schools in South Africa as the major key of boosting health service delivery (Motsoaledi & Motshekga, 2010).

When the WHO defines health, it associates it with all the components that contribute to an individual's health; namely; their physical, social, spiritual and mental well-being. The mental state of learners contributes to their entire well-being and determines whether these learners are healthy or not. According to Motsoaledi and Motshekga (2010), the government of South Africa has pledged that the World Education Forum be integrated within the school system. The Forum suggested a provision of basic components which include construction of health-related policies, healthy physical learning surrounding and safe sanitation and water, education on health, nutrition and school-based health services. These services ensure that the learners have access to public health services and the reduction of poverty interventions for the learners in order to realise the rights of the learners.

The integrated school health policies regard the following programmes in terms of service delivery to the learners based on their health: The Health Promoting Schools Initiative, HIV Testing and Counselling, South African National Oral Health Strategy, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy Guidelines and Integrated Nutrition Programme. These school health policies and programmes are currently being offered by school health nurses employed by the particular school and forms part of the school staff (Motsoaledi & Motshekga, 2010).

## 2.4.2 Mental Health programmes in South Africa

The Department of Education of South Africa (DOE) (2010) recognizes mental health as a one of the components of health and therefore places it under the School- Based Support Team which is hosted and guided by the particular school principal. The team consists of the Life-Orientation or Life-Skills teacher who is responsible for the overall integrated health policy activities within the programme; members of the school health team which include the school nurse and the school assistant nurse, inclusive of the health promoters, representatives of the school governing body, it also includes representatives of the Non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and Community-Based Organisations (CBO's), which are the peer learners and the teachers.

School-based psychologists are deemed necessary for the improvement of learner's performance by the DOE. In contrast, Tinto (as cited in Bojuwoye et al., 2014), avows that learner support is not directly the responsibility of the DOE and that problems are not what affects the academic achievement of the learner. He maintains that the DOE should be considered as a secondary source but the improvement of learner's performance is a learner-educator responsibility. That is, when learners are interacting in class and they receive positive feedback from educators (connectedness), learners get motivated and this improves their academic performance, attainment and achievements. Tinto (2001) describes academic success as a product of interacting with educators and prevention measures developed during strategic teaching approaches provided by the educator during periods of subjects such as Life Skills and Life Orientation. These subjects have been made available for educators to assist learners with skills to deal with life problems and challenges.

Although the idea recognizes the need for the learner support regarding mental health, there is an increasing need for psychological services or perhaps counselling services due to the growing epidemic of HIV, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse, learners experiencing or witnessing violence, suffering from intellectual disability, being addicted to substances such as alcohol or cannabis and being HIV/AIDS sufferers and/or orphans through the AIDS status of the country. However, the National Integrated Health Policy does not incorporate the need of psychologists in the school. Daniels (2013) asserts that

“some schools attempt to overcome this issue by employing teachers who also take on the role of school counsellors. Daniels (2013) and Michelson et al. (2016) agree that many of the formerly white schools that used to be called Model C schools or private schools can employ school counsellors because of the secondary school fees that are charged. This has resulted in a very imbalanced situation where the schools that need counselling services most, have to do without them”.

Despite the few psychological services in the country, it is necessary to identify the level of knowledge contained by the learners and the teachers about the use and importance of psychological services. This knowledge will serve as the basis of their awareness and acknowledgement of their needs. Therefore, psychological services should be promoted to increase the awareness of learners and teachers. School psychological services awareness is also important for the benefit of emerging research and for the sake of the national mental health progress.

## **2.5 Coping mechanism used by learners when experiencing problems**

As clearly and subsequently stated in the above subsections of this chapter, learners at secondary school face high levels of stress. According to Sidek (as cited in Yusoff, 2010), more than 20 percent of children in the world have been approximated by the World Health Organisation to have mental health problems. Yusoff (2010) further states that there is a negative association between stress and mental, emotional and physical health. It is therefore important that learners integrate coping strategies in their everyday life in the absence of a school psychologist.

Folkman and Lazarus (as cited in Yusoff, 2010) aver that coping strategies can be divided into two broad categories, which are, problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping occurs when the individual invests his or her energy into problem solving or putting themselves into action in order to alter the source of stress. Emotion-focused coping occurs when the individual invests his or her energy into reducing or managing the emotional distress that is associated with the situation. Although both strategies form part of coping mechanisms, they mostly function at different occasions. Problem-focused coping tends to predominate in situations where circumstances can be changed and a stressor can be altered whereas emotion-focused predominates in cases

where one is overpowered by the stressor and feels that the situation can only be endured.

Problem-focused coping includes planning on how to solve the problem, suppression of competing activities, seeking instrumental support such as visiting the psychologist, forming part of support group or going for therapy. Emotion-focused coping includes seeking emotional support, being optimistic about meaning of the situation, accepting the new change, being in denial and turning to religion. Other coping strategies that are less useful but tend to be used during emotion-focused coping include venting of emotions, social disengagement, mental disengagement (self-distraction), unexpected and inappropriate humour, substance use and abuse, self-blame (Yusoff, 2010). When learners are not coping effectively, the use of least efficient emotion-focused coping is evident. It is for these instances that a learner should be referred to a school psychologist to deal with matters in a much more effective manner.

Most learners cope with problems inwardly through problem-focused or emotion-focused coping. In contrast, Basch (2011) indicates that there is a body of literature that demonstrates that connectedness between a learner and the educators and the school governing body as one of the useful strategies that assist learners to cope with problems throughout secondary school and it determines a learner's academic performance and achievement. Connectedness may assist a learner to be under surveillance of an educator by being in close contact with the educator and thus preventing some of the problems from occurring such as teenage pregnancy, substance abuse and perhaps aggressive behaviours. However, when an educator is committed to more than one interaction with the learner, it may leave one of the educators' responsibilities in jeopardy with a learner, the educator may be much more focused in being a counselor whilst the teaching responsibility is lagging behind and this may create a dilemma.

### **2.5.1 Services used by learners when experiencing problems (help-seeking behaviour)**

Seeking help takes place when an individual is on the mission to relieve psychological distress or mental problems (Bing, Onn, Eng, Hing, Zee & Yee, 2015). Help-seeking can be divided into two types which are informal and formal help-seeking. Informal help-

seeking takes place when an individual in the process of seeking help, seeks help from informal sources such as friends, family members or partners/spouses. Formal help-seeking is the type of help received by a relevant and licensed professional such as the psychologist, counsellor or psychiatrist.

According to Richwood, Mazzer and Telford (2015), informal help-seeking usually comes after formal or professional help service use. Adolescents prefer informal support rather than formal services when seeking help for mental health problems. When facing problems, younger adolescents usually seek help from their parents. In most cases, parents begin seeking help, whether informal or formal on behalf of the child experiencing the problem. This type of help-seeking can be ineffective and can serve as a barrier of receiving sufficient help. As adolescents begin to grow older, adolescents begin to rely more on their close friends than parents, especially for girls. This pattern of help-seeking also stands as a barrier to effective help-seeking, since close friends provide help based on the level of their experience (Richwood, Mazzer & Telford, 2015).

Gould, Munfakh, Lubell, Kleinman and Parker (2002) explain that most of the adolescents rely on the internet as a source of help for mental health problems. There is a high prevalence of internet services with regards to mental health care and they are highly accessible to adolescents than any mental help service available. These services can serve as advantages for mental health access and can help combat the barriers or challenges observed during help-seeking among adolescents such as stigma towards seeking help, fear of emotional expression and confidentiality (Richwood et al., 2015). However, in terms of treatment, the internet may place certain barriers that restrict or limit the helping process such as desensitizing therapies that would need both the client and the therapist to be physically present when exploring traumatic memories.

## **2.6 Significance of school psychological services**

This section of literature has shown the difficulty faced by learners and has provided subsequent evidence on the insufficient provision of help towards adolescent learners in effort to alleviate the intensity of problems and pressures that they face and to reduce the chilling outcomes in effort of sustaining the mental health state of learners. In addition to physical needs, adolescents have mental health needs, and for them to survive or live a

sufficient quality of life, mental health needs should be met. It is remarkably important for schools to adapt and implement services that alleviate maladjustment problems in adolescents, these services are often referred to as School Mental Health (SMH) programmes. Several professionals such as school nurses, school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers and special school educational teachers may directly provide School Mental Health programmes and collaborate with teachers and parents to effectively combat mental health barriers to learners' social development and educational attainment (Dvorsky, 2013).

School psychologist are the key role players in providing advanced School Mental Health programs and this is their main scope of practice in secondary schools. School psychologists possess a dense array of knowledge in terms of SMH programmes and services which involve the challenges in child development, impact of behaviour and mental health on development and strategies and techniques in implementing interventions to promote mental health and well-being (Dvorsky, 2013). School psychologists are also directly involved in providing psychological assessments, addressing individual and group emotional, cognitive, social and behavioural problems through counselling and they also develop social and life skills on learners.

According to the Australian Psychological Society (2009), adolescents stand a better chance of understanding and managing their emotions and behaviour with the assistance of a psychologists. School psychologists equip learners with better coping strategies that not only work for them and their relationships, but which also spill over to families where the family members can also adopt them into their daily lives to improve their relationships. Furthermore, school psychologists are better positioned to understand the reasons behind adolescents' academic challenges and if needs be, they are the best source of referrals to specialists because school psychologists understand the school environment and its accessibilities to sources of the adolescents' problems and they also understand the problems associated with the learners. School psychologists can also be viewed as advisors for any academic or social challenge. Learners experiencing any form of peer pressure can turn to them for advice and learners experiencing academic pressures receive advice on how to manage their schoolwork effectively. Not only do

school psychologists advice learners, but they are ambassadors to learners or curriculum advisors to teachers by advising teachers on how to develop a working curriculum and which teaching technique works for certain groups of learners.

School Psychologists work in the context of school grounds, although some may argue that school's main objective is to teach and not to treat children. However, for a learner to succeed in school, certain aspects should be considered and specific measures and tools should be put in place to assist the learner to attain education. Therefore, it is a function of schools to educate learners and to offer proper tools to prevent lack of educational attainment.

A thick domain of literature shows that there is a great association between mental disorders and poor academic attainment. In this evolving world where risky resources are easily accessible, if schools continue to lack psychological services. the nation is set up to fail, leaving only the fittest to survive. The provision of psychological services is important in enhancing the chance of academic success.

### **2.6.1 Informal sources**

According to Lawrence (2009), the utilisation of professional psychological services may be low primarily because people prefer to receive help from informal sources such as family, friends, and ministry. Few young people seek professional help for mental health problems and most young people tend to seek informal help before they turn to formal sources. Many learners are not sure what warrants a counselling session; they view their problems as minor to require consulting a psychologist. Most people wait until their symptoms or problems become unbearable (Rickwood et al., 2005).

Young people are more likely to seek help from informal rather than formal sources because they regard friends and family as their main source of help. Friends tend to be the preferred help source for personal emotional problems, while parents are generally ranked second to friends. Some types of problems are more likely to prompt help-seeking behaviour than others and different sources of help are deemed more appropriate for particular types of problems. For example, relationships are often discussed with friends;

personal problems with parents, and educational problems are more likely to be taken to teachers (Rickwood et al., 2005).

