THE INFLUENCE OF EXPOSURE TO COMMUNITY VIOLENCE ON ADOLESCENTS' SENSE OF HOPE WITHIN A DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY IN CAPE TOWN

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Have no doubt it is fear in the land. For what can men do when so many have grown lawless?

Who can enjoy the lovely land, who can enjoy seventy years, and the sun that pours down on the

earth, when there is fear in the heart?

(Alan Paton, Cry the beloved country, 1949)
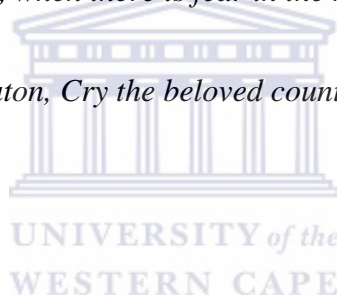
ABSTRACT

Violent crime has proven to have profound negative effects, particularly on those living within communities where violence is a dominant feature. The victims often tend to be adolescents, who, while striving for a better future, are often quite vulnerable to its effects. The present study addresses this important social phenomenon which faces the youth of South Africa. There is a growing need to understand the manner in which the ever-increasing exposure of adolescents living in communities which have high rates of violence affects its victims as well as determine those factors which could provide resiliency against those devastating effects. Moreover, this study focuses on adolescents' sense of hope as a resiliency factor. The purpose of this research study was to ascertain adolescents' understanding of and the meaning they give to exposure to community violence and the extent to which that exposure affects their sense of hope. In this qualitative study, data was collected by means of two, one hour focus groups comprising a total of 14 participants, 14-15 years of age, residing in a community with high rates of violence. The format of the discussion was semi-structured and conducted in English. Various theories were used in order to better describe the information, such as the social learning theory, feminist theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, but the epistemological framework utilized was social constructionism. Ethical principles such as confidentiality and obtaining informed consent were strictly adhered to. The information received from the participants was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and presented in two thematic categories with corresponding themes discussed accordingly. These thematic categories were: "*The meaning of community violence*," and "*The meaning of hope within a context of violence exposure*."

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Participants perceived violence in their community to affect not only victims, but all people in the community. They steadfastly maintained that parents of violence offenders were at fault for not teaching their children values and negatively influencing them. Participants understanding of and the meaning they attach to community violence indicate a normalization or desensitization to violence, however, they did employ various strategies in order to avoid being victimized. Participants demonstrated an understanding of hope as not only being a motivational tool, but also strongly connected to faith. Regardless of the effects experienced of either being a witness or victim of violence in their community, both groups of adolescents regarded both hope and even community violence as a motivational factor which helps them look forward to a 'better' life. This research study identified a need to combine several strategies such as more research regarding the construct of hope, psychological interventions as well as promoting better policing strategies, which can combat community violence on all levels. Furthermore, this study hopes to contribute to the knowledge base of the effects of community violence as well as contribute to the literature on hope (of which there exists little information). This research study also forms part of a larger research endeavour exploring the dynamics between hope, community violence and children's well-being.

DECLARATION

I declare that "*The influence of exposure to community violence on adolescents' sense of hope"*
is my own work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other
university. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as
complete references.

…………………………………..

Serena Isaacs

December 2009

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First and foremost, I give thanks to the Lord for answering all prayers. He grants me grace and guidance always and is the reason I write these acknowledgements today.

To my amazing mother – Supermom – who does it all. The full-time working, part-time studying mother of five: You truly are my inspiration. Thank you for all that you do for our family and the endless support you give me.

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My abundant gratitude to my supervisor: For always demanding excellence and encouraging me to do better than I ever thought I could. Thank you.
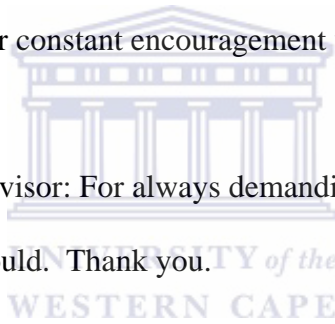
To my ever-supportive friends and very patient partner: Thank you for your tolerance and endurance and accepting all the 'I can't today, I need to work on my thesis' explanations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION
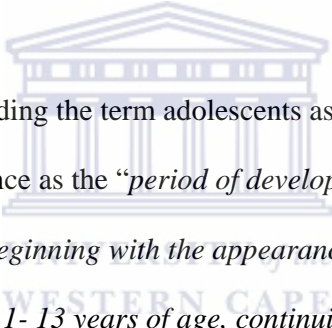
1.1   Background and rationale

Violent crime is a major concern shaping the lives of all South African citizens (Møller, 2004; Leoschut, 2006) and the Western Cape is emerging as this country's most crime-ridden province, particularly in terms of violent and property crime (Leggett, 2004). Violence in urban areas is becoming a serious problem, especially those in low-income communities (Ceballo, Dahl, Artakis & Ramirez, 2001) and particularly for children and older youths living in these communities (Buka, Stichick, Birdthistle & Earls, 2001). The effects of exposure to this community violence are especially harmful to those living within that environment and as Buckner, Beardslee and Bassuk (2004) argue, exposure to violence in any of its various manifestations has been shown to be one of the most damaging experiences a child can endure.

In Cape Town there is a growing need to understand crime in these communities which experience high levels of violence (Haskins, 2007) and no matter which theory you attach to it, whether it be a consequence of apartheid (Hamber, 1999; Children's Institute, 2003), ecological frameworks (Ward, 2007; Jonson-Reid, 1998) or the social learning theory (Margolin & Gordis, 2004) it remains an issue that will always need to be addressed.

Community violence is fast becoming a popular issue in research. It is still in its infancy and after a decade is only now beginning to be conceptualised by researchers (Muller, Goebel-Fabbri, Diamond & Dicklage, 2000; Salzinger, Feldman, Stockhammer & Hood, 2002). A particular area of research that warrants some consideration is the effects of community violence on child and adolescent development. Community violence is defined as those

"*deliberate acts intended to cause physical harm against a person in the community*,"
(McCart *et al*., 2007, p. 434) and could include violence in schools, other public areas as well
as gang violence. In this research study, community violence exposure will refer to those
experiences which involves violent events either heard of in their community, having
witnessed it themselves, or have been directly victimized (Brady, Gorman-Smith, Henry &
Tolan, 2008). Since children from low-income communities are more at-risk for exposure to
violence than children from more advantaged communities (Buckner *et al*., 2004), this
research study's setting, therefore, Parkwood, will be congruent to most other studies'
settings and be conducted in an area, following statistics of the South African Police Service,
of low-income and high violence.

There are many definitions regarding the term adolescents as well the adolescent period.
Colman (2001) defines adolescence as the "*period of development from the onset of puberty
to the attainment of adulthood, beginning with the appearance of secondary sexual
characteristics usually between 11- 13 years of age, continuing through the teenage years
and terminating legally at the age of majority – usually 18 years of age*." This is a very
detailed definition from the beginning to the end of the adolescent period, as well as the
characteristics which would appear during the adolescent period. For the purpose of our
study, the participants in the study will be between the ages 14 – 15 years.

School violence has also become an important area of focus for research investigating
community violence (Raviv, Raviv, Shimoni, Fox & Leavitt, 1999; Bowen & Bowen, 1999)
as young people are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence (Jonson-Reid,
1998; Children's Institute, 2003) and being exposed to community violence, not only close to
home, but at school as well could have even greater detrimental effects. However, whereas

some studies posit that community violence yields the least negative outcomes (Muller *et al.*, 2000), others have proved that its consequences are akin to those other forms of violence such as domestic, sexual or physical (McCart *et al.*, 2000), such as lower levels of academic performance (Heinrich, Schwab-Stone, Fanti, Jones & Ruchkin, 2004), a lowered sense of self and well-being (Savahl, Willenberg & September, 2007; Farver, Ghosh & Garcia, 2000; Haj-Yahia, 2001) and a lowered sense of hope (Oskin, 1996).

If past research tends to focus on the negative effects of violence exposure on those children who have been exposed to violence, then a focus should be placed on their successful adaptation to violence (Margolin & Gordis, 2004; Ahmed, Seedat, van Niekerk & Bulbulia, 2004; McCart *et al.*, 2007). This belief is also shared by Veenema (2001) who points out that future research should focus on adolescents' sense of hope for a future.
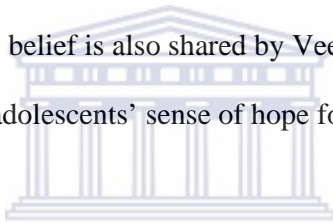
The theory of hope, as proposed by Snyder (2002), suggests that hope may assist in reducing detrimental consequences by 'inoculating' these communities against despair or hopelessness. Hope is defined as a "*cognitive set involving the beliefs in one's capabilities to produce workable routes to goals (the pathways component) as well as the self-related beliefs about initiating and sustaining movement towards these goals (the agency component)*" (Snyder *et al.*, 1997, p. 401). Hope is future and goal orientated. It is grounded in the belief in one's ability to achieve set goals which is crucial in maintaining hope. It is suggested that decreased hope as well as increased hope is an effect of the actions of others; actions such as those leading to traumatic incidents (eg. robberies, physical abuse, school violence, etc.). Furthermore, Snyder *et al.* (1997) believes that factors which work against children (barriers to achieving goals) are an important contributor to hope.

1.2   Significance of the study

Community violence has a highly negative effect on adolescents (Oskin, 1996; McCart *et al.*, 2007), who are already in an extremely vulnerable and impressionable stage of their lives (Harré & Lamb, 1986). Studies investigating the effects of community violence on adolescents tend to be quantitative in design (eg. Farver *et al.*, 2000; Heinrich *et al.*, 2004; McCart *et al.*, 2007). Fewer studies are qualitative in design and so there is a dearth of in-depth information on adolescents' perceptions with regards to community violence exposure and more specifically of the construct of hope. According to Augustyn, Frank, Posner and Zuckerman (2002), when eliciting information about children's account of their perceptions to violence exposure, it is best to ask children themselves.

Research exploring factors which protect children against the negative effects of exposure to community violence could contribute to more effective intervention efforts (Margolin & Gordis, 2004; Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1998). Schwartz (2002) refers to a psychology of hope as a 'positive psychology', one that will influence the manner in which psychology looks at a full human life and reveal how we can use hope to change lives. Thus, this study will contribute to the knowledge base of the effects of community violence and hope. Furthermore, this research study also forms part of a larger research endeavour exploring the relationship between hope, community violence and children's well-being.

1.3   Aims of the study

The aim of the research study is to ascertain adolescents' perception of community violence exposure and the extent to which those perceptions influence their sense of hope.

The objectives of this research study consider the following:

- To ascertain how adolescents understand and give meaning to community violence.
- To determine the way in which adolescents understand and give meaning to hope within the context of community violence.

1.4   Conclusion

The introduction contextualises the topic of the research study and defines the concepts under investigation, namely, community violence, adolescents and hope. The rationale and significance of conducting a study ascertaining the influence of community violence on adolescents' sense of hope is discussed. The aims and objectives of the research study are also defined and elucidated.

1.5   Chapter outline

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

This chapter will review literature relevant to the topic of this research study. Therefore, it will consider empirical studies on children and adolescents, with a focus on community violence, its effects as well as studies investigating hope within the context of community violence.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Considerations

Chapter 3 will outline the various theories considered in the study as well as describe and discuss the epistemological framework of the study. Theories of violence will include biological theories, social theories, psychodynamic theories as well as contextual theories.

Chapter 4 – Method

The methodology implemented in the study will be described in this chapter. The research design, participant selection, procedure, data collection and analysis, reflexivity and very importantly, the ethical guidelines of the study will be explained.

Chapter 5 – Interpretation of Findings and Discussion

This chapter will discuss the findings of the collected data in terms of two thematic categories and their corresponding themes, producing answers to the aims and objectives of the study. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was utilized in order to accomplish this. Each theme is also substantiated with literature as well as theories which can describe participants' understanding of community violence and hope. Furthermore, a summary of the findings are also given.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The last chapter of the study offers a brief review of the findings of the study in relation to the aims and objectives. Theoretical implications are discussed, limitations acknowledged as well as recommendations made for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

A term arose in the 1990's to describe the conflict taking place in South Africa, that of a 'culture of violence' (Hamber, 1999, p. 114).   This particular decade was the worst in South African history with men, women and children of 'black' race being continuously discriminated against and who suffered violent consequences as a result of this prejudice. When retaliated against, the government used violence to control these reactions. In June 1976, youth in Soweto protested against the Nationalist Government's intention to introduce Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in black schools (Davie, 2006). Five hundred and fifty one students were killed in this protest. Others were jailed, beaten, sodomised and raped in an attempt by the government to identify ANC activists (Davie, 2006).
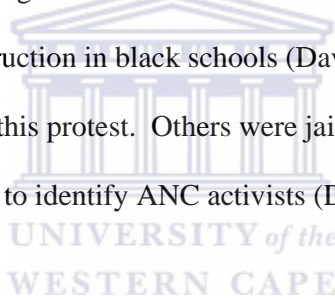
Ironically, the transition from an apartheid government to a democratic South Africa (1990 – 1994) was when this country experienced its violent peak, marked by unparalleled inter- and intra – community violence (Hamber, 1999). The shift seemed to move from vertical violence (when it was sanctioned by the state) to horizontal violence (committed by the discriminated against the discriminated) (Hamber, 1999). Women and children were especially defenceless and devalued (Hamber, 1999).   Presently, children are still continuously exposed to violence (Stavrou, 1993; Wainryb & Pasupathi, 2007). Moreover, Visser (2007) argues that the culture of violence, cultivated in these apartheid years, produced legacies such as poverty and social deprivation which remains a problem deeply embedded in low – income communities today.

Various theories have been attributed to this violence continuum, such as psychodynamic theories, critical theories, such as Bulhan and Fanon, and biological theories but, according to Margolin and Gordis (2004), the most common account is the social learning theory. The contention is that we learn from our social environments and so interact from which we learn. In *Chapter 3* we will review the different theories attached to violence. Understanding various theories ascribed to violence will go a long way in our understanding of violent behaviour, its effects and the resilience of victims in the face of such adversity.

The concepts that are used in this research study have been defined from the outset. This section will therefore review empirical studies within the area of community violence, its effects on adolescents (young people/youth/children) as well as research conducted regarding the construct of hope.
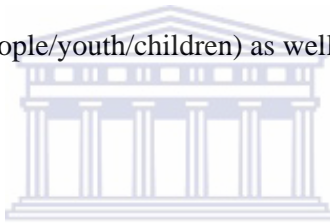
2.2   Rates of exposure to violence – international and national statistics

Buckner *et al.* (2004) posits that outside the home, research on children's exposure to community violence has shown astonishingly high rates. However, the true adversities of the victims of violence (i.e. those who are exposed to or are direct victims of violence) are not always comprehensively documented (Buckner *et al*., 2004). Contributing to this dilemma are the known, and more especially unknown, rates of exposure to violence as not all victims, especially children, report their traumas (Dawes, Long, Alexander & Ward, 2006). The rates of exposure to violence fluctuate on a continual basis and are one of concern. Evidently, much is yet to be discovered about children's adversities in the face of violence.

In 2008 a report was released from The Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence pertaining to young people's exposure to violence in the United States for the past few years.

It was estimated that youth are three times more likely than adults to be victims of violence. This notion was supported by the fact that in 2005, an average of 16 young people (ages 10 – 24 years) were killed each day. Moreover, in 2007, 5.5% of learners reported that they did not go to school because they did not feel safe.

Govender (2006) states that violence rates amongst South African youth is increasing at an alarming rate. In South Africa, the largest number of arrests made in 2007 was in the Western Cape (27%); alluding to the high level of crime and violence in this province (Altbeker, 2005). This statement also feeds the impression that the children of the Western Cape are more at risk of being exposed to crime and violence here, than anywhere else in South Africa. Dawes *et al*. (2006), reporting on exposure to violence amongst young people within the Western Cape, asserts that approximately 68% of adolescents, ages 12 – 17 years, have witnessed someone being victimized. Roughly 16% of these adolescents have reported being the victim of an assault and 75% of these victims claim they knew their attacker. Furthermore, 29% - 39% of learners in Cape Town schools have witnessed someone being stabbed or shot (Dawes *et al*., 2006).

Research in both South Africa and the United States has shown that the crime and violence in schools are more prominent in secondary than in primary schools (Dawes *et al*., 2006; Overstreet, 2000). The exposure of community violence on adolescents can have effects that research is only beginning to conceptualise.

