

**AN INVESTIGATION OF A PEER HELP PROGRAMME IN A LOCAL  
SOUTH AFRICAN SECONDARY SCHOOL: A WHOLE-SCHOOL  
EVALUATION**

**By**

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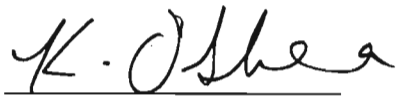
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## DECLARATIONS

Unless specifically stated to the contrary in the text, this thesis is the original work of the undersigned.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. O'Shea", is written over a horizontal line.

KELLY O'SHEA

## ABSTRACT

The present study involved an investigation and evaluation of a peer counselling programme at a local all-girls secondary school. It is argued that, to be effective, a school-based evaluation should consider the programme through an investigation of its impact on the whole school. As such the main focus in the study is to evaluate this programme from the viewpoint of the programme co-ordinator (the school counsellor), the learners, the teacher body and the peer counsellors themselves.

The present study was based on predominantly qualitative data collected through the use of interview, questionnaire and focus-group data-collection methods. The results of the study suggest that the peer counselling programme is perceived positively by the majority of learners (both users and non-users) and the teachers. The programme appears to be impacting the school environment by providing additional support to the learners at the school. In addition, the peer counsellors acknowledged the positive impact of their role on their sense of self-worth.

A number of recommendations are made in keeping with the aims of an evaluation. An initial recommendation is that the terms “peer counsellor” and “peer counselling” be replaced by “peer helper” and “peer helping”, emphasising the more supportive (and less therapeutic) role that the peer counsellors perform. In addition, whilst both the school counsellor and the teachers expressed generally positive comments about the programme, it is suggested that the teachers would benefit from more information with regards to the peer counselling programme. In keeping with a whole-school evaluation, it was felt that the programme would benefit from being more clearly part of the broader school context. Raising both learner and teacher awareness of the programme was a central recommendation. On a broader level, it was recommended that the programme be incorporated into school policy to ensure its official recognition and endorsement in the school context.

Peer-helping programmes represent an innovative way in which South African secondary schools can meet the psycho-social and educational needs of their learners. Further research into such programmes may serve to contribute to a body of research that may inform and guide the effective developments of such present and future programmes.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
ABSTRACT .....	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	V
LIST OF FIGURES.....	IX
LIST OF TABLES.....	IX
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY .....	1
1.2.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2.2 Counselling and Guidance in Secondary Schools.....	1
1.2.3 Towards a New School-Based Counselling Programme.....	2
1.3 PEER-LED COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES.....	3
1.4 MOTIVATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY.....	3
1.5 DEFINITIONS .....	5
1.5.1 Peer Education .....	5
1.5.2 Peer Counsellor .....	5
1.5.3 Peer Counselling .....	6
1.5.4 Guidance and Counselling.....	6
1.5.5 The School Guidance Counsellor/Teacher .....	6
1.5.6 Learner.....	7
1.6 AIMS OF THE STUDY .....	7
1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY .....	7
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	8
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	8

<b>2.2 THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF ADOLESCENCE.....</b>	<b>8</b>
2.2.1 Self-Esteem: The Significance of Positive Self-Regard.....	9
2.2.2 The Humanistic Approach of Carl Rogers: The Need for Positive Regard .....	10
2.2.3 The Quest for Personal Identity: Erikson's Psycho-Social Approach: .....	12
2.2.4 The Importance of Peer Affiliation in Adolescence .....	14
2.2.5 Adolescents at Risk .....	16
<b>2.3 PEER-HELP INITIATIVES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
2.3.1 Guidelines for School-Based Peer Support .....	18
2.3.2 Peer Counselling in a "Whole-School" Approach.....	19
<b>2.4 PEER COUNSELLING RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>21</b>
2.4.1 Introduction.....	21
2.4.2 Rationale for Peer Counselling .....	22
2.4.3 Selection of Peer Counsellors .....	23
2.4.4 Training Issues .....	24
2.4.5 The Efficacy of Peer Counselling Programmes.....	25
2.4.6 Peer Counselling: The Criticisms and Recommendations .....	28
2.4.7 Peer Counselling Research in Southern Africa.....	31
<b>2.5 CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>3.1 RESEARCH SETTING .....</b>	<b>35</b>
3.1.2 Research Aims .....	36
<b>3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN .....</b>	<b>37</b>
3.2.1 Case Study Research .....	39
3.2.2 Evaluation Methodology .....	39
<b>3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>41</b>
3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews .....	41
3.3.2 Teachers' Questionnaire .....	42
3.3.3 Peer Counsellors' Log-sheets .....	43
3.3.4 Learner Questionnaire .....	44
3.3.5 Focus-group with the Peer Counsellors.....	46
<b>3.4 DATA ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>47</b>