## **2.7 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.7.1 Ecological systems theory**

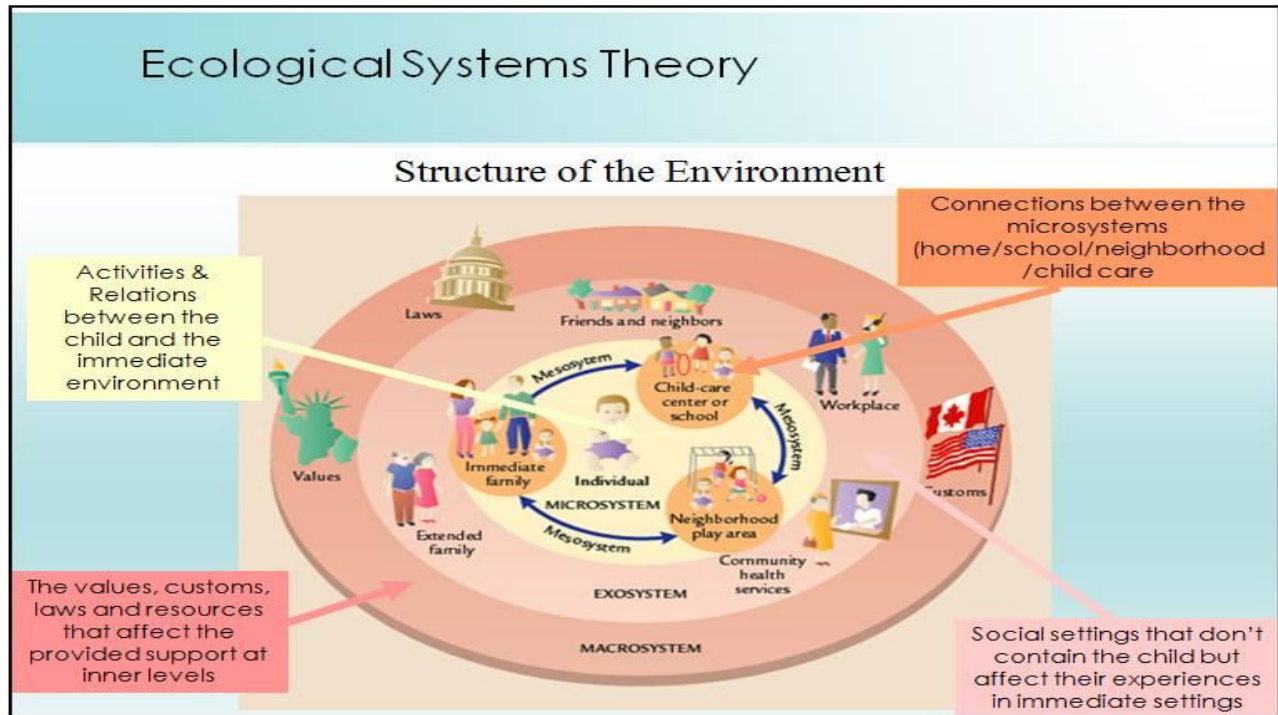
This study is underpinned by the ecological systems theory of human development which is based on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986). The theory was later renamed the bioecological systems theory because it has been perceived to highlight the child's biology as the main environment that is the source of his or her development (Harkonen, 2007). The theory has influenced this study because of its relevance in understanding an individual from an environmental point of view; that is, the theory maintains that to understand a child, one must fully examine the environment from which the child is exposed, the child's home, school, community, culture and so on. The theory holds that the child's development does not take place within a vacuum, meaning that the child's development cannot be examined in exclusion of the external factors surrounding the child, but the environment must be taken into consideration (Stivaros, 2007).

The theory recognises the child as the center of his or her perceived world, which is in a series of systems or layers, the system includes: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystems. The microsystem plays a very big role in the child's development as it represents the immediate social and physical environment. This is the system that contains the child's main interactions and closest relationships such as the relationships with the family, school staff, neighborhood, religious leaders and others. The mesosystem is characterized by processes and interactions taking place within the child's microsystem such as the interaction with the child's home and school or child's home and religious structures. The exosystem comprises the interactions within the larger community in which the child abides. It involves settings which affect the child's cognitive development, but the child is not directly part of, for example, what happens at the parents' workplace educates the child. The macrosystem represents the cultural and religious values, customs and laws given influenced by society. In this study, the interactions that take place within the microsystem and mesosystem are emphasised. The study examines how interactions within the immediate environment supports the child



toward his or her cognitive development and whether linkages between the microsystem and the mesosystem engage or provide changes such as psychological interventions to promote the child's mental health.

Figure 2.1: Image showing the different bioecological systems and their interaction with



the child

Bronfenbrenner also explains a child as a complex nature due to the child's constant interaction with the environment. He explains that as the child begins to grow and mature, the complexity of the child also develops due to the child's psychological and physiological capacity. This occurs when the child grasps knowledge, doctrine and conception from the structures that influence the child. This also means that the environment and the structures within the environment contribute to the child's socialization and uniqueness.

The theory further explains how individual change can be administered at different levels of the ecosystem that affect the individual. That is, if the child is struggling in one ecosystem, interventions in another ecosystem can produce corrective changes on the child through support and other types of interventions (Cappella, Frazer, Atkins, Schoenwald & Glisson, 2008).

The child's micro and mesosystem need to be well examined as it is the environment in which a learner forms part of and is directly affected by the processes that take place within it, these two systems have a significant influence on the learner's mental health and well-being.

This study adopted this theory and mostly focuses on the micro and mesosystems to explain how the child's immediate environment determines the child's behaviour and the outcomes of the child's development. The influence of the microsystem on the learner's mental health can either be a positive or a negative influence. For example, if the learner is in a setting such as a home where the learner experiences domestic violence, the learners' behaviour is most likely to be influenced by that environment. The learner may begin to show a lifestyle that reflects the events that occur in their settings such as drug and alcohol abuse. If corrective interventions on the child are neglected, the behaviour may spill over to other environments such as the microsystem which may involve destructive behaviour, bullying or breaking the law, all the characteristics deemed unethical by society, be it at school or in the community. It is important that there are activities or services in the school setting such as the Psychological services to positively influence or correct these behaviours on the learner.

Burns, Warmbold-Brann and Zaslofsky (2015) state that there is a need to integrate the ecological model at schools to better understand the many phenomena such as physical inactivity, school violence and peer relations. Burns, Warmbold-Brann and Zaslofsky (2015) further explain that school violence and bullying preventative methods are more effective if they are included in the ecologically-based components such as improved parental training, improved playground supervision and rules, school-wide bullying policies and mental health policies and psychological programmes. These psychological programmes may influence the learners to integrate positive strategies of how to effectively overcome the challenges that affect them at their stressful settings, for example, a home with reoccurrences of domestic violence.

### **2.7.2 Social Learning Theory**

This study has also adopted the social learning theory to describe the child's behaviour as predicted by the modelling behaviour of influential models surrounding the child such

as parents, characters on TV, peers and teachers at school. These models set up a behaviour guideline for children or learners to imitate. Basically, the Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977) suggests that a bulk of the child's behaviour is learned through observation and imitation of how role models behave. This information is then internalized and then the behaviour is practiced and acquired.

Firstly, it has been determined that the child is more likely to imitate the people he/she perceives biologically comparable to her/himself. Therefore, it is highly possible to imitate behaviour actioned by role models of the same gender.

Secondly, people observing the modelled behaviour by the child will respond to the behaviour with either reinforcement or punishment. If a child imitates a model's behaviour and the consequences are rewarding, the child is likely to continue performing the behaviour and vice-versa. For example, if a teacher sees a learner telling other learners to be quiet and says "what a competent learner you are" this is rewarding for the learner and makes it more likely that the learner will repeat the behaviour.

When the theory is applied to this study, one can learn that the social environment is an important characteristic in understanding the challenges faced by learners today. The theory was thus useful in describing the occurrence of developmental maladjustments and delinquent behaviour expressed by learners due to the surrounding social environment: the general parenting strategies, the influence of peers and the role that teachers play (Mvungu, 2014).

## **2.8 Conclusion**

Based on the literature gathered in this chapter, it can be concluded that learners face an array of problems including physiological, social, developmental and psychological problems. Literature indicates that although most of these problems affect learners' school performance and attainment, most public secondary schools still do not have psychological services in place for learners to use as only a few private schools in the country have these services. For the school's psychological services, challenges in accessing the services by learners have been found. On the other hand, public schools

are left in desertion with government playing little or no contribution to assist learners in dealing with the problems that they face.

This situation leaves the learners in a position of having to deal with the problems on their own, thus entrusting them on selecting coping mechanisms used that will reduce or alleviate the many problems that they experience. Most Learners cope with problems inwardly, that is, through problem-focused or emotion-focused coping which for most of them, have been defined as the least effective ways to deal with problems. It is therefore necessary that school psychologists are put in place to assist learners to deal with their problems effectively, as the described in the section where roles of school psychologists have been described in detail. Literature has it that although learners prefer informal sources, the collaboration of informal sources available and psychological services gives learners a better chance of coping with their studies.

Two theories that relate to the development of learners, determining the source of problems that learners face and the impact of school psychologists, have been defined in this section above, they include, the Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Learning Theory. These theories have been used to better understand the environment and the social interaction of the learners that plays a large role on how the learners develop and cope. The chapters to follow will also revisit these theories to understand they apply to learners in relation to this particular study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Research methodology is a research strategy that outlines how the researcher plans to undertake his or her study in order to achieve the research aims and objectives. It is the technique utilized to gather information or data for research purposes (Fritsch, Trulson & Blackburn, 2013). Research methodology is a helpful and crucial technique in achieving the goals (aims) of a research and directs the path that a research should embark on. This chapter provides insights on the methods that were adapted in the study and the ethical considerations applied.

### **3.2 Research approach**

A qualitative research approach was adopted to achieve subjective valuation of the learners' attitudes, motives and opinions (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This research approach was used to explore and describe the availability of psychological services in public secondary schools. The use of a qualitative research approach assisted the researcher to develop insights of the situation in focus and to analyse the data provided by the learners.

### **3.3 Research design**

An exploratory research design was employed to examine in-depth the experiences of the learners. The main idea of using this research design was to explore the importance of introducing psychological services as perceived by the learners in their school environments (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Learners are the most affected by problems, the use of exploratory design benefitted the study because the researcher was able to develop insights directly from the learners regarding the importance of having psychological services at secondary schools.

### **3.4 Study setting**

The study was conducted at Thulamela Municipality in the Vhembe District located in the northern part of the Limpopo province of South Africa. Vhembe is one of the five districts in Limpopo province and comprises four local municipalities which are: Thulamela,

Makhado, Musina and Mutale. The research study focused on the Thulamela municipality. Vhembe also has seven circuits which are: Luvuvhu, Mvudi, Dzindi, Dzondo, Tshinane, Sibasa and Tshilamba. The research was conducted in a circuit that mostly forms part of Thohoyandou, which is the Luvuvhu Circuit.

Thulamela Municipality has 127 secondary schools with 87 047 pupils in total (Thulamela IDP, 2016/2017). Each school is situated within the radius of 5km of the community it serves. According to the Thulamela IDP (2016/2017), the walking distance to and from the school may not exceed 10km, otherwise the learner is provided with either school residence or transport. The Department of Education has also provided two libraries for the municipality. There are currently 9 secondary schools in Luvuvhu Circuit which are 5km from one another, they are: Azwifari, Gole, Mukhwanteli, Muvhavha, Sam Mavhina, Thase, Thivhilaeli, Tshilala and Haggai.