2.3   Community violence

Margolin and Gordis (2004) identify the major categories of violence that have been investigated, that of child maltreatment (including physical, sexual abuse and neglect), aggression between parents and community violence. Youth exposed to one type of violence are more likely to be exposed to other types of violence as well (McCabe, Hough, Yeh, Lucchini & Hazen, 2005; Trickett, 2002; Barenbaum, Ruchkin & Schwab-Stone, 2004) and so we review some of the studies which have investigated the effects of these other types of violence.

There remains, however, debate among the literature as to which form of violence produces the most harmful and damaging effects. Some studies have outlined the effects of physical, sexual violence and community violence exposure on youth to be the most injurious (Margolin & Gordis, 2000), while others have found no significant association between the different kinds of violence and its effects on children (eg. McCart *et al.*, 2007).

In a study investigating community violence, Fitzpatrick, Wright, Piko and LaGory (2005) sought to examine depressive symptomatology with a focus on social and personal resource amongst a sample of 10 – 18 years old African American youth. Questionnaires were administered to these learners who lived in an area characterized by violence. Results of the study were congruent to those of most studies on young people living in these 'dangerous communities.' Those participants residing in an especially highly threatening area (i.e. high in community violence), were found to experience more depressive symptoms than those who experienced less violence (e.g. Buckner *et al*., 2004, Osofsky, 1995) Hence, the first point of debate is the alarming number of negative psychological effects on children and adolescents in these high-violence areas. The study also emphasized the buffering effects of interrelationships, social capital and well-being of children.

Similarly, in a longitudinal study conducted over a period of two years, McCabe *et al.* (2005) set out to determine whether being exposed to violence in the community, intimate partner violence and child maltreatment independently contributed to the prediction of conduct problems.

In a sample of 12 – 17 year old adolescents, it was established that community violence exposure contributed significantly to conduct disorder, over two year period, as well as externalizing problems. Child maltreatment predicted conduct disorder but not externalizing symptoms and interparental violence did not relate to either outcome. These conclusions are consistent with Oravecz, Koblinsky and Randolph's (2008) findings. In terms of interparental conflict, Oravecz *et al.* (2008) found more internalizing symptoms (such as fear and anxiety) of these children were discovered, whilst community violence exposure was found to produce more internalizing as well as externalizing child behaviour problems.

The effects of the different types or forms of violence are summarised by Margolin and Gordis (2004). Short-term effects have been identified in recent literature as aggression and delinquency, depression and anxiety. Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms such as nightmares and flashbacks have also been reported. They also point out that different forms of violence also elicit specific responses (i.e., sexual assault can result in the victim engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviour).

Exposure to family and community violence has been specifically linked, on a more long-term basis, to aggressive behaviour later in life. This association has been theorized to be the result of social learning theory, therefore, that children learn aggressive from models in their own environments (Margolin & Gordis, 2004). Other effects of community violence exposure such as internalized and externalized symptoms will be outlined in the next section.

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The most important concern regarding children and violence is exposure and victimization in familiar settings (Margolin & Gordis, 2004). The concern stems from the suggestion that if the home is not safe, then how do children effectively feel safe again? Trickett (2002) states that community violence also affects the rates of child abuse, as those who reside in violent communities tend to have higher rates of physical child abuse as well, indicating the ripple-effect and importance of community violence. Moreover, Coulton and Korbin (2007) contend that adverse child outcomes tend to be concentrated in communities with adverse conditions and risk factors.

2.4   Exposure to community violence and its effects – Empirical studies

Margolin and Gordis (2004) believe that any type of violence (familial violence, community violence, child maltreatment) can have different effects on those who are exposed to them and that there is a need for research to consider effects in adolescents. Exposure to, particularly community violence, either as a witness or victim, has been found to produce negative health problems (Rosario, Salzinger, Feldman & Ng-Mak, 2007) and is seen as a threat to the optimal development of youth (Kuther, 1999); A similar concern is raised by Fitzpatrick *et al*. (2005). Victimization as a result of community violence has been found to compromise children's ability to regulate their emotions, while exposure (or witness) to community violence may lead to depression and increased anxiety since they feel unsafe and unworthy of protection (Margolin & Gordis, 2004).

In a study investigating help-seeking behaviour and neighbourhood perceptions in Ohio, USA, Spilsbury (2002) interviewed 60 participants (age seven to eleven years), ranging from high to low levels of neighbourhood violence. In terms of neighbourhood or community violence, Spilsbury (2002) found that children were particularly concerned about

victimization. These participants engaged in certain strategies in order to prevent victimization and increase personal safety. Strategies involved staying in the company of friends, avoiding areas they knew were not safe and avoided those people who were potential threats to their safety. This study especially highlighted the active role children played in interpreting their environment and their actions which follow. Spilsbury (2002) further points to the importance of emphasizing children's experiences within their environment and the ways in which they add meaning and interpret it.

Barbarin and Richter (2001) sought to identify the extent to which both poverty and violence in the community can be related to behavioural and emotional problems. The context of this study was a South African black township. Mothers (who were employed but of low socioeconomic status) of six year old children were both used as informants and completed surveys based on violence exposure and the *South African Child Assessment Schedule*. Interestingly, poverty did not have strong effects or associations on the emotional functioning and behaviour regulation of those children. Children of a better socioeconomic background were actually found to have more problems than those of a less advantaged background. Those who experienced violence, however, were found to have elevated behavioural and emotional problem scores. They were more likely to experience heightened arousal, emotional distress and even social loss such as social indifference or premature self-reliance (Barbarin & Richter, 2001).

In a similar longitudinal study, spanning over five years, Brady *et al*. (2008) investigated the level of exposure and effects of community violence on youth. Within the first three years they discovered that among a sample of inner-city African American and Latino adolescent males living in high-crime and disadvantaged communities, exposure to violence was high and most of the youth either heard about violent events in their community, witnessed it

themselves, or have been directly victimized. Considering both direct and indirect exposure to community violence during middle adolescence (ages 14 – 16 years), they discovered that the greater the exposure to violence, the greater the involvement in violent behaviour in late adolescence (Brady *et al.*, 2008). These consequences were only found in those who failed to employ certain coping strategies. Those who employed effective coping strategies, however, such as seeking advice from others, praying and engaging in activities to enhance self-esteem, were not associated with negative outcomes later. The variability between and across children in the effects of violence of this sort is largely unexplained (Margolin & Gordis, 2004; Rosario *et al.*, 2007; Ozer, 2005).

One theory that could explain this variability is that of 'desensitization.' McCart *et al.* (2007) set out to investigate whether the effects of community violence on urban adolescents were the same as those of family violence and sexual assault. The aim of their study was to ascertain if urban youth really are 'desensitized' to community violence as the literature leads one to believe.

This theory of 'desensitization' asserts that adolescents who are frequently exposed to community violence adapt to violence in such a way that they do not experience the expected negative consequences. This effect was disproved as McCart *et al.* (2007) found posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and delinquent behaviour present in urban youth. Similarly, Leoschut (2006) also asserts desensitisation in youth owing to continuous violence exposure, yet this exposure, Leoschut states, may yet lead to aggressive behaviour on their part.

The theory of 'desensitization' was also investigated by Funk, Baldacci, Pasold and Baumgardner (2004). These authors delved into this effect of violence by addressing factors

such as media and game violence as opposed to real-life violence influencing this affect. Funk *et al*. (2004) make reference to literature which has reported that violence in the media promoted aggression in adolescents. Desensitization to violence is a subtle process which, according to Funk *et al*. (2004) may occur by repeated exposure to real-life or media violence and includes reduced levels of empathy. Exposure to video game violence was associated with expected low levels of empathy and also strong pro-violence attitudes. However, these findings were not consistent with exposure to real-life violence, emphasizing McCart's *et al*. (2007) findings. Desensitization may not be the only theory which can explain adolescent resilience.

Moreover, exposure to and perceptions of danger in schools and neighbourhoods are likely to threaten the ability of youth to fulfil their potential in the school setting (Bowen & Bowen, 1999). In their research it was found that the constant state of fear and danger of these adolescents (the majority of the sample being African American males) affected attendance at school, behaviour and school outcome (academic performance). Community and school violence exposure accounted for 14% of the variance explained in school attendance, 17% of the variance in trouble avoidance and 5% of the variance in academic performance. Schwartz and Gorman (2003) had similar findings in their study of community violence and academic performance in school.

In view of the maladaptive factors or consequences of exposure to community violence for adolescents, Bowen and Bowen's (1999) study and studies alike (e.g. Buckner *et al*., 2004) speaks to the need to identify and understand resiliency factors, such as hope (Ahmed *et al*., 2004; Oskin, 1996) in adolescents so as, not only to contribute to the existing body of knowledge, but also supply information to inform possible intervention efforts.

2.5   Buffers to community violence exposure

Brookmeyer, Henrich and Schwab-Stone (2005) conducted a longitudinal study over a period of one year, aiming to investigate how parent support and prosocial cognitions may safeguard adolescents who have witnessed community violence from committing violence themselves. According to their findings, effects of witnessing violence were not consistent for both males and females in the sample of grade six and eight adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds. Male subjects who reported high incidences of violence and low parental support were more likely to be at risk over time. However, those males who report violence yet average to high levels of parental support may be less likely to commit acts of violence later. These authors suggest that a well-functioning family may protect victimized adolescents and provide that therapeutic medium to prevent these future consequences. Female subjects did show such results. Unlike the male subjects, prosocial cognitions seemed to protect female from later indecent behaviour. Their research highlighted differences in interpreting acts of violence by males and females.
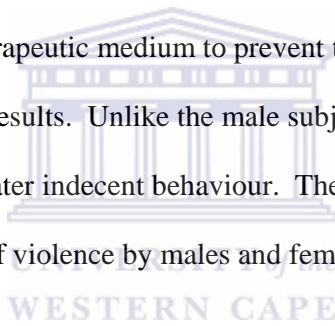
In a study by Muller *et al*. (2000), protective factors such as social support were examined in order to determine the extent to which it buffered the effects of community violence in psychopathology. Muller *et al*. (2000) identified and interviewed 65 at-risk adolescents in psychiatric hospitals. Other sources of information were self-report questionnaires and hospital charts. Social support was not found to act as a buffer to the effects of community violence, regardless of whether exposure was experienced as a witness or a victim.

Ozer (2005) conducted a longitudinal study examining school connection and family support as protective factors for adolescent mental health against community violence. Seventy-three adolescents from two schools in California (from grade seven to grade eight) completed a

baseline questionnaire during Grade 7 and another one at the one year follow up. Measures included *Children's report of Exposure to Community Violence, Daily Hassles Scale, Social Support Rating Scale, Children's Depression Inventory and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health*. Ozer's research proved that the perceived connection to school as well as the support adolescent's perceived to obtain from their family effectively protected these adolescents from the harmful effects of community violence such as impaired mental health. These conclusions are then contradictory to Muller's *et al*. (2000) findings.

Locally, in a qualitative study focusing on how young people construct and understand violence and safety, Parkes (2007) conducted interviews and focus groups with children aged eight to fourteen years in a South African neighbourhood. These young people's accounts of violence included murders, rapes, robberies and burglaries. These crimes were often perpetrated by gangs. The participants of the study adopted ways in which they tried to protect themselves, therefore, relying on adult protection, avoiding dangerous areas and even at times, retaliated. In agreement, Spilsbury's (2002) study also highlighted methods that children employ in order to protect themselves from harm. Parkes's study illustrated the extent of vulnerability felt by young people in these 'dangerous areas'.

Similarly, Ward (2007) conducted focus groups discussions in a qualitative study, exploring children's experiences regarding living in high crime areas in the Western Cape. These participants reported high rates of crime and violence exposure in their communities. The participants (ages 11 - 20 years) reported gangsterism as a problem that is deeply situated in their society. Those affected by this constant fear, found in the majority of the participants, employed strategies such as taking the safest routes home or never walking alone to

counteract community violence. Evidently, coping strategies are a useful tool for young people who wish to protect themselves from violence.

2.6   Adolescent hope and hopelessness

Snyder *et al*. (1997) argues that the way in which children learn to think about themselves in relation to the barriers they encounter is an important contributor to hope, particularly because it can make a difference in how they handle stressors. The role of hope in psychological development, motivation and functioning is slowly coming under investigation (Meissner, 1973). Snyder *et al*. (1997) believes that the foundations of hope are laid within the first two to three years and are then learned and sustained. Hope consists of two elements, pathways and agency (Snyder, *et al*. 1994), because it does not only consider the 'perceived ability' and will-power to reach set goals, but also the ability to navigate around obstacles in the way of those goals (Edward, Ong & Lopez, 2007). These concepts are the differentiating factor with regards to the theory of hope from other concepts such as self-efficacy (Edward *et al*., 2007). Snyder (2002) proposes many factors which can contribute towards diminishing hope such as violence, victimization, loss and non-supportive environments.

The relationship among adolescent students' level of hope and various academic and psychological indicators of school adjustment was investigated in a quantitative study by Gilman, Dooley and Florell (2006). They found that youth who reported low levels of hope also reported significantly high levels of maladaptive indicators, such as irregular school attendance, behaviour, dropping out of school and academic achievement. Furthermore, adolescents possessing high levels of hope reported greater positive benefits and also scored high on personal adjustment and global life satisfaction. Gilman *et al*. (2006) believe that

high levels of hope are necessary because it is linked to a number of positive psychological outcomes.

The factors associated with hope such as those found on the children's hope scale have been found to demonstrate the effects of hope in a child's life. In a study determining the validation of the *Children's Hope Scale*, Edwards *et al*. (2007) administered this six-item scale to a sample of Mexican American youth. The scores on the scale correlated hope positively with positive affect, life satisfaction, family and friend support and optimism. These factors are further found in recent research to contribute to resiliency against exposure and victimization of community violence (eg. Brookmeyer *et al*., 2005; Ward, 2007; Margolin & Gordis, 2004; Brady *et al*., 2007).

Similarly, Ahmed *et al*. (2004) puts forward community hope as a dimension of resilience in their study, which sought to develop a resilience questionnaire and administer it to three low socio-economic communities in the Western Cape. This study found that there was a significant association between some of the dimensions on their measure. Not only was community hope found to be significantly associated with community cohesion, all three communities were found to have high hope scores (Ahmed *et al*., 2004). Furthermore, individual hope was found as less of an important resiliency factor than community hope.

2.7   Community violence and hope

Few studies have delved into the relationship between community violence and hope. Oskin (1996) investigated the relationship between community violence and hope in children, 40 boys and 59 girls, living in a low-income community with high violence rates. These children were interviewed by trained interviewers in their own homes. The sample's ages

ranged from eight to twelve years. This study hypothesised that the more children were exposed to community violence, the lower their levels of hope would be. The results of this questionnaire led Oskin (1996) to find a negative relationship between hope and community violence; as community violence increased, hope decreased. This gives evidence to Snyder's theory that harmful life events decrease or diminish children's hope for a future.   Girls were also found to be more affected than boys by this relationship which Oskin described as being a result of their "emotional response to victimization" (p. 3). In other words, girls' emotionality influences their reaction to events.

 Younger participants were found to have experienced a more negative impact on their levels of hope while older children experienced higher levels of hope than younger ones after exposure, which Oskin considered as an effect of different coping mechanisms used by younger and older children and males or females. Oskin (1996) concluded that more research is needed in order to understand the mechanisms older children use and its effect on their sense of hope. This particular study also gives evidence to the need to not only further investigate the construct of hope, but also to explore this matter in a more in-depth and qualitative manner.

The literature on community violence and its effects may be numerous and diverse, but the research investigating hope and specifically community violence is limited. This dearth of information will permit a much needed contribution for this focus.

2.8 Conclusion

The literature outlines the research conducted in the field of community violence and hope. Research investigating the effects of community violence has shown this type of violence to have negative effects on adolescents and their well-being. McCart's *et al.* (2007) study has proven that perhaps community violence does not have as deleterious consequences as other studies reveal. However, given the number of studies which have resulted in the elaboration of these consequences (eg. Spilsbury,1999; Barbarin & Richter, 2001) an attempt should be made in identifying and highlighting those factors which could assist children's resiliency. The concept of hope has arisen as an alternative to these effects and the research in this field is still developing. This research study will attempt to investigate these concepts' relation to children. The next section, *Chapter 3,* discusses various theories regarding violence, particularly, biological, psychodynamic, contextual as well as critical theories of violence.
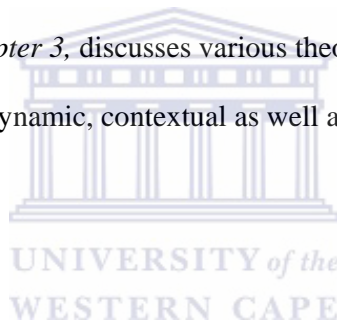
CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1   Introduction

Various theoretical frameworks have been utilized in research investigating community violence such as social learning theory (Margolin & Gordis, 2004), ecological frameworks (Oravecz *et al*., 2008, McCabe *et al*., 2005; Ward, 2007; Jonson-Reid, 1998), biological (Raine, 2002) and critical theories. These frameworks all describe various factors contributing to violence and can add value to describing and understanding behaviour.

