PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS AND CIRCUIT MANAGERS ON THE NEED FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS AT MANKWENG CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that Perceptions of principals and circuit managers on the need for School Social Workers at Mankweng circuit, South Africa is my work and that all the sources used have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution to the best of my knowledge.

Declaration by   KATEKANI SIBISE

Signature   *sibise k*

Date   2 December 2021

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved family for constantly being my source of inspiration that gave me strength when I thought of giving up and who continually provided moral, spiritual, emotional and financial support.

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ABSTRACT

The need for school social work was first recognised in the 1940s in South Africa. And in recent years, researchers have shown interest in understanding social workers in school settings. In pursuit of adding to knowledge, the researcher undertook a study to look at the perceptions of school principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers in Mankweng, Limpopo province. The ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner laid the foundation for this research. The study was driven by a qualitative methodology and a descriptive design; where ten (10) participants were selected purposefully and interviewed in Mankweng, Polokwane. The interviews were semi-structured and used an interview guide. The thematic content analysis method was considered to make sense of the data gathered through interviews and observations.

The study post analysis found that in schools, learners encounter hurdles, social workers play diverse roles, and those social workers are a prerequisite in school settings. In the light of these findings, the researcher came to recommendations that: government should employ and place social workers in all public schools, and that the South African Council for Social Service Profession should promote more specialisation of school social workers to defeat social problems in our schools.

Key words, school social work, principals, circuit managers

ACRONYMS

IFSA	International Federation of Social Work
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SSW	School Social Work
SACENDU	South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use
SAMRC	South African Medical Research Council

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1   BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Children are seen as a group of vulnerable individuals who need special attention and protection. The protection is afforded by various legislations such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa, 1996), the Children's Act 38 of 2005, the Child's Justice Act 75 of 2008 and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. In the process of protecting the best interest of children, their basic human rights have to be considered and protected, especially when making decisions regarding them. In this regard, education is considered to be a basic human right for children. Therefore, the best interest of a child also includes catering for their physical, emotional security, intellectual, social and cultural development (Reyneke, 2018).

Given the prevalent legislations that govern and protect children in an attempt to find a balance in their education and social life, the need for school social workers in South Africa was recognised in the late 40s to address some of the social welfare needs experienced in schools (Kasiram, 1988 & Swart, 1997). In 1948, special teachers were` appointed by the Transvaal and Natal education department to address some of the social welfare needs experienced in schools (Rocher, 1977 & Western Cape School Social Work Forum, 1995). Given the foregoing, social work services in schools were considered a prerequisite by the department of education in the 1970s (Rocher, 1988; Swart. 1997 & SACSSP, 2010). Since then, numerous South African Researchers and researchers in other countires like Zimbabwe have emphasised the need for school social workers within the education system. Thus, it can be perceived that the significance of social workers in schools cannot be disregarded (Le Roux, 1987; Kasiram, 1988, 1993; Swart, 1997; Kemp, 2014 & Huxtable, 2016).

During the 1970s, the following social service regulatory bodies underlined the requisite for social services in different schools; the National Council for child and family welfare, National Council for Mental Health and social advocacy agencies like the South African Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of offenders (Wissing, 2014). Nevertheless, in 2010 the South African Council for Social Service

Professions (SACSSP), as a regulatory body for Social Workers declared school-based social work a specialised area within the social work profession (SACSSP, 2010).

The declaration of school social work as a specialised field in South Africa increased by new school social workers appointed in the Western Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng (Kemp, 2014 & Van Sittert, 2016). Furthermore, an Indaba (Zulu term for a conference) that was held in July 2010 found that the specialisation of school social work was a necessity and recommended that the SACSSP should prioritise the development (Kemp, 2017). Consequently, this led to the establishment of the National Committee for School Social Work Education and Practice (NACOSSWEP) (NACOSSWEP, 2015 & Kemp, 2017). In 2017 after the NACOSSWEP drew a proposal, the SACSSP accepted the National Committees proposal after the working committee of the NACOSSWEP team was requested to formally present the application that included the recommendation that school social work should become a field of speciality where school social workers can be employed at provincial level or a district level within circuit teams or directly in a school (Department of Basic Education, 2015 & NACOSSWEP, 2017).

Although school social work was recommended by the NACOSSWEP to be considered a specialised field, provinces like Limpopo still have no school social workers to date. This then implies that the important unique roles and services of the school social workers, who form part of a multidisciplinary team, are absent. Consequently, children are legally obligated to attend school until they have completed Grade 9 or reached 15 years (South African's Schools Act, 1998). The duration of the years where a school is compulsory, it is also important to note that the school aims at ensuring the educational developments of the child full potential and the preparation of a child to be a responsible citizen. Thus, to achieve this, not only academic knowledge is imperative but a safe school environment that will contribute to their holistic development is a prerequisite.

Siyachitema, (2013), conducted a study in Harare that found that school social work is not a common service in schools although some schools have been providing social work services informally. Social workers are known to play various functions of which are to help people enhance and more effectively utilise their own problem-

solving capacities, establish initial linkages between people and resource systems and contribute to the development and modification of social policy.In line with these functions of social work, social workers play an important role in capacitating people to be able to identify their own problems and also to be able to solve their problems through linking them to available services which they may not be aware of. Consequently, the absentia of a school social worker then implies social work services like providing support, care, protection and other social services are disregarded.

A study conducted in Uganda by GoU,(2011) in response to the post-war development challenges affecting learners found that little is known about the practice of school social work in Uganda, let alone in the entire Sub-Saharan Africa, yet because of the socio economic and political challenges faced post- conflict recovery. Moreover, the study found that many of the challenges that were faced by leareners included early marriage, learners performing domestic chores during school hours as a result learners are subjected to absenteeism which leads in school drop out. Given the background, the researcher wishes to explore and describe the need for school social workers in the Mankweng circuit from the perceptions of school principals and circuit managers.

1.2   RESEARCH PROBLEM

Social problems like bullying amongst learners are experiences that have made and continue to make news headlines both globally and in South African schools (Smith, 2016; Singh, 2017 & Grobler, 2019). Failure to place social workers mostly in public schools was recently epitomised by two bullying incidences in Limpopo and Eastern Cape Province where a learner of Mbilwi High School in the Venda region committed suicide at home, whilst a grade 10 learner at Bhisho High school swallowed a pesticide and died in hospital (SABC, 2021). Research shows that in schools the phenomenon of bullying, teenage pregnancy, poverty, substance abuse and violence are invariably prevalent in schools, as expected these issues affect learners negatively and are likely to hinder their growth and success at school (Baadjies, 2015; Brandt, 2017; Singh, 2017; UNESCO, 2020 & SAMRC, 2021). Furthermore, statistics show that more than 30, 4 million people in South Africa live in poverty, with the majority of this population being learners (Madonsela, 2017 & Mckenzie, 2019).

The profession of social work as it is known today was developed in the west, particularly in Britain and the United States of America (Stuart, 2013). In the case of Africa, social work was brought as a colonial export from the European colonizing countires therefore the development of school social work varies in countries (Kreitzer, 2012). In Africa, it is only Ghana that has a comprehensive school social work system while South Africa and Nigeria are also in the process of fully establishing school social work as a field of practice. As for Zimbabwe, Most people are not even aware that social workers can be employed in schools. Social workers are employed in various settings in the country but surprisingly and unfortunately not in school settings. With the dynamic changes in societies brought about by HIV and AIDS, Learners in zimbabwe encounter a phletora of challenges such as poverty, use of drugs, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, and diaspora parents. Moreover, The high divorce rate in Zimbabwe as noted in The Zimbabwean Newspaper of 4 April 2012 results in many school going children growing up in single parent families (The Zimbabwean, 2012). The paper states that the High Court of Zimbabwe handled 18, 000 civil cases in 2012 with divorce cases topping the list.There is need for professional social workers in schools who understand the influences of living conditions, socioeconomic status, poor health, family and community on academic performance, behaviour, and attendance of children at school.

Similiarily, a study conducted in Nairobi city Country, Kenya by Cheshire (2017), for children with special needs found that children who come from poor backgrounds are unable to be assisted with special programs that accommodate their needs due to lack of financial resources as a result some learners end up dropping out of school. Moreover,female learners have been found to be victims of neglect and violence exploitation both within and outside the school setting.

Kemp, Kemp, Pretoruis and Avenant (2015) in their correlation to the SACSSP to apply for social work services to be recognised as a field of specialisation, indicated that the Limpopo province and Eastern Cape had zero school social workers, while Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Northwest, and Northern Cape had handful social workers; less than five. As for Free State, Kwazulu-Natal and Western Cape, they led with higher numbers ranging from 25 to 57. Nonetheless, provincial and district levels placed marginal social workers in various schools. Given the background, it is plausible to argue that learners face challenges on a daily basis and it is not the duty

of teachers to deal with these challenges since they are not experts in psychosocial matters, therefore, this should be an indication that school social workers are a need in all schools (South African Qualifications Authority, 2018).

1.3 ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY

The researcher adopted the Ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner's (1979). The theory is based on the premise that each system contains roles, norms and guiding principles, which may shape the growth of its members and which may determine the way an individual behaves (E.g., learners at school). The Ecological theory is explained by the following five environmental systems, which an individual interacts with: Microsystem: This system comprises of institutions such as the family, school, religion, neighbourhood and the peers and they closely and directly impact the child's development.

• *Mesosystem*: This system comprises interconnections between the microsystems, family-teacher interactions, and relationships between peers of the child and the family. The relationship between school and home is an example of a mesosystem. These two settings are often connected because they both help the child and collaborate to ensure that he or she has safe and stable growth. In this proposed study, the rapport between teachers and school social workers may not be unnoticed since the two play a major role in learners' development, particularly in helping the learner.

• *Exosystem*: It is composed of the relationships between a social environment in which one has no active role and the immediate context. There are places where children have an indirect interaction with such as their parents' workplace. This can also have an impact on them. For example, a parent who is mistreated at work may vent out their frustrations at home, which may result in the child bullying or being aggressive towards other learners at school which creates a problem for them and requires the intervention of social workers.

• *Macrosystem*: Describes the society in which people live and communicate with each other. The Macrosystem includes socio economic status, poverty, the Child's parents' workplace and the school setting.

• *Chronosystem*: This system is made up of environmental events and the transitions that occur during a Child's life. The chronosystem adds to the influence of both the change and constancy of a child's environment.

The Ecological theory indicates that human development depends on various types of environmental systems. This theory helps us understand what causes children to behave differently by looking for patterns that contrast behaviour at home with behaviour at school and work (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

1.4 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the background of the study, research problem and the role of theory in the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focused on a thick literature review, which was local and global.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter focused on the Methodology that was employed to guide the researcher in this study. This included aims and objectives of the study, research approach, research design, sampling and population, data collection, data analyses and quality criteria

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter focused on the presentation of the data gathered, analysis of the data, and interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter focused on the summary of findings, and conclusions that were drawn from the findings, and the generated recommendations. The following chapter will focus on the literature reviewed in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on the outline of this study. The current chapter focuses on the literature reviewed in line with the objectives of the study. The literature was reviewed from international, continental, national and as well as local. Children today are increasingly victims of many social problems and social forces that are negatively affecting their role as learners. Families are constantly in a state of change and until it becomes stabilized, in whatever form, children's unmet physical, emotional and psychosocial needs will continue to interfere with their ability to learn, focus and adjust in school (Boakye & Ampiah, 2017). The focus of this chapter is to provide an overview of the history and development of school social work intentionally and locally as well as the challenges that learners and teachers encounter at school and specific roles that could be played by social workers in schools.

2.2 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

2.2.1 Social Work

According to the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) (2021), Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to social work.

2.2.2 School Social Worker

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2021), School Social Workers are an integral link between schools; home and community in helping learners achieve academic success. They work directly with school administrators as well as learners and families providing leadership in forming school discipline policies, mental health intervention, and crisis management and support services. As part of the multidisciplinary team to help learners succeed, school social workers facilitate community involvement in schools while advocating for learners' success.

2.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK

2.3.1 International perspective on the development of school social work

School Social Work was first implemented in the U.S.A in 1906 and was an established field of practice in at least 20 countries, including Eastern Europe and East Asian countries by 1977 (Kelly, 2008; Huxable & Blyth, 2002). In research ranging from the late 1970s to more recent sources, there is broad agreement on the causes that led to the creation of school social work. Kelly (2008), for example, ascribed the development of SSW to the need for better communication among major participants in children's education in New York, Boston, and Hartford, Connecticut. Similarly, Huxtable and Blyth (2002) cited these three cities' activities as providing the impetus for the establishment and growth of School Social Work. The Woman's Education Association in Boston developed a home and school visitor in one of the city's schools to ensure a stronger connection between home and school. In Hartford, the first visiting teacher's program was established, which is now known as school social workers (Case Western Reserve University, 2010). Two social settlements in New York provided immediate impetus by assigning visitors to school districts so that the settlement house and staff could keep in closer contact with the teachers of the children who lived in the settlement neighbourhood (Case Western Reserve University, 2010; Huxtable & Blyth, 2002).

Fink (1974) attributed the development of SSW to activities that took place in New York, Boston, and Hartford at different times. Constable, Flynn, and McDonald (1991) interpreted the simultaneous emergence of these social inventions to point to a common cultural substrate that these cities shared. Staudt (1995) suggested that these social projects were in response to common underlying conditions, needs, or socio-political developments in these cities. The adoption of compulsory school attendance regulations and child labour restrictions in several states, for example, is regarded to have aided these attempts that eventually led to the establishment of school social work (Constable, Flynn & McDonald, 1991; Staudt, 1995). Fink (1974) argued that the antecedent conditions of the culture at the time prepared the way for the establishment of SSW rather than the practice of social support at schools resulting from or in response to needs. Traditionally, school social workers were thought to act as liaisons between the home, school, and community.

Since 1907 school social workers have worked more closely with teachers and other school officials to further educational goals (Rocher, 1977; 1988). School social workers were also known as attendance officers, as they were in charge of enforcing compulsory school attendance. Constable, Flynn, and McDonald (1991) described SSWs' primary job as a home-school liaison, in addition to assisting with other social maladies like community, Poverty in the neighbourhood, ill health, and other variables all had an impact on school attendance. The focus of school social workers' services shifted as the number of school social workers grew over the decades, and these shifts were paralleled by societal factors (Case Western Reserve University, 2010).

In the 1940s, the first SSWs were appointed in Canada, Norway, and Sweden (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Municipalities and parent organizations in Stockholm were the first to establish social work positions in high schools. During the 1970s, the Finnish school social work system began to spread (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). In 1977, Finland had 85 school social workers, and by 1993, 220 in a total of 93 municipalities. Since then, the number of school social workers has grown to almost 1,500, with about 50 in Denmark and 80 in Norway. School social work dates back to 1970 in Germany and Hong Kong, with the goal of assisting children with emotional and social issues (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). There were 93 student guidance officers serving 477 primary schools in Hong Kong in the early 1980s, and another 91 social workers serving 297 secondary schools (Hong Kong Government, 1982 in Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Prior 1997, school social work was practised in Argentina's Buenos Aires Province and the Capital District under the job title of school social worker, where they held both a social work degree and a teaching certificate in basic education (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Since 1997, all primary and special education schools in the province of Buenos Aires have had at least one school social worker.

The number of social workers is determined by a formula that calls for one social worker for every 500 primary school students and one for each special education school. If they serve a big number of pupils who are at risk, schools with more than 1,000 students had two school social workers. The severity of what school social workers offer has been justified with this allocation, which includes a range of care, counselling, and counselling for families and youth (Thyers & Myers, 2007).

Huxtable and Blyth (2002) expressed optimism about school social work in the twenty-first century since school social workers around the world know with systems, individuals, groups, relationships, organizations, and theories of change, and as a result, the profession will grow. According to Rocher (2011), an increase in school social workers must maintain an emphasis on working with the school, family, and community, and the type of services should include a strong preventative strategy. Huxtable and Blyth (2002) concluded that SSWs will be the leaders needed to enable changes in preparing children, families, schools, and communities for a fast-changing world.

2.3.2 The history of school social work in Africa

The beginning of social work in Africa in general and Ghana, in particular, can be traced to the activities of three major groups: Christian missionaries; voluntary agencies and tribal societies (Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). These organizations, in collaboration with ethnic communities, founded a number of charities for low-income families. The Colonial Development Act of 1940 gave social work an official status, marking its move from the private sector to the federal government (Gold Coast, 1944-1954 in Huxtable & Blyth, 2002). Since Ghana's independence, social work practice has undergone numerous structural changes, as well as increased, expanded, and taken on new dimensions. For several decades social science academics in South Africa advocated for the appointment of social workers in schools. At present, the need for school social workers has been underscored due to the increase of social problems within communities impacting children having more than one problem (WCED, 2010).