Although the Luvuvhu circuit has a local library, the area is dominated by “shebeens” and clubs. These clubs provide alcohol to local people, even those who are underage. Alcohol is the leading cause of violence in the country and thus the leading cause of abuse. Abuse is also a major concern at Luvuvhu circuit and the learners are at exposed and at risk of being subjected to different forms of child abuse such as physical abuse, sexual abuse (e.g. rape and sexual assault), neglect and emotional abuse due the activities taking place within their community. Several consequences of abuse have been recorded which affect the health of the learner and ultimately impacting on the learner’s ability to learn. Consequences of abuse include psychiatric disorders (can be divided into short-term and long-term psychological disorders) and suicidal behaviour. Examples of short-term psychological disorders due to child abuse (disorders that don’t reach full clinical levels of concern) are depression, anxiety, substance abuse, aggression, shame or cognitive impairment. A full clinical psychiatric impairment because of major consequence of child abuse describes long-term psychological disorders which include post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, anxiety disorders and sleep disorders (World Health Organization, 2002). It is these effects of psychological disorders that prompted the researcher to investigate whether psychological services are significant at secondary schools and for this reason, the researcher developed an interest to explore this area.

### **3.5 Study population**

According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), study population is a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific investigation.

#### **3.5.1 Inclusion criteria**

The individuals of interest for the study were the learners who attend public schools located within the borders of Luvuvhu Circuit, Thulamela Municipality. The reason for selecting learners in public schools was because public schools have the Department of Education as a service provider than the private schools that function independently of the government. The researcher also focused on learners in Grades 10 to 12 because as observed, these learners are the most affected by stress as well as emotional and psychological challenges. Levine (2017) agrees to this and indicates that 21% of adolescents between 13 to 18 years have experienced a major mental disorder in their lives. However, a vast number of literatures such as that of Weiss (2013) indicate that the most stressed out group in High school is the oldest group of learners and mostly those between the ages of 18 – 19 years. Additionally, according Skuse, Bruce, Dowdney and Mrazek (2011), adolescents are generally a more reliable source than assumed in terms of the problems affecting them. The learner may not be located or reside within Luvuvhu Circuit. However, they should be learners attending schools located in Luvuvhu Circuit. The learners of interest in the study were those that attend schools deemed normal or of those deemed mentally capable.

#### **3.5.2 Exclusion criteria**

In contrast to the above, learners who go to private schools where not included in the study. Also, participants who were in Grade 9 and below were excluded due to the reasons stated in the inclusion criteria above. Additionally, learners from special schools were not included in the study because of their increased special needs which is not the part of the study focus.

### **3.6 Sampling and sample size**

The participants of this study were learners in Grades 10, 11 and 12. According to Mugeru (2013), purposive sampling is a non-probability technique in which a researcher chooses participants with a specific goal of focusing on specific characteristics that will enable her to answer the research questions. This sampling technique is appropriate when there is a limited number of people that have knowledge or expertise of the area to be studied.

Seven public schools out of the 11 were purposively selected. Therefore, there were seven Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), each FGD per school. The members of the FGDs were learners from grade 10 to 12. The reason for purposively selecting them was because the lower grades were the least affected by social and psychological challenges. Six to twelve learners of both sexes were conveniently selected to form part of the FGDs.

### **3.7 Entry negotiation**

The researcher requested permission to conduct the research through a letter to the Provincial Department of Education in Limpopo. The letter indicated the aim and objectives of the study that the researcher envisaged to achieve. The researcher then proceeded by requesting permission from the Vhembe District Manager by drafting a letter to the office. After receiving permission from the District manager, the researcher requested permission by writing a letter to the Luvuvhu circuit manager. These letters were submitted to each secondary school principal coupled with a verbal or face-to-face request to conduct a research study with the learners of the school within their school premises.

### **3.8 Research instrument**

The researcher, including the research assistant, made use of a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 4) as a device that guided the data collection procedure (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The research instrument contained two sections, the first section contained the socio-demographic information, which is the information that describes the participant; for example, gender, age, grade and race, etc. (it is important to note that the members of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were kept anonymous, therefore information such as the participants name and home address was excluded



from the study). The second section contained four interview questions that are related to the study objectives. These questions aided the researcher to elicit information from the participants and allowed for more questions to emerge in relation to the study objectives to drive, lead and guide the discussions. The instrument contained open-ended question as items on the research instrument and other probing questions were added based on the emerging interests of the researcher during the interviews. The items addressed the following: problems faced by the learners, the psychological services offered in secondary schools and their effectiveness and the coping strategies used by the learners. The questions were drafted in the participants' first language to give all participants an equal opportunity to respond to their full potential.

### **3.9 Pre-testing**

The research instrument was tested prior to the official data collection to determine whether the questions on the instrument were clear. This was done by conducting a mini version of data collection. The pretesting was conducted with one pilot FGD to respond to the interview questions. The members of the pilot FGD did not have to form part of the main data collection group. Items on the research instrument. All questions were also modified and simplified to make the interviews more comprehensible and clearer for data collection purposes. The following explains in detail how the questions were improved.

The first question was initially long and more complicated for learners and when the question was shortened, learners seemed to grasp it faster and gave the appropriate response. This was the initial question: "What are the problems that are faced by learners such as you? Explain your own experiences or those that have been faced by your friends." Which was later simplified to "What problems are you facing? Explain."

The second question was also quite long and less direct and had the second part as the third question which was corrected and made a follow up question. At first the question was phrased like this: "When you are experiencing problems, do you have a place you can go to or a person (e.g. school nurse or school teacher) who works to deal with problems, you can visit to help you with the problem? Then the third question to follow, if yes, is the person helpful?" The question was then modified with an added follow-up

question: “What are the psychological services offered at this school? Name them and explain how they function. If available, are the psychological services effective?”

The following question was changed to be grammatically correct. This is how it was phrased at first: “Do you sometimes get any visitors who work for the government who come to help you with the problems that you face or speak about where you can go when you have problems?” Then it was later changed to: “Has any member of government come to your school to address any problems that you are facing? Please name any campaign and explain what they were trying to address.”

Then the final question was shortened and simplified to make it easier for learners to grasp. At first it was phrased this way: “Besides seeing the nominated person to help you, what do you do when you have a problem in order to feel better?” Then the shorter version was later used: “Do you cope with the problems that you face? Explain.” The interviews conducted to the learners were administered in a face-to-face setting.

### **3.10 Data collection**

According to Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006), data collection simply means extraction of bits of discrete information from context and analysing them in detail. The type of data collection in this study was in the form of Focus Group Discussions (FGD). This method of data collection was more efficient because it elicited in-depth responses of individual experiences, opinions and feelings on the phenomenon under study that has an impact on their academic lives. FGD also identifies information on commonalities of norms found amongst participants and allows the researcher to discover variations amongst participants. The main goal of focus groups is to get members of the group to discuss ideas amongst themselves that will help the researcher discover norms in relation to the study objectives (Elmusharaf, 2012).

The FGD was aided by the researcher. The researcher made use of a semi-structured interview to guide the discussion process. This type of interview allows the researcher to probe for more information as new ideas emerge along the discussion. Furthermore, it is more applicable to the researcher because it gives detailed and in-depth information on

the phenomenon, as well as more response and an opportunity for the researcher to observe the participants' reactions (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

The researcher conducted the FDG with the help of a research assistant. The interviews were conducted on a face-to-face value to enable the researcher to read the members' facial expression while they responded to the interview questions. The interview sessions took approximately one hour and perhaps longer when new ideas kept emerging. This hour included the process of building rapport, explaining what the research study was all about, reading and signing the consent form, introduction of members of the FGD, responding to the interview questions and closing remarks or vote of thanks.

FGDs were conducted on school premises where the participants were found. Since six participants were sampled per school, the participants were interviewed in the morning before they went for lunch breaks when the learners still had the energy and willingness to form part of the FGD. Interviews were conducted in the language mostly preferred by the participants to avoid any biases. They were recorded on tape, with the consent of the participant and a few points noted on paper. Data collection was done for two weeks.

### **3.11 Data analysis**

The study used Thematic Content Analysis which is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique of analysing data was most appropriate because it minimally organised and described data set in rich detail; it further interpreted various aspects of the research topic. The technique was conducted manually using interpretive analysis which was conducted through a step-by-step process, these steps include:

- **Familiarization**

The researcher was constantly immersed in the data collected by studying it repeatedly, brainstorming it and making diagrams.

- **Inducing themes**

The process of producing themes was undertaken in a bottom-up approach. Main themes gave rise to sub-themes.

- **Coding**

Ideas that were relevant to the themes were marked with the use of highlighters and copy and paste operations.

- **Elaboration**

During this stage, the researcher revisited the structure analysis made from the last three stages and allowed commonalities in data to be viewed side by side.

- **Interpretation and checking**

The researcher made careful inspection of data in order to identify contradictions, summaries and over-analysis.

These step-by-step processes did not follow an orderly manner, but each step was essential for analysing themes (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

### **3.12 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through the following four strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

- **Credibility**

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), credibility exists when there is reliable compatibility between the constructed ideas of the respondents and those attributed to them by the researcher. Credibility in the case of this research was achieved by conducting three types of recording at the same time, the first one was aided by the use of a tape recorder, the second one was assisted through written notes by the researcher and the third one was done by the research assistant through written notes. Credibility was also achieved by engaging with the learners for a prolonged period until data saturation was achieved.

- **Transferability**

Terre Blanche et al. (2006) states that transferability is the extent to which findings of research study can be functional to other contexts or other participants. Transferability

was ensured by developing a thick description of concepts related to the topic. The researcher went to Thohoyandou Secondary school and presented the findings to learners of the school to discover if the findings of the study apply to the learners of that particular school. Similarity to the compared findings will demonstrate that the findings of the study can be transferred, thus apply to other school contexts.

- **Dependability**

Dependability was ensured by making use of the experts available for assistance regarding this study. The experts available were the main supervisor and the co-supervisors who continuously provided insights throughout the process of research. The researcher also made use of an expert in the field of psychology, a professor in the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This ensured that the study became dependable since errors that the researcher might have overlooked were picked up by the experts in the field.

- **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which the acquired data is the product of the research findings and not the biases of the researcher (Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Confirmability was achieved extensively by having the analysed data returned to the learners who produced the information to review if the information was indeed the one that they have produced.

### **3.13 Ethical considerations**

Ethics are very important during research because they guide the researcher towards conducting the study rightfully. They further allow the researcher to follow the right method, procedure and perspective in order to protect participants' rights and avoid overriding what is lawful. The researcher took internal and external ethics into consideration.

#### **Internal ethical considerations**

The researcher undertook the following procedure in achieving ethics to conduct the research.

- Presented at the Department of Psychology for support
- Presented at the School of Health Sciences Higher Degrees Committee for quality assurance
- Submitted to University Higher Degrees Committee (UHDC) for approval
- Submitted to University Ethics Committee for ethical clearance.

Once the researcher was given ethical clearance, the researcher then proceeded with the external gate keepers to request for permission to conduct the research.

### **External ethical considerations**

The researcher proceeded by writing a research request letter to the Provincial Department of Education (DOE). Once the DOE had given the researcher permission to conduct the research, the researcher requested for permission from the principals of the schools from which the participants were selected, and when that was granted, the researcher proceeded with requesting permission from the participants by following ethical considerations as a guideline.

The following are the ethics that were adhered to in this study.

- **Non-maleficence** - the researcher ensured that no harm befell the learners as a direct or indirect consequence of the research. The research participants were not to experience psychological harm. The researcher ensured this by informing the school principal of all procedures to be undertaken and undertaking all procedures in an ethical manner.
- **Confidentiality** – Participants that formed part of the Focus Group Discussion were encouraged to keep information that they heard in the group confidential. The researcher also ensured that the participant's personal or private information was treated as confidential as possible, unless overriding reasons conferred a moral or legal right to disclosure. Confidentiality was sustained because the research participants were not asked to disclose their names and they were not asked to disclose any personal information regarding the interview. Their right to identity was not violated in any way, and that their identity was not revealed in the research in any way.