As previously mentioned in *Chapter 2*, violence can be explained from a variety of theories, be it the social learning theory, the psychodynamic theories, critical theories and cognitive theories. The next section draws on some of these theories in order to understand violence from different positions and so argue for the theoretical framework of this specific research study.

3.2   Theories of violence

3.2.1   Biological theories of violence

There are a variety of biological theories of violence claiming to provide a general framework for the neuropsychology of aggression, although many tread lightly when raising theories of a biological nature. Few scientists in psychology and psychiatry would deny the biological factors relevant to understanding violence and criminal behaviour (Raine, 2002). A few biological theories will be briefly sketched.

In an article by Raine and Scerbo (1991), various biological theories such as *frontal dysfunction theory* are considered as a contribution to violence perpetration. Frontal dysfunction theory states that irregular or abnormal functioning of the frontal cortex contributes to aggressive or violent behaviour. Studies have revealed that damage to the frontal cortex showed results relating to lack of concern for consequences of behaviours, impulsivity and violence (Raine & Scerbo, 1991). However, according to Raine (2002), the direction of this relationship is yet to be determined, as it is not yet known if damage to the frontal cortex causes violence or if violence causes frontal dysfunction.

Left-hemisphere dysfunction is another theory considered in the biology of violence. This theory links violence to damage or abnormalities in the left hemisphere of the brain (Raine & Scerbo, 1991). Dysfunction laterized in this area of the brain has been found to lead to decreased verbal comprehension and language ability in violent offenders (Raine & Scerbo, 1991).
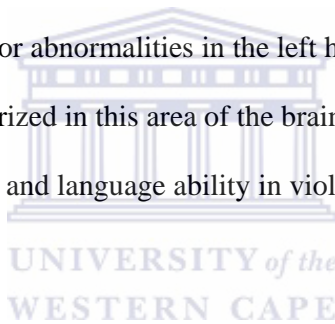
The *Arousal Theory* suggests that cortical underarousal may explain criminal behaviour since the need to promote cortical arousal is that much higher in offenders than those who are not. A number of studies have implicate violent offenders to be cortically underaroused (Raine & Scerbo, 1991). According to Raine (2002), the prevalence of EEG abnormalities in violent individuals ranges from 25 – 50% while normal deviance ranges from 5 – 20%.

A great deal of research needs to be undertaken in order to understand biologically-based theories of violent behaviour. The biological perspective, according to Raine and Scerbo (1991), acknowledges the heterogeneity of violence and identifies the need to further

examine the biological as well as social influences in order to fully be able to understand violence perpetration.

3.2.2 Psychoanalytic theories of violence

Mizen (2003) suggests that theories on violence should always have a 'psychological component aspect,' (p. 285). Accordingly, this section on *Theories of Violence* considers some psychoanalytic theories on this issue.

Jungian analysts promote the concept of a 'dark side' within human nature (Strachey, 1959). This 'dark side' side of being human is unacceptable and is then projected on an 'other' who then becomes the enemy.

For Harry Stack Sullivan, fears and anxieties experienced by humans give rise to 'terror-ridden' distortions which results in tendencies to strike out at others who do not understand and who are different (Strachey, 1959). Within both of these theories, as a result of the individual's emotional state, emotions are found disturbing and unacceptable and are placed within another.

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, believed in the direct connection between aggression and war (Strachey, 1959). Freud stated that:

> *"We are destined to direct our first sexual impulses towards our mother*
>
> *and our first impulses of hatred and violence towards our fathers,"*
>
> (Freud, 1938, p. 308 as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1960, p. 16).

Discussing the concept of the Oedipal Complex (and later the Elektra Complex in girls), Freud suggested, essentially, that our willingness to satiate our own instincts can even be

achieved at the expense of others. This may be seen as the origin or starting point of aggression in humans. Although Freud's theory is deterministic in nature, he did acknowledge that violence may not necessarily be an inevitable result of the aggressive drive. According to Stevens (2008), Freud suggested that it may also be a result of the interaction of different drives and other circumstances determined by social circumstances.

In response to a call by Einstein, in which he posed the question, "Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war?" Freud responded in a letter stating that *"conflicts of interest between man and man are resolved, in principle by the recourse to violence,"* (Freud in Strachey, 1959, p. 9). He likens this recourse to that of behaviour of animals. In his chapter on *'Why War?"* (Strachey, 1959), Freud suggested further that physical force was replaced with weaponry and the victor determined by skill. The 'slaughter of the foe' gratifies an instinctive craving. Hence, violence is not only determined by biological instinctual drives, but the interplay of both the social world and the individual.

Contemporary notions of the psychoanalysis view of violence and aggression have much of the essence as Freud, Jung and Sullivan. Fonagy (2001) refers to the child's primary object relationships, i.e. the relationship between caregiver and child. Through this interaction, the child comes to realise that he/she has his/her own feelings and mental states reaffirmed time and again by the response and interaction of the caregiver. As soon as the caregiver is unable to 'mirror' or manage this process (for whatever reason), the child is left in a state of confusion. The child then has an insatiable desire to find alternative ways of containing psychological experiences and can be left with problems of differentiating reality from fantasy, and the physical from the psychic world. Thus, there ensues a manipulative use of

affect, either personally or towards others, since "*Not being able to feel themselves from within, they are forced to experience the self from without*," (Fonagy, 2001).

The effects of trauma experienced by the child are also considered in the psychoanalysis of violence, however, will be explicated further under contextual theories of violence.

3.2.3   Social theories of violence

Calhoun (1994) states: *"There is no simple sameness unmarked by difference, but likewise no distinction not dependent on some background of common recognition,"* (p. 9). This quote summarises the one feature that all social theories have in common; that differences between individuals are by no means distinct from others, but essentially a result of the influence of others. According to DeLamater and Myers (2007), individuals' self-schema are produced in their social relationships and, as they meet new people, their view of self is modified by the feedback continuously received by others. This next section reviews social theories regarding violence.

The *Social Learning Theory* offers an explanation of aggression and violent behaviour. This theory emphasizes the child's acquisition of cognitive and behavioural skills from the environment (DeLamater & Myers, 2007). Through the observational learning process, called imitation, individuals can acquire new behaviour (DeLamater & Myers, 2007). Thus, observations of the manner in which parents and significant others behave in intimate relationships or social relationships provide an initial learning of behavioural alternatives which are seen as 'appropriate' for these relationships (Mihalic & Elliot, 1997) as children need to learn about the meanings their caregivers associate with various actions (DeLamater & Myers, 2007). This then, in turn, increases that individual's tolerance for certain types of

conduct and, based on the associations made with various actions, may predict their

behaviour throughout their life. Thus, if adults frequently resort to violence in order to

resolve a problem, this may be seen as an easy and efficient way for children to resolve their

problems later. Moreover, as Leoschut (2006) contends children who live in homes where

their parents model violent behaviour patterns are more likely than those not exposed to such

a scenario to imitate similar violence and aggression later in their lives.

Additionally, variations in meanings tend to give groups and societies their distinctiveness

(DeLamater & Myers, 2007). The deduction can be made then, that communities wrought

with violence can be a result of the meaning community members have attached to violence

and exemplified for others.

Margolin and Gordis (2004) have also applied this theory to community violence, since

children learn from the aggressive models in their environment.
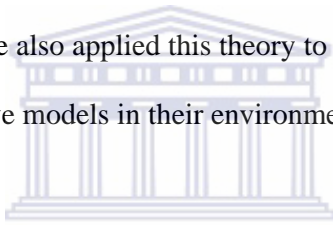
A subtype of the social learning theory, the *Sex-Role Theory*, accounts for gender-role

differences in behaviour (Stevens, 2008). According to Mihalic and Elliot (1997), early sex-

role theory explains that boys are taught to be the dominant partner and to maintain power

and control and, if necessary, by use of force. Females, on the hand, are taught to accept this

dominance and meet the needs of others through their roles of mothers and wives (Mihalic &

Elliot, 1997). This could also be used to explain why, in studies investigating the effects of

community violence in young people, males and females display varying symptoms (Oskin,

1996; Raviv *et al.*, 1999).

According to DeLamater and Myers (2007), *Realistic Group Conflict Theory* provides an

explanation for intergroup conflict (i.e. conflict arising as a result of members of one group

viewing themselves as different in important ways from members of another group). These

authors explain how conflict can emerge owing to opposition of interest; when one group is pursuing objectives in which a gain in the one group leads to a loss in another group. The frustration experienced by that group intensifies and can escalate to such an extent that the slightest aggravation can lead to conflict.

Consistent with this theory is the Soweto uprising in 1976 and more recently the Xenophobic attacks in South Africa in 2008. South African citizens were seen assaulting and torturing foreign citizens (Steinberg, 2008). The consequences of those events were devastating as many found themselves returning to their home countries (even those who initially emigrated as a result of conflict in their own country) and many displaced, living in town halls, makeshift camps and sports centres. The motivation behind these attacks was blamed on the fact that work and other resources are scarce and according to the perpetrators, the victims were taking all the opportunities from them.
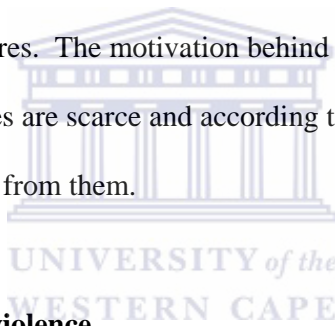
3.2.4 Contextual theories of violence

Contextual theories such as *Ecological Theory* and *Feminist Theory* is discussed as they are two commonly used contextual theories in many studies (e.g. Levendosky, Graham-Bermann, 2001; Ward, 2007; Jonson-Reid, 1998; Nelson & Oliver, 1998; Anderson, 1997). In this section a review of the ecological and the feminist perspective will be given as falling under contextual theories of violence.

The feminist perspective views violence as largely the result of unequal power distribution in society. According to Nelson & Oliver (1998), power is central: Men have power over women and objectify them; Adults have power over children and objectify them. One of the earliest points of discussion in the feminist approach was rape and sexual abuse since the

prevalence of girls as victims arises from the combination of their lower status (as female) and men's greater likelihood of desiring young women (Nelson & Oliver, 1998). Moreover, victims tend to be female and perpetrators tend to be male.

Anderson (1997) states that socio-demographic indicators of structural inequality influences propensity for domestic assaults. This author views domestic violence as rooted in gender and power and is a representation of men's active attempts to maintain dominance and control over women. This 'patriachy-as-power' framework is at the core of the feminist approach to violence.

However, the feminist approach views not only the issues of violence against women, but any violent act against a vulnerable population, such as children. According to Gordon (1986), violence against children represents a more complex challenge to feminist theory since, unlike women, children lack the potential for social and economic independence. Child abuse or maltreatment is also seen as a gendered phenomenon whether or not men are the perpetrators since it reflects the sexual division of the labour of reproduction. If men are the oppressors, women are almost always implicated since it is the 'duty' of women to protect the children.

Furthermore, *feminist theory*, according to Butler (1988), has sought to understand the way in which systemic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and reproduced through individual acts and practices. If various acts reproduce our political and cultural structures, one can then view violence as a product of the socio-political-cultural ideologies of that time.

Another theory which takes into account not only the social or cultural, but the political as well, is *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model*. Urie Bronfenbrenner considered the ecological environment as a nested arrangement of structures, each situated in the next, and each affecting each other. According to Neville and Mobley (2001), the ecological model speaks to the recursive influences of individual and systemic on multiple subsystems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem, influencing human behaviour. This model is used in many studies and articles explaining violence (eg. Carlson, 1984; Fraser, 1996; Neville & Mobley, 2001).

In his 1977 paper entitled, *'Toward an experimental ecology of human development,"* Bronfenbrenner considered human development as a result of these systems or structures in the individual's life. The discussion of this model from this paper will follow.

The first level which Bronfenbrenner theorises to influence human development is the microsystem. The microsystem refers to the complex relations of the individual and his or her immediate environment. The microsystem can contain the individual's family, friends and school.

The mesosystem comprises the interrelations among major settings in which the individual is contained at any particular point in time. It is a system of microsystems and can be interactions among family and school as well as place of worship and work.

A system which encompasses other informal and formal social structures which do not contain the individual directly, yet still directly influences that individual and his or her immediate environment is the exosystem. This system could be the individual's community and agencies of government. Leoschut (2006) states that many youth in South Africa are being raised in homes where they are taught that violence is an effective and acceptable

means of solving their problems and these violent activities are only aggravated when these notions are reinforced outside of the home.

The fourth level, the macrosystem, does not refer to the specific contexts affecting the life of a particular person, but to the existing culture or subcultures setting the pattern for the structures and activities occurring in that person's life. The macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner is the 'blueprint' for the other systems. In this particular system, overarching institutional patterns, ideologies, laws, regulations and political systems are then manifested through the activities of that person's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). When the values of the different systems are similar, the development of the individual can take place with ease. In South Africa, an argument for violence permeating society is that if the victimization of young people is taking place without being recognised or dealt with and crime and violence rates are fluctuating, we are denying the rights of these people (Leoschut, 2006). If the macrosystem is allowing a manifestation of its ideologies in the daily lives and activities of individuals, then this is another cause of violence.

According to Fraser (1996), during the course of life, successful family, school and work experiences have bases in early childhood opportunities for the optimal development of any person. Factors promoting successful development endorse social and cognitive skills that promote establishing relations between children and adults. Thus, from an ecological perspective, violence is seen as the result of an impoverished opportunity structure, inadequate training in critical social and cognitive skills (Fraser, 1996).

According to Carlson (1984), when determining causes of interpersonal violence, there should ideally be a focus on multiple levels. This focus encourages understanding of the nature of violence and those multiple factors that promote violence.

3.2.5   Critical theories of violence

In *Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* (1985), Bulhan criticizes Freud's idea of instincts being innate to all individuals. Bulhan even went on to describe it as "mere fiction that may or may not help to describe, explain and predict behaviour," (p.261). Context, according to Bulhan, is important in all theories and yet it is missing from most.

The introduction to *Chapter 2* is a testament to the need to understand violence not only in terms of the individual, or the immediate environment, but also in terms of the broader or 'macro' level influences. A critical approach to understanding violence requires not only understanding socio-political-historical issues, but necessitates a move to action.

Bulhan (1985) states that "*A situation of oppression is essentially a cauldron of violence,*" (p. 131). This statement is made clear in South Africa's history. According to Bulhan (1985), South Africa is the prime example of a situation of oppression and typically involves all three forms of violence, personal, institutional and structural violence.

Bulhan defines violence as "*any relation, process or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social and or psychological integrity of another person or group,*" (p. 135). He believes that one of the ironies in societies where oppression is dominant, is that the oppressed submit to suppression for fear of physical death, yet they die more frequently since they suffer greater poverty, disease and dislocation. The consequence of this structural violence, institutional and personal violence is a higher rate of physical, social and psychological death (Bulhan, 1985).

Bulhan draws on Frantz Fanon in his explanation of the origins of violence. Fanon believed that Manichean psychology underlies all human violence and oppression. In other words, every label, every category has its opposite, e.g. black vs. white, good vs. evil, and it is in this labelling or tendency to categorize people and things that sets in motion the chain of events which consequently ends in violence and destruction. The processes which label, dehumanize and oppress people, however unjust, can be seen as the origin of violence. It begins with the labelling or categorizing of 'others' as 'bad' and, in the case of most oppressor and oppressed societies, subsequently 'less than human.' The beliefs of the oppressor that anything other than that which they can identify with is not part of them and so have to remain distant. They cannot receive the same privileges, cannot live in the same vicinity, cannot be treated the same and so are treated unfairly. These people, the oppressed, according to Fanon, are treated as they are labelled. The more happy and content the 'oppressor', the more sad and restless are the 'oppressed.' The nicer and spacious the homes of the 'oppressor,' the dirtier and cramped are the homes and the environment of the 'oppressed.'

The Manichean psychology becomes internalized by all – the oppressors and the oppressed. All start believing it and behave accordingly. Yet, the frustration that builds within the oppressed manifests itself in ways even unknown to themselves. Bulhan explains horizontal and vertical violence distinguished in *Chapter 2*. The cause of violence, according to Bulhan as Fanon believed, originates as a result of aggressive forms of practice, such as that seen in South Africa's history and consequently manifests itself in the 'oppressed'. When the oppressed lack consciousness and organization to retaliate against the oppressor (which Fanon believed was the best way to regain independence and empowerment), they fight amongst themselves.