In the late 1940s, the necessity for social work in schools was recognized in South Africa (Swart, 1997). The Transvaal and Natal Education Department employed special instructors or visiting teachers in 1948 to address some of the school population's social welfare requirements (Rocher, 1977 & Western Cape SSW Forum, 1995). Rocher (1977) went on to say that the need for school social work in South Africa's social welfare system was a need. Rocher (1977) went on to say that the lack of school social work in South Africa's social welfare system was a major source of worry in the late 1970s.

Thus, the value of school social work towards providing support was recognized in the development of education in the 1970s in South Africa (Rocher, 1988). Since then, various South African researchers have increasingly underscored the need for school social work within the South African education system (Le Roux, 1987; Kasiram, 1988, 1993; Kemp, 1992; Swart, 1997). During the 1970s, social service regulatory bodies (e.g., National Council for Child and Family Welfare, 1974; National Welfare Council, 1973/4; National Council for Mental Health, 1977); professional bodies (e.g., Social Workers' Association of South Africa, 1967; Commission for Social Work, 1975/6) and social advocacy agencies (e.g., NICRO, 1970's, Oranje Vroue Vereniging, 1971) all emphasized the importance of social work services in various types of schools.

School social work was recently recognized as a speciality area within the social work profession in South Africa by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), the governing authority for social workers (2010). More recently the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP), as the regulatory body for Social Workers, acknowledged school social work to be a specialization area within the social work profession in South Africa (WCED, 2010). Political leaders, such as the Premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille, expressed the need for SSW and referred to the important role school social workers could play especially with regard to the prevention of substance abuse in the schools (Argus, 2010).

According to Rocher (1977), 13.5 per cent of the white school population required social work assistance. He went on to say that there was adequate data to back up the assertion that other populations have equivalent or greater requirements than the White population at the time. The need for school social work intervention has been acknowledged in all school populations, and it has been expanded to treat a wide range of social pathologies such as para-suicide, behavioural difficulties, substance misuse, juvenile delinquency, truancy, learning problems, and family collapse (WCED, 2001).

In 1987, the first school social worker was hired (Kemp, Kemp, 2017). Since 1983, school social workers have been employed in several regions as part of the educational support services (Swart, 1997). The service was usually housed under the Department of Education, and it offered support to students, parents, and educators. From four school social workers working in ordinary schools in 1995 to 46 school social workers at the district level in 2010, the WCED has grown its workforce of school social workers (Argus, 2010). In addition, the number of social workers employed in schools increased from 4 to 166 in 2017. Despite the fact that school social work is based on basic social work concepts and practices, school social work varies in its application and institutional arrangements from nation to country (Rocher, 1977 in Welfare Focus, 1985). This variation is especially evident in the South African context, where school social work is practised in diverse ways in different provinces.

According to Collins (1982), during the 1980s, the Department of Education saw socio-pedagogues or visiting teachers as focusing on cognitive-affective development, whereas school social workers focused on the social functioning and interaction of the child in the school, home, and community, with an emphasis on cognitive-affective development in this broader context. However, the Interdepartmental Committee on Rehabilitation Matters believed that socio-pedagogics and social workers overlapped in 1976, and the Social Workers Association of South Africa had already warned in 1968 that this overlap resulted in late referrals to welfare authorities for specialized intervention.

These comments show a historical trend in the role of school social work within the realm of learner education. More recently, the Western Cape SSW conference (1995) agreed that the notion had been endorsed by the Committee of Education Heads. In both cases, implementation was delayed due to a) financial considerations; b) the impending passage of social worker legislation, such as the Social and Associated Workers Act; and c) the need for these education authorities to establish staffing structures, salary scales, and promotion opportunities.

In 1979, the Western Cape and the Natal Education Departments recognized the socio-pedagogues' preventive function concerning the learner and his or her family. The Committee of Education Heads stipulated in 1980 that dual registration, i.e., bachelor's level degrees in both education and social work, was a necessity. Furthermore, the De Lange Commission (1981) fuelled the growth of school social work, with a focus on "special needs children," guidance, and parental participation. The Commission identified issues with a) the demand for special education for children with special needs; b) the lack of adequate facilities for child identification, education, diagnosis/classification; and c) the provision of assistance and specialized services both inside and outside the school setting, as well as the volume of demand. Several other issues were discovered, including a) scarcity of educated, specialized staff; b) issues of specialized schools in connection to mainstream education and flexibility in mobility between the two; c) responsibility for mental-health provisions; and d) achieving parental involvement (Rocher, 1977; Swart, 1997).

Geldenhuys (1982, in Swart, 1997) emphasized the importance of multi-professional collaboration and teamwork, as well as the need for social work to have its own professional identity while contributing to the teaching process. The survey stated that school social work remained essentially theoretical, owing to educational authorities' firm belief that socio-pedagogic and school counselling services adequately satisfied the needs of students. During 1982, SSW and sociopedagogic coexisted. The realization that "parasocial work" specialists are unable to provide a holistic social work service with proper integration into the social welfare infrastructure led to the substitution of school social work for socio-pedagogues.

The Western Cape Education Department transferred all sociopedagogic and truant officers' roles to the Welfare Department in 1984 to create a School Social Work service (WCED, 2012). This signalled SSW's inclusion in the Department of Education, with the primary goal of correcting the issues raised in the De Lange and Geldenhuys study. There are differences in how School Social Work is operationalized across provinces. For the purpose of this study, the focus will be on Mankweng in the Limpopo Province.

2.3.3 Present situation of school social workers in South Africa

School social workers are located in most provinces except for Limpopo and the Eastern Cape. Provinces that employ school social workers utilize the service in a group of sections within the Department of Education. The current state for social workers employed by the Department of Basic Education in South Africa is presented in a table below:

NAME OF THE PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA	NUMBER OF SOCIAL WORKERS PLACED IN THE PROVINCE	LOCATION
Limpopo	0 Social Workers (Learner Support Agents- 180)	Schools
Eastern Cape	0	None
Gauteng	27 (20 Secondments from DSD	Provincial Office and Special Schools
Kwazulu- Natal	25 (Learner Support Agents -400)	Provincial, District Offices (Schools)
Mpumalanga	4	District Offices
Northern Cape	3	Special Schools
North West	1	Wellness Programme within the DOE
Western Cape	166	Provincial Office and District Offices.
Free State	32	District Offices and Special Schools
TOTAL	258	

Department of Education (2020).

Given the background, it can be noted that School social workers based at a district office render services across a cluster or group of schools instead of being stationed at one school. The objective for district-based School Social Workers is similar to school-based School Social Workers in addressing the needs of the child, community and school. However, the researcher is of the view that the primary location or placement of school social workers should be at schools instead of the district and provincial level because the root of all challenges begins at schools and can be quickly addressed. Given the lack of school social workers in the Limpopo province, the researcher wishes to gain insight from principals and circuit managers on the need to have school social workers.

2.3.4 School social work within the Limpopo Province

Within the Limpopo province, school social workers can be employed at a provincial level or a district level within circuit teams or directly in a school. However, currently, there are no school social workers in the Limpopo province. Although there are no school social workers in the Limpopo province, the Department of Education has however employed 180 Social Work graduates as Learner Support Agents in schools (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2015). The role of learner support agents employed in schools is providing care and support to learners in need of support as a result of experiencing social health, behavioural and poverty-related barriers (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2015).

2.4 CHALLENGES FACED IN SCHOOLS

2.4.1 Violence in schools

Violence in schools is not unique to South Africa as children worldwide are raised within the context of a catastrophic breakdown of traditional family systems, unemployment, high levels of substance abuse and widespread violence (Schoeman, 2010). A study conducted by Every Town Research and policy in the United States in 2021, found that at least 127 incidents of gunfire in schools occurred which resulted in 26 deaths and 76 injuries. Moreover, an estimation of 3 million children in the US is exposed to the shooting per year; they witness shooting in their school, their communities or their home which results in a devastating impact.

Such a framework accords due to recognition of the transactional relationship between environmental conditions and the human condition. Experience and exposure to violence in any environment at a young age increase the risk of later victimization, as well as perpetration of violence and other antisocial behaviour (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, 2016).

Concurring to the Ecological Theory, Schools form part of the Microsystem which refers to the direct environmental setting children have in their lives. It is made up of their classmates, friends, family, teachers, neighbours and other people who have direct contact with daily. The theory states that individuals are not just mere recipients of the experiences they have when socializing with people in the microsystem environment, but they also contribute to the construction of such environment (Brofenbrenner, 1994; Duerden and Witt, 2010). The school plays a vital role in a learner's learning and socialization and it is therefore essential that schools offer a safe environment in which authentic learning and development can take place (Ngqela & Lewis, 2012). Given the current state of violence in schools, the school environment has transformed into one of fear and anxiety (Burton & Leoshut, 2013; UNESCO, 2017). Moreover, this hampers the educational environment and consequently prevents learners from accessing and full benefiting from their educational opportunities and also creates a generation of lives shaped by threat (Benjamin, 2011a). This causes physical, emotional, psychosocial, low self-esteem resulting in victimization (Burton & Leoshut, 2013; UNESCO, 2017).

A study conducted by the Centre for justice and crime prevention shows that violence is widespread in South African Schools. "One in five secondary school learners- a total of 22.2% had experienced any violence while at school in 12 months between August 2011 and August 2012. A recent case in Forest high in Johannesburg is also an indication that has brought violence into the spotlight again where Daniel Bakwela, a 16-year-old was stabbed to death outside the school, allegedly by a fellow pupil (Grobler, 2019) Following the case of Daniel Bakwela, there have been several reports of violent incidents in extreme nature where a 16-year-old was stabbed to death by a fellow pupil at a school in Ga- Mamabolo, outside Polokwane.

In March (2020), a 19-year Grade 11 in Mondeor high school pupil died after being stabbed outside the school and in February, two pupils were seriously injured at Lentegeur high school in Cape Town when two fellow schoolmates allegedly stabbed them on the premises. School violence therefore cannot only be limited to the school premises, it also includes violence that occurs when walking to or from school, where the school has no control over what happens. Much of the violence includes learner on learner violence, gender aggression, bumping and shouting and sometimes serious bullying, where a group of kids would extort others, by blocking the gates unless they pay; these things are endemic in schools (Grobler, 2019).

Corporal punishment has been banned since 1997 which was also supported by the South African law that protects learners from corporal punishment and abuse. Section 12(1) of the constitution states that;" everyone has the right to freedom and security, including the rights to be free from all forms of violence, not to be tortured or punished in a cruel, in the human or degrading way (The constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 2007). However, many parents use corporal punishment to try to discipline their children, this can be in a form of hitting the child, which indicates that society resorts to a social system where violence is used to resolve problems which also sends a message to learners that violence is okay and this is how we solve problems (Burton, 2013).

Following the incidences of violence in schools, the Ecological theory suggests that a child is a complete entity surrounded by unique social systems or ecosystems. When the various aspects of the system are functioning harmoniously together, then the ecosystem is congruent or balanced. When the different aspects of the system are not functioning optimally, then the system is not balanced. This implies that the ecological theory is relevant to school Social Work because the school is a real-life ecological unit. The child is in intimate interaction with the school. The school social worker is placed at the interface of the school and the child. The school social worker also stands as the interface of the family and the school and community or society and the school. This also suggests that a variety of interventions are needed to effect change and produce congruence within the child's ecosystem.

2.4.2 Substance Abuse

Drug and alcohol abuse are some of the major burdens of societies in the 21st century. Globally learners in schools are abusing drugs and alcohol (UNICEF, 2008; WHO, 2014). Peltzer, Ramlahan and Gliksman (2009) assert that a child is brought into this world so that society may create or mould it accordingly to fit well into the existing way of life. The Mesosystem in the Ecological Theory asserts that a child's family experience may be related to their school experience. This is supported by a study conducted by WHO, (2014) that states that Children raised in families where parents abuse drugs, observe the behaviour and in turn do what they have seen their parents doing. Thus, the key institution for the transmission of traditional values is the family. As such, the success of socialization results in children cherishing similar beliefs, customs and expectations as those of their parents. However, for children who model parents using alcohol and substances results in socialization being a hazard to their upbringing. According to the United Nations, globally, Cannabis (Dagga) is a widely consumed illicit drug. Although it is not the primary drug of abuse in most nations such as Europe, Asia and America, it has been found to be the primary drug of abuse in Africa, especially amongst young people. This is proven by a study that was conducted in Nigeria which found that drug abuse among youth and school learners is respectively high.

The commonly abused drugs included Dagga, Heroin, cough syrup, and codeine which are obtained from drug stores, drug hawkers and friends. The reason for use included relieving stress and deriving pleasure (Jatau, Sha'aban and Mutaspha, 2021). In South Africa, substance abuse is extremely serious; with the drug users reported being twice the world norm. Over 15% of the population suffers from a drug problem. The figures were published by the South African Police Service that shows that drug abuse accounts for 60% of all crime in the country. On the other hand, the Department of Education in the Western Cape Province took it amongst themselves to conduct a drug test for the first three terms of 2018 where learners who were subjected to drug tests, 60,9% of the primary school learners tested positive while 71.1% of the high school learners came up as positive meanwhile, the South African

Community Epidemiology Network on Drug use (SACENDU) reported that 21% to 28% of the patients treated for substance abuse in 2016- 2017 were under the age-

of 20. All these statistics show that South Africa is facing a huge drug problem among youth. (Department of Education-Western Cape, 2018). The MEC of the Department of Education in the Western Cape Province Debbie Schafer also responded to the shocking drug tests results that were revealed in parliament about drug testing in schools in 2018. According to Schafer (2018), she acknowledged the fact that it was worrying that anyone is taking drugs to school, but primary learners in particular, however, fortunately, there were only three cases of Tic, one of Mandrax and two of cocaine since 2017. Schafer (2018) further stated that most of these drug use can be gang-related but often it is young people experimenting and also pleads with the parents to get involved and help with addressing drug problems within the community as well as at home.

According to Mabote (2017), one of the observed consequences involving school problems associated with substance abuse among young people includes a lowered commitment to education, declining grades, absenteeism from school, increased potential for dropping out of school and higher truancy. These consequences of drug use are an escape to the overwhelming pressures the youth of today face daily and the significant impact of peer pressure which is the desire by adolescents to fit in and be socially accepted by their peers because they have a high value for the opinion of their peers (Seggie, 2012; Strauss, 2019).

According to Strauss (2019), Drugs offer an easy escape from loneliness, anxiety and fear of pain. Television and film glamorize drug use, painting a false picture of the consequences and creating a culture of "carefree Experimentation" (Strauss, 2019). Strauss Adds that common myths such as "it won't happen to me" associated with drugs make matters worse because young people believe that they can experiment on drugs or use drugs and somehow avoid the scientifically – proven consequences. Many schools face enormous pressure to produce results academically but need to recognize first how prevalent substance abuse is and secondly that the best results mean very little when life falls apart because of addiction (Strauss, 2019).

Keeping children away from drugs is increasingly difficult but building a healthy relationship both at home and with friends is key and also sharing and receiving correct information about drugs and their impact can go a very long way in dealing

with substance abuse (SACENDU, 2017). The researcher as a social worker acknowledges that although the government cannot be solely responsible for tackling and designating responsibilities to different Departments in dealing with social issues within the country, however, the Involvement of school social workers holistically and introducing their programs is essential and can create a safe space and learning environment for learners and educators. Moreover, programs that deal with mental health, prevention and coping strategies to the use of substances can allow parents and children to seek help through rehabilitation centres and support groups

2.4.3 Lack of parental recognition and involvement

Parental involvement is a significant element that can have an impact or enhancement in the child's education. Parental involvement implicates the active and significant involvement of the parent in all aspects, where a parent is interacting with the child for guidance and support. However, research in Okeke (2014) shows that poor parental involvement is the biggest challenge facing public schools in South Africa, especially in Rural Areas. In South Africa, according to the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, effective education requires close cooperation between parents and teachers. With the 1994 democratic changes in education, parents in the form of School Governing Bodies (SGB's) have been assigned powers and responsibilities to get involved in educational matters. The South African Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 mandates for the participation and commitment of all stakeholders, parents, in particular, to ensure the enhancement of educational transformation. However, there is evidence that shows poor parental involvement in education even though researchers around the world acknowledge the importance of parent involvement in their children education (Bakker, Denessen & Brus- Laven, Mncube, 2010 and Schaughency, 2017).

In reference to the Exosystem in the ecological theory which refers to one or more settings that do not involve the learner as an active participant but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by what happens in the setting (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Brown and Duku cited in Motala and Lexumo (2014), revealed inadequate functions of the SGBs due to the tensions with school principals, teachers, and government officials who at times, undermine parents, but who still believe and

expect parents to entirely take responsibility for their children's education. This then implies that due to lack of collaborative partnerships between educators and teachers, learners are unable to comprehend how the school and their parents relate to each other in terms of the learners' development, and they consequently may see their educators and parents as being separate entities, working independently of each other. The Mesosystem can therefore be described as a set of microsystems that continually interact with one another (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2010).