- **Respects for the dignity of person** – Participants were respected as persons, and their intrinsic worth, dignity, and sense of value were acknowledged.
- **Information sheet** – On the onset of data collection, the researcher provided the participants with information in terms of what the research is all about, the research process and explained how their contribution will be utilized in the study. The researcher also described all the benefits and risks involved in participating in the research to the principal of the school as well as to the participants.
- **Consent form** – It is the duty of the researcher to provide participants with an informed consent form. This form was read out in the presence of the participants and the principal and the researcher ensured that the participants fully understood the content of the informed consent. The participants then decided to sign an informed consent form that indicated that they were to voluntarily take part in the study although they were not going to receive payment.

### 3.14 Conclusion

This chapter covered the research methodology that was followed to conduct this study including the research design, population, sample, data-collection instrument and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the data analysis process and findings obtained.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis of data as it emerged during data collection. This chapter interlinks with the upcoming Chapter 5. The method of analysis in this study followed a Thematic Content Analysis which is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Blanche, 2006). The steps used in this chapter include familiarization, inducing themes, coding, elaboration, interpretation and checking. All these steps were necessary in generating the themes and sub-themes in order to reach the synthesis of the summary of findings gathered during data collection. The participants that provided the information were Grade 10 to 12 learners as explained in the preceding chapters and for that reason, the concepts learners and participants will be used interchangeably, as it represents the same thing.

### 4.2 Socio-demographic information

The information in the table below was provided by the participants themselves after providing informed consent during group discussions. Each focus group consisted of six participants except for group three that had two extra participants. Most participants in each group were interactive, however, there were few participants who were not interactive. It is for this reason that some participants will not be reflected on the transcripts provided in Annexure A.

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of participants (n=45)

Name of School	Gender	Number
#1 Thase secondary school	Male	3
	Female	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
#2 Gole secondary school	Male	3
	Female	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
#3 Tshilala secondary school	Male	2



	Female	7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>
#4 Azwifarwi secondary school	Male	3
	Female	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
#5 Thivhilaeli secondary school	Male	3
	Female	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
#6 Sam Mavhina secondary school	Male	3
	Female	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
#7 Muvhavha secondary school	Male	3
	Female	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>7 Schools</b>	<b>Overall total participants</b>	<b>45</b>

Table 4.1 indicates that almost each focus group had six participants and in each focus group, there were three females and three males (with the exception to focus group no.3 which had nine participants – two males and seven females). Two participants from each focus group were from grade 10, two from grade 11 and the other two from grade 12. As stated in section 3, the reason for selecting learners between grades 10 to grade 12 is based on the fact that the oldest learners in high school experience the most problems. None of the participants were married and none had a disability.

#### 4.2.1 Findings on socio demographic information

As described above, participants that formed part of the seven FGDs were older adolescents in grades 10 to 12. Each focus group was conducted at each of the seven schools of Luvuvhu circuit. Participant from most of the schools shared similar problems such as peer pressure, bullying, anxiety and addiction. However, some problems were not common in other schools such as sexual harassment, low self-esteem, grieving a loved one and anger management. The problems expressed were not specifically

personal problems, but problems experienced by related age groups in that specific setting. From the Focus Group Discussions, the following are themes that emerged.

### 4.3 Emerging themes

Table 4.2: Summary of themes and sub-themes that emerged from this study

Themes	Sub themes
1. Problems experienced by learners at public secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Pressure</li> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Anxiety and Fear</li> <li>• Addiction</li> <li>• Interparental conflict</li> <li>• Child maltreatment</li> <li>• Other problems</li> </ul>
2. The experience of learners when seeking psychological services at their public secondary schools and the effectiveness of the services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Availability of reliable sources of help at school</li> <li>• Effectiveness of problem solving by the sources of help</li> </ul>
3. Experiences of learners regarding the interventions from the government aiming or attempting to assist them with their problems	
4. Self-applied coping strategies used by the learners	

Table 4.2 above summarises major themes and the corresponding sub-themes that emerged during data collection. Four main themes emerged, they are: problems experienced by learners at public secondary schools, the experience of learners when seeking for help and learner's experience of the interventions from government aiming or attempting to assist them with their problems and self-applied problem-solving strategies used by the learners.

### 4.3.1 Theme 1: Problems experienced by learners at public secondary schools

Participants expressed in their narratives their experiences of problems that they face as learners at home or at school. The researcher will therefore present the problems they have narrated according to their frequency across the seven focus groups and the two divisions of themes i.e. majority and minority of problems have been interpreted randomly and not according to some ranking of significance. Therefore, the researcher has begun by describing majority of problems experienced down to the least of the problems faced by the learners. Majority of participants expressed bullying and peer pressure as prevalent problems in their day to day lives.

#### Sub-theme 1: Peer pressure

Peer pressure seemed to be having some effect on the participants' well-being, this came out in all focus groups. During the collection of data, majority of learners revealed that peer pressure had some effect on their well-being

*“The other boys here at school treat me like an outcast because I don’t want to join them when they do bad things like drinking alcohol and smoking. I rather focus on my school work and study. So, they end up calling me names and treating me badly”, Participant 1.*

Most learners demonstrated peer pressure as a conflict between the values that they obtain from home or that they learn from teachers against their friends wishes, lifestyles or attitudes. They felt threatened that not following their friends' wishes of drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana and being in an intimate relationship would put them at risk of being outcasted.

The researcher comprehended that at the stage of adolescence, relating to other peers seems more valuable and therefore being an outcast would warrant a great deal of distress. Being in a place of abiding by the values obtained from home by parents that are being threatened by values obtained at school by peers can be a gruesome experience for an adolescent, this is because siding with one value, attitude or norm can mean a threat to one of the relationships. Amongst other examples provided by other learners, here is another similar experience by another participant.

*“FOMO, Fear of Missing Out. It mostly gets me in trouble because of doing things I don’t intend to do, like doing things that the police, parents tell us not to do such as drinking, smoking. I get a nervous breakdown when my friends are doing something I don’t intend to do. I have this fear of missing out.” Participant 23*

It is comprehensible that majority of learners face challenges when they should consider which values are important to them, those obtained from one system or those obtained from another system.

### Sub-theme 2: Bullying

Bullying is one of the pressing themes that kept emerging as learners described the extent of bullying that they encountered at school. Learners expressed that they are bullied by teachers and to some extent by learners in the following manner: name calling, mean words, being ridiculed, activity isolation and spreading rumours about them. However, the conversations during the group discussions emphasized and circulated around the power relations between the learners and the teachers at schools, this demonstrated the misuse of power as a form of bullying as explained by the learners. The researcher discovered that almost all the focus groups were facing problems of power misuse or dominance by the teachers.

*“Teachers here call us names like witches, prostitutes, sluts etc. [among others] they even say, “You are just running here to school but you have failed the entire school bag”, Participant 14.*

*“The teachers here are too personal instead of being professional, you get me? they deal with such things. They are even able to beat a learner with a clap or kick a learner and they beat learners on the buttocks with their hands and girls aren’t supposed to be beaten on the buttocks, especially by men, but here you will find that happening”, Participant 35.*

Results of this study showed that students experienced some form of bullying from their teachers. Learners have indicated that it was unbearable to experience this kind of humiliation from teachers who were supposed to be protecting them from learners who bully them at school.

As opposed to the bullying from the teachers, learners have indicated the different forms in which other learners bully them. This includes being teased, being made a subject of a joke to a point where you feel like committing suicide. They expressed that the most painful part of being bullied is when one is being teased about their bodies which they cannot change. Here are some examples of how most learners felt.

*“In a class they make fun of how skinny I am. I think in primary, I almost committed suicide and at secondary school I almost died of FOMO. Sometimes I isolate myself ...cause [because] I reduce the cost of people telling me how skinny I am”,*  
Participant 23.

*“My problem is that older boys at the school call me “gay” and because they are older and stronger there is nothing I can do”,* Participant 2.

Findings revealed learners who were bullied by either a teacher or a learner felt hopeless because they could not change the situation they are in which brought the bullying about. This is the reason why some felt like committing suicide. This is also a sign of a long lasting desperate need to escape from the situation. This is where help is of paramount importance to save the life of a learner.

In addition to the two above problems, there were a few problems that participants expressed, and these were sexual harassment, addiction, anxiety, low self-esteem, stress from parental divorce or separation, grief, anger management, abuse, career stress and unwanted thoughts as the source of their problems. These problems are discussed below in relation to the narratives of learners.

### Sub-theme 3: Anxiety and fear

Anxiety is one of the problems that were discussed during the sessions of data collection. However, only a small number of learners explained this as a problem in their lives. Reasons for anxiety varied from test/exam anxiety to anxiety expressed in the presence of a teacher and simply fear of other learners and teachers. Test anxiety seemed to be supported by several learners while the participants brought the topic forward.

*“When I’m writing a test or exam, I get anxious and end up not remembering what I studied. And mostly, I don’t write well when I am too anxious even when I have studied enough, I’ll end up writing the wrong stuff”, Participant 28.*

The outcomes revealed how much anxiety affects most learners’ academic performance. They articulated how anxiety plays a serious role to the level of their memory during a test or exams. This becomes a problem to the learners as academics is the major reason they are at school in the first place, and not being able to handle the anxiousness becomes a career issue as they may be unable to attain enough points for the desired career.

#### Sub-theme 4: Addiction

Addiction is a situation that exists in a few secondary schools as presented by the learners. Substances of interest discussed by learners were marijuana, cigarettes and alcohol. However, under this sub-theme, most learners would not associate the term addiction with themselves and they would normally connect it to other learners.

*‘I know of a friend of mine who is addicted to cigarettes and he wants to stop smoking but he doesn’t know how to stop. And he says he gets cravings during tests and exams when the test is difficult and he doesn’t know what to do’, Participant 6.*

*“Sometimes the learners here are too eager to use substances, you just find a person starting to get involved in things like drugs and you can notice that they are no longer themselves and they have a while without coming to school”, Participant 29.*

Substance abuse seems to be a problem for learners, mostly for those who are aware of the restrictions of using substances on school grounds. Some learners indicated that they are unable to smoke during tests and exams. It seems that dealing with the craving of substances during school hours poses a challenge to the learners and seems to affect their school attendance as expressed by most the learners.

#### Sub-theme 5: Inter-parental conflict (separation or divorce)

Participants seemed to have a hard time expressing personal problems such as parental divorce since this might expose how their household situation stood, however, when the group seemed more supportive than ignorant, the learner felt empathised with than judged. Only a few learners over all the focus groups felt open enough to discuss the effect of parental separation.

*“I had a very big problem last year, I decided that since I was 19 I wanted to come and stay at Manini (village in which the school is located). I had decided that I would like to stay with my mom. So, when I was here with my mom, my dad kept calling me to come back home. I just didn’t know if it was because I was the only son or because he was left alone, and that used to stress me out when I was this side, it gave me a problem because I wanted to be with my mom more because my mom and I had never stayed together. So, I came to one of the teachers here, we spoke and I had a clear understanding. I forget it sometimes but at times those thoughts just come back especially during the times that I need serious help because when I speak to my dad about the help I need, he will tell me that I left him and he wants me home. He helps me after he tells me about coming back home. That stresses me out”, Participant 40.*

Learners who were faced with separation of their parents expressed that they felt like tearing themselves into half to please both parents. The separation of learners’ parents results to negligence of learners as parents try to carry on with their lives, leaving the child in a needy situation.