Evidence for this theory is the fact that presently, violence – high levels of violence – seem to be more visible and prevalent in certain communities, particularly those of 'previously disadvantaged' – or previously oppressed. The socio-political-historical frustration gives rise to psychological frustration and powerlessness and, subsequently, violent acts towards others. Bulhan (1985) further states that a racist society elaborates false belief systems into cultural and institutional reality. Through socialization processes, members of that society are conditioned to this 'reality.' Therefore, in these societies, the dominant group relates to the dominant by means of projection (projecting their beliefs of privilege and their sense of superiority onto their own), while the dominated relate to the dominant by means of introjections and identification with the aggressor.

3.3   Epistemological framework of the study

Although this research study will draw on the theories already discussed, the epistemological framework chosen for this study is that of social constructionism. This theoretical orientation draws its influences from a number of disciplines such as sociology and linguistics, making this a very multidisciplinary theory in nature. Early social constructionists sought to divert from a positivist worldview and use different approaches such as symbolic interactionism to reveal the hidden world of everyday interaction and decision-making (Brown, 1995). Thus, this approach proposes a unique method for framing information based on the assumptions it makes about people's knowledge, ideas or thoughts and consequently meanings that are attached thereto. Its epistemology holds certain assumptions about the knowledge we attain in the world in which we live, which will be explicated further. This is the chosen epistemological stance of the research study.

Social constructionist approaches focus on the construction of social reality through discursive processes (Kiguwa, 2006). Elements typically conceived as personal individual characteristics are taken to be socially constructed and can therefore be revealed through everyday conversation. Language is considered a central aspect of this theory. According to Kiguwa (2006) discourse both facilitates and endorses the emergence of certain relations made in everyday concepts. Thus the aims, research design and data collection procedure of present research study, therefore a qualitative approach, as stipulated in *Chapter 4,* conform to this approach. The key features of the social constructionist framework are presented below.

Firstly, the social constructionist approach assumes a critical stance towards knowledge which is often taken for granted (Burr, 1995). The researcher is then compelled to be ever-suspicious of assuming 'common' knowledge. The labels or categories people tend to use in everyday life are neither truth nor reality. It is subjective to that particular individual. Elements or concepts often used within a context typically represent social constructs (Kiguwa, 2006).

Secondly, Burr (1995) states that people's understandings are historically and culturally specific. It stands to reason that our perceptions are rooted in a context and this context is always culturally and historically influenced. We are all influenced by our environment or society. However, this does not imply that one should analyze the history and culture of each individual. It merely emphasizes the role and significance of historical and socio-cultural influences on the means by which the world is seen and lived in (Kiguwa, 2006).

Thirdly, knowledge is, within this paradigm, sustained by social processes (Burr, 1995). People therefore construct their own knowledge of the world, but do so involving others. This theory is congruent with many social theories. Social interactions and especially language are of great considerations to social constructionists as language frames people's knowledge.

Lastly, social constructionism views knowledge and social action to have an interaction effect. Therefore, the knowledge that individuals acquire will determine the nature of social action that they may adopt because all knowledge is constructed differently and so they act differently (Kiguwa, 2006). The realities that individuals construct for themselves allow them to attach understandings and meanings to various elements within that reality. Attaching meaning to these elements is significant as it carries an understanding of consequences to actions and will therefore determine the actions that individuals will make.

This theory is ideal in framing and explaining adolescents' understanding and meanings they attach to subjects such as community violence and hope. It offers a unique approach in seeking to attain reflexivity (which is crucial in any research study) by moving away from simply accepting anything as truth but rather questioning and understanding interpretation.

Social constructionism emphasizes meaning attached to individual's perspective of their reality. Participants' particular discourses will therefore reflect their understanding and the meaning they attach to community violence as well as their sense of hope. This theoretical orientation will allow for a deeper insight into their social realities.

Within this research study, the researcher utilized these principles whilst conducting and analyzing the focus group transcriptions, with an awareness of all the processes involved when working with people and their individual experiences.

The next section, *Chapter 4* details the methodology of the study, the research design, data collection techniques, data analysis and processes involved in the research study.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

4.1   Introduction

The aim of the research study was to ascertain adolescents' understanding of and the meaning they attach to exposure to community violence and the extent to which that exposure affects their sense of hope. Therefore, the research study proposed to gather information from adolescents and the understandings and meanings they attach to violence exposure, which can be explicated by employing a qualitative methodology.

This next section will therefore elucidate the particular research design, procedure, participants and ethical considerations of the study. Furthermore, given the nature of the utilized approach and the epistemological framework, the researcher will reflect on the validity and reflexivity of the research process.
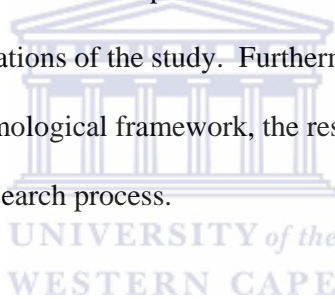
4.2   Research design

A qualitative approach was implemented for the aim of the study. In contrast to a quantitative method, which translates social phenomena into variables and mathematical formulae (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999), a qualitative approach was preferred since it relies on the "*naturalistic description or interpretation of phenomena in terms of the meaning these have for the people experiencing them*," (Langdridge, 2007, p. 2).

  According to Durrheim (1999), qualitative research is naturalistic, holistic and inductive. It allows real-world situations to unfold naturally, to understand the complexities of certain phenomena and immerse oneself in the details and specifics of the information. This type of design allows researchers to study certain issues in depth and detail and attempt to understand

categories of information that emerge from the data (Durrheim, 1999). This was pertinent in a study of this nature as it was not the wish of the researcher to generalise findings, but to gain an understanding from a particular group of people in their particular context. Furthermore, the nature of the study is exploratory, which is especially suited to a qualitative method. Exploratory studies are implemented when a researcher examines a new topic of interest and deems it appropriate for further investigation (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This particular subject matter has two parts. The first is to establish the adolescents' understanding of community violence (of which there are many studies) and the meaning they attach to it and secondly, to ascertain how the exposure to violence in the community has affected their sense of hope (of which there are few studies). Owing to the dearth of information, particularly from a qualitative framework, this research will be known as an exploratory study.

Many studies investigating community violence exposure and its effects have been conducted quantitatively (eg. Barbarin & Richter, 2001; Kitsantas, Ware & Martinez-Arias, 2004; Overstreet & Braun, 2000; Jones, 2007, McCart *et al.*, 2007) and have rarely attempted to discover experiences from the perspective of participants in their own words. The diversity of life, changing contexts and rapid social change, reflect the need for qualitative research is crucial (Flick, 2002). The approach in this study allows for this, as qualitative enquiry captures information of phenomena in the words of and from the perspective of the informant.
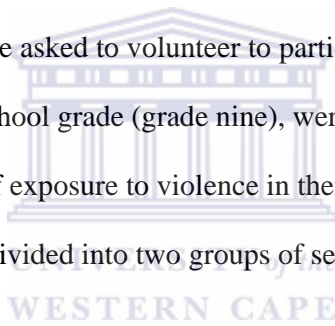
4.3   Participants

The context of this particular research setting was in keeping with the aims and objectives of the research study. The chosen community, situated approximately 20 kilometres from the

city of Cape Town, on the Cape Flats, is characterised by high levels of community violence and poverty owing to unemployment (Western Cape Education Department, 2008). The South African Police Services (2009) statistics for the community's surrounding area illustrated an increase from the previous year in the following categories: 250 counts of assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm; 142 counts of robbery; 828 counts of burglary at residential premises; 664 counts of theft out of or from motor vehicle and 923 counts of drug-related crime within the period 2008-2009 alone.

Participants were selected based on specific criteria. They therefore had to reside, attend a secondary school within the above-mentioned community and be 14-15 years of age. Fourteen learners (eight females and six males) participated in the study from one high school in the community. Learners were asked to volunteer to participate in the study. Participants were homogenous in terms of school grade (grade nine), were of similar socioeconomic status and also had some level of exposure to violence in their community. The fourteen participants selected were then divided into two groups of seven for data collection.

4.4   Data collection

Data was collected by means of two focus group discussions. A focus group is a qualitative method in which participants are asked to discuss their perceptions, or understandings, on a particular topic (Liefooghe *et al*., 1995). Focus groups are advantageous and considered most appropriate for the specific aims of the study for a number of reasons.

Firstly, this data collection technique is used principally when trying to collect information from a group of people who may not necessarily be comfortable being isolated from their normal context (Flick, 2002). They are especially appropriate when working with a group of people who may not feel secure enough with participating in a one-on-one interview with a

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stranger (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson, 2001) and since the selected participants were of ages 14 – 15 years, this method was considered most appropriate.

Secondly, according to Liefooghe *et al*. (1995), focus groups are also useful in that they are specifically designed to yield information on a community's belief and values, further meeting the aims of the study.

In this research study, data was collected by means of two focus groups consisting of semi-structured questions (see Appendix D). Given the nature of a focus group discussion, a semi-structured format allows for a degree of meandering discussion as it gives the group an opportunity to talk about what is most pressing for them (Kelly, 1999).

Kelly (1999) further states that six to twelve participants typically comprise a focus group. In this study, each focus group consisted of seven participants (four females and three males) and was conducted in English.

4.5   Procedure

Permission was sought and received from the Western Cape Education Department in order to access the school in the selected community. The high school was chosen based on certain characteristics (i.e. high violence statistics) as well as accessibility. Participants were purposively selected based on the criteria mentioned above.

After permission was attained from the school, teachers were informed of the research study and required to select learners on the criteria given. Consent letters were distributed to participants as well as their parents/guardians explaining the aims of the research study, their rights as participants and requesting permission for their participation.

The school was contacted in order to arrange an appropriate and convenient date for all parties concerned to conduct the focus groups. Both focus groups were conducted on the

same day and during school hours at the participants' school. This was also accomplished so as not to 'isolate' participants (i.e. remove them from their environment) and also make them feel as relaxed as possible.

With the permission of the participants, the discussion was audio-recorded. Before the focus groups commenced, the aims and objectives of the research study was explained once more as to ensure the participants understood them clearly. The duration of the first focus group was one hour and ten minutes and the second focus group about 45 minutes in length. The audio–files were transcribed verbatim, analyzed and conclusions drawn and reported.

4.6   Data analysis

The information gathered from the transcription will be analysed using a thematic content analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is seen as a basic method for qualitative analysis and encompasses everything from identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data. Since the aims and objectives of the study required a qualitative design, the analysis of the data will be analysed according to Braun and Clarke's explanation of conducting a thematic analysis.

Although many would support a discourse analysis above all else when working within a social constructionist framework (eg. Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999), a thematic analysis is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thus emphasizing its flexibility.

Braun and Clarke (2006) identify a six-phase guide in order to conduct a thematic analysis which will now be discussed.

Phase one involves familiarizing oneself with the data. It is important for the researcher to immerse him/herself with the transcribed scripts. During data collection the facilitator is already aware of the content of the data, has already made notes and by now has an idea of the themes that may arise. The initial reading and re-reading provides the researcher with an even better idea of the depth and breadth of the content of the data. The key to this step is completely immersing oneself and becoming knowledgeable of the transcripts. Braun and Clarke state that this provides the 'bedrock' for the remainder of the analysis.

Phase two requires the generating of initial codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that the researcher should systematically work through the data, paying complete attention to each data item and identify interesting aspects in the data on the basis of repeated patterns. Another important recommendation is that the analyst codes the information as far as possible. It is not clear in the initial coding what may or may not be essential information later and so, in this step, the researcher requires having too much information rather than too little information.

The next step is the search for themes in the transcripts. Once all the data has been coded, the analyst or researcher shifts the narrow focus of coding to a broader level and focuses on the themes of which the codes are indicative. The analyst may not initially see the bigger themes, but rather sub-themes. This is not necessarily a delay of the analysis process, since sub-themes could later be identified as larger themes.

The researcher should also review the themes under consideration. Once the preliminary themes list is drawn, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that step four requires an examination of these themes. In some instances some themes overlap and other times some themes are realised as not being valid. Once this process is complete, the researcher is able to see the

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importance of certain themes, the manner in which it complements or contradicts each other and the overall results of the analysis.

Defining and naming the themes is the fifth step in the analysis process. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend a 'define and refine' step in the analysis process. Here, the analyst identifies the 'essence' of each themes as well as the feature of the data that each theme captures. This information is then also used in the naming of the theme. Essentially, one wants to the name the theme according to its function.

The above steps then leads to the step six, wherein the researcher, produces the report based on the first five steps, therefore, the analysis of the data.

These steps are explicated in *Chapter 5: Results of the Study*.

4.7 Reflexivity and validity

Identifying pre-conceived ideas, thoughts and opinions, which each individual possesses, is important for a researcher, especially when conducting a study that could be of specific bias for that individual.
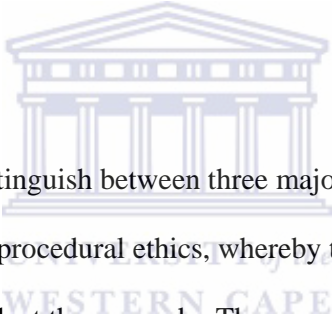
Those employing a social constructionist framework should be sceptical of the idea that a researcher can ever play a purely facilitative role in allowing the participants to give expression to her or his feelings and experiences – all meanings are seen as being co-constructed between facilitator and participant (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The researcher was constantly aware of these concerns and attempted to identify areas of personal subjectivity and sensitivity as far as possible. This was continuously reflected upon during this research process. Furthermore, concerns which might be raised, particularly from a social constructionist epistemological framework, are presented in the limitations of the study.

Moreover, assessing qualitative research entails multiple readings and considerations of its representational understanding and meaning. Validity of qualitative research should not be conceived as a determination ("is it valid" versus "is it not valid") but a continual process of interrogation and reformulation (Aguinaldo, 2004), within the context of rigorous documentation of method and process (Savahl, 2008).

4.8   Ethical considerations

According to Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999), the essential purpose of ethical research planning is to protect the welfare and the rights of research participants. This study required the participation of young people (under the age of 18 year) and so ethical guidelines were of even greater importance.

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) distinguish between three major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research. The first is procedural ethics, whereby the researcher seeks approval from an ethics committee to conduct the research. The second, they name 'ethics in practice,' which refer to those guidelines which occur everyday during the research process. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) further mention a third component, that of ethics stipulated by ethics committees. This research study conformed to all three of these dimensions.

The ethical considerations of the study were in keeping with those stipulated by the University of the Western Cape. Permission was obtained from the Western Cape Education Department in order to gain access to a school. Permission was also sought from the principal and teachers of that school.

Consent letters were distributed to learners as well as their parents explaining the research study, their rights as participants and requesting their signatures as evidence of consent to participate.

Prior to the commencement of the focus groups, participants were informed of their rights in the research process once more to ensure informed consent. These rights include autonomy (participants are under no obligation to reply to any question that they are not comfortable with) and were allowed to withdraw from the research process, at any time, without consequence. Confidentiality was assured and maintained at all times. Furthermore, participants were aware that if problems or trauma should arise as a result of the research study, counselling will be made available to them.

4.9   Conclusion

This chapter has described the method of the research study. A sketch of the research design was delineated, supporting the study's aims and objectives. Participant selection, data collection, procedures, data analysis and reflexivity was also described. Furthermore, crucial ethical concerns were also discussed which were maintained throughout the research process. *Chapter 5* of this thesis will describe and explain the findings of the focus groups in terms of the literature reviewed as well as theories considered.

CHAPTER 5

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction

The following chapter presents the analysis and findings of the transcribed focus groups as well as a brief discussion of each theme. The transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) method of thematic analysis wherein reading and re-reading the transcripts, identifying codes and then grouping them together into meaningful themes is essential. Thematic categories were identified according to the aims and objectives of the study and then discussed as various themes accordingly. In order to substantiate the themes, extracts of the focus group discussion are also presented[1]. The discussion of each theme was also linked to the present literature as well as relevant theories. Furthermore, a summary of the present findings will be reviewed.
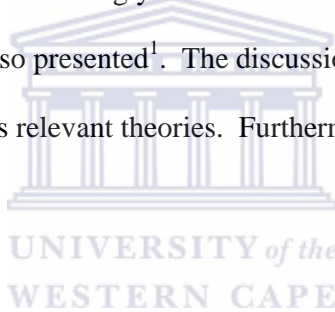
5.2   Findings of the study

Two thematic categories were identified.   The thematic categories are then divided into themes and described further, elucidating the aims and objectives of the study.