Parental involvement is central to effective learning and development and can have both formally and informally social and emotional benefits. Such involvement includes recognition for parents as the primary caregivers of their children and, as such, that they are a central resource to the education system. More specifically, they are critical components for effective governance of centres of learning and for facilitating community ownership of these facilities. Where parents are not given this recognition or where their participation is not facilitated and encouraged effective learning is threatened and hindered (Humphrey- Taylor, 2015). Negative attitudes towards parental involvement, lack of resources to facilitate such involvement, lack of parent empowerment and support for parent organizations, particularly in poorer communities, all contribute to a lack of parental involvement in centres of learning (Lee and Bowen, 2007).

According to Mcdwall and Schaughency, 2017), Educators in schools serving disadvantaged communities are more likely to have a negative perception of parental involvement, often classifying it as less encouraging and less rewarding in terms of advancing children's learners learning. While ignoring the potential of parents to supervise learners and partake in school activities (Edwards, 2004; Lexumo and Motala, 2012). This indicates that teacher education curricula and teaching training institutions do not specifically prepare educators to deal with such issues related to family-school community partnerships (Epstein, 2018; Jacobs, 2008; Lemmer, 2007). This is an indication that teacher training is significant because the emphasis is placed on the importance of parental involvement (Epstein, 2018; Mansfield- Barry, 2017). Parents have been viewed as very important stakeholders in South Africa in children the educational world. Parents may sometimes feel embarrassed about being involved in educational matters due to their family background and the hardships of life. Mbokodi and Singh (2011) affirmed that parents have distress that

they may be mocked and humiliated for owing some of the school's accessories due to unemployment when they come to school. As a result, the school management has to come to such parents' level to ease them to feel comfortable to participate in school activities. In this regard the researcher, as a social worker is of the view that social workers are essential within the school environment in dealing and understanding family dynamics since they are exposed to working with families in addressing their challenges daily and their various family structures.

A study conducted by Msila (2012) in Nigeria found that parents are busy with their economic pursuits, leaving their children in the hands of teachers and nannies, leaving it all to their responsibilities. Some of the parents were found to be swinging their responsibilities all to educators. Their poor involvement in education leads to poor child performance because, among others, parents do not care about their children being late for school, learners being absent or not and their children not getting done with their homework's.

Several cases have been reported through the media on schools that were burnt down in Limpopo- Malamulele and Vuwani municipalities in Vhembe District as a result of service delivery (Zimela, 2016). Looking at the matter itself, this is the case that might be caused by parents who have nothing to do with the involvement in the education of their children. If there were, they would have separated education from politics and prioritized education. On the other hand, the Limpopo provincial Department at times is seen as incompetent and unsupportive in education. This is seen through the late delivery of stationery, workbooks and textbooks in most parts of the province, which pushes parents far to get involved in education instead of energizing them. The unavailability of textbooks not only frustrates teachers and learners but demotivates parents as well (Mwonga, 2012 & Wanyama, 2016).

Recently, the unavailability of resources in schools and other contributing factors to lack of parental involvement in their children's education has not been the only factors that demoralize the effective participation of parents in their children's education, the Covid 19 pandemic has partially taken over Normal school routines globally. Nearly 200 countries shut down schools with over 90% of these learners ranging from early years through higher education facing some sort of destruction (UNESCO, 2020). A study conducted about parental involvement in their children's

education since Covid 19 found that parents have mixed emotions. Some parents feel more connected to their Child's schoolwork while others see this as an additional burden (UNESCO, 2020). Furthermore, other parents also indicated that they find a struggle to balance between parent employment demands and learner needs.

Whilst others noted difficulty with completing job-related tasks and supporting their children in completing schoolwork during the Covid 19 pandemic since they are essential workers and they struggle to provide the attention or interaction with their children's needs along with their work. Lastly, parents have indicated their inability of them being able to stand being around their children all day at home. According to the researcher because of the current state of the Covid 19, the occurrence of school closure and remote school has bought an additional struggle and turmoil to parents in balancing responsibilities however, social work has always been an appropriately equipped social service that is essential in mitigating the damage effects of social issues and the current Covid 19 pandemic. Looking at the current circumstances of the relationship between parental involvement in their children's education it can be noted that social workers can build on existing and poor relationship ties to children, families and communities utilizing the Ecological theory to understand and to rapidly respond in ways that are effective and find a balance between their children's education and their careers.

2.4.4 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence manifests in different ways and women are seen as particularly vulnerable to becoming domestic violence victims. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), reports that 30% of women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and or sexual abuse by their intimate partner.

The mentioned report further reveals that 38% of all global female murders were committed by their intimate partner. Domestic violence is common in male-dominated cultures such as patrilineal and patriarchal cultures, as it is justified in customs and traditions, and condoned by law. Some of the domestic violence cases go unreported, since children may suffer in silence. There are various reasons for the lack of reporting, for example, young children cannot report, many children are afraid of reprisals by perpetrators or interventions by the authorities that worsen their overall situation and parents, the primary protectors of children, are in many cases

also the perpetrators of violence and may remain silent if the violence is perpetrated by other family members or powerful members of the community or society (Jaffe, Scott, Jenny, Dawson, Straatmaan & Campbell, 2014).

The effects of violence are wide-ranging and long-lasting. Several studies show that violence is associated with short- and long-term effects on physical and mental health. Children who are abused learn to tolerate violence and are at increased risk of poor mental health (e.g., anxiety and depression), drug and alcohol abuse, risky sexual behaviours and HIV, externalizing behaviour problems (e.g., aggression, delinquency) and poor social functioning. Violence or maltreatment commonly results in childhood trauma, where the child experiences the event as intense and emotionally distressing making them feel that they are not safe and have no control over their life (Carr, 2018). Children who are maltreated at home are also at an increased risk of experiencing violence outside the home by more than 65% of primary school children, rising to 89% of adolescents; and while fewer adults committed acts of violence, the acts became more serious. Interestingly, the study found no significant association between the sexual abuse of boys and their mental health outcomes in adulthood when personal and social vulnerabilities were taken into account. Moreover, this is supported by the microsystem that states that children are shaped by their experiences when they are socializing with people within the microsystem which includes their families, friends and other microsystems. This is contrary to many other studies that found boys' exposure to childhood violence is associated with aggressive behaviour later in life, particularly rape and IPV, and in extreme cases intimate femicide (Children's Institute, 2018).

Children exposure to any form of violence has considerable potential to be perceived as life-threatening by those victimized and leave them with a sense of vulnerability, hopelessness, psychological disorders and emotional threats. Which end up affecting their academic lives. The Ecological Theory states that when the different aspects of the system are not functioning optimally, it results in the imbalance of the system which is also said to conflict with each other and this is proven by a study by Edleson (2013) found that children's problems associated with witnessing violence can be grouped into behavioural and emotional problems, and cognitive functioning and attitude problems. On behavioural and emotional problems; the study found that children exposed to domestic violence exhibit more aggressive and antisocial

(externalized behaviours) as well as fearful and inhibited behaviours (internalized behaviours) and show lower social competence than other children.

A 12-year-old boy reported to the police that his father had physically assaulted him. His mother and three siblings corroborated his statement. The mother also reported that her husband was a bully and that she had been a victim of domestic violence. She also stated that she was initially reluctant to ask her husband to stop assaulting the child because she was afraid of him. The case was withdrawn by the police three days later. The commander noted in the diary: "This is moderate discipline and even falls short of child abuse. Withdraw." The family was not referred to support services. In addition to direct experiences of abuse during childhood, indirect exposure to violence, such as witnessing domestic violence, causes bystander trauma increasing the risk for violence perpetration and victimization later in life. Girls who witnessed their mothers being abused when they were children are more likely to be victims of partner violence as adults. The trauma can cause long-term psychological problems including repetition compulsions, where people expose themselves to situations reminiscent of the original trauma, i.e., they subconsciously choose violent partners.

2.4.5 High school Dropout Rates

Education is one of the strongest predictors of health worldwide with well documented positive outcomes. Youth Education is globally is a priority and given this, School Dropout remains an urgent concern (Freudenberg& Ruglis. 2007). High school learners often drop out of school because they have challenges or struggle academically and think that they cannot pass.

In South Africa, school dropout is a crisis whereby only 52% of grade 12 learners remained enrolled (Department of Education, 2015). The quality of education has hardly improved and there are several reasons behind the high school dropout rates. A study conducted by the Department of Education indicates that 326 000 pupils have dropped out of school between April and October 2020. A presentation that took place in the parliament on the 6th of October 2020 has proven that critics that typically compared grade 1 enrolments and National Senior Certificate (Matric) Passes in the November examinations arrive at the drop out figures of between 37% and 42%; Although the department indicated that this was not a true reflection of the actual Drop out as the supplementary June NSC exams and other equivalent

qualifications are not considered in this qualification. These figures had been revealed by Basic Education Minister, Angie Motshekga as she was responding to the National Assembly. Moreover, it was also found that Kwazulu- Natal and the Western Cape were far worse since of the 326 00 learners were longer going to school as a result these two provinces accounted for 241 141. Gauteng had the third-worst figures with over 55 000 learners who had stopped going to school (Angie Motshekga, 2020) Given the statistics of the three provinces, it is evident that the South African Schools were facing a Crisis.

According to the Department of Education (2020), one of the major reasons for learners dropping out of school is grade repetition. Historically, one-way low performance has been addressed is by holding learners back to repeat a grade. By the time learners reach grades 10-12, 52% have repeated a grade and 9% of Grade 12th graders repeat a grade three times or more. Furthermore, Grade repetition is said to discourage children about their educational prospects that makes them relatively old for their grade, so opting out of school might become socially or economically attractive. Moreover, other social issues such as migration, health problems and household labour, parents' unsympathetic behaviour and family responsibilities may be reasons why other learners drop out of school.

According to Digman and Soan (2008), Children who are negatively influenced by their home environments struggle to meet academic demands and manage their relationships with others. Research also shows that parents who sometimes display unsympathetic behaviour towards their children, with negative references to barriers of learning that children experience instead of loving and supporting their children, sometimes make negative comments such as "yes, you are stupid" to their children, which may lead to the development of low self-esteem in the child and turn may adopt negative responses to any form of support from the school. Given the four main reasons identified by a study conducted by Ananga's (2011) for a national household survey (a representative sample of 4, 498 households, household poverty and cost of education (i.e., access costs), teenage pregnancy, a lack of interest and grade repetition.

These factors are interlinked and dropping out is often understood as a series of circumstances rather than an isolated event. The Ecological Theory strives for the

need for interventions to focus on improving interactions between children and their parents. In doing so, the social worker will adopt a preventative stance to problem-solving and problem prevention by standing as the interface of the family and the school and community or society and the school. Lastly, the current state of the global pandemic, COVID- 19 has been found to have an impact on the drop-out rate of learners in schools. According to the Department of Education, the COVID- 19 has led to some short- and long-term negative impacts on school dropouts. The possible short-term impact on children in grades 10- 12 includes; the time lost in school could discourage the youth about the chances of completing their NSC or lead to school push out. Moreover, learners were found to have had a lot of time in their hands during the lockdown which could've also increased more social problems like teenage pregnancy which could lead to an increase in school dropout.

2.4.6 Teenage Pregnancy

Education is highly valued by young people in South Africa and aspirations for education are high. It is therefore not surprising that the rise in access to education since the 1970s, particularly for young women, has been met with a commitment decline in teenage fertility (Morrell, 2009). Despite the debate as to whether teenage pregnancy is a cause of, or results from dropout, local and international studies show that both share the common antecedent of poverty and poor school performance. While pregnancy may be the endpoint most directly associated with dropout, it is often not the cause. Girls who perform poorly at school are more likely to return to school following a pregnancy (Morejele, Kachieng'a, Makoko, Matsobane, Perry, Nkokwane, 2006).

Fertility and motherhood continue to be important factors in the life course of a woman however; Teenage pregnancy is viewed as a major setback in terms of educational and economic aspirations (Panday et al. 2009). Teenage pregnancy is driven by several things in South Africa; this includes, gender expectations of how teenage boys and girls should conduct themselves; taboos for girls and sexual permissiveness for boys, poverty, poor access to contraceptives and termination pregnancies. Although even when girls have experienced an early pregnancy, South Africa's liberal policy allows pregnant girls to remain in school and to return to school post- pregnancy. However, only a third of teenage mothers return to school.

According to Runhare (2010), pregnant learners encountered a lot of abuse in schools ranging from loss of friendship, isolation, mockery, negative labelling, being used as examples of bad behaviour to being given nicknames.

In a study conducted by Khumalo (2011), it was found that pregnant learners dropped out of school because of the pressures they experienced, including stigmatization associated with early parenting, isolation from peers and lack of needed support from family, friends and the school environment. An investigation conducted by Fihlani in Limpopo, particularly at Blood River, outside Polokwane found that 17-year-old Kholofelo was a victim of one of the 27 girls who became pregnant in the same year at the Molautsi Secondary school- out of 438 female pupils aged between 15 and 19 (BBC NEWS, 2018). Ardington, Branson, Lam, Leibbrandt, Marteleto, Menendez, Mutevedzi, and Ranchold, (2012), found that a significant number of these pregnancies are unplanned. Hlungwangi (2011) reported in Sowetan Live that pupils at Mavalani Secondary School outside Giyani, Limpopo went on a rampage, destroying property after accusing the principal of reporting that 57 of their schoolmates were pregnant and the youngest expectant mother was 13 years old (Sowetan, 2011: online). This confirms the high rate of pregnancy among teenagers who are still at school. It further suggests that parents and educators may be failing in curbing teenage pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy has always been a global issue however the COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked unprecedented havoc on children, families and communities around the globe, disrupting vital services and putting millions of lives at risk (WHO, 2020). School closure during the pandemic has led to girls spending more time with men and boys than they would be they to be in school leading to a greater likelihood of engagement in risky sexual behaviour and increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation and 0teenage pregnancy (UNESCO, 2020).

The prevalence of teenage pregnancy is endless, it is estimated that 182, 000 South African Teenagers become pregnant each year and many are still at school. In Limpopo province, a total of 16, 238 children were born of teenagers in the province state-owned hospitals between April 2017 and March 2018 (BBC NEWS, 2018). As of 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately five per cent of females aged 14-19 years in South Africa were stated to be going through different stages of

pregnancy within the last 12 months. The prevalence of pregnancy increased with age. While 0.4% of young women aged 14 were stated pregnant, the number of 19 years old pregnant women was 32 times higher. Furthermore, pregnancy amongst women aged 19 years increased by 2.8% between 2018 and 2019 (STATSSA, 2021)

Teenagers are having sex and although some educators and parents turn a blind eye to what is going on in their absentia. Parents and educators often consider sex an illicit topic. The tight restrictions around sex education and access to contraceptives due to negative attitudes received by teenagers in hospitals and clinics result in unwanted pregnancies, illegal abortions and the rise in HIV/AIDS (Wallace, 2019). An interview that was conducted with Limpopo Education Minister Maaria Kgetjepe supports how turning a blind eye to sex and the negative attitudes by nurses in hospitals and clinics affects teenagers. Minister Maaria Kgetjepe states "Rural Communities are still reluctant to talk openly about sex. Talking to young people about sex is considered Taboo. The problem with that is it does not mean they are not engaging in those activities, he says. Moreover, learners also tell us there is a lot of judgment and ill-treatment from older nurses when they visit government facilities to ask for contraceptives so this makes them reluctant to approach clinics and hospitals.

The above-mentioned author posits that during COVID-19, Krachi West Area Programme in Ghana has experienced an almost ninefold rise in teenage pregnancy. Between March and May 2020, 51 children have been reported pregnant. Whereas there were just six cases of teen pregnancy recorded in all of 2018 (Bandiera et al, 2018). The majority of these pregnancies came because of the lockdown instituted by the government as a preventive measure to stop the infection of COVID-19. A case study conducted in Kenya found that a 17-year-old Cathy is 5 months pregnant since schools had been closed in March because of COVID-19. 17-year-old Cathy stated that "COVID-19 has destroyed everything. If it were not for the pandemic, I would have been busy in school and not pregnant."

Given the prevalent cases of teenage pregnancy prior to COVID-19 and date, it can be noted that The Ecological Theory suggests that the primary premise explaining human problems is derived from the complex interplay of psychological, social,

economic, political and physical forces therefore, it allows the practitioner to effectively treat problems and needs of various systemic levels including the individual, family, the small group, and the larger community (Landsberg, Kruger & Swart, 2011).

2.4.7 Bullying

Bullying constitutes a significant challenge for school safety and undermines directly the creation of an enabling school environment that supports personal growth and development. It is arguably one of the most underrated and enduring problems in schools today, and while adults are often unaware of bullying, research shows that it is a reality in the lives of most South African children, whether they are bullies, victims or witnesses (Juan, 2018). Victims of bullying often suffer from health issues, physical injury and severe emotional and psychological problems that can last a lifetime, and even result in school drop-out, self-harm, suicide and murder. There are many forms of bullying that victims experience and it includes cyber bullying, physical, sexual and verbal bullying (Zuze, Andrea, Govender and Reddy, 2018).