*“I have a big problem, when I was still around six years, I was going to another school then in Tshakhuma, so my mother and father went to work far in Gauteng so I moved and stayed with my grandmother. So, my grandmother didn’t like me because I was born with a twin sister and my grandmother loved my twin sister. So, my grandmother told me that she doesn’t like me, she likes my twin. So, I went and stayed with my parents, after some time my parents separated, I don’t know what happened. So, I had to come and stay with my grandmother. As a child, I liked to stay with both parents and my father took good care of me, but what will my grandmother say when I am visiting my father. This weekend my father called and told me that he wanted to buy me clothes but I am afraid to accept them because I am afraid of what my grandmother will say since I don’t stay with my*

*Dad. I have years without seeing my father and that oppresses me. My mom got married, it hurts me because my mother is the one who was supposed to be providing for me. Every time I ask my mother for assistance she will always tell me that she doesn't have money and I realised that I can get help from my father but I cannot ask from my father because my grandmother won't like it", Participant 42.*

Conclusively, the participants expressed the problems of parental separation as a 'big problem' because they realised the extent at which the problem of not staying with both parents affects them. They are aware that the case is different and much more difficult. This problem created stress in the lives of these learners.

#### Sub-theme 6: Child Maltreatment

Findings show that some learners defined problems such as maltreatment at home and more especially at school. The frequency of such problems among learners revealed the intensity of the problem as it goes beyond the learners to control the situation. The perpetrators go beyond physical harm to humiliating the learners by exposing the girls' undergarments in the public space during such acts.

*"The teachers here are too personal instead of being professional... you get me. they deal with such things. They are even able to beat a learner with a clap or kick a learner and they can beat learners on the buttocks with their hands and girls aren't supposed to be beaten on the buttocks, especially by men but here you will find that happening", Participant 35.*

Learners try to show how hard they have been battling with such a recurrent problem with no success and how it brings shame and resentment upon them. The researcher avers that problems such as these may develop into bigger problems later in life if not dealt with properly. Problems in general need special attention from the right people (meaning people with the expertise to help).

#### Sub-theme 7: Other problems

The results show that other problems faced by a few number of learners include sexual harassment, low self-esteem, grieving for a loved one, anger management which leads



to fighting with other learners, abuse that takes place at home and career stress or subject stress. These problems were unique as it only a few learners expressed them.

*“My problem is that there are older and taller boys who come to my class and start pulling and pushing me around when I have not done or said anything to them. They threaten to beat me and even touch my private area”, Participant 9.*

*“If one has a low self-esteem, how can one help oneself to build it up? And to become confident?” Participant 26.*

*“Sometimes you find a learner comes to school with bruises and you can see that the learner has been beaten from where they come from and the learner is hurt. In class during the lesson, you find that learner crying. She doesn’t like talking to anyone, it’s like she is always afraid and when we have to make speeches in class she’s always looking down as if she has a low self-esteem”, Participant 33.*

*“I think another problem I see a lot around the school is that many learners choose subjects that are not for them such as Science and then when they fail, they want to change to another subject such as History and I think it’s a waste of time”, Participant 26.*

*“The problem that I would like to share now is not my own problem but a problem that is being faced by my friend. My friend has a short temper and when he gets angry he likes to fight, he gets angered over very mundane things and ends up beating people right here at school which makes me wonder if he is just not persistent on things that bore him. He is the type that if you make a mistake and step on him, you will say everything that day”, Participant 41.*

*“He has lost his parents, sometimes he sits at a corner singing”, Participant 42.*

The researcher can therefore conclude that the problems experienced by learners at secondary school are bullying, peer pressure, sexual harassment, addiction, anxiety, low self-esteem, stress from parental divorce or separation, grief, anger management, abuse, career stress/subject stress and unwanted thoughts.

### **4.3.2 Theme 2: The experience of learners when seeking for psychological services at their public secondary schools and the effectiveness of the services**

The results of the entire group discussions revealed that most participants were aware that when they are experiencing problems, it is for their own benefit to seek help. However, they categorised problems that needed help seeking efforts as those that are difficult to deal on their own or recurrent stressful problems. Seeking help is an important stage towards problem solving. This stage may yield positive or negative results. Learners who may experience negative results during help-seeking may have a negative attitude towards help-seeking in the future. During data collection, participants expressed their experience towards help-seeking. They expressed the availability of reliable sources of help at school and the effectiveness of these sources.

#### Sub-theme 1: Availability of reliable sources of help at school

Some schools are better equipped to handle problems faced by the learners than others as they have school counsellors, nurses or guidance teachers. In my study, however, findings confirm that majority of learners indicated that there were no specific places or nominated persons (such as a school nurse or school teacher) who are tasked to deal with problems that they could visit at any given time. However, many participants explained that they select a teacher or staff member whom they believe fits best to assist them with their problems. This may be a teacher who they get along better with in terms of academics, meaning the learner probably performs better under the teacher's subject or the teacher is a relative or the teacher is simply approachable or a kind principal who is feared by teachers and is in the best position to deal with their problems.

*"We do not have a school nurse or a nominated school teacher to deal with our problems but there are two of those teachers who seem understanding, whom you can trust to go and sit down and speak to them. Actually, it depends, as we know there are those teachers who like you and those who don't, favour is the one that will help you. If the teacher likes you he/she will help you but if she doesn't like you, she'll be out of reach", Participant 39.*

The learners explained that for them to get help, they should make the effort of choosing the right candidate to help them since there is no place or persons put in place at their

disposal. This can be a problem since the person of choice can be unequipped for the job. Many learners were concerned about the confidentiality of the person they select to help them with their problems.

*“We can go to the principal; the only problem is that you might hear other people talking about your problem.... the problem is that you can tell him something in private, but you will find him saying that in public”, Participant 32.*

The above quote is an example of how majority of learners felt when they expressed how unreliable the sources of help are to them because the staff members are not equipped of the ethics involved during problem solving or counselling. Learners expressed problem solving efforts as another problem because of the risk it involves, that is, finding your problems being discussed by other people. This is a stressful and discouraging situation when trying to receive a solution for a pressing problem.

There were very few learners who expressed the availability of a nominated person that all the learners were permitted and at liberty to visit at any time.

*“We have a nominated person who is the School Confidante, she is the LO teacher and we go to her if we have problems”, Participant 7.*

These learners are a few of those learners who are privileged to have a teacher who is equipped to help them with their problems. Learners agreed that the school confidante brings a positive change at school.

*“I think she brings in good change into the school. I think I would go to her if there was a problem I couldn’t handle such as being abused or raped”, Participant 8.*

The participants expressed a sense of trust unto the teacher but trust with conditions to the type of problem consulted for. They again expressed a sense of incapability towards the nominated source.

*“I think learners don’t prefer going to her because they trust other professionals. They don’t believe that she has the capacity or capability to resolve their problems. Learners would rather go to the principal than to the school confidante”, Participant*

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The participants' doubt was due to the disrespect that other learners have shown towards the teacher in comparison to the respect that has been displayed to the principal and this affected their confidence towards the capabilities of the source of help.

Sub-theme 2: Effectiveness of problem solving by the sources of help

A few learners were in the position to discuss this theme due to the lack of experience they had with seeking help from the available sources of help. A few of the participants relied on the experience of other learners who had attempted to seek help from the sources available. A small number of those who attempted to seek help themselves did not present a positive outcome to their efforts.

*“Sometimes the teacher will be teaching and you will try to tell him your problem and he will just ignore you and continue teaching”, Participant 22.*

The learners expressed their vain attempts of receiving solutions to their problem. Other participant expressed the experience of other learners as narrated hereunder:

*“There was a learner who had a problem and told it to her mother, the mother came to the school to enquire, so after that when the learner needed help from the teachers even for academic reasons, the teachers would tell her that we can't speak to you about anything because you will go and report the matter to your mother”, Participant 33.*

Like in the case above, some learners explained how seeking help had a disadvantageous consequence that placed them in trouble with the source of help instead of producing positive outcomes. This outcome may very well discourage the learners' future attempts to help-seeking. I can therefore conclude that the experience of learners towards help-seeking has been a dreadful experience and their level of confidence towards the available sources of help was poor. Therefore, the effectiveness of help-seeking behaviour has generated poor results and it can be expected that the future help-seeking attempts by learners will be minimal.

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Experiences of learners regarding interventions from the government aiming or attempting to assist them with their problems

Government has a large role to play in learners' education, especially in government schools. It would be ignorant for the government to lack interventions in place to assist learners when they need help in solving their problems. After the discussions, results showed that majority of learners indicated that there were government agents who had visited their schools. The learners mentioned two groups of government organisations in particular, the Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP) that mostly discuss HIV and AIDS and a group of social workers who introduced where they were based and the services that they offer. Participants explained that these two organisations came only once a year and did not offer any type of counselling, but they equipped them with knowledge.

*"We get people from TVEP and social workers maybe, once every year",*  
Participant 8.

*"They speak to us about substance abuse and they also taught us about the ABC of sexual intercourse. They gave us pamphlets of HIV and AIDS",* Participant 7.

The learners were least vocal and unsure during this stage of discussions, perhaps they did not seem to remember what transpired during the visit of agents from governmental programs since these agents came once a year. However, the learners were positive about the intentions of the visits although they did not tackle their psychological problems. Only a few learners mentioned that they did not receive any visitation from the agents of government programmes.

*"No, we haven't received anyone",* Group 5 responding all at once.

*"There were guys who came last year but they were just former matriculants who were not even in varsity yet and they were laughing at us telling us that we were still young."* Participant 35

A minimal number of participants spoke negatively about a policeman who they believed was an agent of the government, sent to assist them with problems.

*“There is a local policeman who helps deal with the problems of the community, they even ask him to come to school if there is a problem, but the problem is that he first wants to sleep with you”, Participant 18.*

The participants expressed victimization before receiving any form of help from the government agent. It is clear that there was abuse of power in this instance and learners fell prey of their vulnerability.

It can therefore be concluded that not all learners had the experience of government interventions since some groups explained that they did not receive any visit from the government agents. For those who did receive visitation and had some experience of the interventions that took place, none of the interventions focused on reducing psychological problems of learners either for a brief period or in the long run. All interventions were brief and only lasted a day for the entire year which was not an effective strategy because most learners seemed to find it difficult to recall what transpired during that day.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Self applied coping strategies used by learners**

Results revealed that some learners preferred more than one strategy as a way of feeling better and reducing tension. The strategies will be named according to frequency, however, there were few common strategies used by the learners. To further clarify, the order will not be based on any importance scale but due to frequency.

Several learners mentioned that they spoke to a friend or a family member for advice as a strategy to solve their problems. Others described instrumental strategies such as singing and playing guitar as forms of coping strategies.

*“I prefer to sit down with my mother and explain to her what I am feeling so that she can help me where she can”, Participant 18.*

*“Sometimes I just lock the door and sing for myself then I dance wild, some days I play music and dance”, Participant 9.*

Nevertheless, there were others who said they preferred listening to music, playing games or watching television. Others sleep to feel better. Others wrote in their diaries. Others hoped and believed in God to help them. Others cry, ignore, or kept the anger

inside. Others exercise or go running. Very few participants say they eat a lot to feel better.