1) Thematic Category 1: The meaning of community violence

   a. Understanding of community

   b. Different types of violence

   c. Perceptions of causes of violence

   d. Experiences of exposure to violence

   e. Perceptions of the effects of violence

---

[1] The following abbreviations are used in the extracts from the focus groups: F- Faciliator; MR- Male respondent; FR- Female respondent; []- translated text; ... - unclear text.

2) Thematic Category 2: The meaning of hope within a context of violence exposure

    a. The religiosity of hope

    b. The future

    c. The future of the community

5.3   The meaning of community violence

The meaning that these adolescents attach to community violence is established through five themes: how they understand community, what they understand as violence in their community, their perceptions of the causes of violence, their experiences of exposure to violence and the effects experienced as a result of that exposure. These themes together clearly describe and explain how this group of young people have constructed their understanding of and the meaning they ascribe to community violence.
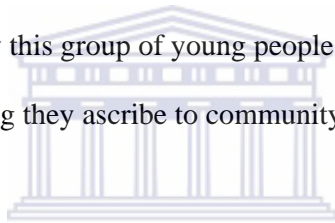
5.3.1   Understanding of community

The first theme to emerge from the discussion was participants' understanding of community violence. This was achieved by initially gaining an understanding of the meaning they attached to being part of a community and then establishing what they perceived as violence in their community. In this section, we will review the manner in which participants refer to community, what they understand by violence and how their understanding reflects Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model.

Participants had various opinions and understandings of what a community is. Some thoughts were general and others more specific.

        FR: A place where people live

        FR: You can meet new people and socialise

                                              (Focus Group 2, p. 1)

> MR: *Playing in the street*

Within the above dialogue, a community is not described as merely comprising buildings, houses and streets, but as serving certain purposes. The utilization of the words "live," "socialize" and "playing" indicates a dominantly social view of community. It assigns responsibility on community members who should guarantee social interactions, since it would seem that people make a community 'come alive' and not the buildings upon which it is built. For these adolescents, being part of a community should ensure safety, assist in developing relationships as well as promote unity between its people. Further evidence hereof can be seen in the following extract:

> FR: *You grow attached to your neighbour, your opposite neighbour and*
>   *friends*
> FR: *A place where people help other people*

> FR: *Safety*

> FR: *There are certain things that you have to stand together for so that is*
>   *basically the focus of the community*

One of the most important benefits of being part of a community was that of protecting one another. Once more the responsibility ascribed to community members is highlighted. People encompass a community and therefore people should assist in keeping it safe. These young people believe that belonging to a community promotes neighbours, friendships, attachments and should ensure or focus on protecting and helping one another. These

participants have a particularly socialized construction of community life. These purposes, which participants identified, can further be seen as the meaning that they attach to being part of a community. Some participants did, however, allude to the disadvantages of being part of a community. In the next excerpt, it is clear that not all community members are helping to achieve these purposes of promoting socialization.

> *FR:* *There's some people in the community that doesn't really stand together and then they come doing wrong things and then they're bringing your community down*
>
> *MR:* *They're bad influence*
>
> *MR:* *Drug using in the community is strong*
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 2)*

The above extract exhibits the dual construction of community life. Being part of a community not only has its advantages, but disadvantages as well. This can also be explained by Bulhan (1985) who argues that people tend to see the world in terms of this duality such as 'good' and 'bad,' or in other words, a Manichean psychology. One individual's actions seem to have an effect on everyone in this community. Participants' reality is constructed not in terms of individualism, but in terms of collectivism. One person's actions affect all. The statement from this male participant also emphasizes the link between drug using and crime and violence. Statistics from the SAPS (2009) also provide support for this since 923 counts of drug-related crime in their residential area was reported for the year 2008 – 2009.

One male participant also referred to a disadvantage of being part of a community, already highlighting what would be the focus of the discussion as well as very the manner in which he connects his community with violence.

> *MR:*   *Like in my community, people from Parkwood come and break into the houses.*
>
>   *So that is a disadvantage.*

<div align="right">

(Focus Group 2, p. 1)

</div>

This participant was referring to people from the surrounding area, an area slightly higher in crime and violence rates than his own. Residents of the participants' area and this surrounding area all report to the same police station. Those statistics show an increase in burglaries in 2008 – 2009 than the previous year. Participants are aware of violence in their community and the extent to which it affects everyone. The inferred construction is that crime in the community, even if one person is victimized, can and does affect everyone else in that community. Evidently, these adolescents felt the 'diffusion' of the effects of violent activities wherein all members of the community are affected, including themselves. The meaning that community violence has for these participants is seen as not only affecting the particular victim, but the entire community.
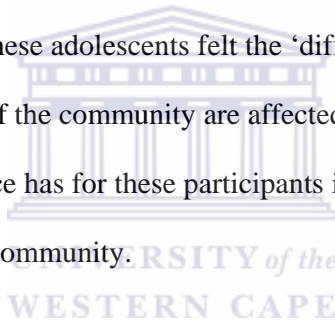
5.3.2   Different types of community violence

Participants further described their understanding of violence in terms of the different types of violence they knew and to which they have been exposed.

> *MR:*   *Fighting. Killing. Shooting. Guns*

<div align="right">

(Focus Group 2, p. 2)

</div>

> *FR:*   *Abuse*
>
> *FR:*   *Verbal and physical abuse*
>
> *MR:*   *Physical, verbal, emotional, sexual abuse also*
>
> *MR:*   *Mostly about fighting*

<div align="right">

(Focus Group 1, p. 1)

</div>

Some of the participants also mentioned why violence is known as 'violent.'

> *MR: Because of conflict*
>
> *MR: Because it's cruel*

These male participants used the words "cruel" and "conflict" indicating that intentionality are important aspects to consider. This group of young people felt that the intention of the perpetrator made something violent, therefore, that someone intends to hurt somebody. They believe that people purposefully intend to cause conflict and that this is what violence is. Participants were of the opinion that most of the violence that occurs in their community is selfish and cruel as one participant describes: *"...that person is only doing it to satisfy his need and his not thinking of what 'Adam'[2] is feeling" (FR, Focus Group 2, p. 6)*. This however contradicts the previous male participant's belief in the extract above. The female participant is of the belief that perpetrators are "not thinking" about the consequences of their actions. One can further infer that this participant believed that if they were considerate, then perhaps there would be less crime.

> **F: So you think violence is very selfish?**
>
> *MR: Very*

Participants reflected upon what they perceive as violence in the community.

> **F: Can you give me examples of what happens in your community?**
>
> *MR: There's a lot of fights. They break into houses. Like, they stole my daddy's rims off the car. They do all these things like 10 o'clock the night*

---

[2] 'Adam' is used as a pseudonym in order to protect participants in their rights of confidentiality

> *FR: People do drugs on the corners. They just smoke and don't worry*
>
> *FR: Affecting people in the community*
>
> *MR: They lie, they steal out in the open*

<div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 4)*</div>

Participants viewed violence as either being made up of or as caused by drugs and a 'lack of concern.' One other participant felt that these drug users are *"affecting the people in the community*," since they *"lie, they steal out in the open."* The drug abuse was identified as a cause of violence which spreads in the community. Participants have constructed their understanding of right and wrong in terms of the possible consequences that a decision can hold. Violence has serious consequences which they perceive as affecting all people in the community and is therefore wrong.

These adolescents also reflected upon the community as having both advantageous and disadvantageous. One of the disadvantageous that came into view quite strongly is drug use and violence in the community, which affects not only the victims, but everyone in the community. This conclusion is also maintained by Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological theory which describes the individual as being nested within and influenced by different systems, therefore, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. In the present study, the exosystem, namely community–level features have an impact on all individuals.

Furthermore, a distinction was also made between the types of areas that experience high levels of violence which is in support of Bulhan's (1985) view of certain groups of people experiencing more violence.

> **F:**   *Of the things that happen around you (violence in the community). And*
>
>   *does that happen often?*
>
> **FR:**   *Yes.*
>
> **MR:**   *Yes.*
>
> **FR:**   *No, not often.*
>
> **FR:**   *She lives in a civilised area.*
>
> **F:**   *What civilised? What makes something civilised?*
>
> **FR:**   *It's quiet.*

(Focus Group 1, p. 5)

Here adolescents understand certain areas to have more violence than others. The use of the word 'civilised' indicates this point cogently. A 'civilised' area does not have lots of violence whereas those areas where poverty is high do experience high rates of violence.

> **MR:**   *If you live in like a poverty area, you must always walk..... Like I*
>
>   *always have a Taser[3]*

(Focus Group 2, p. 4)

This participant was referring to a coping strategy he employed when walking in an area with high rates of violence, which he believed was either a result of poverty or a characteristic of a violent community. This further substantiates Bulhan's theory of violence occurring in places where there was, even at one time, a situation of oppression. As highlighted in *Chapter 3* evidence for Bulhan's (1985) theory of violence is emphasized by certain communities, especially those who were previously disadvantaged or oppressed, such as the community in this study, which displays higher levels of violence.

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[3]A Taser is a hand-held device typically used to immobilise another person by 'shocking' them with electricity

The distinction between the terms "civilised" and "poverty" in reference to different areas is of significance and further reflects an understanding of different communities which is, as Burr (1995) argues, historically and culturally specific. The use of the word "civilised" indicates that in that particular community, there is no crime; a community which is peaceful, calm and quiet. Conversely, one can also deduce that a community with violence would be 'uncivilised.'

The use of the word "poverty" also specifies a construction of where and why violence occurs; violence in certain communities is characterised by poverty. This also supports the argument by Buckner *et al*. (2004) that low-income communities are more at-risk for exposure to violence than high-income communities. It is evident from the above excerpts that these adolescents have constructed certain ideas about what characterised community violence.
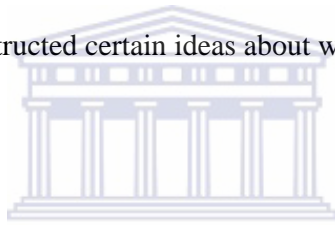
5.3.3 Perceptions of causes of violence

Although not a specified question, an emerging theme from the focus groups was particpants' perceptions of the causes of violence. *Chapter 3* of this research study clearly explicates the various theories which support violence causation which can be seen in terms of participants' understandings. The manner in which participants discussed the different causes of violence signifies a multi-level understanding or construction of the causes of violence similar to that of Bronfenbrenner. Participants felt that there were several explanations which can be attributed to people choosing to commit crime and engage in violent acts, on both an individual and community level. This group of young people each had an opinion on the causes of violence, some of which are reminiscent of social learning theory and theories of psychoanalysis.

Participants identified the home and parenting style as contributing factors to violence.

> *FR: They (parents) have no control anymore*
>
> *FR: I would say it starts at home*
>
> *MR: Now, it's like no respect. They have no respect for elderly people.*
>
> <div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 4)*</div>

According to this group of participants, parents were at fault since they do not discipline their children properly or teach them respect. One can also infer that these participants perceive good values to be pivotal in development as well as can act as a buffer against violence perpetration. Research by Brookmeyer *et al*. (2005) revealed the importance of parental support which may buffer adolescents against committing acts of violence later in life. This suggests that a well-functioning family may protect adolescents, who have been exposed to violence, against later indecent behaviour. These adolescents understood that parents and inadequate child-rearing techniques can be a negative influence and can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *FR: You're not supposed to swear in front of a small child. You're not supposed to do anything wrong in front of them*
>
> *FR: That's not setting an example*
>
> *FR: And they teach the small children that's busy learning say 'your ma' and all that*
>
> <div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 23)*</div>

This participant was referring to the foul language that adults are teaching children to use at a very young age. It is typically referred to as a 'funny story,' yet this group of young people agreed that it is unacceptable to behave such a manner in front of young people. Participants felt that the modelling of behaviour or examples that older children and adults are setting for

their younger children was also a contributing factor. This is supported by Leoschut (2006) who posits that children who live in homes where their parent models violent behaviour are more likely to imitate similar aggression later. Participants believed that adults are negatively influencing children with their behaviour. Some participants believed that the problem did not only start at home, but extended to the school setting.

> FR: It starts at school because if you look at school, you're stealing each
>   other's things
>
> FR: Pens, erasers, sharpeners, everything. They start small
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 14)*

It can be deduced that participants have constructed violence as a process. Violence starts with petty crime, stealing other people's minor possessions and then progresses to the larger, more violent activities.

A few participants attributed certain individual factors to violence perpetration.

> FR: Sometimes people just do it to fit in
>
> FR: Peer pressure
>
> FR: Laziness. Some people don't want to work
>
> FR: To cause conflict
>
> FR: To become popular. It's almost like they want everyone to notice him
>   or her and like everybody must know they must be scared of them
>   because they in gangs
>
> *(Focus Group 2, p. 8)*

The above excerpt argues in favour of the view that there are individual factors involved which explain violence. Freud (in Strachey, 1959) suggests that conflicts of interest are

resolved through violence, however, in this study, participants suggest that violence is used to cause conflict. The 'laziness' factor recognized by the female participant is indicative of the violence rates in those communities characterized by high unemployment. This participant is of the opinion that perpetrators of violence simply cannot and have no wish to provide for themselves and steal from others. This suggests that she has constructed one cause of violence to be unemployment, however more specifically, that it is a consequence of an unwillingness to work. Violence perpetration is a choice. It further connects with the statement made earlier by one participant who perceived poverty to be a characteristic of high violence communities. However, this contradicts the contentions of Barbarin and Richter (2001) who found that poverty did not have strong effects on the behavioural regulation of children of a low socioeconomic status. In fact, children of better socioeconomic background displayed more aggressive problems than those from lower socioeconomic status.
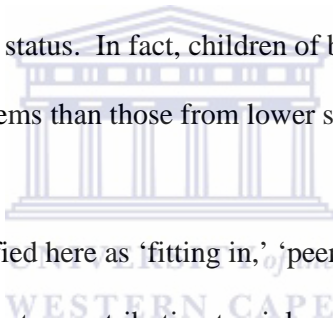
Additionally, conformity (identified here as 'fitting in,' 'peer pressure,' and 'to become popular') is also identified as a factor contributing to violence, which suggests that they understand a level of pressure which may be present when someone commits a crime. It can be deduced that violence in these adolescents' community is not only an individual decision, but influenced by other social processes, further supporting a social theory of violence. The last extract from the female adolescent also confirms Parkes (2007) conclusion, therefore, that most violence is perpetrated by gangs in high violence communities. Gangs receive a certain amount of 'respect' or fear – a respect which these adolescents believe that perpetrators desire. Ironically, the group originally identified lack of respect, or more specifically parents not teaching children respect, as a cause of violence, yet here, gangs commit crimes and behave violently in order to gain respect from others.

Further support of this argument for gang violence can be seen in the following excerpt:

FR: Have you noticed they don't come rob you one man alone. They all come.

FR: They all come up.

MR: Gamma vrag mense. You know, you already take your phone out.

[A lot of people. You know, you already take your phone out]

This excerpt also support findings by Ward's (2007) study conducted in two communities characterized by high crime levels in the Western Cape. Gangsterism was seen by participants as a problem deeply affecting the community. In both the present study and Ward's study, people in these communities live in fear of gangs. Furthermore, the fear that these adolescents experience, evidenced in the statement *"You already take your phone out,"* is also supported by Ward's study as high levels of fear were also found in those participants.
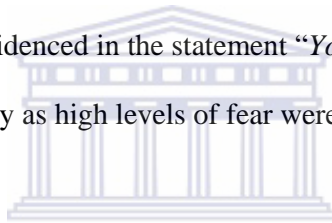
5.3.3.1   Models of behaviour

As mentioned previously, an emerging sub-theme from both focus groups was the belief that young people do not have many good choices for role models or people who set good examples. Participants further reflected their understanding of the cause of violence as also being a result of poor role models, poor policing, government's disinterest and Ministers of government abusing their power. Participants had very strong beliefs concerning people in power and the poor examples they set. Their understandings also maintain a social learning theory in understanding causes of violence. In this section, we review participants' beliefs that people in positions of power do not set a good example for citizens or do their civic duty as best they should.

F: What is the immediate thought when you hear such stories (about violence)?