<b>3.5</b>	<b>ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.5.1	Undertaking the Research.....	49
3.5.2	Conclusion .....	52
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS .....</b>		<b>53</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>THE ROLE OF PEER COUNSELLING AT THE SCHOOL.....</b>	<b>53</b>
4.2.1	Background to the Development of the Peer Counselling Programme .....	53
4.2.2	The Development of the Peer Counselling Programme .....	63
4.2.3	Users and Non-Users of the Peer Counselling Programme.....	67
<b>4.3</b>	<b>EVALUATION OF THE PEER COUNSELLING PROGRAMME.....</b>	<b>71</b>
4.3.1	Learners' Evaluation of the Peer Counselling Programme .....	71
4.3.2	Teachers' Evaluation of the Peer Counselling Programme .....	88
4.3.3	The School Counsellor's Perspective regarding the Development of the Peer Counselling Programme.....	95
<b>4.4</b>	<b>THE PEER COUNSELLORS' OBSERVATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME AND ITS EFFECT ON THEM PERSONALLY .....</b>	<b>95</b>
4.4.1	Becoming a Peer Counsellor: Aims, Motives and Expectations .....	96
4.4.2	The Peer Counsellors' Perceptions of Being Helpers .....	96
4.4.3	What Concerns/ Issues are they Addressing as Peer Counsellors?.....	97
4.4.4	The Counselling Framework .....	97
4.4.5	The Peer Counselling Groups.....	98
4.4.6	Trust: Why do Some Learners not trust the Peer Counsellors?.....	98
4.4.7	The Peer Counsellors' Recommendations regarding the Programme .....	100
4.4.8	Being a Peer Counsellor: How it has influenced them Personally .....	101
<b>4.5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>		<b>103</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>A "WHOLE-SCHOOL" APPROACH TO EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>104</b>
5.2.1	School Learners' Needs.....	104
5.2.2	The Role of the School in Helping the Learners.....	105

5.2.3 The Development of the Peer Counselling Programme: Goals and Expectations .....	106
5.2.4 The Practical Implementation of the Peer Counselling Programme .....	107
5.2.5 Users and Non-Users of the Peer Counselling Programme.....	110
5.2.6 The Learners' Opinion .....	111
5.2.7 The Teachers' Views.....	118
5.2.8 The Peer Counsellors' Experiences .....	121
<b>5.3 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>6.1 INDICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE SCHOOL .....</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE SCHOOL .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PARENTS.....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: THE PEER COUNSELLORS' LOG-SHEETS.....</b>	<b>147</b>
<b>APPENDIX E: THE LEARNERS' QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>APPENDIX F: THE TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>APPENDIX G: A LIST OF THEMES AND CODES: LEARNERS' QUESTIONNAIRE .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>APPENDIX H: THEMES AND CODES: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE.....</b>	<b>178</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Models of Peer Support.....	17
Figure 2.2 The Process of Peer Support .....	31
Figure 3.1 The Inductive Mode of Research in a Qualitative Study .....	49
Figure 4.1 The Learners' Stated Concerns .....	55
Figure 4.2 Family Concerns.....	57
Figure 4.3 Concerns Raised with the Peer Counsellors.....	69

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1 Concerns/ Issues for which the School Offers Help .....	59
Table 4.2 Places, People and Helping Contexts in the School Environment .....	61
Table 4.3 Users and Non-Users of the Programme .....	68
Table 4.4 Issues/ Concerns Discussed with the Peer Counsellors .....	70
Table 4.5 Understanding of What Peer Counsellors Do.....	72
Table 4.6 Issues and Concerns that the Learners Would Discuss with a Peer Counsellor.....	75
Table 4.7 The Learners' Recommendations Regarding the Programme.....	79
Table 4.8 The Learners' Ratings of the Experience of Seeing a Peer Counsellor .....	87

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### ***1.1 INTRODUCTION***

The aim of this chapter is to describe the scope and context of this research project. Firstly the context of the study is described. This includes an introduction to the notions of guidance and counselling in South African schools. Secondly, an introduction to peer-led counselling programmes is provided. This chapter also includes a description of the concepts and terms used in this study. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of the study's aims as well as the structure of the six chapters within this dissertation.