A study conducted by the Department of Education (2012), found that children who bully other learners often copy or act out the behaviour they see or experience, especially at home. Moreover, Children who bully often have trouble dealing with their feelings or the feelings of others. Some children bully as a way of dealing with negative emotions. They may be angry or frustrated and exert power over others as a way of making themselves feel better. Children who bully also often lack the skills needed to solve problems without resorting to violence. For targets, the consequences of bullying can be severe, and often last a lifetime (Rekord Newspaper, 2019).

Although some learners may only find bullying annoying, it can also cause significant physical and psychological harm. In addition to injuries, mental stress often results in physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea and stomach pains. Victims also often become anxious, socially withdrawn and depressed, and in severe cases may even develop eating disorders, self-harm or commit suicide (Wanget al., 2009; Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017). The physical and psychological problems associated with bullying also make it hard for learners to concentrate and can negatively affect

school performance. They may also skip classes or school and even drop out to avoid being bullied (Hymel and Waterhouse, 2017).

Bullying continues to be a part of the everyday life of school-going children in South Africa. Several bullying incidents continuously show that bullying is a serious matter like any other social problem experienced in schools. A 17-year-old pupil from Roodepark High school was admitted to the hospital after an alleged bullying incident at school where he was slam-dunked onto the concrete by a fellow pupil during an altercation (Luvhengo, 2020). Following the incident of a 17-year-old pupil from Rooderpark High school is the death of Limpopo teenager, Lufuno Mavhungu brought the effects of bullying and violence on children caused by other learners at school, to the forefront. The grade 10 pupil was laid to rest after a video of her getting beaten up and called names by other learners went viral on social media in April this Year. It was reported that she passed after a pill overdose following the incident (Gcwabe, 2021).

According to Dr Mayisela (2021), an Educational Psychologist with a special interest in school violence noted that bullying has lasting psychological effects on both the victim and the bully. She further indicated that many children do not report bullying because they fear being labelled and called weak. This results in a child being withdrawn, depressed, anxious and unable to socialize in the future. The children who witness others being bullied are also affected because they are likely to have low self-esteem and show signs of post-traumatic stress. Research has also shown that male children especially, those who become bullies grow up to be verbally or physically abusive fathers and husbands.

A Study by Rembe and Muhuro, (2011), found that some learners use violent behaviour to appropriate lunchboxes from other learners or instruct these victims to request or steal money from home. The implication of school social work practice is that to cultivate harmony between learners and their environment as suggested in the Ecosystems theory, there must be interventions that seek to contribute to the learning environment that will deal with bullying together with other social problems faced in schools (Earnshaw, Elliot, Reisner, Mrug, Windle, Emery, Peskin and Schuster (2017).

2.4.8 Poverty

South Africa has struggled with poverty with high rates of poverty for many years and the correlation between South African poverty and Education is present in many different aspects of the relationship. In rural areas, in former homelands, about 81% of children are below the poverty line and 44% of the children in urban areas live in poverty as well. Education in rural areas suffers especially, simply as are a result of the barriers presented by the location. For example, critical resources such as water, electricity, books and technology are missing (Hogan, 2020). There are many factors that influence how children learn and develop, both in the classroom and at home. One of the major challenges is poverty. Unfortunately, in South Africa, poverty affects millions of households. Therefore, learners regardless of their socio-economic status or poverty level need support in the educational process. However, the learning process is not easy for learners from poverty-stricken families which are often caused by unemployment and other economic inequalities and the inability of families to meet basic needs such as nutrition and shelter (Milner, 2015).

Learners across poverty categories bring a range of strengths and assets into a learning environment however, that becomes a challenge for Learners living under emotional stress which adversely affects learning and development. Moreover, malnutrition can affect a child's cognitive abilities as well as their level of concentration (Moloi, 2015).

Parents of children living in poverty often struggle to provide them with enough quality food and medical coverage (Rembe and Muhuro, 2011). Children living in poverty often come to school without having had enough sleep and without having had breakfast and may be unable to pay for extracurricular activities as well as lacking adequate clothes to wear. Children want to feel loved and secure however when security is absent, children do not want to go to school or be around other people, which complicates the learning process. This is also supported by the Macrosystem in the Ecological theory that states even though the child may seem far removed from government policies and other economic systems, they often have an impact on the child's life. An example would be poverty in this case because children who come from a poor family or community setup and experience little to no support struggle with confidence which reduces their desire to learn (Genesis, 2020)

Poverty has been found to deprive families of the power to insist on an education system that answers their needs. Many children leave school because their caregivers cannot afford to afford basic household necessities of food and clothing. Children in the lowest income groups are more likely to walk to school than those in the highest income group. It was found that in Kwazulu- Natal alone, more learners walk to school than in any other province, more than 210 000 learners walk for more than an hour each day and 659 00 walks for between 30 minutes and an hour each day, this is because they are unable to cover transport costs even when these are minimal (South Africa; Broken and unequal education perpetuating poverty and inequality, 11 February 2020). Studies in India show that nearly 47.9 % of Indian Households that have more than five children are severely deprived of shelter, water, sanitation, health and education as compared to 7.8% of poor families without children according to the Indian Human Development Survey released on May 11, 2019. This is supported by Misselhorn (2018) that asserts Many children are compelled to find work to augment household income, or to attend household duties, such as caring for their younger siblings (Misselhorn, 2018).

Girls are deeply affected than boys with nearly 20% of non- school attendance among girls being accounted for by family commitments. Moreover, these young girls are found to be without sanitary towels. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted education across the globe and while schools have managed to carry on using online resources and dividing attendance however the pandemic has exposed and declared the inequalities in the country's childhood education (Mlaba, 2020). According to TimesLive (2020), South Africa's Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, confirmed that more than 300, 000 children have potentially dropped out of schools across South Africa over 6 months, including the National Lockdown. Statistics South Africa reported that 2, 2 million jobs were lost as a result of the economy shutting down during the lockdown period, and this could affect children school attendance (Mlaba, 2020). Ayanda in Khayelitsha states that "E-learning has always been for the middle class and upper classes leaving behind the working class to fend for themselves. "While parents across the city are deeply concerned about their children's education, many do not have the access to devices, data, electricity or stationery to make remote learning a possibility (Anciano, Cooper-Knock, Dube, Papane, Majola, 2020).

Poverty has persistently proven time and time again that if it is not well addressed, it will worsen. For those living in confined and densely populated areas, like most South African Townships or informal settlements, physical distancing is almost impossible as is frequent hand-washing for those with limited access to water or money to purchase soap and hand sanitiser. With interruptions to many income-generating strategies and the closure of schools (places where many South African children receive their only meal in a day) increasing hunger. The impact of lockdown has been borne disproportionately by those children living on or below the breadline. These pandemic highlights how crucial it is to fundamentally address the inequalities that exist in South African Society as well as involve relevant stakeholders who are fully equipped to deal with social challenges like Poverty as suggested by the Ecological theory. Social workers should be given the platform to stand as the interface of the family, the school and community or society to utilise a variety of interventions to produce consonance within the child's ecosystem (Oliveira and Walker, 2021).

2.4.9 Peer Pressure

Adolescents in South Africa often lack supportive and stable home environments; as a result, they turn to their friends and peers to gain a sense of belonging. According to Ecological Theory Pioneered by Bronfenbrenner, it states that Independence (Freedom), is a part of personal growth and development in a child's life however learners, particularly teenagers do not always practice it in the healthiest ways as a result of too much leisure time are factors that increase risky behaviours in disadvantaged communities. (Raising children, 2021). Peer pressure tends to grow in intensity as learners move up through their grades and by the time these learners reach high school, fitting in has become a priority (Raising Children, 2021). Most, if not all the learners who succumb to Peer pressure, often come from poor backgrounds as a result other learners make feel ashamed or bad about themselves and their families therefore to gain acceptance, they conform to negative practices which will result in negative consequences (Costello and Hope, 2016).

The Mesosystem entails connections between the child's Microsystem structures with one another (Shepard, 2012). This is the relationship between one's family and peers. Mesosystem interaction is the simultaneous multiple role participation of the

adolescent where people play different roles in different contexts to another. In addition, social roles are defined as behaviours and expectations associated with various interpersonal relationships and positions in society. Certainly, roles have a transformation effect on developing children or adolescent as well as on all those with whom he or she interacts. To this end, Mesosystem is the interrelationships among settings. Hence, the stronger and more diverse the links among settings, the more powerful an influence the resulting systems will be on the adolescent moral development. In these interrelationships, the initiatives of the adolescent and the parent's involvement in linking the home and the school, play roles in determining the quality of the adolescent moral behaviour based on the Mesosystem that is why It is common for teenagers to think that nobody understands them and that they whole world is against them. However, in a few cases, the influence of peer pressure is such that it draws teenagers completely away from family and friends who mean well (Padama, 2014). They shut themselves off and fall into a bad company (6 Negative effects of Peer pressure 2).

In a Nutshell, the Mesosystem helps us understand the relationship between the different neighbourhoods that influence children or learners, moral adolescent and moral behaviours therefore, a child develops behaviours he or she relates to as they interact with their peers and this is supported by a study conducted in the Western Cape about understanding the reasons why teenagers conform to peer pressure, where one of the participants mentioned that they care a lot about what their friends think and say about them and also they have the fear of missing out (FOMO) on any of the activities their friends may be participating in even if its wrong (Andrews, 2018).

2.4.10 Sexual violence

Sexual Violence has been a constant feature of South African Schools as it has been off social society in general. Many schools have become violent and unsafe environments, particularly for the girl child. It is also unfortunately a matter on which there has been resounding silence from society (CALS, 2021). Sexual abuse takes various forms and is perpetrated by both learners and staff in schools. It ranges from sexual harassment, touching and verbal degradation to rape and other forms of

sexual violence. The abuse takes place in dormitories, in empty classrooms, in hallways and school toilets (Bhana, 2021)

A study that was conducted in urban high schools in South Africa about teenage girls experiences in schools found that majority of these sexual violence's are linked to drug use, social inequalities and construction of gender identity. Moreover, the study found certain behaviour was tolerated because it was not seen as violence (Mayeza, 2021). The outcome of the study further found that the challenges of these urban schools included overcrowding, old and dilapidated buildings. According to the participants interviewed, they indicated that boys at school sexually gazed at girls in the corridors during lunch breaks and gossiped about girls' physical appearance, their bodies and their desires and demands to have sex with girls. Sexual harassment in corridors also involved inappropriate touching (Mayeza & Bhana, 2021). Seemingly; a study conducted in the United Kingdom by Siddique (2021), about the experiences of sexual harassment and violence among girls in schools, found that these school girls experience harassment in school corridors, name-calling and being asked to send Nudes by boys.

Moreover, they further indicated that they are less likely to report these incidences because they see these as 'common incidents' hence they do not see the point of reporting and challenging this behaviour (Siddique, 2020). Macrosystem consists of the larger cultural world surrounding learners together with any underlying belief systems and includes aspects such as the government, political ideology, cultural customs and beliefs, historical events and the economic system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Duerden and Witt, 2010). The recognition of violence against girls is a significant barrier to social and economic development in all parts of the world is linked with the understanding that the societal mistreatment of school girls is reflected in the culture of the nations that marginalize and lessen the value of women and their contribution to the Society (Chisholm and September 2005). Therefore, the emphasis is on the social norms created by the society towards children that negatively affect their development, understanding and perceptions of sexual violence and the impact it has on the victims.

Schools and learners should have a safe learning environment that allows them to thrive however, in South Africa this goal is compromised by sexual and other types

of violence in schools, from physical fights among pupils and between teachers and pupils to cases of rape. This is proven after 2 cases of sexual assault by teachers in the Northern Cape and Gauteng was reported (Mogaotlhe, 2019). It was found that a trainee school teacher in Orania, a White only town in Northern Cape was arrested for allegedly having sex with a minor. Meanwhile in Gauteng, a report by investigative TV show Carte Blanche exposed what learners and some teachers call a culture of sexual grooming and assault at Tebogo Kgologobe Arts Academy in Centurion. One of the former teachers, Jennifer Notoane spoke on the record about the disturbing behaviour she observed, including a male teacher touching a learner inappropriately (Mogaotlhe, 2019).

Despite the country's political response to violence against women and girls, South Africa is a violent country and no day passes without reminding us of this sad reality (Ngoma-Diseko, 2021). School going girls struggle with male violence in and out of school and they often show poor academic performance, regular school absenteeism, anxiety and depression. School violence is a pervasive issue that affects both learners and teachers.

In October 2019, the South African Council for Educators (SACE) released its 2018-2019 annual report, which indicated that cases of sexual abuse in schools have increased by 230% over the past five-year period. This report clearly indicates a national crisis requiring urgent action to address the root cause; without distracting from the reality that educations and other learners are not only the perpetrators, and are often the victims themselves (Esterhuizen &Gaum, 2020).

2.4.11 Homelessness/ Poor Housing Conditions

Homelessness is another step down the ladder of poverty. It is a problem that is faced by 1.5 million children. Many Homeless families live in shelters in rural or urban areas. With one rent and living expenses (De Beer, 2015). Many families are just one emergency away from disaster. Homeless children still need to have an education, although when they get to school they may be teased about their clothes and the fact that they fall asleep in class. Even though homeless children are with their families, older homeless children may be runaways or may have been kicked out of their homes and some may have been victims of sexual and physical abuse, witnesses of parental alcoholism abuse and family violence (Roets, 2016).

Broken relationships, dysfunctional families and Divorce have led to homelessness which results in adverse effects on children including hunger, poor physical and mental health and missed educational opportunities (Makiwane, 2012; Nixion, 2016). Schooling for homeless children is often interrupted and delayed, with homeless children twice as likely to have a learning disability, a repeat grade or to be suspended (Phillips, 2012; Nixion, 2016). Homeless children lack stability in their lives with 97% having moved at least once on an annual basis, which leads to disruptions in schooling and negatively impacts academic achievement. Moreover, it is reported that a number of homeless children living with their families turn to Drugs as they are easily accessible for homeless people. The abuse of drugs becomes both a survival strategy and escapism from reality (Tembe, 2015).

A study that was conducted in Ekukhanyisweni Primary school found that quite a number of learners in that school reside in informal structures and can barely afford proper school uniforms. Moreover, another study conducted about the relationship between poor housing conditions and educational attainment found that children living in overcrowded houses have a lower probability of completing secondary education and have an increased tendency to be absent from school. Homelessness and overcrowding have been found to have an adverse impact on children's educational performance, including their physical and psychological health and life chances (Ambrose and Farrel 2009). This is supported by the Ecological theory that states, children's development is affected by their surroundings or environment. Moreover, the Mesosystem also states that if a child is neglected by their parents, they are more likely to develop a low chance of positive attitudes towards teachers at school.

According to Cunnigham and Macdonald (2012), proper and conducive housing for a learner should consist of the following dimensions; housing quality, residential stability, affordable housing and a safe and residential neighbourhood. All of these dimensions both on their own and combined; affect the academic achievement of children. However, in our current state, most learners do not have the privileges to find themselves and their families occupying such residential areas due to financial constraints. Street homelessness is a complex phenomenon that is caused by many factors, including poverty. Children and families that live in the streets live in

inhumane conditions and their survival strategies question the applicability of the basic human right in their context (Nixion, 2016).

2.4.12 Child headed households/ Families

In a country like South Africa, still struggling with two epidemics- HIV and TB that have resulted in many children losing parents, we now have a pandemic (COVID-19) where over 20% of all deaths occur amongst people over 65 years of age. This also means that children are losing grandparents who, in many cases may be the primary caregiver and source of financial support. Illness, isolation and quarantine have resulted in newborns and young children being separated from their mothers, an experience that we know is devastating for infant and child development (Tomllision, Richter, Slemming, 2021). The increasing rate of mortality among adults due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, violence, poverty and other such factors has impacted the basic structure of the nuclear and extended family systems due to an increase in the number of orphans and vulnerable children.

Families and communities are unable to cope with the effects of HIV and AIDS with special emphasis on the care and support of the affected orphans and vulnerable children, who as a result have been compelled to look after themselves giving rise to a new type of Family, the child-headed household. The increase of CHH is a direct consequence of the increasing number of orphans as well as the dismantling of the social support system for orphans and families by the scourge of HIV/AIDS. Child headed households are both present nationally and globally. An elaborate interrogation of both national and international literature on child-headed households led to the identification of several challenges that are experienced by children living in such households. Some of these challenges are; increased responsibility of a nurse and care for the sick family members (Evans & Becker 2009; Skovdal et al. 2009); the difficulty of dealing with the stigma of family members being sick or dead due to HIV and AIDS.