> *MR: Like the government is doing nothing to help the people*
>
> *FR: ...it's like they don't care anymore*
>
> *FR: ...like the Ministers of today...You look at their records. They commit more crimes than the good people in the community...What example is that?*

<div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 8)*</div>

These young people were evidently concerned with people at government level not setting a good example for citizens. The social learning theory is also in support of this belief. This theory explicates that children learn associated meanings that adults attach to certain behaviours (DeLamater & Myers, 2007). In other words, if citizens are being exposed to crime, violence and 'corruption' at a government level and believe that this is acceptable, this would increase their tolerance for violence later in life. Participants also felt that they were not doing their jobs properly.
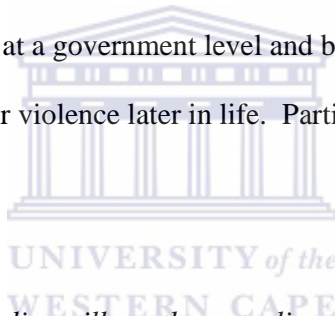
> *MR: Like the police will see them stealing wheels off a car, they will just drive past. They don't work.*

<div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 8)*</div>

> *FR: ...and they cause more corruption. It's almost like maar you phone the police now 'you're busy dying' and then it's your funeral...and then they come, so what's the point?*

<div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 9)*</div>

These adolescents believed the police's purpose in the community is to ensure safety and yet they were not fulfilling that purpose. Not only are people in positions of power not setting good examples by their own way of life, they are also not doing the work they are employed to do.

The above two excerpts also emphasize the theory of feminism which Butler (1988) explains. Feminism seeks to understand and explain unequal power distribution and the manner in which the abuse of power (in this case the authorities) is re-enacted through individuals' actions. Therefore, by simply identifying people's actions as violent or abusive is in fact a reproduction of the systemic or pervasive political and cultural structures of society (Butler, 1988). In other words, these "Ministers' " and "police's" actions are seen as acceptable and other people so recreate these 'acceptable' activities. Moreover, these young people also understand violence as being a consequence of top-down processes.

Furthermore, by these excerpts alone, young people of this high violence community immediately identify structures at a macrosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) as a cause of violence in their community which is seen as affecting them on their individual level. This group has constructed their understanding of the problem in their community, therefore, violence, in which they are nested, as affected by the negative influences being 'passed down' from the government.
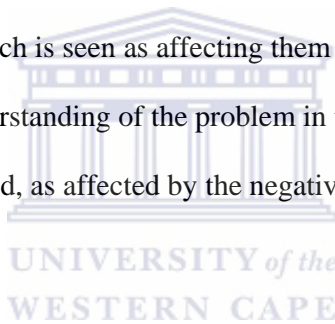
5.3.4 Experiences of exposure to violence

The most dominant theme to surface was adolescents' experiences of exposure to violence. Much of the discussion was spent with the group continuously wanting to share their experiences with the group. Most of the participants were quite open and honest about the violent activities in their community. Examples of exposure to violence are consistent with statistics and reports from the SAPS (2009) of the community in the present study and the surrounding area.

Each of the fourteen participants had shared their different experiences of being exposed to community violence.

> *FR:*   *I was in the crossfire already*
>
> **F:**   **What happened?**
>
> *FR:*   *It was the Americans and somebody so when they're finished you just*
>
>   *see blood and bodies. Nothing new*

(Focus Group 1, p. 6)

Once more, gang violence emerges. This particular participant, caught in the crossfire between two gangs has normalized such events as can be seen by the phrase, *"Nothing new."* The phrase "nothing new" distinguishes a normalized understanding of violence. This desensitization is explained by McCart *et al.* (2007) who posit that adolescents who are frequently exposed to violence in the community adapt to violence in such a way that they do not experience the negative consequences expected. However, this will be explicated further under '*Perceptions of the Effects of Violence*.'
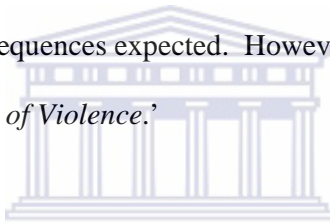
The most common violent activity to take place in these young people's lives is that of theft, robbery and burglaries. Statistics from the SAPS (2009) support the high rates of violence in this community and the surrounding areas. Burglaries (828 counts), common robbery (142 counts) and theft out of or from motor vehicles (664 counts) have all increased in the year 2008 – 2009 than the previous year. Evidence of these statistics can be seen in their exposure to violence in their community.

> *FR:*   *They tried to rob my friend, it was at a bank, and they pointed the gun*
>
>   *at him. They asked him for his card and his pin. But he gave a wrong*
>
>   *pin, so he couldn't get anything*

(Focus Group 2, p. 3)

MR: But they tried to rob me and my friend. They took his bike and his

          phone. They asked me what I have and I said I have nothing

(Focus Group 2, p. 4)

MR: ... the last time my brother went to the shop and so there were like four

          or five like nineteen or twenty year old boys and so they like asking me

          and my brother for money and if we say no and then they maybe going

          to like... they threaten you

(Focus Group 1, p. 7)

FR: And when I was in grade six and then I went to school the morning and

          then I came home and then I saw my daddy's window was open of the

          car but it was like hit in and they stole his tape and like all, the change

          that was in the car.

(Focus Group 1, p. 13)

The word "rob" which occurs more than once is indicative of the type of violence

experienced the most. Evidently, robberies, theft and burglaries take place quite frequently

and these participants are exposed to it from a young age. Robberies were especially a

frequent crime and this type of violence did not only occur in the community, but in the

school environment as well.

FR: But that happens at school also sometimes. It's called protection fees.

F: Protection fees?

FR: ...if you pay them nothing will happen to you

(Focus Group 1, p.7)

FR: One day they robbed me.

FR: Oh, they robbed her.

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F: **Oh, you were robbed. What happened?**

FR: *Of my cell. It was two boys on the school but they're still on school in grade nine.*

FR: *They're grade eight nuh?*

FR: *No, the one is in grade eight and the one is in grade nine. They were five other boys.*

FR: *Afrikaans boys, old.*

FR: *... and so they pulled me so they robbed me of my phone.*

(Focus Group 1, p. 12)

In accordance, Dawes *et al.* (2006) argue that violence at secondary schools is becoming more prominent. Raviv *et al.* (1999) and Bowen and Bowen (1999) further reflect upon the detrimental effects of school violence on development. These youth are unmistakably continuously exposed to violence not only at home and its surrounds but at schools as well. Participants also refer to violence that they have been exposed to elsewhere in the community.

MR: *And also the thing that upsets me is that they also rob you when you're in the church premises also.*

FR: *They rob the church also, that's why. They rob the church nowadays.*

MR: *The last time they broke into our soccer club, this two guys but when we found out who it was so we didn't involve the police. All of the club members standing there all gave a hand*

(Focus Group 1, p. 14)

The manner in which they refer to violent acts is also suggestive of the understanding that violence occurs everywhere. Participants seem to be identifying violence that they have

exposed to on all levels of Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, therefore, the home, school, community and governmental level. It is constructed as being unavoidable and inescapable.

5.3.5   Perceptions of the effects of violence

The group of young people in both focus group discussions had strong opinions and emotions on violent events and its effects, particularly on being victimized, evident in their speech. Participants' examples of being exposed to violence substantiate the argument that young people are more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violence (Jonson-Reid, 1998; Children's Institute, 2003). Since participants reflected mostly on their personal victimization, they too referred to their views of the effects that they experienced.

> *F:*   *Now what do you think about all these things that happen?*
>
> *MR:*   *It's wrong.*
>
> *FR:*   *It's wrong.*
>
> *FR:*   *I think because we are innocent, man. We do nothing and we don't deserve stuff like this.*
>
> *FR:*   *And our parents work very hard*
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 16)*

Literature on the effects of violence is extensive (see *Chapter 2*) and well-documented. These participants also understood violence to have extensive effects and even without realising it, participants were informing the facilitator of these effects. Participants explained some of the emotional and physical effects.

> *F:*   *...how does it make you feel when you see all these things happen around you, when you experience this?*

MR: Sad of course...

F: Sad

MR: ... and also upset. It also makes you upset really. And also sometimes... you

         can't get it out of your mind the whole time.

F: Is it? So you just... you think about it all the time?

MR: Yes, the whole time. Yes. You fear to go to the shop. Don't want to go to the

         shop.

F: So you fear?

MR: You're scared. You know when you hit that turn there's someone that's going

         to rob you.

F: So you always think about it?

MR: Yes.

F: And it's something that's constantly on your mind.

MR: Everything... because you know something is going to happen.
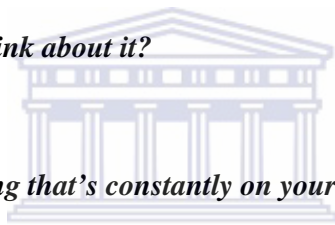
                                                                      (Focus Group 1, p. 21)

Words such as "fear," "sad,", "upset," and "scared" refer to the emotional effects

experienced. The results of Ward's (2007) study resonates with the above extract and

identifies the extent to which the fear experienced by adolescents living in a high violence

community, adjust their lives around perpetrators of violence. In addition, the statements

made by the participants above such as *"sad," "fear,"* and being *"scared,"* is supported by

Buckner *et al*. (2004) who reported internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety in

his study of children's exposure to violence in a low-income community. Similar to this is

findings by Margolin and Gordis (2004) who reported PTSD symptoms (of which anxiety

and continuous thoughts about violent acts are symptoms) as an effect of community

violence.

Furthermore, participants felt that violence in their community is continuously in their thoughts. The phrase used by the male participants above ("*Sad, of course*") suggests that it is natural and obvious that they should feel this way. However, not all participants agreed with this perception. When asked the same question in the other focus group, a few participants replied *"No, not really."*

After experiencing a particularly traumatic event, one participant had the following to say:

> *FR:*   *I have to go for counselling because like I was shocked. I did nothing, they robbed me.*
>
> ***F:***   ***Oh, so you went to counselling. Okay.***
>
> *FR:*   *The police lady gave me counselling.*
>
>   *(Focus Group 1, p. 22)*

This excerpt also places more emphasis on the extent of trauma experienced as a result of violence and highlights the "*innocence*" and "*unfairness*" of this particular young person since she *"did nothing."* These negative effects are consistent with arguments made by many researcher studies such as Buckner *et al*. (2004) who posits that exposure to violence in any of its various manifestations has been shown to be one of the most damaging experiences a child can endure and can be seen in the traumatic effect that this participant's particular experience has had.

Furthermore, as a result of the continuous exposure to violence and the frequency with which it occurs, violence is seen as inevitable. It is not something that they can run away from since, according to this group, it is "*everywhere*" and is in further support of Ward's (2007) findings of constant fear that adolescents experience as a result of violence exposure.

5.3.5.1 Coping strategies

Various coping strategies were also employed in order for this group of adolescents to protect themselves from crime and violence in their community, ranging from always walking in groups to walking with Tasers. Ward (2007), Parkes (2007) and Spilsbury (2002) discuss personal safety measures which young people employ in order to protect themselves. Participants in this community have already learned the different warning signs to be aware of if you suspect someone might attempt to steal from them.

MR: *But normally when people come for robbing, they always start by asking for a rand or they ask for the time. Whatever you do, if someone comes, just say you don't have and walk on. Because if you gonna take out or you gonna show them the time, then they gonna rob you.*

(Focus Group 2, p. 4)

MR: *"Like if you've been robbed before you can... you can read on this ou's [guy's] mind that he's going to rob you and normally they follow you and they walk till by your house,"*

(Focus Group 1, p. 19)

Others employ certain strategies to protect themselves.

MR: *When I walk at night, I always keep a knife on me because there's always people from Parkwood coming over like druggies, they always geroek [high] or something and they always come to come rob the people. But now at night when I walk around, I always walk with a knife. That's my protection.*

MR: *I walk with my dog at night*

MR: Like I always walk with my Taser

FR: *...so now the sensors there so that if somebody walk past the sensor and then the sensors go off. Then we know immediately there's somebody here or something.*

The exposure to violence these adolescents experience has allowed them to be quite familiar with the ways in which it can be avoided. Not only are these insurance strategies, these participants have found themselves in a position to use them.

MR: *Like I always have a Taser and if I walk down Plantation Road, and I have a Mongoose bike. So I was walking, me, my friend and my girlfriend. My friend was smoking, so this bra ask him for a cigarette, so he gave him. Then the bra come to me and say "Yor, that's a nice bike." I say "Ja." So he tell me, "Is this a real Mongoose?" I say, "Ja." He say, "No, that's not a real Mongoose. It doesn't look real." I said "It is man." He say, "Now let me see how it drives?" I said, "No, I must still go to my Ouma." So he pulled out a knife and I had the Taser and he still had water and he threw the water over his body [All laugh]. So I shocked him. There were two boys, so I shocked the big one and so they run away.*

When questioned on other self-preservation strategies, participants mentioned various other methods or 'words of advice' which they and other people should follow in order to remain safe.

> MR: Walk in a group

> FR: Never walk alone

> FR: Come out at a certain time and go in a certain time. Even if it's just down the
>   road

> FR: Don't go into alleys and dark places

(Focus Group 2, p. 7)

Ward (2007) and Parkes (2007) similarly report on methods that adolescents adopt to avoid

violence. Ward (2007) report on certain strategies such as taking the safest route home or

never walking alone. Additionally, Parkes (2007) refers to methods such as avoiding

dangerous areas. The findings of the present study are closely associated with the findings of

these two studies. Furthermore, the above excerpts also connect to Burr's (1995) argument

that knowledge and social action has an interaction effect. The knowledge that these

adolescents have acquired regarding violence and all the processes involved, have equipped

them with knowledge which they put to action in order to avoid being victimized.

Another participant linked these strategies to a community level problem and so could be

solved by the community.

> MR: I think it's best to live in a neighbourhood that watch the houses, make a lot
>   of friends and everybody will know you

(Focus Group 2, p. 7)

Once more the meaning attached to being part of a community emerges. The purpose of a

community should be to ensure safety of its members, a purpose which the community is not

fulfilling. Similarly, Margolin and Gordis (2004) state that, as a consequence young people,

may feel unsafe and unworthy of protection. Interestingly enough, in order to avoid being

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victimized, one participant employed a strategy succinct with the phrase "keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

> FR: *I got introduced to all the gangsters so they won't hurt me. And also if you're connected to the gangsters, they will... they will stand up for you if you are in a tight spot or something.*
>
> <div align="right">*(Focus Group 1, p. 23)*</div>

Others simply "*stay out of the way"* and avoid any situation which can cause or they suspect might lead to violence. 'Knowing your enemy' has its disadvantages too. However, not all participants simply avoided certain areas or walked around with some of weapon. The next sub-theme reports on the manner in which these adolescents also retaliated.

5.3.5.2 Taking the law into their own hands

Given frequency with which these adolescents experience community violence and the perception that the police are not fulfilling their duties, participants also expressed the necessity of taking the law into their own hands. Parkes (2007) findings are also consistent with these as many of the participants of that study also retaliated against perpetrators of violence. This view is supported by the discussion of the present study.

> FR: *It's called self-defence and you have to take the law into your own hands sometimes*
>
> MR: *That's why lots of people have their own guns also.*
>
> <div align="right">*(Focus Group1, p. 11)*</div>

Another emerging trend in this group was that of revenge. This understanding of violence also supports a theory of realistic group conflict (DeLamater & Myers, 2007). This intergroup conflict can be explained by one group of people (in this case, the gangs who are

continuously referred to as 'they') who commit crime and violence and those victims who have experienced one crime too many and decide to retaliate.

Not only did these adolescents fight back against perpetrators, but felt that people who commit crime deserve more than simply be sent to prison.

> MR: The police mustn't just shoot the people. I say torture the people. Let them
>   feel how it feels to hurt somebody
>
> FR: They must cut their flesh off
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 10)*

Another participant felt particularly passionately about the matter.

> FR: No, but some people just live with it. 'If they must rob me then they must just
>   rob me, there's nothing I can do so.' But me huh uh. If you must rob me now
>   I'll make sure that you get your day. Sorry. I like revenge, I don't know why.
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 19)*

In support of this, Leoschut (2006) also argues that even though young people who are exposed to high levels of violence may have normalized violence, it may lead to aggression later. In some way participants try to regain some control or power that they have in these violent situations. These young people believe that offenders of violence should be placed in positions within which they can be punished to an extent that they feel the pain that they are inflicting on others. A word such as "revenge" denote an 'eye-for-an-eye' understanding of violence, in other words, there should be justice and if the police do not give it, then they will do it themselves.

Similarly, the social learning theory maintains this view that if violence is seen as an acceptable way to resolve conflict (DeLamater & Myers, 2007), then this view becomes ingrained in people's mind and they so start employing these violent strategies themselves. Additionally, Bulhan's (1985) theory on violence is also supported by the present study's findings. Bulhan maintained the view of social processes in violence and aggression causation. If violence is seen at a vertical level, particularly crimes committed by government officials and police, it will no doubt, travel to a more horizontal violence, wherein which people fight amongst themselves.