### ***1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY***

#### **1.2.1 Introduction**

Adolescence is recognised to be a time in which a litany of pressures and problems are faced by the adolescent (Cowie & Wallace, 2000). Rapid developmental changes occur at a time when environmental stressors such as parental and teacher pressure to achieve in school, peer pressure to experiment with alcohol and drugs, conflicted family or peer relationships, loneliness, and pressure to make career/study choices, are at their peak (Robinson, Morrow, Kigin & Lindeman, 1991). Within the South African context especially, a high percentage of single parent homes, unemployment and violence, and the threat and incidence of HIV/AIDS, may lead to further social and personal difficulties experienced by the adolescent. These pressures all exert themselves within the context of the adolescent's evolving sense of personal identity, sexuality, and self-esteem (in *ibid.*).

#### **1.2.2 Counselling and Guidance in Secondary Schools**

School guidance began in a formalised and structured way in the early 1900's in America. The late 1960's saw school guidance being introduced in South African white schools, whilst it was only introduced in some African secondary schools in 1981 (Ntshangase, 1995). It has been stated that the growing need of students for guidance and counselling services has



outstripped the supply of school counsellors available to meet these needs (Downe, Altmann & Nysetvold, 1986; Robinson et al., 1991; Tobias & Myrick, 1999). The picture in South Africa is further complicated by the fact that, historically, most South African schools have lacked specialist guidance and counselling posts, and few educators have been adequately trained to deal with social and emotional problems (Ntlhe, 1995). In addition, the history of guidance and counselling in schools during the apartheid era, in both black and white schools, was often one of using the programmes to serve the aims of the government of the time (Dovey, 1980; Dovey & Mason, 1984). Ntshangase (1995) observes that this may have contributed to school guidance being marginalised in black schools.

### **1.2.3 Towards a New School-Based Counselling Programme**

The advent of the democratic government in South Africa has led to wide-scale transformation taking place throughout South Africa. The education department has been no exception. The advent of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) has recognised the need for an inclusive education to meet the diverse needs of South African learners (Naicker, 1999). The OBE system lists eight Specific Outcomes which are to be applied to the Learning Areas that learners are to cover. All eight Learning Areas have “assessment criteria” (Naicker, 1999, p. 99) which indicates the need for these areas to be taught and assessed to ensure an observable process of learning. Included in these eight Learning Areas is “Life Orientation” which refers in part to what was formerly the guidance and counselling component of a school’s curriculum.

The Life Orientation curriculum aims to enable the learner to develop skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that inform him/her to make decisions and take appropriate actions regarding the following: Health promotion, social development, personal development, physical development, and movement and orientation to the world of work (Department of Education, 2002). It is argued that, although the Life Orientation curriculum is, in theory, a commendable development in the life of school guidance and counselling in this country, its practical implementation in schools may be problematic due to resource and personnel constraints (A. Dorrian, personal communication, 28 January, 2003). However, schools need to take responsibility for implementing the new Life Orientation policy. Innovative strategies may need to be considered as ways in which the school is meeting the Life Orientation needs of its learners.

### ***1.3 PEER-LED COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES***

One method that secondary schools have used to help combat some of the difficulties faced by students in the context of limited available counselling teachers is the use of peer-led counselling programmes, an approach that first developed in the 1960's and 1970's (Latham, 1997; Robinson et al., 1991). The rationale behind the development of such programmes was that students tend to seek out peers more than adults in discussing personal concerns, and that both the peer counsellors and their clients might benefit from such interactions (McDowell, 1983; Morey, Miller, Rosen & Fulton, 1991; Topping, 1988).

Adolescence in particular is a time in which adolescents in distress often first turn to their peers for help (Cowie & Pecherek, 1994). School counsellors are seldom the first source of help sought (Dorrian, 1998). Cowie and Sharp (1996) state that there is a growing body of evidence which suggests that with the right sort of training and support, it is possible to create systems which facilitate this natural process and which builds on the potential for helping which is already there. A more systematic form of peer helping can be termed "peer counselling".