The lack of grief support (Pillay, 2012); shortage of resources and an increase of starvation and malnutrition; increased school absenteeism and withdrawal due to being responsible for house chores such as cooking, cleaning and looking after the siblings; poor school performance; inadequate access to medical care and the sexual exploitation of the girl child. Several South African studies on CHH have not

only corroborated the challenges mentioned but may also have expanded the body of knowledge, especially in terms of the educational, psychological and social challenges that children from Child Headed households are confronted with on a daily basis which forces them to make the adjustment from being a child to assume the role of a parent, without being prepared for it because of lack of support from lack of support from extended family or relatives, Moreover, these young pupils heading households are deprived from their childhood and forced to take the role of a parent which is also overwhelming for them(Leatham 2005; Pillay & Nesengani 2006; Devereux, Hochfeld, Karriem, Mensah, Msimango et al, 2018).

Adults have struggled to raise families in the wake of the pandemic. However, for child-headed families, it has been a double blow. According to the Citizen Bulletin (2021), 17-year-old Vumani from Makwandara Village in Namibia is trying to find a way out of the vicious cycle of poverty. He is the eldest in a child-headed household of four children.

Vumani is a school dropout and he lost his parents in 2015 to HIV/AIDS and he was 11 years old and was going grade 6. In a bid to make a living for his siblings, he volunteered to mix clay assisting potters in ceramic moulding products at Gwayi pottery, a business that was severely affected by COVID-19 due to travel restrictions and fewer tourists. "Since then Vumani has been surviving from Handouts and some piece jobs although things are not easy he stated."

According to the Child Protection and Adoption Act Chapter 5;6 of Zimbabwe, a child whose parents are both dead or cannot be traced and has no legal guardian is considered a child in need of care and protection. The government of Zimbabwe has also implemented the National Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVcs). However, speaking to this publication. Sibusiso Ndlovu, aged 16 years noted that such interventions have not been effective in a blueprint. "During the COVID-19 lockdown, we heard of the relief funds and some allowances, but I have never received anything. I had to cut firewood for neighbours and tend their gardens in order to survive and feed my brothers, says Sibusiso.".

Given the reports of the impact of COVID 19 on child-headed households, it can be noted that child-headed households have been a challenge however since COVID-19 it has made it extremely difficult for children to survive in the midst of the-

pandemic and continues to place children's lives at risk especially in terms of their lack of formal housing and support from an adult. The degree of child-headed households remains severe and requires effective intervention (Global Citizen, 2020).

2.5 THE ROLES THAT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS PLAY IN ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY LEARNERS AND TEACHERS.

This section addresses the key roles of the school social worker. The main frame of reference for discussion will be the South African context and more specifically, Mankweng Circuit in the Limpopo Province. School social workers are trained and hired to enhance the district's ability to meet the academic missions, especially where home, school and community collaboration is the key to achieving learner's success. Moreover, school social workers bring unique knowledge and skills to enable and enhance children to function effectively in school and community (NASW, 2010).

According to analyses of the local literature, it indicates that the roles, tasks and functions of South African school social workers are largely determined by where they are employed within the education system and the level of authority associated with the position (Kemp, 2014; NACOSSWEP, 2015). Social workers that are employed at the National level perform more managerial and administrative roles and tasks, such as the development of policies, strategies, norms, standards, systems, and structures, as well as monitoring and evaluation (NACOSSWEP, 2015). At the provincial Level, the roles are coupled with other tasks. These include the management and support of District social workers, the coordination of school social work services, the organizing of seminars and training and screening of Programs (Morgan, 2017; NACOSSWEP, 2015). At the District level, direct support is provided to learners, parents, caregivers, educators and school governing Bodies (NACOSSWEP, 2015). The following roles are played by social workers in tackling social issues that are faced by learners in their homes which affect their school progress and school environment.

2.5.1 Broker

The social worker is involved in the process of making referrals to link families or a child with resources. This role also entails not only providing information but also

following up to ensure that the needed resources are attained. The broker also helps put various segments of the community in touch with one another to enhance their mutual interests (Barker, 1995). In micro-level and mezzo systems, this requires that the social worker be familiar with the community services, have general knowledge about eligibility requirements and be sensitive to the client's needs. In a school setting, a child may help a child obtain emergency food, housing, legal aid or other needed resources (Zastrow &Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

2.5.2 Enabler

In the enabler role, a social worker helps the client become capable of coping with a situation or transition. A social worker conveys hope, reducing resistance and ambivalence, recognizing and managing feelings, identifying and supporting personal strengths and social assets, breaking down problems into parts that can be solved more readily and maintaining a focus on goals and the means of achieving them (Barker, 1977).

2.5.3 Facilitator

A Facilitator is one who serves as a leader for some group experience (Barker, 1995). The group may be a family therapy group, a task group, a sensitivity group, an educational group, a self-help group or a group with some other focus. The facilitator role may also apply to Macro practice. In this context, a facilitator assumes the responsibility to expedite the change effort by bringing together people and lines of communication, channelling their activities and resources and providing them with access to expertise

2.5.4 Consultant

Social workers are uniquely qualified to operate as consultants at all ecological system levels. The Mandate for individual change and social change ensures that social workers are always mindful of individual change and social change. The social worker as a consultant understands the person within the environment (Schein, 2010).

2.5.5 Counsellor

Social workers play the role of counsellors by ensuring that families and children improve relationships and cope with difficult situations such as divorce, illness or

death. In addition, school social workers assist parents and teachers in learning to cope with and manage a child's emotional and behavioural problems (NASW, 2002 Standard 26) in a school setting where social workers are dealing with learners from different backgrounds. Counselling occurs in different ways and it includes counselling individuals on a one-on-one basis or in groups. Counselling in groups involves through membership in groups. These groups meet the needs of diverse populations and are effective tools in reaching many learners at once. Group work in schools includes the three Major models of group work: remedial, reciprocal and social goals. The remedial model provides group therapy geared towards changing dysfunctional behaviour. The reciprocal model focuses on achieving mutual aid or support through group work such as that practised by Alcoholics Anonymous. The social goal model addresses social and consciousness or responsibility through groups such as social skills and anger management groups (Whitaker, 1980). Some of the main types of groups with which social workers assist are to focus on social skills, support for new learners, anger management, and grief or support related to parental separation.

In addition, recreational groups provide field trips and teach new skills. Social workers also train learners in group work and counselling skills so they can help their peers. School social workers assist parents through group work as well. Teaching parental skills and educating parents on how to accommodate learners with specific disabilities. They also work on the transition specialists to help learners and their parents prepare to leave public school when the learners turn 18 or have completed an equivalency exam for special education learners leaving high school. Social workers also teach parents about the various community programs and resources and when necessary, make referrals.

2.5.6 Mediator

The role of a mediator involves resolving conflicts at micro, mezzo and macro systems. It mediates between the client and the microsystems, between the client and the macro system, between the two microsystems or between two macro systems. At Macro Level, the mediator helps various subsystems, within a community, or a community and some other system, work on their differences. At the micro and mezzo levels, mediation helps in such areas as resolving divorce and

child custody cases (Zastrow and Kirst- Ashman, 2007, Kirst-Ashman and Hull, 2016). School Social workers can be effective neutral mediators to bring about needed change or to find mutually agreeable ways to settle down the conflict between parents and schools (NASW, standard 15).

2.5.7 Assessor/ Evaluator

The role of evaluator involves social workers having a broad knowledge based on how various systems function can analyze or evaluate how well programs and systems work. They can also evaluate the effectiveness of their interventions (Zastrow &Kirst-Ashman, 1997).

2.5.8 Advocate

The role of advocacy for school social workers ensures that all learners have equal access to education and services to enhance their academic progress. This includes; helping learners gain access to and effective use of formal and informal community resources that enable families to self-advocate (NASW, 2012). Social workers act as advocates for parents when they help them understand their rights.

Often, social workers seek out parents who are unwilling to become involved with the school system and help them understand that someone in the school supports them. Many parents are intimidated by the school system; as a result, the social worker reaches out to them and assures the successful outcome of their interactions with the school (Bnachy, 1977).

2.5.9 Educator

Social workers are often involved in teaching people about resources and how to develop particular skills such as budgeting, the caring discipline of children, effective communication, the meaning of medical diagnosis and the prevention of violence. The role of an enabler requires the social worker to be knowledgeable, additionally, the social worker must be a good communicator so that information is conveyed clearly and is understood by the client or Macrosystem (Zastrow & Kirst- Ashman, 1997).

2.5.10 Negotiator

A negotiator represents an organization, a group or an individual that is trying to gain something from another group or system. Somewhat like mediation, negotiation involves finding a middle ground that all sides can live with and achieving consensus whenever possible. However, unlike mediators who play a neutral role, negotiators ally themselves with one of the sides involved (Zastrow & Kirst- Ashman, 1997).

2.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter dealt with the literature that was reviewed and the theory that was employed in this study. The literature was reviewed in line with the aims and objectives of the study. This dissertation focused on the magnitude of issues that are faced by learners and educators in a school setting. The Ecological theory by Bronfenbrenner was used in this study to help us understand the influence of social environments on human development. This theory argues that the environment which one grows up in affects every aspect of a person's life. The next chapter will focus on the methodology employed in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. 1 INTRODUCTION

Research Methodology encompasses the way one intends to carry out their study (Salmons, 2021). This section brings to the fore the methodology that was deployed in carrying out the research study. Thus, the key discussions centre around the aim of the study, objectives, research approach, research design, sampling and population, data collection, data analysis and quality criteria, significance of the study, limitations of the study and ethical considerations of the study.

3.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

3.2.1 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of School principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers at Mankweng circuit.

3.2.2 Objectives of the study

The study pursued the following objectives:

• To describe the perceptions of school principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers.

• To determine perceived roles played by school social workers from principals and circuit managers vantage points; and

• To provide recommendations on the need for school social workers.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH ANDRESEARCH DESIGN

3.3.1 Research Approach

The researcher selected the qualitative approach to guide the study. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport, (2011), a qualitative approach involves understanding human behaviour from the perspective of the people involved. Moriarty (2011), adds that qualitative approach is directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning

about their societal and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories.

This type of research typically takes place in the natural world, drawing on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The qualitative approach is therefore regarded as unstructured because it allows flexibility in all research aspects (Denzin& Lincon, 2008). This approach was selected and deemed fit because it helped the researcher understand the perceptions of principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers in Mankweng.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Babbie and Mouton, (2012), a research design refers to a strategy of how the researcher aims to conduct the research. It focuses on the reason or sense of research and the kind of evidence required to address the research questions adequately. In addition, Yin (2014) "defines a research design as a logical plan of getting from here to there, where here may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered and here is some set of conclusions about these questions."

The descriptive research design was chosen for the study. According to McCombes (2019), a descriptive research design aims at accurately and systematically describing a population, situation or a phenomenon. Moreover, it can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables. Descriptive research was found fit for the study because it helped the and allowed the researcher to answer what, where, when and how questions. According to Hancook, Algozzine,Lim (2021), a descriptive design assists and allowed the researcher to describe, analyse and interpret a phenomenon which in these cases the perceptions of principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers.

3.5 SAMPLING AND POPULATION

A study population is a complete set of individuals or other entities to which study outcomes are to be generalised (Engel & Schurr; 2013; Kenton, 2019). The population of the study was in the Capricorn district. Capricorn District is divided into two (2) regions, namely, Capricorn South and North region. However, the focus was placed on schools that are in the South region.

The South region is made up of four (4) clusters, from which Dimamo, Lebopo, Mamabolo, Mankweng and Kgakotlou emerged. A purposive sample of ten (10) participants was selected for this study which consisted of six (6) principals and four (4) circuit managers from four (4) clusters in the Capricorn South. The participants were selected using a non- Probability sampling method, namely, purposive sampling method. According to Barratt, Ferris and Lenton (2015), purposive sampling relies on the researchers' knowledge of the field and rapport with members of targeted networks. The foregoing is based on the researcher's judgement and was motivated by the purpose of the study (De Vos et al., 2011). The participants were selected using a criterion based on certain characteristics they share. These common characteristics included participants coming from the same circuit (Mankweng) which was suitable for the selection criteria and ensured that data collected was relevant and accurate. Participants were not forced to participate in the study.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection refers to a process of gathering and measuring information on variable of interest, in an established systematic approach that enables one to answer stated research questions, hypotheses and evaluates outcomes (Kabir, 2016; Bhandari, 2021). Firstly, the researcher scheduled appointments with participants, and interviews were conducted in private spaces in order to ensure participants feel comfortable and free. Semi-structured face to face interviews were used for data collection. These types of interviews were ideal because they allowed the researcher to make follow ups on certain avenues of the interview as well as participants. This gave the researcher a comprehensive picture of participant's daily life experiences. Semi structured interviews are mainly appropriate when the researcher is mostly fascinated in complication or when an issue is datable or intimate (De Vos et al., 2011). The interviews used in this study allowed participants to be free to respond to open- ended questions as they wish, and the researcher was able to probe their responses (Mcintosh & Morse, 2015). Prior the commencement of data collection, the researcher obtained Ethical clearance from Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

The researcher also obtained permission from gatekeepers at the Department of Education, which covers Mankweng Circuit. Thereafter, ten (10) participants were interviewed by the researcher from Mankweng Circuit using a list of questions carefully constructed. A total response rate of hundred per cent (100%) was successfully achieved. An audio recording device was utilised with the permission from participants to record their responses. The researcher also used field notes to back up the interview process.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis was followed. This study sourced primary data from interviews and secondary data was used through literature which shed greater insight into the current study. According to Braun and Clark, (2011); Byrne, (2021), Thematic Content Analysis entails identifying, analysing and reporting technique for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. The Researcher conducted the six phased Thematic Content Analysis as outlined by Braun and Clark (2011).

Step one: Familiarizing oneself with data.

The researcher collected data through interviewing participants and thereafter occupied herself with it by frequently reading and recording and developing themes. After conducting interviews, the researcher transcribed them, then read and re-read through transcripts, making notes of initial ideas to be familiar with data. This involved careful reading of the data to extract themes, explaining the challenges that are faced by educators and learners in a school setting.

Step two: Generating initial codes.

After the researcher has familiarised herself with data, a list of notions were generated. This step involved the production of initial codes from the data. The codes identified a feature of the data that looked thought- provoking to the researcher and referred to the most basic elements of the raw data. All real data extracts were coded and organized together within each code.

Codes of analysis that explain the challenges faced by learners and teachers in schools which require the intervention of School social workers were generated.

Step three: Searching for themes

After data were coded and collated, different codes were organised and identified into credible themes. All the relevant coded data was assembled within the identified themes. The researcher then analysed the codes and considered how different codes could be combined to form the all-comprehensive theme. Thereafter, the themes were arranged into themes and sub-themes.

Step four: Reviewing themes

The themes that we developed from the data were then re-examined and advanced. The researcher instigated the re-examination of themes to polish them and remained with fascinating and salient themes. All assembled extracts for each theme were read and considered to see whether they appeared to form a coherent pattern.

Step five: Defining and naming themes

Themes were defined and further refined. The researcher ran theme names and clear working definitions that outlined the essence of each theme briefly. The researcher examined each theme and then put it into writing. Themes that relate to the challenges that are faced by educators and learners and the roles of school social workers were reviewed. The refining and defining of themes is all about identifying the essence of each theme and determining aspects of the data each theme was taken.

Step six: Producing the report.

A final analysis was made by the researcher and a report was written for analysis of the dissertation. The researcher provided a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story of the data, within and across the themes.

3.8 QUALITY CRITERIA

Trustworthiness refers to the degree of confidence that the researcher has that their qualitative data and findings are credible, transferable and dependable (Halcomb& Andrews, 2008; Lemon&Hayes, 2020). The following criteria will be applied to determine the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

3.8.1 Credibility

The researcher adopted a well- recognised research method to ensure the durability and then debriefed the participants and described the phenomenon under scrutiny (Sheton, 2004) As outlined by De Vos (2011), the criterion reflects the truth and value of the information and findings of participants, as well as the context in which the study has been undertaken. The researcher immersed herself in participant's world, views and the feelings which assisted in understanding the challenges they experience, eliminating distortions of information that arise due to her presence in the field, given the fact that the researcher is female.

Therefore, credibility helped to establish if the findings will represent reasonable information drawn from participants' original data and that interpretation the participants' point of view. According to Glaser, Kyle, Onwuegbuzie and Whittermore (2013), transferability alludes to the generalisation of the study and findings to other situations and contexts. Transferability can also be defined as the degree to which the outcomes of a research can be transferred to other contexts by the readers (Cameroon, 2005; Mertens, 2011). This means the results can be generalised, and can be applied to other comparable settings, populations, circumstances, etc. The researcher will research context to assist the research community in duplicating the study elsewhere if need be.