5.3.5.3 Desensitization to violence

Whereas some participants thought about violence and ways in which it can be avoided, others spoke of it in a manner that suggests a, as the literature describes, desensitized or normalized construction of violence. As much as participants reported some effects experienced as a result of community violence, they also seem to have normalized these effects. References to the phrases *"So what's the point?" (e.g. Focus Group 1, p. 26, 33 & 35)* and *"Nothing new," (Focus Group 1, p. 6)* were made several times during the discussion and strongly evidence this point. As previously argued, these adolescents speak in a manner which alludes to desensitization. Funk *et al*. (2004) describes desensitization as a subtle process which can occur by repeated exposure to real-life violence. Desensitization also includes reduced levels of empathy which can be supported by the following extract:

> FR: *Then you get that people who steal nuh and then they get bang and when you're running after them then they will just give it back to you.*
>
> FR: *Apologise.*
>
> FR: *What gets me is when they apologise and you're supposed to feel sorry for them that moment. No, sorry.*

These adolescents have no sympathy or empathy for people who commit crime. This further gives evidence to Funk *et al*. (2004) view on desensitization. However, one participant's thoughts on this matter is contradictory to the observation of Funk *et al*. (2004) as she states, *"No, but if it makes you feel like how would you be if you were in that person's shoes," (FR, Focus Group 1, p. 20).* Another participant was quick to point out, however, that, *"No, but still if they catch you alone dan moet jy weet hulle gaan jou kry[4]," (FR, Focus Group 1, p.20).*

Participants also referred to, on many accounts, that they either "*know all the skelms*" or *"got introduced to the gangsters."* These adolescents are physically and mentally adjusting their lives to accommodate violence in their community.

The distinction was also made between two types of gangsters: the good ones and the bad ones.
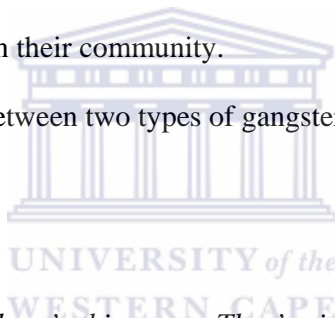
> FR: *There by us nuh there's this group. They're in Wynberg. Now it's like fifty percent of them will rob the people and then the other fifty percent of them they will say now they see people robbing then they will stand up for the people. Now that's the people with good understanding. You get the good gangsters and then you get the...*
>
> MR: *The bad gangsters.*
>
> FR: *But it's like they look at the people by their faces. Say now you look like that then you are that. They judge you.*
>
> **F: So what do you mean you get the good gangsters and you get the bad gangsters?**

---

[4] [...Then you must know they're going to get you]

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FR: *No man, it's like you... there's the bad who will like rob the people and then*

        the good ones they see the people rob the people and then they will...

FR: *Stand up for them.*

FR: *Say like you're the person that was robbed. It's like who robbed you and*

        where then they will go to that place and see...

MR: *They will go get your stuff.*

(Focus Group 1, p. 18)

This further suggests desensitization as it has now become normal to associate and thereby promote and justify violence with violence as long as it can be rationalized as justice. Aggression certainly seems rife in this group Leoschut (2006) contends that desensitization often leads to aggression. Furthermore, desensitization is addressed by both McCart *et al*. (2007) and Funk *et al*. (2004). However, this theory was disproved in both their studies as externalizing symptoms such as behavioural problems and is so not in support of the findings of the present study.
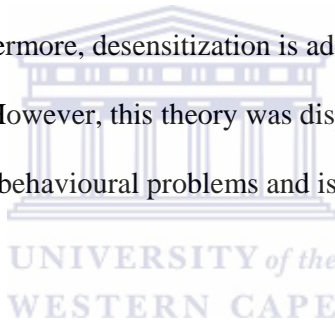
5.4   Thematic Category 2: The meaning of hope within a context of community violence exposure

The understanding and the meaning of hope in the context of community violence are discussed in three themes: the religiosity of hope, the future and the future of the community. These three themes explain the manner in which these adolescents construct hope as well as how being exposed to community violence influences their sense of hope.

5.4.1   The religiosity of hope

A question was posed to the groups, asking if they knew what they understood by the construct 'hope.' Snyder *et al*. (1997) proposed hope to be future and goal-orientated.

FR: *It's like... it's like wishing for something...*

MR: *Yeah, it's like hoping you're going to get there safe and...*

(Focus Group 1, p. 27)

FP2:   *If you believe like something that you believe in*

MP2:   *Something that you would like to happen*

FP3:   *Your values*

(Focus Group 2, p. 8)

FP2:   *It's about self-esteem*

(Focus Group 2, p. 9)
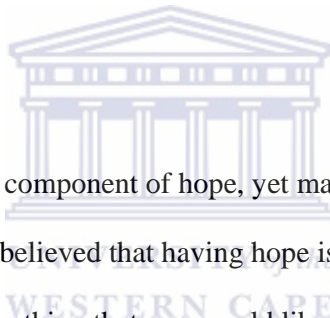
Participants alluded to the future component of hope, yet maintained their own views on what they understood by hope. Some believed that having hope is "wishing for something," "believing in something" or "something that you would like to have happen." Others believed that it is linked to values and self-esteem. This is also consistent with Snyder's *et al.* (1994) arguments of hope being linked to perceived ability to reach goals since self-esteem is connected to 'self-related beliefs' (Snyder *et al.*, 1997). An unexpected finding was the link between religion and hope. Participants also equated hope with prayers and faith.

MR: *Must always have hope and faith*

(Focus Group 1, p. 27)

Participants were then asked how being exposed to violence in their community affects their sense of hope and how they think others are affected.

> *MR: I think it affects people because why people then they stop*
>
> *believing in their religion because "it's not helping me"*

Once more the link between religion and hope is made. This group of young people all believed that having hope is "very important" especially since it could see them through difficult challenges, especially if residing in a violent community. Snyder (2002) posits that hope may assist in reducing detrimental consequences of barriers such as violence and prevent hopelessness. These participants are also of the same opinion.

> *FR: It motivates you ja...passed the negative side*

In support of this understanding of hope, Gilman *et al.* (2006) argue that high levels of hope are necessary since it is connected to a number of positive psychological outcomes. Since having hope was so important, for these participants, losing hope could possibly be associated with violence causation.

> *MR: Yes, hope will help people a lot.*
>
> *MR: There are people... firstly most of the gangsters they don't go to mosque, they don't go to church. Evens not... they're not gangsters. Sundays, they don't go to church or so then you see... didn't you go to church? No, I don't go to church. It's boring there. That's wrong.*

FR: *You completely lose hope. You're like yoh, why am I believing in God because*

           I'm like not benefitting anything because that's the people's... that's what

           people want. They just want to benefit.

           (Focus Group 1, p. 28)

Participants associated violence with not having hope, or in other words, with not having

faith. One participant had a particularly spiritual view on having hope.

FR: *That's why God and Allah put you on this earth to test you. To see if you can*

           take it. To see if you can take it. That's why like we say sabr[5]. Must always

           have patience so if you like... if you're struggling you must always go on your

           muslah, you must always pray, you must do your best of everything then you

           will see at the end of the day you will get everything that you want

           (Focus Group 1, p. 29)

Two other participants felt that perhaps giving up hope is pointless.

MR: *You don't know if you're going to live tomorrow*

FR: *You only live once*

MR: *If you go to heaven, you live twice*

MR: *You're used to it already so if I get robbed you don't worry anymore because*

           you know tomorrow the same thing is going to happen
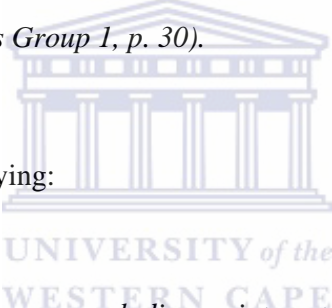
           (Focus Group 1, p. 29)

Violence is a fact of life for this group which, once again, perhaps speaks to desensitization

of violent acts in their lives. However, this group placed more importance on having hope

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[5] 'Sabr' is the Islamic virtue of patience and endurance

than on violence. Violence is normal. It is something that will occur again the very next day

anyway. Since violence happens every day for them, it does not help them to dwell on it, but

rather to look to other things that will help them '*get passed the negative side.*' For them,

hope is the tool which can not only help them in the future, but also assist in preventing crime

and violence. The various phrases used by the participants reveals a faith-linked construction

of hope and therefore not something that should easily be let go of, since that could lead to

even more negative outcomes.

Losing hope, or having no hope was also linked to suicide. One participant posed the

question, in answer to loss of hope, as "*Why do you think some people commit suicide just to*

get away from it all?"(FR, Focus Group 1, p. 30).

One participant replied to this saying:

> FR: *It's like people have so much disappointments in their life. It's like they don't*
>
> *believe that there's light at the end of the tunnel so now what's the use? I'm*
>
> *here when everything is going wrong. So I might as well leave. Then they go*
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 30)*

This excerpt supports Edwards *et al*. (2007) view on having hope. These adolescents made

the association between not having hope contributing to giving up and so can end in suicide.

The belief by participants on the effects of not having hope is also sustained by Gilman *et al*.

(2006). His study reports low levels of hope being significant with maladaptive

psychological factors. Participants clearly demonstrated the importance that having hope has

in their lives and in other people's lives. Their understanding and the meaning that they give

to hope is also consistent with Snyder's and Edwards' *et al.* (2007) belief that hope is a

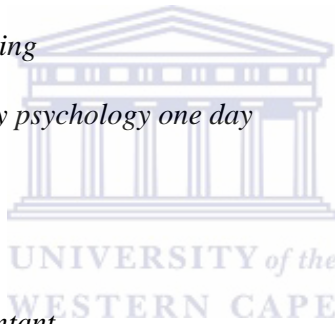protective or resiliency factor in face of much adversity.

5.4.2   The future

Participants were also asked where they saw themselves in the future. Snyder viewed hope as

goal and future – orientated and so, the researcher felt that obtaining an idea of how they

viewed the future would bring forth their thoughts and know truly whether or not they do,

according to Snyder, have hope. The following passage supports the finding that these

participants experience high levels of hope.

> *FR:*   *I see myself overseas. New York...Just to be there, man. There on top*
>
> *MR:*   *I see myself studying*
>
> *FR:*   *I'm going to study psychology one day*
>
> *(Focus Group 1, p. 31)*
>
> *FR:*   *Beauty therapist*
>
> *FR:*   *Chartered Accountant*
>
> *FR:*   *Also Chartered Accountant*
>
> *FR:*   *Disc Jockey*
>
> *MR:*   *Mechanical engineer*
>
> *MR:*   *IT*
>
> *MR:*   *Civil engineering*
>
> *(Focus Group 2, p. 10)*

These participants have actively thought about their future and what they wanted to be.

Furthermore, Edwards *et al.* (2007) arguments of hope being associated with positive affect

and optimism is also supported by these focus groups. The manner in which these

participants spoke about the future was optimistic. They have actively thought about the

future. Participants were also asked to which extent being exposed to such violence has affected their future plans, participants explained:

> FR: *It gives you, not more power, but it motivates you. It gives you more motivation.*
>
> FR: *When you in the area where violence is exposed and you just wanna be a beauty therapist and say 'I just wanna get out of here'*
>
> FR: *To have a better lifestyle*
>
> FR: *To live in a better place*

(Focus Group 2, p. 11)

Edward *et al.* (2007) argues that hope also considers the ability to navigate around obstacles. These participants understood violence to also be more of a motivational tool. They wanted to leave. They wanted to get out of their high violence communities in order to have a better 'lifestyle' and "*live in a better place.*" Participants were also asked what they thought was preventing them from also giving up hope for their future.

> **F: *What do you think is stopping you from...***
>
> FR: *We were... we were reared nuh and we watched how it happens around you and we know how it ends up and so we're mos trying to be better than that, man.*
>
> MR: *Change it*

(Focus Group 1, p. 34)

Findings from the present study are contradictory to Oskin's (1996) findings on increased community violence contributing to low levels of hope. These participants did not feel that being exposed to community violence negatively impacted them, but rather increased their motivation to construct a better life in the future.

Other participants did not share the same opinion.

> *FR:* Can I... can I speak? You know how some people are in the community? Say
>
> now you want to make a success of your life and they haven't...
>
> *MR:* Then they druk you af [Then they push you down]
>
> *FR:* Then they push you down. Like you want to go up there and when you are up
>
> there then you don't remember where you come from and you degrade our
>
> community. But you have experience and you're not degrading it, you're just
>
> saying what happened, man and you mos... you mos have the right to speak
>
> out. Then that is what puts you down and that makes some people also think
>
> you know what? Just leave everything because no one is... they... no one 'gun'
>
> it for me so what's the point.
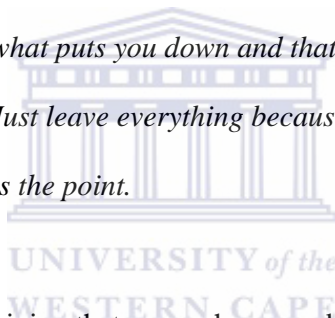
(Focus Group 1, p. 33)

These participants were of the opinion that even when you do set goals for yourself, nobody

from the community actually supports you and would rather 'push you down' than be happy

when you achieve your goals. This also indicates the importance the perceived social support

in achieving goals and has theoretical implications for a social theory of development. These

young people see social support as important to them. Therefore, the social processes are

necessary for development. This is contradictory to Muller's *et al.* (2000) findings that

perceived social support does not act as a buffer in adolescents. The adolescents from the

present study almost seemed to want to 'give up' on their goals since the support they receive

from others are so low.

5.4.3   The future of the community

Ahmed *et al*. (2004) suggests that those from low-income and high violence communities tend to have higher community hope than individual hope. Some participants thought that their community would not change while others thought that given the proper intervention efforts, responsibility and willingness of the people could improve the current circumstances.
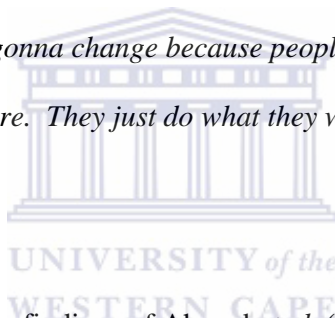

> *F:*   ***Do you believe that these things will change in the future?***
>
> *MR:*   *I don't think so*
>
> *FR:*   *I think it will get worse*
>
>   *(Focus Group 1, p. 33)*
>
> *MP1:* *I don't think it's gonna change because people just go with the flow, they don't care anymore. They just do what they want. So that's why I say it's not gonna change.*
>
>   *(Focus Group 2, p. 12)*

This extract is also contrary to the findings of Ahmed *et al*. (2004) who did not find individual hope to be prominent, but rather, community hope. The present study's participants had a better sense of individual hope than they did hope for the community. There seemed to be a split in the focus groups. One half seemed to think that their community would not change, while others thought that there might be hope, if people do something about it.

> *FR:*   *I think it will if the people in the community would do something about it.*
>
> *F:*   ***So things will change if you start taking a stand.***
>
> *FR:*   *Like if they see your way of living and motivating them to have a better lifestyle.*

FR: Like if there's a lot of robberies and they just get sick of it and wanna do

       something about it.

These participants believe that what people really need to change are good role models

standing up for change.

FR: They need someone to stand up and say 'You should change.' Someone to

       open their mouth.

One participant also felt that as a community, people can make some changes for the better.

FR: The community... if it stops. Man and some people can put their foot down and

       people stand more together and not disagreeing with each other like say for

       example your community for example. For example... no, be serious. Like if

       you people can stand together not push you down. In my community half of the

       people they didn't even pass matric but we live in closeness in the four

       seasons.   If you walk in Leader Way you know everybody knows you because

       your mommy's this. They know your mommy. They know everybody. They push

       you up so you make a success. Like my daddy always says I give you education

       it's what you do with it, it's your thing. That's the only thing... that's the only

       thing I can actually give you where you make a success of your lives. So

       whether we can just all have positive thinking it can be that. I think it should...

       it can.

Another participant thought that the solution would be found at a government level.

> MR: *I think the rules in the country must become more strict because like they must*
>
> *like the cigarettes they must push the price up like eighty rand.*
>
> FR: *And same with the wine.*

(Focus Group 1, p. 36)

Participants also felt that intervention efforts were a good option.

> MR: *I think we can run a programme... How to change a community if everybody*
>
> *can stand together and change, I think it will work.*

(Focus Group 2, p. 12)

It can be deduced that participants believed that change would only occur not only if one person took the lead, but if everybody, as a community also wanted the current circumstances to change. Participants also believed that government should play a much better and more active role than they are now and that they themselves could perhaps do certain things to contribute to this end, as one female participant mentioned, *"If we could vote, the country would be a better place," (Focus Group 1, p. 37).* For this group of young people, since participants viewed violence as a community problem, the solution could also be found at a community level. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model is prominent here. Participants understood people as being nested within a system and all these systems can and does influence each other.