### ***1.4 MOTIVATION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY***

Adolescence is a turbulent time in which the adolescent negotiates his or her transition into young adulthood. Donald, Lazarus, and Lolwana (1997) suggest that adolescents' capacity to actively cope with the stresses in their lives is a vital developmental skill to facilitate. School guidance and counselling may be one way in which learners are directed and/or encouraged to develop their personal potential. In the school context, peers not only provide social support to others but can also make up for a lack of support in the home/family environment. According to Donald et al., (1997) peer group support may become even more influential in contexts of social disadvantage where the social support offered by peers may compensate for the lack of other forms of support. Peer counsellors may assume a position of support-giving in the school that provides the learners with further social and emotional helping resources. Peer counsellors may also become role models whom the learners may emulate.



Local research on the perceptions of South African secondary school learners towards counselling teachers has been conducted. Haffajee (1991) and Ntshangase (1995) investigated the perceptions of learners towards the school counsellor as a preferred helping agent. Both studies demonstrated that the school counsellor was not the preferred helping agent chosen by learners for a variety of concerns. Haffajee (1991) found that Grade 11 learners, both male and female, preferred to approach their friends when experiencing difficulties in friendships, family relationships, physical appearance, relating to teachers, schoolwork, and for “other” problems. Based on their research, both Haffajee (1991) and Ntshangase (1995) recommend the necessity of considering training peers to be effective helpers. Even with the presence of a counselling teacher or department within a school, the usefulness of the service is not guaranteed. These two research projects demonstrate the potential usefulness of considering peer-help models in South African secondary schools.

It should be noted that whilst some tertiary institutions in South Africa have developed peer counselling programmes, few South African secondary schools have implemented peer-led helping models as a means of offering a more effective and efficient counselling service (Janks, 1993 in Dorrian, 1998). In addition there is a general lack of evaluative research that has been done on school-based peer counselling programmes, especially in the South African context.

A number of researchers stress the importance of considering the potential weaknesses in implementing a peer-led counselling intervention. Bowman, Hatley and Bowman (1995) caution the reader against only seeking the virtues of peer counselling documented in the literature. They note that the dual roles that peer counsellors occupy can ethically compromise the counselling services and impact negatively on the counsellor. In addition Lewis and Lewis (1996) note that peer counsellors are increasingly being asked to shoulder a burden that should be overseen only by trained, seasoned professionals. The notion of peer counselling research and evaluation is particularly pertinent when one considers the potential difficulties in utilizing this form of peer help.

Related to the above discussion is Cowie and Sharp’s (1996) observation that whilst it is generally acknowledged that due to peer counselling programmes the school benefits, the ethos improves, young people’s distress is alleviated and the peer counsellors themselves gain in self-esteem, confidence and maturity, these judgements tend to be made subjectively.

They recognise the growing sense in the research community, as well as in schools, of the need for systematic and rigorous evaluations of both process and outcome, if the factors which facilitate the successful development of a peer counselling programme and its implementation over time are to be identified.

The present study aims to extend and contribute to peer counselling research in South African secondary schools in an effort to explore the efficacy and potential usefulness of a peer help programme as an additional school-based support to its learners.

## **1.5 DEFINITIONS**

A variety of terms and concepts used in this study require clarification. The term peer counselling is used throughout this study and is distinguished from other peer-led activities. The terms student and learner have very specific meanings. It is also necessary to define the role of the teacher responsible for the counselling at the school.

### **1.5.1 Peer Education**

Peer education is defined by Finn (1981 in Cowie & Wallace, 2000) as the sharing of information, attitudes or behaviours by people who are not professionally trained educators but whose goal is to educate. Peer educators are usually close in age to those with whom they work. They are usually given health-related information to share with their peers in an accurate, factual and non-judgemental manner. Topics frequently include drug and alcohol use, diversity issues, sexual behaviour, safer sex, eating patterns and eating disorders.

### **1.5.2 Peer Counsellor**

The term 'peer counsellor' in this study refers to a young person who has been selected and trained to provide supportive help to his or her peers. Many writers in the field prefer the term peer helpers or peer supporters (Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Henriksen, 1991; Turner, 1999) in the school context especially. This is because the term 'peer counsellor' may imply a professional and therapeutic role. The terms 'peer supporter' or 'peer helper' may be less threatening titles and may place emphasis on the peer helper's role of support in the school.

In this study, however, the term peer counsellor will be used as this is the term referred to predominantly in the literature. In addition, 'peer counsellor' is the term used by the school in the present study.