*“I sleep or I watch TV”, Participant 31.*

*“I write in my diary,” Participant 12.*

*“I believe that God is alive, if I am facing a problem.... what I prefer is praying, praying gives consciousness to the people who are perhaps oppressing you in life. Out of my own experience, I have seen it but through prayer, things just vanish”, Participant 13.*

*“I cry to feel better”, Participant 33.*

*“The teachers won’t help you and because there isn’t anyone you can trust to help you; you just ignore it until you forget”, Participant 35.*

*“When I have a problem... I can play a game or listen to music. Besides that, I can go running, I’m the type of person who loves running”, Participant 41.*

To the researcher, it would seem like most of these strategies are efforts to release the tension building inside or efforts to distract oneself from dealing with the problem at hand, which can seem effective but only temporarily. Not dealing with the problem is not solving the problem and this does not make the situation better.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Problems experienced by learners at secondary school are bullying, peer pressure, sexual harassment, addiction, anxiety, low self-esteem, stress from parental divorce or separation, grief, anger management, abuse, career stress and unwanted thoughts. However, the learners make attempts to find solutions, their attempts fail when the sources are unreliable and the outcomes of problem solving fail them. Government attempts are not aimed at dealing with their psychological problems but aim mainly at reducing social problems. Learners therefore resort to solving problems on their own which involves poorly equipped skills of resolving problems which may not deal with the problem at hand.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY RESULTS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, a summary of study results is discussed and interpreted. Participants' insights and scholars' concepts come together to provide a detailed summary of the study aim and objectives. This chapter forms the basis concrete results which are in support of other researchers.

### **5.2 Socio-demographic information**

The study consisted of seven focus groups derived from all the seven public secondary schools under Luvuvhu circuit. This was important in ensuring that concrete information regarding psychological services in schools is gathered. Each focus group was intended to have six participants which was the case of all focus groups besides the third focus group that had nine participants instead. It was necessary to have both genders in the groups to enable the researcher to get perceptions emerging on the help-seeking behaviours of both genders. The study participants were Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners. Their ages ranged from 15 years to 19 years, however, age was not considered a variable when selecting participants but it was determined after selecting the specific grades. This was important since the researcher wanted to determine problems faced by learners in the highest grades, the idea was, because they spend more time in similar settings, they are more likely to share similar problems. Furthermore, most studies such as that of Weiss (2013) and Levine (2017) found that adolescence is the most vulnerable group to problems, and they experience the most challenges during help-seeking behaviour and when reaching out to psychological services.

### **5.3 Emerging themes**

#### **5.3.1 Problems faced by learners at secondary school**

The study results revealed that majority of learners faced two main problems which are, peer pressure and bullying amongst the others. Bullying was inflicted by teachers or other learners, however, it was confirmed that bullying by teachers was of greater concern to



the learners than bullying by learners. Other problems faced by a few of the learners were addiction to substances, anxiety, inter-parental conflict and low self-esteem.

#### 5.3.1.1 Peer pressure

The outcomes of the study revealed that peer pressure seemed to be one of the major problems faced by learners. Pressure was in terms of whether one should engage in substance abuse, alcohol or intimate relationships as opposed to what they had been taught by their parents and teachers. The pressure faced by learners of changing values to serve their peers' interests has been clarified by Korir and Kipkemboi (2004) when they state that peer pressure is when peers pressurise one to change one's value system towards the groups value system which could be engaging in substance use. Ungar's (2000) explanation affirms this by stating that learners compete with the values of their parents, teachers, other professionals and the community at large to identify who they are and the results are dire not only to the adolescent's self-esteem, but also to their survival. This is in line with the Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977) as discussed earlier in the study. This theory states that the learners' behaviour is influenced by the behaviour as observed and accepted by members of groups deemed models by the child and therefore, those behaviours pressurise the learners to suppress their values and follow the behaviours of their role models.

The type of pressure that learners were mostly concerned with was the negative type of peer pressure which stemmed mostly from the friends at school who were engaging in delinquent behaviour. Yuksel-Sahin (2014) explained such findings by differentiating positive and negative peer pressure and defining negative peer pressure, which is more common, as pressure inflicted by peers into pressurising one towards undesired behaviours and outcomes.

Findings revealed that learners felt threatened to be outcasts of the group and this for them was an undesirable outcome. They felt pressure to submit to school misconducts and substance abuse such as smoking, drinking alcohol and engaging in undesired intimate relationships. To concur with the findings and to substantiate this point, Ungar (2004) explains that adolescents feel that the association with peers protects them from the problem of being outcasts even if the association and identification is with

delinquency, and that being labelled an outcast is perceived as humiliating to such an extent that one's self-esteem is threatened and one could end up committing suicide.

#### 5.3.1.2 Bullying

From the study findings, learners emphasized bullying as a major problem at school. They are mostly concerned about the bullying perpetuated by their teachers and to some extent they were concerned about bullying inflicted by other learners at school. As Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) have explained, bullying occurs due to power differences between the perpetrator and the victim. Chabalala, Kgosimore and Sithole (2011) support the previous authors by stating that bullies hold more power than the victims in a way that the victims are defenceless, they use the advantage of being bigger than the victim, being taller, stronger, older or hold positions of authority.

The study findings revealed that the common forms of bullying were name calling, mean words, being ridiculed, activity isolation and spreading rumours. Chabalala et al. (2011) obtained similar results and concluded that bullying can occur in different ways such as teasing, being told mean words, name calling, sexual comments, exclusion from activities and many physical forms. Bullying either by a teacher or fellow learner gave the victim of bullying a sense of despair and worthlessness due to the inability to change the faulty nature that subjected them to the position of bullying in the first place. This resulted to some of the learners having suicide ideations in response to the despair that they encountered. Athanasiades and Deliyanni-Kouimtzis (2010) are in support of this finding by acknowledging that learners who are victims of bullying may begin to show a decline in self-esteem and in intense situations, a learner may commit suicide to escape from the situation.

Most literature gathered that the reason behind this behaviour was in response to abuse that occurs at home, that is, most learners who abuse other learners are victims of abuse themselves by a caregiver or sibling at home (Athanasiades & Deliyanni-Kouimtzis, 2010). As shown in chapter 2 of the theoretical framework, this was determined a while back in 1979 by Urie Bronfenbrenner who developed the ecological model that states that a child's behaviour is a product of the social environment they belong to or the structure of interactions they have within their immediate systems or settings. The interactions are

absorbed as behaviours, internalized and expressed in other settings. This means that when a child is abused at home, they are most likely to adopt that behaviour and express it in other environments such as the school setting. Without the school psychologist being present to correct this behaviour, the child may develop advanced violent behaviours that can make them outlaws in future (Burns, Warmbold-Brann & Zaslofsky, 2015).

#### 5.3.1.3 Anxiety and fear

Study results uncovered that learners were having problems with anxiousness and fear. The finding is in line with one obtained by Kabanga (2016), Hess (2014) and Van den Berg (2011) who explained that anxiety falls under the most common psychological problems among adolescent learners all over the world and it occurs much more often due to the overwhelming workload and strict deadlines that continue to build up in their academic lives. Learners revealed that they are confronted with test or examination anxiety, anxiety due to the teacher's presence and fear of other teachers and learners for unknown reasons. Chen, Chou, Tzeng, Chang, Kou, Pan, Yeh, Yeh and Mou, (2015) support this finding by expressing that problematic academic anxiety occurs in learners due to the increased time spent in preparing for tests, assignments, oral presentations and exams.

Learners expressed that when they are anxious about a test, they tend to be more forgetful than when they are relaxed and this affects their test performance. The results are supported by Owens et al. (2014) who assert that elevated levels of anxiety have a clear correlation to poor performance on cognitive tests which in turn, affects the overall academic attainment or success of the learner. This will therefore affect the possibility of entry to universities and colleges. No theory was used to support this finding.

#### 5.3.1.4 Addiction

Addiction is a common problem experienced by majority of secondary school learners, this finding is line with one revealed by Hammond, Mayes, Potenza (2015) who state that adolescence is associated with risk for substance abuse and addiction and this is due to the inability to connect current behaviours to future consequences. Addiction can also be another example of the Social Learning Theory; where the learner imitates the behaviours

of substance abuse from their role models, just like their role models who become addicted and Bronfenbrenners' Ecological theory; where the learner is subject to the influences of the parent, community or peers that use or substances and regard it as normal, trying to fit in, and they become victims of addiction.

The researcher identified that most addicted learners dissociate themselves from addictive behaviour and this has also been identified by Morrisson (1990) who explains that it is rather difficult to make an early diagnosis of an adolescent suffering from addiction because they may display symptoms of denial.

As discovered in section 2 and explained in the beginning of this subsection, learners indicate reasons for substance use as mostly to be accepted by their peer groups (Skuse et al., 2011). This finding is similar to that of Bandura who explains that the learners adopt some behaviour from observing those of their role model and once the behaviour is accepted by the role model, it becomes reinforced.

Furthermore, as addiction progresses, the adolescent develops a change in priority of the activities deemed important previously which impacts on learning and increases in denial. Chapman and Rokutani (2005) agrees with this and explain that a decrease in motivation to learn is evident and this is due to the negative impact that substances have on memory and the ability to concentrate resulting in more instances of absence in classes.

#### 5.3.1.5 Inter-parental conflict (separation or divorce)

A few learners expressed the level distress that parental divorce and separation has on their lives. They felt like they could not please both parents as both parents wished to have custody over them. This finding is in accordance to that of Wolman and Taylor (1991) who explained that custody disputed among parents warrants emotional instabilities on the children of divorced or separated parents. Bronfenbenner's theory explains the effects of divorce within the Microsystem on the child's development stemming from the conflict of the parents, which makes the child upset with the world and expresses these emotions on other systems that he/she may interact with. The researcher agrees that tension between parents can bring major changes in the household that was once a stable environment (Microsystem) and thus affect the

development of the child. A study performed by Fotheringham, Dunbar and Hensley (2013) supports the statement by acknowledging that children exposed to custody disputes by parents, are confronted with excessive trauma, which includes depression, aggressive behaviour, social maladjustments, academic challenges and suicidal attempts.

Findings revealed that most learners whose parents had separated had to stay with their grandparents. For some learners, this arrangement was undesirable because they felt that they were being neglected by their parents and that their needs were not catered for, they expressed that this was because of the influence of the parent towards the grandparent who did not show any affection and sense of responsibility towards them. Atter-Schwartz and Fuller-Thomson (2017) elaborate on these findings by explaining that grandparents usually take over while the parent is dealing with the emotional distress of the divorce. Furthermore, the parent determines the success of the grandchild and the grandparent bond because the parent acts as a mediator between the grandparent and the grandchild when the parent tries to provide communication between them and opens an opportunity for the grandparent to learn the grandchild's character.

#### 5.3.1.5 Low self-esteem

Low self-esteem is one of the study outcomes from what learners viewed as a problem in their lives. Learners explained that they were concerned about the ability of one to improve their self-esteem to feel confident. Learners associated confidence with the ability to withstand peer pressure. Cheng and Furnham (2017) agree to the finding by explaining that low self-esteem has a significant correlation with peer pressure and that low self-esteem subjects one to peer pressure and the inability to handle stress. Furthermore, low self-esteem can be an influence on the development of depression, and it can also prolong depression. The Social Learning Theory has a high correlation to this subject, indicating that as learners observe their peer role models, they tend to imitate their behaviour. If the peer role model is involved in delinquent behaviour, the learner may be pressured to imitate the same delinquent behaviour (Mathys, Vitaro & Born, 2012).