3.8.2 Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which results of the study can be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochum. 2006; Guenther& Falk, 2019). The researcher also recognised shortcomings in the research methods and their potential effects and minimised them, for instance, administrator bias, which meant that she had to conduct the interviews similarly as she could (Shenton, 2004). The researcher enhanced confirmability by documenting all procedures used to check and recheck the data throughout the study. Critical to this process is the audit trail, which allows any observer to trace the course of the research step- by-step via decisions made and procedures described. Belief underpinning decisions made and methods adopted were acknowledge within the research report, and reasons for favouring one approach when others could have been taken were mentioned.

3.8.3 Bias

In this study, the following safeguards were taken to minimise bias:

The researcher was guided by the supervisor from time to time. The researcher did not assist or give signals on how her (the researcher) would prefer the questions to be answered. The researcher listened sensibly to the participants and recorded. The researcher complied with the ethical standards when interpreting data as well as during the period of interviews.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Significance refers to the study's justification, importance or contribution to an area of interest (Punch, 2005; Cueva, 2020). Thus, this study will add to knowledge as far as the need for social workers in schools is concerned, with particular reference to Limpopo province, and other provinces at large. In addition, this will possibly shed light to the Department of Education (policies) or government on the need to place social workers in schools (looking at the challenges encountered in schools by learners and educators). It is argued that schools are spaces where learners and teachers spend most of their time (Turiel, 2014).

5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Bryman and Bell (2017), the following principles signify the most imperative aspects related to ethical considerations in research. The researcher was guided by the following principles;

5.1 Permission to conduct the study

Prior to the commencement of the study, the researcher obtained Ethical clearance from Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) of the University of Limpopo. The researcher also attained permission from the gate keepers at The Department of Education (see Appendix F) which covers schools in Mankweng Circuit.

5.2 Violation of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

Privacy suggests the element of individual privacy, while confidentiality infers managing information in a confidential way (De Vos et al., 2011). The researcher conducted the interview in a private and separate office in the school.

The researcher also ensured that the participant's information is entrusted and their identity remained anonymous by replacing their real names with the word participant. In addition, respondent's information was secretly marked and also informed the participant that it will made available to the supervisor for guidance and purpose of the study.

5.3 Informed Consent

In this study, the participants were provided with all the details of the study and their consent was obtained. The researcher informed participants about what the study is about and its intentions after its completion so that they can freely participate in the research. According to De Vos et al. (2011), this makes participants fully aware of the possible dangers and advantages of the study. Participants were required to sign a consent form (See appendix C). As outlined by the De Vos et al. (2011), locating informed consent suggests that all important procedure of the investigation will be followed and participants are fully aware of the procedure.

5.4 Avoidance of harm to participants

The significant ethical rule of social research is that it needs to gather information or discover knowledge not previously known to verify existing data without bringing any harm to participants (Babbie, 2007; Jones and Bartlett, 2014). The researcher fully prepared the participants for the interview and the nature of the study itself to enable them to be open and share their experiences in details and information.

5.5 Voluntary participation

Participation in this study was voluntary and no one was forced to participate (Bowel, 2005). Participants were not coerced to engage in the study without their consent. All important information and processes involving their participation in the study were explained. They were required to sign consent form prior to the commencement of data collection (See Appendix E).

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter driven by the foregoing chapter on methodology sets out to present empirical findings of the qualitative study entitled "the perceptions of school principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers at Mankweng circuit, South Africa". The study had ten (10) participants interviewed which consisted of six (6) school principals and four (4) circuit managers. As may be expected, this number of participants is informed by the principle of data saturation (inductive thematic saturation). Nevertheless, a rigorous literature study was carried out by the researcher to gain deep insight of the subject under scrutiny. Thus, buttressing and bringing to the fore existing knowledge on the need, perceptions and roles of school social workers. In the discussion, the word participant was used across the study to replace the real names of the individuals participating in this study. The researcher begins this section by first classifying the biographical information of the participants.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE FINDINGS.

4.2.1 Table 1. Demographic Data of Participants

Participants	Age	Years of Experience	Occupation	Type of School	Education Qualification
1.	60	19 Years	Circuit Manager	Both P/Secondary	Tertiary Qualification
2.	48	13 Years	Circuit Manager	Both P/Secondary	Tertiary Qualification
3.	51	16 Years	Circuit Manager	Both P/Secondary	Tertiary Qualification
4.	57	15 Years	Circuit Manager	Both P/Secondary	Tertiary Qualification
5.	40	7 Years	Principal	High School	Tertiary Qualification

6.	49	9 Years	Principal	Primary School	Tertiary Qualification
7.	52	11 Years	Principal	High School	Tertiary Qualification
8.	47	5 Years	Principal	Primary School	Tertiary Qualification
9.	57	8 Years	Principal	Primary School	Tertiary Qualification
10.	50	6 Years	Principal	High School	Tertiary Qualification

Table 1 above presents the demographic details of the sample of 10 participants. The study participants' ages ranged from 40-60 years. Literature shows that educators in High Schools are most likely to obtain a managerial position from 37 years and above (Wills, 2015). All the participants were employed by the Department of Education at the time of the interviews. Most participants spoke Sepedi but every participant was allowed to express themselves in any language they wished. The data presented in the above table shows us that circuit managers' years of work experience ranges from fifteen (15) to nineteen (19) years while principals' years of work experience range from five (5) to eleven (11) years. The data presented further indicates that participants interviewed were employed in both primary and secondary schools in Mankweng circuit and they all obtained a tertiary qualification.

4.3 DISCUSSION OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS: THEMES AND SUBTHEMES

The researcher using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic guidelines arrived at table two (2) that follows, which include themes and subthemes that emerged post analysis.

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Learners encounter hurdles	Poverty Substance Abuse Child headed households Lack of parental Involvement Bullying Teenage pregnancy Sexual Violence Domestic Violence
Diverse social workers roles in schools	Counsellor Mediator Advocate Educator
Social workers are a prerequisite in schools	Social workers are needed to help learners with emotional support Learners starve at home Child negligence Lack of Parenting skills

4.4 THEME 1: LEARNERS ENCOUNTER HURDLES AT SCHOOL

Matters of the challenges that are faced by learners and educators emerged as a theme in the study. This section aimed to establish and describe the challenges that are faced in schools by both teachers and learners. The participants expressed the feeling that children are increasingly victims of many social problems and social forces that are negatively affecting their role as learners. Literature indicates that schools are places where children acquire information, interact with others and know themselves and other people therefore it is vital for the environment to be conducive (Constable 2008; Bezuidenhout, 2013 & Boakye, Ampiah, 2017).

The finding was expressed as follows:

> **Participant 1:** *To answer your question on what are the challenges that are faced by learners, Mmmmhh, alright, there are many challenges faced by our learners which range from social problems, financial issues, family backgrounds…. But as a principal one of my duties is to understand that children come from different backgrounds and children need support from both parents and educators. When they're in our school we become their parents and look after every aspect of their needs. When children are not raised well or taken care of… they cannot do their best at school because of those challenges.*

> **Participant 7:** *Some of our learners are stressed out because of the challenges they experience at home and we have to deal with their anxiety and their breaking points. This at times also affects educators because they deal with different issues from different learners.*

A study conducted by (Shepard, 2012) found that the ascription of what makes up a healthy and conducive learning environment is determined by the kind of environment a child is socialised in and from one cultural setting to the next. A similar study conducted by (Edelson, 2013) concur that the implication is that learners learn easily and adapt to good and bad behaviour easily. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the school environment is healthy and sociable in order to guarantee the expansion and prosperity of children.

In line with the theory underpinning the study, the ecological theory supports that every human being is shaped by the environmental systems they are brought up in as a result; exposure to good or bad environments determines the outcome of how a person will interact with other people.

4.4.1 Poverty

The findings of this study found that poverty is the main threat towards children's growth and development in their education as well as their mental health. The findings of the study are supported by Moloi, (2015), who states that children living under emotional stress adversely affect their learning and development. Moreover, malnutrition can affect a child's cognitive abilities as well as their level of concentration. This finding is also consistent to the Ecological Theory (1979) which states that even though the child may seem far removed from government policies and other economic systems, they often have an impact on the child's life. An example would be poverty in this case because children who come from a poor family or community setup and experience little to no support, they struggle with confidence which reduces their desire to learn (Genesis, 2020). The findings were expressed as follows;

> **Participant 6:** *We teach learners who come to school with an empty stomach. I mean you will find learners who run to be the first on the Q for food because that would be their first meal and probably their last meal.*

> **Participant 8:** *Majority of these children from poverty-stricken families hardly ever perform well in their academics, they have no interest in their school work or are even well taken care of at home; they are without proper school shoes and jerseys in winter, when asked why are they not wearing a jersey they will tell you that they do not have one.*

> **Participant 3:** *Hunger, starvation and lack of resources like gadgets has since gotten worse since COVID-19 because these learners do not come to school every day so this would mean that they only eat once or twice in a week at school and the rest of the days we do not know what they eat. Moreover, these learners do not even have access to phones or data and are unable to complete school work sent using WhatsApp groups and other social media platforms.*

While the study indicates that poverty deprives families the power to insist on an education system that answers their needs. COVID-19 has also exposed and declared the inequalities in the country's childhood education. This is substantiated by a study conducted by Ayanda in Khayelitsha that states that E- learning has always been for the middle class and upper classes leaving behind the working class to fend for themselves. As a result even though parents across may be deeply concerned about their children's education, many do not have the access to devices, data, electricity or stationery to make remote learning a possibility (Anciano, Cooper-Knock,Dube, Papane & Majola, 2020).

The findings of this study show us that children are raised in catastrophic environments. Their lack of love, food and security and other basic needs like proper clothing at home results in children not wanting to go to school or only going to school so that they can be fed. Consequently, learners end up missing the whole point of education or school which complicates their learning process. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it even worse; learners have lost interest in school because they only attend once or twice in a week (Hogan, 2020).

4.4.2 Substance Abuse

The participants are of view that substance abuse is one of the most drastic challenges faced in schools, particularly in high school. Research worldwide shows that drug and alcohol abuse are some of the major burdens of societies in the 21st century. Globally learners in schools are abusing drugs and alcohol (UNICEF, 2008; WHO, 2014; USAID, 2017). In addition, according to the United Nations, globally, Cannabis (Dagga) is a widely consumed illicit drug. Although it is not the primary drug of abuse in most nations such as Europe, Asia and America, it has been found to be the primary drug of abuse in Africa, especially amongst young people. The participants disputed that, learners abuse drugs because of peer pressure. This is supported by Seggie, (2012); Strauss, (2019) who assert that these consequences of drug use are an escape to the overwhelming pressures the youth of today face on a daily basis and significant impact of peer pressure which is the desire by adolescents to fit in and be socially accepted by their peers because they have a high value for the opinion of their peers.

The following responses were echoed by participants:

Participant 4: *I have lost count on the number of times where the issue of substance abuse is addressed among our schools in Mankweng. I do not understand the world we are living in; our learners are comfortable in using substances to an extent that even when you find them smoking, they are not even ashamed.*

Participant 5: *Drugs are a serious case in this school. I remember there was a time where there was a case of a class who decided to contribute money and bought dagga and easy mix muffins. They asked one of their classmates to mix the two and bake it, they referred to these as "Space cookies" that entire class did not learn that day. They were very disruptive, some kept on laughing the entire time during school lessons, whilst some were sleeping. To add on, this class is the worst when it comes to their school performance, they never take anything serious.*

Participant 8: *Our learners are burdened by issues from home and sometimes I believe smoking and school is the only place where they get to offload their issues. You will find these learners smoking during break time and in between class.*

It can be noted that Substance abuse is regarded as a life-threatening social issue that is used to relieve stress, derive pleasure and gain social status among peers. The findings of the study reveal that the use of Substance among learners is a result of peer pressure to most learners whereas to others it's a coping mechanism to their personal problems. It is the researcher's opinion that once the learner has conformed to peer pressure and feels the urge to fit in a group then the chances of the learner to perform well at school are slim. This view is supported by Mabote (2017) who found that One of the observed consequences involving school problems associated with substance abuse among young people include lowered commitment to education, declining grades, absenteeism from school, increased potential for dropping out of school and higher truancy.

4.4.3 Sub theme 3: Child Headed Households

The participants in the study indicated that Child headed households are severe and majority of these households are prompted by parents who are sick and need to be taken care of by their children and parents who passed on due to HIV/AIDS. The

study further revealed that these responsibilities embedded on children result in learners facing challenges in their academics such as absenteeism. These findings are supported by Evans & Becker 2009; Skovdal et al. 2009; Pillay, 2012, who indicate that parental responsibilities embedded on children result in severe school hindrances like increased school absenteeism and withdrawal due to being responsible for house chores such as cooking, cleaning and looking after the sibling, poor school performance and inadequate access to medical care and the sexual exploitation of the girl child.

In support of the above, the researcher is in accord with the view that child headed households are a great concern and hindrance to children's education, wellbeing and their childhood because it deprives children of their childhood and focus on their education. This is supported by a study conducted in Namibia that found that a 17-year-old boy was forced to drop out of school and start a ceramic molding business to fend for his siblings after he lost his parents to HIV/AIDS (Citizen Bulletin 2021.) The following responses were echoed by participants in support of child headed families being a challenge:

> **Participant 9:** *I don't think there is anything as painful as watching children head families, simply because they should be the ones been taken care of. Mhhhh…. you know every time I reflect back on this one case of one of our learners who was taking care of her disabled sibling, I get very emotional. This learner lived with her father and her sibling so she would come to school late every day until I discovered that she had to prepare her sibling and drop her off at her aunt's place before coming to school. As time went on her father chased them away and she had to relocate to her aunt's place which resulted her in dropping out of school.*

> **Participant 6***: Majority of the children in our schools are children who are left with their grandparents who are old because they either lost their parents to HIV/AIDS or their parents are not involved in their lives.*

> *Some of these learners come to school very tired because they have to take care of their grandparents and siblings before they come to school.*

> **Participants 2:** *Learners are the primary caregivers of most of the families in the community, the sad reality of this is that sometimes it is not that parents*

have passed on but they are just absent parents because some are under the influence of substances and they never home.

The study findings show us that child headed households is an enormous challenge because it deprives learners the opportunity to fully dedicate their lives in enriching themselves educationally rather, they are forced to fully take responsibility of families at a very young age which leads to absenteeism, school dropout and malnutrition for those learners who fully fail to provide for their siblings. This is supported by Leatham 2005; Pillay & Nesengani 2006; Devereux, Hochfeld, Karriem, Mensah, Msimango et al, 2018). Who state that young pupils heading households are deprived from their childhood and forced to take the role of a parent which is also overwhelming for them?

4.4.4 Sub theme 4: Lack of parental involvement

The participants articulated that majority of the parents do not participate in their children's' education, rather they leave all their parental duties and responsibilities in the school hands which hinders the growth and development of their learner's education. This is supported by a study conducted by Msila (2012) in Nigeria who found that parents are busy with their economic pursuits, leaving their children in the hands of teachers and nannies, leaving it all to their responsibilities. Some of the parents were found to be swinging their responsibilities all to educators. Moreover, their poor involvement in education leads to poor child performance because, among others, parents do not care about their children being late for school, learners being absent or not and their children not getting done with their homework's.

Some participants argued as follows;

> **Participant 1***: We have made it a point to visit schools prior school closure every term to evaluate the progress of schools and understand their challenges. We have come to realise lack of parental involvement has been our biggest challenge in Mankweng Circuit, majority of the parents here never attends school meetings. They don't seem to care about their children school progress.*

> **Participant 6:** *Our parents have a negative attitude towards us sometimes, I remember there was a time where I asked a parent to come see me at school*

because of their child school performance, the parent told me that she does not have money to come to school so if I want her to come then I must give her taxi fare, to add on, some parents say we undermine them that's why they never bother coming to school.

Participant 9: *COVID-19 has made things worse. These children do not even get guidance or help from their parents with any of their school work. In most cases from my own personal experience, their parents are young and they spend most of their time in the street so they are never at home.*

Parental involvement is a significant element that can have an impact or enhancement in the child's education. Parental involvement implicates the active and significant involvement of the parent in all aspects, where a parent is interacting with the child for guidance and support. However, research in Okeke (2014) shows that poor parental involvement is the biggest challenge facing public schools in South Africa, especially in Rural Areas. In South Africa, according to the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, effective education requires close cooperation between parents and teachers. With the 1994 democratic changes in education, parents in the form of School Governing Bodies (SGB's) have been assigned powers and responsibilities to get involved in educational matters. The South African Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 mandates for the participation and commitment of all stakeholders, parents in particular, to ensure the enhancement of educational transformation.

Given the current state of the Global pandemic, the researcher is of view that lack of parental involvement has left parents with mixed emotions and uncertainties in terms of how they can assist their learners with their school work. This is supported by a study conducted by UNESCO (2020), which found that some parents feel more connected to their Child's schoolwork while others see this as an additional burden. Furthermore, other parents also indicated that they find a struggle to balance between parent employment demands and learner needs.