### **1.5.3 Peer Counselling**

This refers to the process of selecting, training and supporting a carefully chosen group of people who will provide basic counselling and support services to their peers in a specific context such as a school. The counselling may relate to school and/or home-based concerns. Downe, Altmann and Nysetvold (1986) provide a comprehensive definition of peer counselling as "a process in which trained, supervised students are selected to help in the systematic facilitation of affective growth and the development of effective coping skills among other students" (p. 355).

### **1.5.4 Guidance and Counselling**

Dorrian (1998) distinguishes between the terms 'guidance' and 'counselling'. Guidance refers to instructional learning, direction and/or advice to the receiver of this guidance in such a way as to encourage personal responsibility. Counselling involves less directive, open-ended discussions that incorporate special responding and listening skills with the aim of encouraging the counsellee to gain increased awareness and in order to reach personal solutions to a problem.

### **1.5.5 The School Guidance Counsellor/Teacher**

This is a member of staff in the school who is a qualified teacher and who has trained in psychology/school guidance. According to Lombe (1993 in Ntshangase, 1995) the role of the school guidance teacher is both didactic and therapeutic. It is didactic in the sense that the guidance teacher/counsellor is expected to provide instructive lessons to learners, and therapeutic in terms of promoting the psychological growth of learners in a supportive and frequently in a one on one context. 'Guidance teacher', 'school counsellor' and 'guidance counsellor' are some titles that may be used to refer to this particular staff member.

### **1.5.6 Learner**

This term is used to refer to a person who is attending a South African school. The term, 'learner', is used to differentiate school goers from people attending tertiary institutions who are more frequently referred to as students. In the American context however, school goers are referred to as students.

## **1.6 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of a peer counselling programme at a local all-girls secondary school. The evaluation seeks to develop a holistic understanding of the role of peer counselling at the school and its perceived and observed effect on the learners, the teachers, and the broader school context. A secondary aim of the study is to consider the usefulness of such a programme in other secondary South African schools where a peer counselling programme may prove beneficial.

## **1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY**

The first chapter has attempted to define the context, aims and rationale for the study. Chapter Two provides the theoretical background and the research literature relevant to the study. Emphasis will be placed on the development of and the developmental needs of the adolescent. The research on peer counselling programmes will also be explored. Chapter Three will describe the research design used, while Chapter Four will provide a detailed record of findings from the data collected in this study. Finally, Chapter Five will include a discussion of these results and their relevance to the literature together with the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research. Chapter Six will conclude this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a theoretical background to the present study as well as a review of the relevant research literature. The chapter comprises three sections. The first contains a discussion of adolescence in terms of the experiences and needs of adolescents, as well as the difficulties that they commonly face. The second section provides an introduction to the notion of peer help. The final section reviews the international and local research on peer counselling in secondary schools in particular.

### **2.2 THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF ADOLESCENCE**

Gilbert (1982 in Ntshangase, 1991) refers to adolescence as a process rather than a rigid age category (p. 6). The term, adolescence, refers generally to the transitional years in which young people are in the process of entering into young adulthood. It is recognised as a time during which important life changes occur and decisions with far reaching consequences are made (Elliott & Lambourn, 1999). Prout and Brown (1983) suggest a number of issues and challenges that confront the adolescent in his/her development:

Adolescents are expected to do well at school, perhaps to hold down a job, and be planning a career. Their social contacts and male and female friends are often under close surveillance. They are often still exploring the meaning and purpose of life. Because a large number of external values appear to be imposed upon them, it is important to help adolescents develop their own values in order to increase their self-esteem and their ability to cooperate with others (pp. 306-307).

Frequently the relationship between parent/s and adolescent may become conflictual. Parents often emphasise the importance of school achievements and preparation for the future, whereas the adolescent's preoccupation tends to be with self, social matters, peer friendships, and sexuality (Ntshangase, 1995). Adolescents are also establishing a more independent

sense of identity and this process can conflict with parental expectations, rules, and the family's established way of doing things.

Adolescents, like any age group, have particular social and emotional needs that require expression and fulfilment. Sharp and Cowie (1998 in Cowie & Wallace, 2000) describe the optimal context for the social and emotional needs of the adolescent to be met.

Young people need to have affection and respectful physical contact with others; they need to be comforted when they are upset, listened to with sympathy, taken seriously and given opportunities to share feelings, including difficult ones like anger, fear, anxiety and bewilderment. They need to have access to educational opportunities in contexts that are supportive, that prepare them for the roles of adult life and in which there are resources to help them realise their potential. They also need to gain the experience of taking responsibility for themselves and others in age-appropriate ways, and of dealing constructively with the ethical dilemmas and interpersonal conflicts they will inevitably encounter in their lives (p. 5).