The researcher found that low self-esteem falls under both categories of sources of problems and consequences of a problem. This is because learners seem to express low

self-esteem as a consequence of a problem and also as a cause of the problem, for example, a consequence of bullying resulting in low self-esteem. This outcome agrees with Cheng and Furnham's (2017) findings that low self-esteem is also a state of outcome or consequence and not only a condition of cause, that is, low self-esteem may occur due to a poor socioeconomic background, being subjected to physical and sexual abuse or being physically challenged.

#### 5.3.1.6 Child maltreatment

Learners revealed that abuse is a reality in their lives. Learners face physical abuse and neglect from caregivers. They have explained the extent it in which it affects their academic and social lives to a point where they cannot focus in class and cannot have social conversations with their friends due to the trauma and emotional build up. These findings are in relation to the outcomes of Oh and Song (2017); Lina et al. (2016) and Spann et al. (2012) who revealed that the effects of abuse are so traumatic that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has issued a warning against child maltreatment and it further stressed the seriousness of such social issues due to the tremendous psychological effects it has on the overall development of the child. Child maltreatment (physical abuse and neglect) on adolescents is so dire and may have long lasting consequences upon their entire life, this can be explained by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, as briefly described under the divorce subsection of this chapter, that the conflict in the Microsystem has ripple effects on other systems. Furthermore, Oh and Song (2017) explained that extreme psychological effects such as depression and anxiety have been reported as an impact of abused adolescents. Abused adolescents stand a higher chance of committing suicide, emotional instability, behavioural problems and impacts in cognitive functioning and being perpetrators of abuse themselves as underpinned by the Social Learning Theory (Lina et al., 2016).

#### 5.3.1.7 Other problems

According to the findings of the study, other least frequent problems include sexual harassment, grieving a loved one, anger management which led to fighting with other learners, abuse that took place at home, undesired thoughts and career stress or subject stress. These problems were unique as it seemed that a few learners had expressed

them, therefore no theory was used to support each problem. However, Essel and Owusu (2017) argue that problems of such may cause significant stress on the adolescent learner and they may affect their eating and sleeping habits, self-esteem, health, elicit substance abuse, motivation to learn and have a negative impact on their well-being.

### **5.3.2 The experience of learners when seeking for help and their effectiveness**

Findings reveal that learners weigh problems during help-seeking. They perceive some problems as being more deserving to receive external help than others. Problems that they find difficult to solve themselves and those that keep recurring will encourage the learner to seek help. This is in line with Folkman and Lazarus's (as cited in Yusoff, 2010) findings that explain that learners may seek help when they observe that they may attain a solution from another source called problem-focused coping, or if the adolescent observes the problem being one that a solution cannot be obtained by another source of help and he or she should endure and then focus on accepting the situation, this is called emotion-focused coping. The researcher acknowledges that learners know the importance of receiving help, however the scale of measuring which problems can yield solutions from a helper may be based on intuition and not knowledge.

#### **5.3.2.1 Availability of reliable sources of help at school**

The outcomes of the study findings were skewed towards the unavailability of psychological services within the school premises, this includes the unavailability of nominated school nurses or schoolteachers (where school nurses are completely unavailable) to help learners with their problems. This confirms the researcher's idea to conduct this study to help combat the lack of psychological services at public secondary schools. Mashau et al (2008) obtained similar results that confirm that only a very few schools in the country offer psychological services. Schools that prioritise psychological services are mostly private schools and not public schools. However, this is not in line with what the ministers of the Department of Health and Basic Education (2010) have reported when they stated that mental health services are currently being offered by school health nurses employed by schools and form part of the school staff.

Nevertheless, learners have explained that they put it upon themselves to seek out for help from a suitable and understanding teacher who can be kind enough or willing to assist them with their problems. Learners have explained that the choice of the teacher to provide help is important since it is possible that the teacher may dismiss them during the attempt to seek out for help from them. Teachers usually offer support under the following conditions; if they get along with the learner in terms of academics, meaning the learner probably performs better under the teachers' subject; the teacher is a family relative to the learner; the teacher is simply approachable or a kind principal who is feared by teachers and is in the best position to deal with their problems.

There were very few learners who expressed that they had a Life Orientation teacher available to help them deal with problems, known as the school Confidante. This is one of the interventions adopted from the Department of Education of South Africa (2010) that considers a School-Based Support Team led by the school principal and managed by the Life Orientation teacher or Life-Skills teacher, they guide the rest of the team through the integrated health policy activities. It can be concluded that this intervention is being seldom practiced in schools since only a few learners have knowledge and experience of such a program.

#### 5.3.2.2 Effectiveness of problem solving by the sources of help

A small number of learners who did not have a structured intervention of problem solving, who attempted to seek help themselves from the teachers that were not nominated to help students did not present a positive outcome to their efforts. This finding is in line with the outcomes of Basch (2011) who described the current situation in most schools as that of the DOE and teachers being negligent and being disappointing towards the learners. On the other hand, learners who had psychological services present in the form of a Life Orientation teacher reported positive outcomes and appreciation of having a source of help present to help them deal with their problems. To concur with this finding, Garmy et al. (2015) avow that proper psychological interventions at schools like the DISA programme has positive impacts on learners shown by the outcomes that the programme delivered. That is, learners presented a positive response in addition to a positive well-being, when proper psychological structures are developed within schools.



However, learners who had the experience of relying on the Life orientation teacher presented issues of trust towards the teacher. Learners felt that they were not sure about or comfortable with the confidentiality of their issues when being discussed with the teacher and whether the teacher could resist any temptations to share their issues with other teachers or other learners who may threaten the teacher to share confidential information of other learners with them. Rickwood et al. (2005) agrees and explained this finding as a fear of stigma which also relates to fears regarding the confidentiality of professional services. To explain this further, Rickwood et al. (2005) found that some learners in developed countries such as the United States of America feel that school counsellors' offices are often located in public locations, such as near the cafeteria or the front entrance to the school, and that this is a barrier to going there. Basch (2011) states that the solution is for the teachers to make use of databases that contain knowledge, well-structured approaches available to them to influence in their decision making and providing the most effective practices including confidentiality ethics towards counselling programmes in their schools.

### **5.3.3 Learners' experience of the interventions from the government aiming or attempting to assist them with their problems**

The outcomes of the study showed that majority of learners explained that there were government agents who had visited their schools. The learners mentioned two groups of government organisations, the Thohoyandou Victim Empowerment Programme (TVEP) that mostly discussed HIV and AIDS and a group of social workers who introduced where they were based and the services they offered. Coming from a decade where HIV and AIDS was an epidemic, it is not surprising that the topic was of importance. Participants also explained that these two organisations came only once a year and did not offer any type of counselling, but they equipped them with some knowledge, meaning that these statements are not in line with what was reported by the ministers, because according to Motsoaledi and Motshekga (2010), the government of South Africa has pledged that the World Education Forum be integrated within the school system which is responsible for the provision of basic components which include construction of health-related policies, healthy physical learning surrounding and safe sanitation and water, education on health,

nutrition and school-based health services. These services ensure that the learners have access to public health services and the reduction of poverty interventions for the learners to realise the rights of the learners.

The integrated school health policies regard the following programmes in terms of service delivery to the learners based on their health: The Health Promoting Schools Initiative, HIV Testing and Counselling, South African National Oral health Strategy, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy Guidelines and Integrated Nutrition Programme. The researcher can conclude that these school health policies and programmes are currently being offered by school health nurses employed by the schools and form part of the school staff (Motsoaledi & Motshekga, 2010). Therefore, it is clear that there is an incongruency between what the DOE had reported a few years earlier and what is currently taking place.

#### **5.3.4 Self-applied coping strategies used by learners**

Findings reveal that learners use different strategies when dealing with problems on their own. They may speak to a friend or a family member for advice as a strategy to solve their problems. The researcher believes that these strategies are to some extent effective. Goa, Chub, Barlas and Chong (2017) confirm this by explaining that learners may seek out the help of a family member such as a sister, brother, mother, father or grandparents when they are experiencing problems and seeking such help has been associated with improved well-being. Richwood, Mazzer and Telford (2015) are also in agreement with the former scholars by stating that adolescents prefer informal support rather than formal services when seeking help for mental health problems. When facing problems, younger adolescents usually seek help from their parents.

Results also disclose that other learners prefer instrumental strategies such as singing and playing the guitar whereas others said that they preferred listening to music, playing games or watching Television. Others said they sleep to feel better. Others wrote in their diaries. Others hoped and believed in God to help them and others cry. Others exercise or go running. Very few participants said that they eat a lot to feel better. Eating to feel better indicates a potential for eating disorders that may develop later in life as a coping strategy to deal with problems.

Goa, Chub, Barlas and Chong (2017) explained this as the individual level of problem-solving strategies and this has been associated with adolescents. The former scholars explained that adolescents may prefer speaking to a sister, mother, father or grandparents, depending on the type and strength of their relationship. Seeking help from a caregiver has been associated with improved well-being in maltreated adolescents. When support is provided by a caregiver, less depressive symptoms and drug use has been reported. Instead, they build constructive relationships with their peers due to increased level of confidence and self-esteem.

Other learners explained that they used ignorance or kept the anger inside. This finding is in agreement with that found by Eftekhari, Turner and Larimer (2004) that most adolescents are victims of poor tension reduction strategies, which include ignoring the problem till it fades away, avoiding dealing with the problem, modelling the perpetrator, denial and suppressing the problem and carrying on with life as if the problem does not exist, and according to them, these poor coping strategies may result in long term psychological and psychosocial maladjustments.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

Objectives of the study have been satisfied and the outcomes of the group discussions were discussed. It has been concluded that the provision of psychological services at public secondary schools is highly significant as it will improve the academic performances and attainments of secondary school learners. Findings revealed that implementation towards health services including mental and physical health services in secondary schools remain poor and changes should be made if academic achievements are to be improved.

Without psychologists being present at public secondary schools, learners are more likely to internalize inappropriate behaviours and express them without being fully realised and corrected by professionals. As indicated by the theory of Bronfenbrenner, the influence of interactions by members of a specific system hold the greatest influence of the outcome of the child's behaviour. Without the influence of psychologists, learners are subject to developmental maladjustment

## **CHAPTER 6: LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This final chapter concludes the research report by examining the significance of psychological services on secondary school learners at Luvuvhu circuit. The chapter explores the limitations of the study, the implications and recommendations for further research.

### **6.2 Summary of findings**

Objective 1: To identify problems faced by learners in public secondary schools

Based on the findings of the study, learners in the public secondary schools at the Luvuvhu Circuit, Thulamela municipality, face a lot of different and life altering problems in their lives which adversely affect their academic performance and social interaction with other learners. Problems faced by learners in public secondary schools include peer pressure, bullying, anxiety and fear, inter-parental conflict (divorce or separation), low self-esteem, child maltreatment and other least frequent problems which include sexual harassment, grieving for a loved one, anger management which leads to fighting with other learners, undesired thoughts and career stress or subject stress. Learners highlighted how these problems affect their relationships and their academic performance.

Objective 2: To identify the psychological services offered in public secondary schools and the effectiveness of these services

The response to this objective presented an alarming outcome towards the availability of psychological services within the school premises. Despite the unavailability of school counsellors or social workers, it is evident that most schools fell in the statistics of unavailability of nominated school nurses or school teachers (where school nurses are completely unavailable) to help learners with their problems. Only one school out of all the schools in the circuit had a nominated teacher, a Life Orientation teacher who was

then referred to as a School Confidante who provide the basic psychological services to learners in need of such basic services.