Whilst others noted difficulty with completing job-related tasks and supporting their children in completing schoolwork during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the fact that they are essential workers and they struggle to provide the attention or interaction with their children's needs along with their work. Lastly, parents have

indicated their inability of them being able to stand being around their children all day at home.

The findings show that there are underlying issues like the use of substances that prevent parents from being involved in their children's education as well as contradicting statements when it comes to understanding the reason behind the lack of parental involvement in learner's education, moreover it seems that parents are not only the ones responsible for their lack of involvement in their children's lives. This is supported by Brown and Duku who cited in Motala and Lexumo (2014) and revealed that there are issues that demoralize the participation of parental involvement in their children lives. These include; inadequate functions of the SGBs due to the tensions with school principals, teachers, and government officials who at times, undermines parents, but who still believe and expect parents to entirely take responsibility for their children's education.

4.4.5 Sub theme 5: Bullying

The participants indicate that bullying occurs in various places within the school environment and it happens in various ways. For instance, aggression, violently pushing other and forcing other learners to do things they are not comfortable with is what constitutes bullying in their schools. According to Juan (2018) Bullying constitutes a significant challenge for school safety and undermines directly the creation of an enabling school environment that supports personal growth and development. In a study conducted by the Department of Education (2012), it found that children who bully other learners often copy or act out the behaviour they see or experience, especially at home. Moreover, Victims of Bullying often suffer from health issues, physical injury and severe emotional and psychological problems that can last a lifetime, and even result in school drop-out, self-harm, suicide and murder.

The following responses underpin the subtheme:

> **Participant 3:** *Bullying is a serious problem both in primary and high schools. We have come to schools for more than once trying to address the issue of bullying, but there is still no change, I mean it feels like we are not doing enough, a week never ends without hearing those learners have assaulted each other.*

Participant 4: *Bullying is not only limited to boys only, even girls bully other learners. We once had a case where grade a group of grade 7 girl learners would wait in the girl's restrooms and request R1's from fellow grade R and one (1) learner who wanted to use the bathroom. These children were told that it was an entrance fee.*

Participant 8: *Our school encourages good performance by learners so we award learners who have performed well and improved throughout the term in the midst of all the learners at school. There was a case that was discovered by one of the teachers and she found one of the grade 8 learners being bullied into completing school projects for her fellow classmates who do not perform well because she is an outstanding learner.*

The findings of the study show that bullying is a norm in South African Schools, particularly in reference to Mankweng Circuit. Furthermore, the study also shows us that learners will do anything in order to ensure that they are feared and respected by other learners. This is also validated by a study by Rembe and Muhuro, (2011) that found that some learners use violent behaviour to appropriate lunchboxes from other learners or instruct these victims to request or steal money from home.

4.4.6 Sub theme 6: Teenage Pregnancy

Fertility and motherhood continue to be important factors in the life course of a woman however; Teenage pregnancy is viewed as a major setback in terms of educational and economic aspirations (Panday et al. 2009). According to Morrell (2019) Education is highly valued by young people in South Africa and aspirations for education are high. However, there are several things in South Africa that drive teenage pregnancy; this includes gender expectations of how teenage boys and girls should conduct themselves; taboos for girls and sexual permissiveness for boys, poverty, poor access to contraceptives and the processes of termination of pregnancies.

The researcher argues that the factors that drive teenage pregnancy are not only limited to gender expectations of how teenage boys and girls should behave however it extends to the tight restrictions around sex education and access to contraceptives due to negative attitudes received by teenagers in hospitals and clinics which results in unwanted pregnancies, illegal abortions and the rise in

HIV/AIDS and School Dropout. This notion is supported by participants who indicated that learners tell them that there is lot of judgment and ill- treatment from older nurses when they visit government facilities to ask for contraceptives so this makes them reluctant to approach clinics and hospitals. Additionally, the COVID-19 Pandemic has wrecked unprecedented havoc on children, families and communities around the globe, disrupting vital services and putting millions of lives at risk (WHO, 2020). School closure during the pandemic has led to girls spending more time with men and boys than they would were they to be in school leading to a greater likelihood of engagement in risky sexual behaviour and increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation and teenage pregnancy (UNESCO, 2020).

Some participants echoed the following sentiments:

> **Participant 2**: *Teenage pregnancy is not common in primary school but common in high school particularly from grade 8 learners. One thing we have noticed is that learners in grade 8 are influenced by peer pressure and are filled with the anticipation from the shift of primary to secondary school.*

> **Participant 5:** *Our children love exploring and sex is the first thing they do not hesitate to experiment especially if they grow up being exposed to it. We teach learners who watch their parents have sex in the presence.*

> **Participant 6:** *Sometimes our health workers ill-treat these learners when they seek for information about the use of contraceptives, hence they don't go to health facilities anymore.*

> **Participant 10:** *Majority of these learners are "night riders", they go to bottle stores in the evening and drink alcohol with people they don't know and sometimes this result in them being raped or engaging in sexual activities moreover, we have discovered that many learners have returned to school pregnant after the lockdown.*

It can be noted from the findings of the study that children are influenced by exposure and experience from what they learn at an early age. They grow up in environments where sex is practiced in their presence as a result, they grow up thinking that it is okay to practice sex even though they are not ready to face the consequences that come with having sex, particularly unprotected sex. Moreover,

The COVID-19 has led into an increase in teenage pregnancy, this is sustained by UNESCO (2020) who state that school closure during the pandemic has led to girls spending more time with men and boys than they would were they to be in school leading to a greater likelihood of engagement in risky sexual behaviour and increased risk of sexual violence and exploitation and teenage pregnancy.

4.4.7 Sub theme 7: Sexual Violence

The study found that most of the learners reside with their step parents or in family houses where you find learners sharing sleeping bedrooms with their brothers and sisters and some share the bedrooms with their parents. Thus, there is no privacy among siblings of the opposite sex as well as with parents. This results in learners growing up being exposed to sexual practices at a very young age and as they grow, they tend to want to practice the same sexual acts towards other children at school and within the community. This leads to some children being molested or abused by their step parents. The following comments were echoed by participants in support of the reasons behind sexual violence:

> **Participant 5:** *Majority of these learners in our school live in family houses where you find that they share bedrooms with everyone and there is no privacy. These learners grow up being exposed to sexual activities hence they want to practice these sexual acts towards other learners.*

> **Participant 7:** *You know there are times where I ask myself how these children cope with all of these burdens and experiences because it requires a lot of strength to actually deal with what these children go through. I remember there was a case in our school where one of our learners was raped by their pastor during these night prayer meetings in the mountain, this happened on numerous occasions until the learner fell pregnant.*

> **Participant 8***: I remember I once encountered a group of boys peeping through a window of the girl's toilet while they use the bathroom. Our learners are perverts and they do not see anything wrong with that.*

According to CALS (2021), sexual Violence has been a constant feature of South African Schools as it has been of social society in general. Many schools have become violent and unsafe environments, particularly for the girl child. It is also

unfortunately a matter on which there has been resounding silence from society Sexual abuse takes various forms and it is perpetrated by both learners and staff in schools. It ranges from sexual harassment, touching and verbal degradation to rape and other forms of sexual violence. The abuse takes place in dormitories, in empty classrooms, in hallways and in school toilets (Bhana, 2021).

4.4.8 Sub theme 8: Domestic Violence

The study found that children who are exposed to domestic violence in their homes are the ones who are prone to engage in risky behaviours like drug abuse in search of a coping mechanism of the situation that is happening at home. Moreover, these children also tend to be aggressive and portray violent behaviour (fighting, throwing sharp objects towards other children at school and teachers as well.) The study further found that domestic violence manifests in different ways most if not all cases go unreported since children suffer in silence because the primary protectors of children, are in many cases also the perpetrators of violence and may remain silent if the violence is perpetrated by other family members or powerful members of the community or society. In line with these findings, (Brofenbrenner, (1994) and Duerden and Witt, (2010) in the ecological theory states that individuals are not just mere recipients of the experiences they have when socializing with people in the microsystem environment (family, school, friends, teachers and society), but they also contributing to the construction of such an environment. It is the researcher's view that violence at home results in learners being violent in schools towards other learners.

In support of the above-mentioned view, the Ecological theory also states that children are shaped by their unique social systems which they constantly interact with on a daily basis which can either result in individuals and systems functioning harmoniously or incongruent.

The following responses were echoed by participants:

> **Participant 6:** *You know…. most of the children in our schools come from dysfunctional families where you find that their parents are always fighting and what is even worse is that they fight in their presence, so I think because of the kind of environment they grow up in, they see violence or fighting as a solution to everything.*

Participant 9: *You will not believe me If I tell you that prior COVID-19 a week would never pass by without having to solve or stop a fight among our learners, our learners are very violent and they never hesitate to fight when an opportunity arises, at least with our COVID-19 restrictions learners are divided into groups to attend school, fighting has been better but we cannot guarantee that because once COVID-19 ends, its back to square one.*

Participants demonstrated that Children exposure to any form of violence has considerable potential to be perceived as life threatening by those victimized and leave them with a sense of vulnerability, hopelessness, psychological disorders and emotional threats, which end up affecting their academic lives. This is also supported by a study conducted by Edleson (2013) that found that children's problems associated with witnessing violence can be grouped into behavioural and emotional problems, and cognitive functioning and attitude problems. On behavioural and emotional problems; the study found that children exposed to domestic violence exhibits more aggressive and antisocial (externalized behaviours) as well as fearful and inhibited behaviours (internalized behaviours) and show lower social competence than other children. In addition, teachers who are victims of domestic violence find themselves portraying behaviours that are questionable such as isolating themselves from other staff members, being absent from work.

4.5 THEME 2: DIVERSE SOCIAL WORK ROLES IN SCHOOLS

The aim of this section was to determine the roles that can be played by social workers in a school setting in addressing the challenges encountered. School social workers are trained and hired to enhance the district's ability to meet the academic missions, especially where home, school and community collaboration is the key to achieving learner's success.

Moreover, school social workers bring unique knowledge and skills in order to enable and enhance children to function effectively in school and community (NASW, 2010). It was found in the study that the following social work roles are needed to address the challenges at school.

4.5.1 Sub theme: Counsellor

The study found that participants highly commend the need for social workers to provide therapeutic counselling to learners and educators who are in need of emotional support. According to Colostate (2020), the role of a counselor involves focusing on improving people, families, organizations and communities social functioning and articulating their needs. The clinical tasks in a school context are that social workers will provide emotional support by understanding emotions, identifying learners with problems and helping to identify the action plan to deal with the challenges identified in reference to teachers and learners at schools (Kirst-Ashman, 2010).

The following comments were echoed by participants:

> **Participant 7:** *I am a principal but I also teach learners as well…. I remember there was a time where I had a learner who would get emotional on numerous occasions and when I tried to assist, she wouldn't want to talk…. It got to a point where I even asked my colleagues to talk to her but she wouldn't share anything…. We then decided to call in her parents and that is when we found out that she was a victim of rape…. We knew she was not coping even after she had undergone therapy, but it wasn't enough for her. She needed further support.*

> **Participant 3:** *We need social workers; children have issues and it is hard for us to deal with them. I mean I'm just a principal and I have no knowledge with counselling, at least social workers are trained to work with people and to help them deal with their challenges.*

> **Participant 4:** *I believe teachers also need counselling, I mean they experience all these challenges first hand and most of the time it weighs them down. Social workers are a need.*

The study findings demonstrate that each and every individual in any work place has the ability to assist to a certain extent and their capabilities are limited to the services they are trained to provide; as a result, it is difficult for educators and principals to intensely understand and help deal with learner's behaviours and emotions.

4.5.2 Subtheme: Facilitator

The Study findings reveal that schools are aware of the magnitude of the social issues that are faced within the school environment. The researcher is therefore of view that circuit managers and principals are not social scientists or social workers, and are not trained to deal with social issues rather they are trained to impart knowledge and skills in the educational sector therefore, they will not address social issues as adequately as social workers. According to Kirst- Ashman, 2010; Wells, (2013), a facilitator serves as a leader or a mentor for a specific group experience for purposes such as self-advocacy. The groups that the facilitator my run include a family therapy and an educational group. During a group, facilitators lead and direct a way for others. In a school setting, the facilitator may run a therapy group for learners who are victims of bullying by channelling their activities and resources as well as access to expertise to help them. The following responses were echoed by participants in support of the findings:

> **Participant 4:** *I am part of the SMT (School Management Team) and we have constantly tried to come with ways of addressing the challenges that are experienced in our schools especially for learners who abuse substances but we have failed. Maybe there is something that we are not doing right and at this point we need assistance.*

> **Participant 2:** *Mhhhh…Pause for a moment…. you know things have been made easier these days in our curriculum, our learners are taught about everyday life experiences especially in Life Orientation but the sad part is that they never practice these healthy behaviours. They always fall into the trap and it is hard to get them out.*

4.5.3 Subtheme: Mediator

The role of the mediator includes a position in which a social worker manages or deals with challenges on a micro, mezzo and macro level disputes to establish productive and healthy relationships (Zastrow & Kirst- Ashman, 1997; Wells, 2013: Kiera, 2018). At macro level, the social worker attempts to address conflicts between a family and other systems and at Mezzo and macro levels, mediation assists in areas that involve divorce and child custody. Mediation in a school setting involves attempts to resolve learner, parent and school conflicts. The study found that there is

no proper relationship between the school and parents because of underlying issues like divorce that result in parents pulling back from being involved in their children's academics. The findings are supported by the following responses by participants:

Participant 1: *I don't think parents understand the importance of their involvement in their children's lives. I mean sometimes you would think that these children do not have parents whilst they do because their parents never attend any school meetings or anything. To make matters even worse the learners whose parents are not involved are the ones who need assistance because they do not perform well in their academics.*

Participant 4: *Parents do not have a good relationship with other parents as well at the school. I remember we once had a situation that involved parents exchanging vulgar words during a meeting after one of their learners stole the other learner's school jersey. I don't know how some people think, maybe social workers understand better why other parents behave the way they do.*

Participant 6: *I think we need to start understanding how badly divorce affects children especially where parents have turned into rivals instead of understanding the importance of their roles as parents and finding healthy and conducive ways to co-parent…. We once tried addressing a case of parents using their child as a pawn to despise the other party, they would both swing their parental responsibilities among each other for instance, one parent would indicate that I didn't buy the child school uniform because he was supposed to buy it.*

The study findings illustrate to us that there are no good relationships between parents, children and school, parents see each other as rivals and use their children as pawns to deal with their unresolved issues forgetting that the common goal here is to ensure that their learners get a proper education and excel in their studies. This in return affects their children's education and school performance. This is supported by a study conducted by Schwartz (2015) that found that children who are victims of their parents' divorce are most likely to being stuck in between parent's disputes which results in the children being neglected emotionally and in all other aspects.

4.5.4 Subtheme: Advocate

The study found that majority of the parents swing their parental responsibilities towards educators and school at large. Parents are found to have some sort of level of expectations towards educators in helping their children and ignore the fact that they solely responsible for their children's wellbeing and school development. The role of an advocate involves advocating for a course of action directly on behalf of one or more people or an organization or community where in most cases, others will not listen or they are unable to speak for themselves in order to ensure social justice (Mickelson, 1995; Colostate, 2020). The National Association for Social Workers standard 8 for services provided by social workers in schools recognizes advocacy as one of the most important roles. In a school setting, social workers may advocate for learners and their families in a variety of situations (NASW standard 8, 2000). For example, Social workers play the role of advocacy by advocating for learners who do not receive support from home regarding their education. The social worker helps learners understand their rights and the responsibilities of their parents, especially those parents who are unwilling to become involved with the school system and children's school activities. Social workers help parents recognize the fact that they are responsible for their children as well as the activities that occur at school even though teachers play a primary role at school.

The following responses were detailed by participants:

Participant 5: *I think one of the most challenging things that we deal with here at school is difficult parent's yoh!!!! …There was a time where a parent came to the school and told us that we all are useless, the only thing we do here is look down on parents because we were unable to assist the child with new school shoes. I think our parents feel entitled to everything that we try to provide or assist children from our own pockets.*

Participant 8: *I think parents believe that educators are miracle workers and they can access anything at any given time as long as it benefits them. The sense of entitlement of parents is way out this world…. I believe sometimes parents forget that they have full responsibility for their children.*

The study findings illustrate that there is a huge gap to fill in helping parents understand their role in their children's lives as well as their education. Moreover,

there is a need to help the school, parents and children build a healthy relationship in order to ensure that learner's education is not hindered by the mishaps and misunderstandings that may occur throughout their interactions. This notion is supported by Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2010) who implies that due to lack of collaborative partnerships between educators and teachers, learners are unable to comprehend how the school and their parents relate to each other in terms of the learner's development, and they consequently may see their educators and parents as being separate entities, working independently of each other.