5.5   Summary of findings

The focus group discussions were analysed using a thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and were arranged and presented in themes. Participants described a clear

understanding of the main aim of the research study, that is, to determine these adolescents' understanding of community violence, how it affects their lives, determine their understanding of hope as well as how having hope impacts their lives in the context of community violence. The interpretations of the findings are presented in this chapter as two thematic categories with their themes, namely, '*The meaning community violence'* and '*The meaning of hope within a context of community violence.'*

Participants reported their views of what a community is, the meaning attached to being part of a community as well as the disadvantages sometimes associated with community life. Participants believed that being part of a community provides opportunities for developing close relationships, promoting unity among people as well as ensuring safety. However, participants also alluded to the manner in which one person's actions could negatively impact the entire community. In view of this, it can be deduced that young people from this high-violence community understand that one person's actions affect the entire community, therefore, violence occurring at one home and with one person will and did affect everyone else. This group of young people seem to have a collectivist view of living in a community. Traumatic events or incidents concern not only one individual, but all people.

Participants reflected upon the definition of violence in terms of various types of violence, indicative of the violence that they have been exposed to in their community. Furthermore, this group of young people also understood violence as being violent in terms of intent, therefore, it is cruel and causes conflict.

These two groups of young people identified one of the points of origin of violence to be the home, within which parents do not teach children proper values such as respect, or have any control over them. Violence also starts at and is exacerbated at school. Participants also

reported that violence is a continuous process, one that 'starts small,' by stealing stationary and expands to the more serious crimes.

Individual factors were also specified as contributing to violence perpetration, such as to conform to the standards of others, an effect of peer pressure and laziness. Participants thought that some people simply do not want to earn their own living and would rather steal it from others. Furthermore, not only parents but people in positions of power, especially at government level, were also not setting a good enough example for younger children.

Each of the fourteen participants had been exposed to some form of violence in the community. They could identify it at all levels, therefore, at home, school, church, soccer clubs and at government level. This group of young people have been exposed to different types of violence from being caught in the crossfire between gangs, witnessing a married couple fight physically, to burglaries. However, the most common form of violence they not only witnessed but were victims as well was robbery. In fact, people were frequently exposed to robberies and theft, including being robbed of cellular phones, their bicycles, money and basically anything participants had at the time.

The effects of violence experienced by participants also varied. Most participants felt that violence is wrong and selfish since they have earned their possessions and those who simply steal them have not. Emotional effects of shock, sadness and distress were also experienced. This group of adolescents also employed certain coping strategies in order to protect themselves from violence such as staying indoors, only leaving their houses at certain times, walking with a knife, their dog or a Taser. Not only have these adolescents had to carry these as defence weapons, but they have also had to use them. Participants felt that it was self-defence and, therefore, appropriate. Furthermore, these young people also felt that

perpetrators should be punished more severely for their crimes and felt that perhaps acts of revenge were even more appropriate.

In addition, participants reflected upon their experiences of having been exposed to violence in such a way as to suggest that they have normalized violence. Participants laughed and joked at different people's stories of violence. They also distinguished between good gangsters (those who stood up and fought for people instead of against) and bad gangsters (those who do wrong and commit crime for selfish reasons). Therefore, according to this group of young people, there is a time when violence is acceptable and a time that it is not.

Moreover, given the frequency with which these adolescents have been exposed to violence, participants frequently reflected upon the inevitability of violence. They continuously revealed how they were well aware that it could happen at any time.

Hope was seen by participants as very important to have. Participants viewed hope as being connected to wishing, values, self-esteem, providing motivation, as something one would like to have happen, as well as religion and faith. The connection between hope and faith came across strongly. This group of adolescents were of the opinion that losing hope was not an option since it can offer solace during challenging times and gives one patience and endurance, factors which are necessary when living in a community high in violence. Since violence was a fact of life for them, losing hope was seen as pointless since people have to make the most of the one life they live. Participants also perceived offenders of violence as having no hope and suggest is as a possible cause of violence since they do not see offenders in a church. This group of young people did not see violence as having affected them too

negatively as the harmful events they see around them inspire them to do better so that they do not do the same thing.

In review, participants have a particularly socialized construction of community life. The meaning that community violence has for these participants is seen as not only affecting the particular victim, but the entire community. Violence is perceived as a process which results as a consequence of disintegrating values, social and public services and a lack of community cohesion. The manner in which these participants referred to violence perpetration strongly associated to a social learning theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model.

The meaning that these adolescents attach to hope is seen in the connection made between hope, faith and their dreams for the future. Religion is important to them and consequently so is hope. Hopelessness was seen as a cause for violence perpetration and even suicide. It can be deduced then that these young people attach great meaning to having hope and understand it to be a buffer against negative acts such as violence perpetration. Further evidence for this can be seen in each participants dream for their future, since Snyder conceptualizes hope to be future-orientated. Therefore, based on their construction of the concept and the way in which it is understood, even in the context of community violence, these adolescents still maintain a strong sense of hope.

5.6   Conclusion

A qualitative exploratory design was implemented in describing adolescents' views of community violence and hope. The themes presented above are in keeping with the aim and objectives of the research study. The next chapter presents a final conclusion of the research study, limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The present study addresses an important social phenomenon which faces the youth of South Africa. Violence, especially in South Africa, affects and shapes the lives of all its citizens. There is a growing need to understand the manner in which the ever-increasing exposure of people living in communities which are high in violence affects its victims. Exposure to community violence, especially for adolescents who are in a very critical phase of development, has been proven to have especially negative effects on adolescents. The review of the literature specifically explicated the need to not only address an issue such as community violence in the Western Cape, but also to identify and address factors which can assist in preventing or overcoming violence and its negative effects.
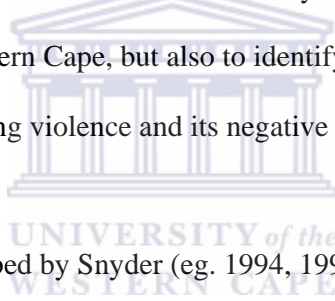
The construct of hope, as described by Snyder (eg. 1994, 1997, 2002), is understood to be an effective resiliency factor in combating these effects. Given the dearth of research focusing specifically on community violence and hope, the aim of the present was to ascertain adolescents' understanding of and the meaning they give to exposure to community violence and how the extent of that exposure affects their sense of hope. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain how adolescents understand and give meaning to community violence as well as to determine the way in which these adolescents understand and give meaning to hope within the context of community violence.

Adolescents understood violence in their community as being a fundamental community-level problem. These young people have constructed violence as a process, as having many

influences and is especially the result of negative social influences. They also understood violence in the community to not only affect one victim at a time, but as affecting all community members. They see themselves as not only being part of, but also being influenced by their community. This further emphasizes the literature which argues for community violence being particularly harmful and damaging. Their views are emphasized by the purposes they attributed to community, such as promoting unity of people, establishing meaningful relationships and ensuring safety. Yet, some of the effects that community members experience, such as having to remain indoors, move them further from them realising these purposes.

This group of adolescents also strongly associated hope with religion and faith and having no hope as being pointless. Hopelessness was associated with even more negative effects than those effects experienced as a result of exposure to community violence. Hopelessness was seen as a possible contributing factor of violence perpetration and even suicide. Additionally, community violence was far too normal and inevitable to get unnecessarily upset, but giving up hope, was not an option.

These adolescents displayed having more hope despite of, or in actual fact, because of the high exposure to community violence and is seen as a useful motivational tool in their goal-setting and future-planning.

6.1 Theoretical implications

The present study gives support to most of the theories discussed in *Chapter 3*. Biological explanations of violence were not considered in the present study as participants attributed psychoanalytic, social and contextual theories not only in their understanding of violence, but in their explanations of the various causes of violence. Although not an initial aim in the

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study, obtaining their theories of violence highlights their understanding of community violence. Obtaining their understanding of hope further assists in developing an understanding of the meaning they attach to having hope, especially in the context of community violence.

Participants attributed psychoanalytic causes of violence in terms of individual factors that they believed contributed to violence perpetration as well as poor familial relationships. The social theories, more specifically, the social learning theory offered perhaps the most comprehensive theory for framing their understanding and meaning attached to community violence and hope. Second to this theory is Bronfenbrenner's ecological model which can also be used very broadly to explain the discussion and topics participants described. Bronfenbrenner's model framed the participants' beliefs and thoughts appropriately, since their dialogue portrayed an understanding of community violence and hope as being constructed according to the systems he identifies.

Apartheid or any conditions of oppression was not cited as a cause of any violence. It was expected that Bulhan's (1985) theory of violence would accommodate the discussion, yet very seldom did participants mention any reason, cause or explanation which could be connected with this theory.

According to Carlson (1984) focus should always be centred upon multiple levels when determining causes of interpersonal violence. Since the most comprehensively utilized theories were of social learning and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, perhaps more thought should be given to the complementary manner in which it can be used in future studies.

6.2   Limitations

Prominent in the present study's literature review, it is clear that there is a paucity of empirical studies focusing on hope within the context of community violence. The researcher only identified one such study concerning hope and violence specifically. Additionally, no such studies have yet been conducted in South Africa.

Another limitation of the study occurred during the data collection process. Focus groups took place during the month of Ramadaan in which people of the Islamic faith do not eat during the day (also known as fasting). Although the first focus group went quite well, in the second focus group, participants shared with the researcher that they were quite tired because of the fast and so did not discuss as much as they could have.

Furthermore, as transcribing took place, it was clear that the facilitator should have set a rule of participants talking one at a time, as participants simultaneously interrupted each other, rendering the transcribing process quite challenging.
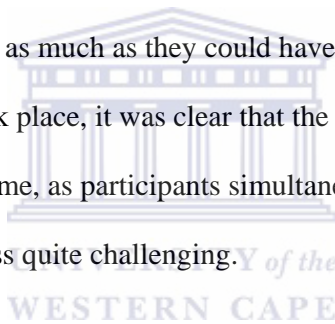
Theoretically, the epistemological framework of the study was better suited to a discourse analysis and perhaps would have revealed a more nuanced and in-depth understanding than the thematic analysis utilized in the study.

6.3   Recommendations

Regardless of some of the challenges occurring during the research, the present study identified pertinent social issues which can be addressed in future research.

The understanding and meaning that community life entailed for these adolescents were unexpected. That is, they recognized a unity in community, building relationships and the purpose of a community to ensure protection. Intervention strategies promoting community

cohesion could assist in the lives of those experiencing high exposure to violence and create opportunities for solutions. Perhaps a quantitative study could reveal whether the opinions expressed by participants in this study are common to other adolescents.

Additionally, participants described better policing as a factor which could decrease violence rates in their community. Participants believed that if police are more visible and respond to emergencies in an acceptable manner, violence in their community could be alleviated. Hope was recognized as having more importance in their lives than the effects of community violence. The level of hope that participants described in spite of all the barriers surrounding them was remarkable, especially the connection between hope and religion. Snyder's (2002) theory of hope is extremely supported in this study and perhaps further research exploring a more in-depth look at hope, not only in the context of community violence, but other barriers of hope should be addressed. Quantitative studies could also be implemented in order to assess whether there are high levels of hope in other high violence areas as well. Research conducted on any of these findings could promote further intervention strategies in the future.

Furthermore, participants also recognized a need for intervention programmes in the community with a focus on the community standing together to fight violence. Based on the findings in this study, other possible intervention programmes should also be designed such as those focusing on parenting styles and self as role model. There is a need to combine strategies such as research, psychological interventions as well as promoting better policing strategies, which can combat the community violence on all levels.

6.4   Conclusion

Community violence is seen as having negative effects and outcomes on adolescents not only presently, but in their future as well. This study attempted to address a resiliency factor, therefore hope, which could not only buffer these effects but be used as an active tool to shape their future. It was found that, even in the context of community violence, young people living in this community still experienced high levels of hope and in fact saw hope as a motivational tool. Furthermore, this study will also inform a larger research endeavour exploring the dynamics of community violence, hope and children's sense of well-being. This study could contribute to intervention efforts by those working in the violence as well as contribute to the knowledge base of community violence and hope of which there seems to be a scarcity in South Africa.

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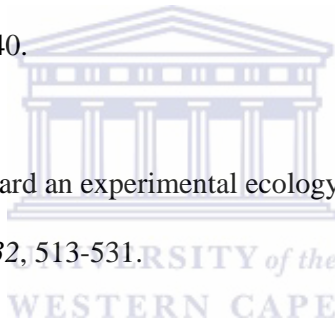
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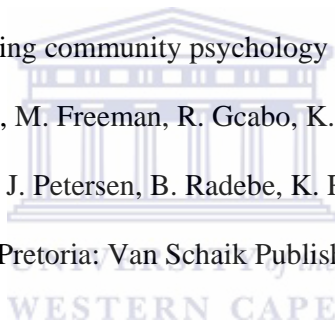
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APPENDIX A

Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
Bellville
7535
Tel: 27 21 959 2283

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

INFORMATION LETTER

I am a Master's Research student at the University of the Western Cape. I am currently conducting a research study which seeks to explore the influence of exposure community violence on adolescent's sense of hope. The aims of my study are to ascertain how adolescents exposed to community violence, experience and give meaning to community violence and explore as to how this exposure affects their sense of hope for themselves, and for their future.

In order to achieve this, I will conduct two focus groups (consisting of six adolescents per group) in order to understand how adolescent's themselves experience violence in their community. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The research process is guided by strict ethical considerations of the University of the Western Cape and will be adhered to at all times. If the discussion results in any emotional discomfort or trauma, counselling will be arranged by the researcher. Should you have any further queries, feel free to contact me.

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully

Serena Isaacs
Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
(c) 074 19 777 04

APPENDIX B

Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
Bellville
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Tel: 27 21 959 2283

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

LEARNER CONSENT FORM

I am a Master's Research student at the University of the Western Cape. I am currently conducting a research study that seeks to explore the influence of exposure community violence on adolescents' sense of hope. In order to achieve this, I will conduct two focus groups (consisting of six learners per group) in order to discuss and understand how adolescent's themselves experience violence in their community.

The research process is guided by strict ethical considerations of the University of the Western Cape and will be adhered to at all times. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your identity will not be disclosed and the researcher will monitor access to the information you provide. You may also withdraw from the focus group at any time with no consequences.

If the discussion results in any emotional discomfort or trauma, counselling will be arranged by the researcher. Should you have any further queries, feel free to contact me, **Serena Isaacs (c) 074 1977 704**.

Your co-operation will be greatly appreciated.

I confirm that I have read and understand the nature of the research study.

I agree to participate in my individual capacity.

Signature of participant ……………………….   **Date: ....**

Signature of Researcher ……………………….   **Date:……………………………..**

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X 17
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Tel: 27 21 959 2283

UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

PARENT CONSENT FORM

I am a Master's Research student at the University of the Western Cape. I am currently conducting a research study that seeks to explore the influence of exposure community violence on adolescents' sense of hope. In order to achieve this, I will conduct two focus groups (consisting of six learners per group) in order to discuss and understand how adolescent's themselves experience violence in their community.

The research process is guided by strict ethical considerations of the University of the Western Cape and will be adhered to at all times. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your son/daughter's identity will not be disclosed and the researcher will monitor access to the information he/she provides. Your son/daughter may also withdraw from the focus group at any time with no consequences.

If the discussion results in any emotional discomfort or trauma, counselling will be arranged by the researcher. Should you have any further queries, feel free to contact me, **Serena Isaacs (c) 074 1977 704**.

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated.

I confirm that I have read and understand the nature of the research study.

I permit my son/daughter, ... ,to participate in this study.

Signature of participant ……………………….   **Date: ....**

Signature of Researcher ……………………….   **Date:……………………………..**

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study.

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. **What do you think a community is?**

   - Is being part of one important to you? Why?

   - What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of being part of a community?

2. **Explain what you think violence is?**

   - Explain what makes something violent?

   - Explain what you see as violence in your community? Does this happen a lot in your community?

   - Can you give me examples of what happens in this community?

   - Have any of you ever witnessed/ been exposed to violent acts? Explain.

   - What do you think about these things happening where you live?

   - How do you think community violence has affected you?

   - How do you think community violence has affected people in the community?

   - How do you think people are affected when their community is not safe?   - What can happen/happens to them?

   - How have you coped with community violence?/Have you changed the way you do certain things? – walk home, locking doors, going outside a lot?

   - What do you think are the causes of violent acts?

3. **What do you think about people having hope?**

- What do you understand by the word 'hope'?

- What does having hope, mean to you?

- Do you think hope is important? Explain.

- How can having hope affect you?

- Where/How do you see yourself in the future?

- In what way do you think that being exposed to community violence has affected your hope for the future?

- Do you think that being exposed to community violence will affect your goals for the future?

- Do you believe that your community will change for the better in the future?