In majority schools where psychological services are completely unavailable, learners put it upon themselves to seek out for help from a suitable and understanding teacher who can be kind enough or show the willingness to assist them in solving their problems. The issue with this form of help-seeking behaviour is that only a few learners had the initiative to approach teachers with their problems and only a few teachers were willing to assist learners with their problems. Learners who were able to approach teachers had the courage to do so because of the readily developed academic relationships they had with the teachers since the learner performed well under the teachers' subject, leaving learners who present extreme cases of mental illnesses by failing the all-academic subjects unable to pick a teacher who can assist them due to lack of commonality and leaving them unattended.

Objective 3: To identify the interventions put by the Department of Education in South Africa

It is grieving to discover that problems are rarely being attended to by the Department of Education, since the department only sends its agents to learners with knowledge, but do not to assist them with the problems that they face to such an extent that learners have to find ways on their own to cope with pressing problems and yet continue with their normal academic routines. The services provided by the DOE include HIV and AIDS education and minimal education services provided by social workers. These forms of intervention do nothing to assist learners with the problems they have but only adds more items on the list of education. Although President Jacob Zuma announced that mental health services and physical health services are crucial for learners in secondary schools and that they are currently being offered by school nurses in designated schools, this is skewed to the outcomes of the study since many schools still lack counsellors and school nurses up to date.

Objective 4: To determine the coping strategies used by learners

Learners use a range of coping strategies to deal with problems, ranging from effective strategies to ineffective ones. Majority of learners use what is called the individual level of problem solving where they consider speaking to a friend or a family member for advice as the highest level of problem solving, this strategy is an effective way of dealing with the problem. The individual level of problem solving may extend to emotion-focused strategies where learners indicated that they prefer listening to music, playing games or watching Television. Others sleep to feel better. Others write in their diaries, others hope and believe in God to help them and others cry. Others exercise or go running. Very few learners eat a lot to feel better. These strategies are deemed ineffective as they may increase chances of learners developing depression later. The most gruesome coping strategies used by learners include ignoring the problem till it fades away or keeping the anger inside until it subsides, these poor coping strategies may result in long-term psychological and psychosocial maladjustments and a future with psychologically ill citizens and parents with poor coping strategies to offer the next generation of learners.

### **6.3 Limitations of the study**

- Some learners felt uncomfortable to share their problems with the group even if they were permitted to express the problems as a friend's problems, thus, suitable modifications such as using Face-to-face interviews during data collection is important to enhance anonymity and confidence in sharing personal problems and therefore, increasing the quality of data collected.
- Information that supported the study was mostly international due to the under implementation of psychological services in the schools of South Africa.

### **6.4 Implications for future research**

- Based on research findings, there is a need to conduct further research on teachers' perception on the availability of psychological services in schools.
- It will also be imperative for research to be conducted on the effectiveness and challenges that teachers are faced with as they attempt to assist learners with psychological problems.

- During the process of data collection, it appears that the bullying experienced by learners due to teachers was a more pressing issue for the learners as this topic emerged often.
- Results of the current study indicate that majority of students develop test anxiety which may negatively affect them and their studies. Based on this, there is a need for research on the relationship between anxiety and academic achievement because it is one area that is hugely affected by anxiety among learners.
- Learners have indicated that when they have problems, be it psychological, educational or social, in many cases they are referred to Life Orientation teachers who are not that efficient when it comes to helping them. A possible research topic on the effectiveness of LO teachers in assisting learners needs to be probed further.
- There is very scarce research conducted under this topic and further research is crucial, especially in rural areas such as Limpopo.

## 6.5 Recommendations

Recommendations directed to the DOE:

- The Department of Education should ensure that teachers who teach Life Orientation and are tasked with the responsibility of assisting learners with psychological issues have Psychology as a major in their degree studies. This will enable them to recognise affected learners, assist them where they can and be aware when referrals are necessary. In future, teachers who are tasked with this responsibility should be given specialized training on counselling skills.
- Given that there are no available nurses and psychology professional in school, the health desk of the Department of Education health desk should liaises with the Department of Health for the provision and improvement of health-services in schools.
- The Department of Education should consider placing one psychologist at each circuit level to assist learners who are facing problems in order to improve the pass rate of learners by curbing the problems that they face. It would be much more effective to implement psychological services from primary level so that learners gain trust towards psychological services from a young age.

- Department of Health and Social Development should visit schools more often to equip learners with knowledge and to also provide services that serve the interests of the learners such as health services.
- The district should follow-up on the Integrated School Health Policies that have been reported to operate in schools and ensure that the services operate in a smooth and effective way.

Recommendations directed to schools.

- Schools should have a separate room designed to be private where learners can freely speak to a teacher or school nurse for urgent matters when a psychologist cannot be available. This will also improve the confidence that learners have on the teachers and other professionals tasked to assist learners.
- School principals and teachers should have some psychological knowledge of the helper and helpee relationship, including the ethics involved by attending seminars and workshops in order to know how best to help learners where a psychologist cannot assist due to certain circumstances. Background knowledge on psychological services will also help teachers to pick up signs and symptoms of stress, maladjustments, depression and trauma on learners.
- School principals and teachers should also take the initiative to hold awareness campaigns and seminars that teach learners on the benefits of psychological services and interventions during challenging situations. This will help the learners to become aware of the importance of seeing a psychologist and to become familiarised with the process.
- Teachers should be pioneers of help. They should be the first step towards helping by picking up signs of stress and trauma and communicating with the psychologist in connection to a distressed learner.

It is therefore, the responsibility of the DOE to ensure that these recommendations reach the stakeholders and that the schools and learners receive psychological services from the circuit level. Principals should ensure that the teachers attend workshops designed to improve their knowledge on psychological services.



## 6.6 Conclusion

This research report was aimed at exploring the significance of psychological services on public secondary school learners at Luvuvhu Circuit, Thulamela municipality. The main objectives of this study were to identify the psychological services offered in secondary schools and their significance, to identify the interventions put in place by the Department of Education in South Africa and to also explore the coping strategies used by the learners. This study was motivated by reports of the increase in the failure rate at secondary school due to social and psychological problems faced by secondary school learners. Universities seem to have the appropriate psychological services in place for students to utilise (Lawrence, 2009), however, this does not seem to be the case for secondary school learners who are faced with extreme developmental crisis. Therefore, the study aimed at involving stakeholders from the Department of Education in collaboration with the Department of Health (DOH) to assist in providing adequate psychological services to secondary school learners.

The research is qualitative in nature with the use of Focus Group Discussions and semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling was applied and a sample of nine focus groups was found ideal by the researcher because of the need to gather detailed information on the significance of psychological services offered to secondary school learners at Luvuvhu Circuit. The sample was drawn from learners in grades 10 to 12 attending any of the nine public secondary schools in the Luvuvhu Circuit. Collected data was analysed using Thematic Content Analysis. The Main themes were each analysed. The findings relied on the data collection findings.

It is evident that learners face devastating problems, with most being a day to day situation without hope of any assistance. It is not surprising to discover that these problems not only affect their school performance and attainment, as circumstance of the inability to cope with the problems that they face but also their social relationships. Having to deal with the problems on their own indicates some of the less effective coping mechanisms used by learners in order to achieve some form of relief from the problems that they experience. Most problems are ignored by learners meaning that they internalise

most of these issues to be revealed later in their lives as it will then affect their roles in society, work places and families.

It can therefore be mentioned that urgency for psychological interventions is essential, not only are learners suffering at schools but, they are also struggling at all aspects of life. This need for psychological services to learners calls for even less intense levels of intervention to be undertaken immediately if problems faced by learners are to be curbed before any further damage to their psychological functioning. Schools need a collaboration of professionals that are ready to assist learners with any form of problem. Collaboration between the DOE, Department of Health and school role players is long overdue, therefore, teachers and principals may have to step in and become pioneers of psychological interventions by becoming equipped with the knowledge that will allow some skills towards implementing psychological services possible.

Parents should also be roped in through the process by inviting them to join hands in awareness campaigns hosted by teachers in collaboration with the DOE and DOH that highlight problems faced by learners and equip them with effective strategies that will assist their relationship with their children.

For the future, the need to provide school psychologists and nurses in every school is important. If learners' mental health and physical health should be taken care of, the DOE and DOH should come into play and ensure that every learner receives proper assistance to attaining academic achievements and well-being from professionals that are well positioned in providing mental health and physical health services necessary for learners' future.

It can therefore be concluded that the implementation of psychological services at public secondary schools in Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela municipality, is not only highly significant, but urgent, not only for the interest of the learners to attain academic achievements but also for the future interest and academic success of the country.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Permission letter

Date

Mr. X

Head of School

Address

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Mr. X:

I am requesting for permission to conduct a research study at your school with your learners. I am currently enrolled at the University of Venda, School of Health Sciences, Department of Psychology, and I am in the process of writing my master's thesis. The study is entitled "The significance of psychological services on public secondary school learners in Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela municipality." I have received permission from the circuit manager and has promised to be in contact with you.

With your consent, I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit 6 learners (mixed genders), from grade 10, 11 and 12, 2 learners per grade, to form part of 1 focus group and to anonymously respond and discuss 4 semi-structured interview questions (copy enclosed). Interested students who volunteer to participate will be given a consent form to be signed by them (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the interview process.

If approval is granted, student respondents will participate in the focus group discussion in a classroom or other quiet setting on the school site during the long break and school time, and I therefore ask for permission for the use of this time as well. The survey process should take no longer than 1 hour. The survey results will be pooled for the thesis project and individual results of this study will remain confidential and anonymous. Should this

study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your school/center or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at 082 220 4214.

If you agree, kindly sign below and submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this survey/study at your School.

Sincerely,

Negota Tshilidzi, Research Psychology Masters student

Enclosures

cc: Mr Rambani, Circuit Manager

Approved by:

.....

.....

.....

Print your name and title here

Signature

Date

## Appendix 2: Information letter

Dear Research Participant

I Negota Tshildzi Diana, a registered student at the University of Venda am currently studying towards Master of Psychology degree. I am conducting a study under the topic: *“The significance of psychological services on public secondary school learners in Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela municipality.”*

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of psychological services on learners at their respective public secondary schools located within Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela municipality.

I am therefore, asking for your active participation in the study. This consent form is not a legally binding contract, but it is proof of voluntary participation by the participant. There is no payment for participating in the study, but participation will be highly appreciated. All information collected during the interview will be kept strictly confidential and a participant’s identity will be kept anonymous. The study will not pose any harm to the participants as they are required to give their knowledge on the study topic.

Please sign in the provided space as proof of consent to participate in the study.

.....

.....

Signature of Participant

Date

Your participation will be highly appreciated.

I therefore confirm that I have debriefed the participant of all details concerning the research and have not withheld any information.

.....

.....

Signature of the Researcher

Date

### Appendix 3: Consent form

I.....hereby consent to participate in the research study entitled, “*The significance of psychological services on public secondary school learners in Luvuvhu circuit, Thulamela municipality*”. I understand that I participate voluntarily and without being coerced to participate. I also understand that I can stop participating at any point during the interview process. I fully understand the study purpose and the conditions of my involvement.

.....  
Signature of participant

.....  
Date

.....  
Signature of researcher

.....  
Date

## **Appendix 4: Instrument**

### **Section B: Interview Questions**

1. What problems are you facing? Explain.
2. What are the psychological services offered at this school? Name them and explain how they function.
  - 2.1 If available, are the psychological services effective?
3. Has any member of government come to your school to address any problems that you are facing? Please name any campaign and explain what they were trying to address.
4. Do you cope with the problems that you face? Explain.