4.5.5 Subtheme: Enabler

The role of an enabler requires the social worker to help the client cope with problems or acute stress. A social worker in a school setting supports learners who face challenges in transiting from primary to secondary schools and helps them to modify behaviours that can serve as obstacles in achieving academic success, such as drug and alcohol use (Kirst- Ashman, 2010; Kiera, 2018). The Social worker conveys optimism, reducing resistance and ambivalence, and manages feelings. The study findings illustrate that, learners are burdened by many social issues which results in learners finding unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with their emotions. These include learners abusing substances like Alcohol to deprive pleasure and relieve stress.

The following statements were echoed by participants:

> **Participant 6:** You know it is okay for a parent to worry about what they are going to feed their children but I feel it is sad when the children have to worry about what their siblings will eat.

> Our children are from poverty-stricken families and all they worry about is their situations at home. They hardly ever concentrate well during class or even perform well in school.

> **Participant 9:** You know I am glad we are having this conversation about the challenges we encounter because I believe you will understand better. I always tell my colleagues that the manner in which our children behave at school is beyond what we can think, it's not only because they under the influence of substances but it's because of the challenges they face at home.

The study found that there are several challenges that are faced in schools by learners and any challenge encountered without resolutions results in new challenges being added on to the current ones. This implies that school social workers are service providers who have the ability to improve the education of learners by helping them deal with their challenges. Moreover, these services are provided professionally and ethically because it is crucial that every learner is protected and provided with a service of highest quality (SACSSP; 2015 and Reyneke; 2020).

4.6 SOCIAL WORKERS ARE PREREQUISITE IN SCHOOLS

Several educational policies have been developed to assist in dealing with barriers to learning. These include White Paper 6 (2001), the care and support for teaching and learning conceptual framework (2010) and the Psychosocial Support strategy for learners in the educational system of South Africa 2010-2020 (Department of Basic Education, 2016). The main purpose of the strategy was to define the scope of psychosocial support in the education sector, to assist in the identification of learner's psychosocial needs and to indicate how existing resources and structures may be utilised to help these learners effectively access the support they needed (DBE, 2016). Although social workers have been placed or appointed in some schools in recent years with the assumption that social work services can contribute towards improving education in schools, in supporting the psychological development of learners, unfortunately Provinces like Limpopo still do not have access to school social workers. The following sub-themes emerged in support of social workers being a prerequisite in schools:

4.6.1 Subtheme: Learners starve at home

The participants indicated that there is an enormous need for social workers to be employed in schools particularly in reference to helping deal with starvation, hunger and poverty among learners. Participants further dispute that there are underlying issues that result in learners' starving and these include dysfunctional families where they abuse substances, lack of information on how to access certain resources like application for child support grant especially with learners who are orphans and live with their grandparents and individuals who are affected by mental illness or physical disability. This notion is supported by a study conducted by Miler (2019), that states

that social workers are advocates for people who are unable to speak for themselves, who lack knowledge on how to access certain information and who are faced with conditions that make it difficult or impossible for them to advocate for their needs. The following responses were echoed by participants.

> **Participants 3:** *One thing we forget to understand is that many of our children are orphans, they live with their grandparents and most of the time they are a family of five (5) or more. Sometimes that's the only income they get which has to cater for everyone in the family.*

> **Participant 6:** *I am really glad that we are having this interview and you are conducting this study. I hope the Department sees how much of need social workers are at schools. We really are going through a lot. As we speak now, I am currently providing transport money to one of our learners so that they can travel to school.*

4.6.2 Sub theme: Social workers are needed to provide emotional support.

The study found that participants recommend the need to have social workers in schools in order to help learners deal with their emotional challenges, in addition, these learners are found to experience challenges like sexual abuse which in most cases they do not receive support or counselling. This notion is supported by Pro Care Therapy (2019) that states that many children experience events in their lives that cause them to struggle in the classroom which teachers are unable to address these, but social workers have the background to assist and support them. Social workers are trained to help with social and emotional needs. The following responses were echoed by participants in support of the above:

> **Participant 7**: *I think it is high time the Department takes into consideration the need to employ social workers in schools, and not even one (1) social worker, at least three (3) per school. I have come across numerous cases that required me to provide emotional support, and I couldn't help.*

> **Participant 9:** *Mhhhh…pause… I cannot stress this enough. Social workers are a need. I honestly think schools should not function without social workers. I'm just a school principal and I have no knowledge or skills to deal with social issues.*

> **Participant 4***: I go to work to provide services that I am employed for. I'm not here to reprimand learners about behavioural issues, help learners deal with their emotions for that matter. Social workers should come to the rescue, they understand people better.*

The study findings illustrate to us that principals and circuit managers are not experts in understanding and dealing with behavioural, developmental and emotional challenges experienced by learners as compared to social workers who are able to take time to get to know and understand the nuances of life outside school for these children. Webb and Bywaters (2019), which states that although learners may be burdened by unpleasant home situations, which affect their sense of worth and wellbeing, social work is a profession that upholds and promotes human dignity and wellbeing of individuals. Thus, social workers are responsible for building relationships to earn trust, help and work through challenges experienced by learners.

4.6.3 Sub theme: Child Negligence

The study found that child negligence is a serious challenge in schools and it is mostly caused by parents unhealthy and anti- social behaviours. This implies that parents do not provide proper and adequate nutrition to their children; their children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and parents fail to provide learners with safe living home circumstances. Therefore, participants highly recommend social workers to be placed in schools. These findings are supported by the SACSSP, (2016); Van Sittert and Wilson, (2018), who state that social workers not only place a high priority on ethical conduct, but are custodians of the Children's Act, they also have distinct legal obligations towards children hence, social workers in schools are important because their mandate is to assist learners, families and the wider community to address social needs and problems.

The findings are supported by the following responses by participants:

> **Participant 5:** *I think social workers will come in handy because majority of these parents are young and irresponsible. They either gamble the money they need to use to take care of their children or use it to buy alcohol.*

Participant 10: *I think it is high time the Department takes into consideration the need to employ social workers in schools, and not even one social worker, at least three (3) per school. These learners go through a lot, I mean some get raped and never get help. It is sad.*

Participant 2: *Learners experience numerous challenges and it is evident everywhere, in the news, in the newspapers and social media…. social workers are a need.*

Participant 7: *learners sleep on an empty stomach; learners are raised in dysfunctional families that disturb their learning journey. What more will it take for the department to recognise the need to have social workers in schools.*

4.6.4 Subtheme: Lack of parenting skills

The study findings reveal that parents lack parenting skills and this is because many of them live under low socioeconomic status. According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005, it states or holds parents accountable for exercising their parental responsibilities to provide for a child's basic physical, intellectual, emotional or social needs. This implies that parents are held solely responsible for their children's upbringing. However, that is not the case because many of these children are brought up in dysfunctional families where they are prone to substance abuse, separation of parents, violence and health problem. Some conduct anti- social behaviours like gambling. Therefore, participants highly recommend the need for social workers to be employed in schools.

The following responses were ascribed by participants in support of the above:

Participant 2: *Our learners are raised by drunkards and irresponsible people; some use their children support Grant Card to Gamble instead of purchasing school uniform for their children. The intervention of social workers is needed ASAP!*

Participant 3: *Our learners can't differentiate between right and wrong and I don't blame them. They live under chaotic home environments. Social workers are needed urgently.*

The study findings illustrate that there is an enormous need for social workers to be placed in schools. The researcher disputes that learner have diverse backgrounds,

experiences, abilities and needs. Consequently, learners are entitled to a quality and supportive educational environment. The study further found that participants believe that social workers can provide interventions that involve parenting skills that will assist parents in the upbringing of their children, programs that prevent school violence and other social problems because they are trained to understand the risk factors and warming signs of violent behaviours. Additionally, School social workers are knowledgeable in classroom management and behaviours intervention that can assist teachers and other school personnel in identifying concerning behaviours of learners and developing supportive intervention plans.

4.7 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter focused on presenting, analysing and interpreting the findings from the data collected from principals and circuit managers. The study findings found that principals and circuit mangers experience enormous school challenges which require the intervention of school social workers. These findings were founded based on their experiences. The findings were grouped into themes. The literature reviewed aided to support and revealed important information about the subject matter. Quotes were heisted and the researcher argument was written in normal font. The following chapter will address the summary of the findings, the conclusions that were drawn from the findings and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on data presentation, analysis and interpretation of empirical findings. Chapter five (5) presents the research conclusions and report limitations of the study. Recommendations are suggested and limitations are addressed as follows by the conclusion of the current study;

5.2 RESTATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Social problems like bullying amongst learners are experiences that have made and continue to make news headlines both globally and in South African schools (Smith, 2016; Singh, 2017; Grobler; 2019). Failure to place social workers mostly in public schools was recently epitomised by two bullying incidences in Limpopo and Eastern Cape Province where a learner of Mbilwi High School in the Venda region committed suicide at home, whilst a grade 10 learner at Bhisho High school swallowed a pesticide and died in hospital (SABC 2021). Research shows that in schools the phenomenon of bullying, teenage pregnancy, poverty, substance abuse and violence are invariably prevalent in schools, as expected these issues affect learners negatively and are likely to hinder their growth and success at school (Baadjies, 2015; Brandt, 2017; Singh, 2017; UNESCO, 2020; SAMRC, 2021). Furthermore, statistics show that more than 30, 4 million people in South Africa live in poverty, with the majority of this population being learners (Madonsela, 2017; Mckenzie, 2019).

Kemp, Kemp, Pretoruis and Avenant (2015) in their correlation to the SACSSP to apply for social work services to be recognised as a field of specialisation, they indicated that the Limpopo province and Eastern Cape had zero school social workers, while Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Northwest, and Northern Cape had handful social workers; less than five. As for Free State, Kwazulu-Natal and Western Cape, they led with higher numbers ranging from 25 to 57. Nonetheless, provincial and district levels placed marginal social workers in various schools. Given the background, it is plausible to argue that learners face challenges on a daily basis and it is not the duty of teachers to deal with these challenges since they are not experts in psychosocial matters, therefore, this should be an indication that school

social workers are a need in all schools (South African Qualifications Authority, 2018).

5.3 RESTATEMENT OF THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

5.3.1 Aim of the study

This study sought to explore the perceptions of principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers at Mankweng circuit.

5.3.2 Objectives of the study

The study pursed the following objectives

•   To demonstrate the attitude and perceptions of circuit managers and school principals towards having social workers at schools.

The objective has been achieved in the current study. The study findings revealed that principals and circuit managers convey the need to have school social workers because they encounter enormous challenges in school settings. In addition, refer to Theme 1.

•   To determine the perceived roles played by social workers in school settings from principals and circuit managers point of view.

The objective has been achieved in the current study. The study findings revealed that due to the magnitude of challenges experienced in the school settings that range from teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, sexual abuse and poverty, there is a need for social workers to play their roles in addressing the challenges encountered. In addition, refer to Theme 2

•   To recommend the need of school social workers.

The objective has been achieved in the current study. The study findings revealed that principals and circuit managers recommend the need to have school social workers. In addition, refer to Theme 3.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The researcher sought to explore the perceptions of school principals and circuit managers on the need for school social workers at Mankweng circuit. The study was

qualitative and used Thematic Content Analysis to develop themes. The research question of the study was answered and all objectives were achieved. The researcher believes that the study may contribute to the employment of social workers in schools. Moreover, it may contribute to the body of knowledge which will help the Department of Social Development and Education understand better the magnitude of the challenges experienced in schools which require the intervention of school social workers in order to guarantee a conducive, healthy learning and working environment for both learners and school personnel.

5.5 RECOMMENDATION OF THE STUDY

Government should employ and place social workers in school settings.

The South African Council for Social Service Profession should promote more specialisation of school social workers to defeat social problems in schools.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings of the study, the following ideas can serve as possible topics for future Research:

•   The need for placement of social workers or psychologists in all school settings.

•   The need for social workers to serve as educators in certain school subjects.

•   Each school should allocate one social worker who deals directly with challenges facing learners.

•   The department of education should run its own program of recruiting trained social workers at their schools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: FACULTY APPROVAL LETTER

University of Limpopo
Faculty of Humanities
Executive Dean
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 4895, Fax: (015) 268 3425, Email:Satsope.maoto@ul.ac.za

DATE: 26 July 2021

NAME OF STUDENT:	SIBISE, K
STUDENT NUMBER:	[201522265]
DEPARTMENT:	MSW – Social Work
SCHOOL:	

Dear Student

FACULTY APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL (PROPOSAL NO. FHDC2021/6/01)

I have pleasure in informing you that your MSW proposal served at the Faculty Higher Degrees Meeting on 23 June 2021 and your title was approved as follows:

TITLE: PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS AND CIRCUIT MANAGERS ON THE NEED FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS AT MANKWENG CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

Note the following:

Ethical Clearance	Tick One
In principle the study requires no ethical clearance, but will need a TREC permission letter before proceeding with the study	
Requires ethical clearance (Human) (TREC) (apply online) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	√
Requires ethical clearance (Animal) (AREC) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	

Yours faithfully

Prof RS Maoto,
Executive Dean: Faculty of Humanities
Director:	Prof SL Sithole
Supervisor:	Mr PJ Mmadi
Co-Supervisor:	Dr MR Manganyi

APPENDIX B: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICAL COMMITTEE

University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 3935, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email: anastasia.ngobe@ul.ac.za

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TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

ETHICS CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

MEETING: 14 October 2021

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/257/2021: PG

PROJECT:

Title:	Perceptions of Principals and Circuit managers on the need for School Social Workers at Mankweng Circuit, South Africa
Researcher:	K Sibise
Supervisor:	Mr PJ Mmadi
Co-Supervisor/s:	Dr MR Manganyi
School:	Social Sciences
Degree:	Master of Social Work

PROF P MASOKO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

Note:

i) This Ethics Clearance Certificate will be valid for one (1) year, as from the abovementioned date. Application for annual renewal (or annual review) need to be received by TREC one month before lapse of this period.

ii) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee, together with the Application for Amendment form.

iii) PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Finding solutions for Africa

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I hereby agree to participate in the study entitled: Perceptions of Principals and Circuit managers on the need for School Social Workers at Mankweng circuit, South Africa.

The aim of the study was explained to me and I understood. I am fully aware that my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time should I need to. I had been assured of confidentiality and that any disclosed data by me would remain anonymous when used for reporting the findings of the study.

Signature of participant

…………………………..

Date

…………………………..

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Identifying Particulars of circuit managers and principals:

Age:

Gender:

Questions:

1. Establishing and describing challenges faced by learners and educators at schools

•   What are the challenges faced by teachers at school?

•   How do teachers deal with the challenges encountered at school?

•   What are the challenges encountered by learners at school?

•   How do learners deal with the challenges encountered at school?

2. Determining the roles played by social workers in school settings

•   What roles could social workers play in schools?

3. Generating recommendations

•   Given the challenges encountered at school(s), what is your view on the need for school social workers?

APPENDIX E: EDITORIAL LETTER

Private Language Service Providers (Jay Researchers Incorporated)

Language Practitioner: Mmatlou Jeridha Malatji

Reg no: 2018/215867/07

Cell: 0728995095

Date: 07 December 2021

To whom it may concern

RE: LANGUAGE EDITING OF THE DISSERTATION OF MISS KATEKANI SIBISE STU NO: 201522265

This letter serves to confirm that, I undersigned, have edited and proofread the dissertation of the abovementioned student registered with the:

School of Social Sciences

At the

University of Limpopo

For their Master of Arts degree qualification

Entitled

PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS AND CIRCUIT MANAGERS ON THE NEED FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS AT MANKWENG CIRCUIT, SOUTH AFRICA

The ONUS of effecting recommended language changes rest solely with the author of the aforementioned dissertation.

Editor: Ms. MJ Malatji (MA- University of Limpopo)

APPENDIX F: LPREC CERTIFICATE

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

Office of the Premier

Research and Development Directorate

Private Bag X9483, Polokwane, 0700, South Africa

Tel: (015) 230 9910, Email: mokobij@premier.limpopo.gov.za

LIMPOPO PROVINCIAL RESEARCH ETHICS

COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Online Review Date: 07th – 14th October 2021

Project Number: LPREC/114/2021: PG

Subject: Perceptions of Principals and Circuit Managers on the Need for School Social Workers at Mankweng Circuit, South Africa

Researcher: Sibise K

Dr Thembinkosi Mabila

Chairperson: Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee

The Limpopo Provincial Research Ethics Committee (LPREC) is registered with National Health Research Council (NHREC) Registration Number REC-111513-038.

Note:

I.   This study is categorized as a Low Risk Level in accordance with risk level descriptors as enshrined in LPREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

II.   Should there be any amendment to the approved research proposal; the researcher(s) must re-submit the proposal to the ethics committee for review prior data collection.

III. The researcher(s) must provide annual reporting to the committee as well as the relevant department and also provide the department with the final report/thesis.

IV.   The ethical clearance certificate is valid for 12 months. Should the need to extend the period for data collection arise then the researcher should renew the certificate through LPREC secretariat. PLEASE QUOTE THE PROJECT NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.