Such a statement reinforces the intra-and inter-personal needs of adolescents. These will be discussed under the sub-headings of: self-esteem; personal identity; the adolescent's need for positive regard; and peer affiliation in adolescence. Finally, the topic of adolescents at risk will be discussed.

### **2.2.1 Self-Esteem: The Significance of Positive Self-Regard**

A person who doubts himself is like a man who would enlist in the ranks of enemies and bear arms against himself. He makes his failure certain by himself being the first person to be convinced of it.

Alexandre Dumas, *The Three Musketeers* (1844/1962 in Purkey & Novak, 1996)

Gerdes (1988) refers to the self-concept as a composite image of what we think we are, what we think we can achieve, what we think others think of us, and what we would like to be. Self-esteem refers to the evaluative aspect of the self-concept, the extent to which we admire or value the self (Hamachek, 1978), which in turn is related to a sense of self-worth. While the self-concept develops throughout life, the period of adolescence is a time in which the



adolescent increasingly measures him or herself against the norms and values of society. Contributors to the adolescent's self concept and self-esteem include the family situation and specific child rearing practices, sex role modelling and stereotyping, feedback from significant others (both family and peers and the environment and society), as well as language and body image (Dorrian, 1998).

According to Gerdes (1988), during adolescence the standards of friends and the peer group become a particularly important yardstick for self-evaluation. In trying to become more independent of his/her parents, the adolescent may depend heavily on his/her peers for support and self-definition.

Purkey and Novak (1996) draw parallels between a learner's efforts to succeed and their levels of self-esteem. With low self-esteem levels, learners may easily succumb to apathy, dependency, and a loss of self-control. Thus the beneficial nature of a positive self-esteem may frequently extend to the educational sphere.

The extent to which an adolescent values his/herself is related, in part, to a sense of "positive regard" (Purkey & Novak, 1996) that they have received or are receiving from the environment. This is explored in the context of a helping relationship due to its relevance to school and peer-based helping interventions.

### **2.2.2 The Humanistic Approach of Carl Rogers: The Need for Positive Regard**

"The greatest gift one can give to another is a deeper understanding of life and the ability to love and believe in self" (Myrick & Erney, 2000, p. 25).

Carl Rogers (1951) is known especially for his person-centred approach to therapy. His theory is especially relevant to this study, in terms of its views on the useful aspects of a helping relationship.

Rogers sees people's realisations of their inherent potential as the goal of development (Gerdes, 1988). According to Rogers, as children develop their sense of self becomes the self-concept and is made up of children's experiences and environmental perceptions, especially how others respond to and interact with them (Prout & Brown, 1983). Children

who receive the positive regard of others develop a sense of self-worth. However when parents and others give the impression that their love is dependent on whether the child pleases them, children may begin to doubt their own thoughts and feelings and act in a way to satisfy the adult care-givers (in *ibid*).

The person with a poor self-concept may be helped by a counselling relationship because she/he is accepted unconditionally by the counsellor. This allows him/her to come to a realistic evaluation of him/herself gradually.

Although a discussion of Rogers' therapeutic theories falls outside the scope of this study, the three essential elements in the counsellor's behaviour are discussed due to their relevance to the counselling relationship. Rogers stressed the core relationship between counsellor and counsellee when he identified these attitudes and/or behaviours on the part of the counsellor which were essential if change in the client was to occur (Cowie & Pecherek, 1994).

Genuineness or congruence refers to the counsellor presenting themselves as they are to the client and not hiding behind a façade. Empathetic understanding refers to the counsellor's ability to understand and convey what is happening to the client in the counselling situation, or in terms of the classroom, to the student (Dorrian, 1998). Unconditional positive regard is the counsellor's complete acceptance of the counsellee for who he/she is. The person is accepted for who he or she is, without showing approval or disapproval (Gillis, 1994).

Combined with these, Rogers saw the need for trust in any learning relationship (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994).

Related to the above-mentioned attributes of a helping relationship, Conger (1977 in McDowell, 1983) argues that it is particularly important for adolescents who are seeking help that trust and security are present when they are discussing inner thoughts and feelings. To McDowell (1983), adolescent peer counsellors can be trained to use these facilitative skills of empathy, warmth, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard to establish a relationship of trust, openness and caring.

Counsellors with a person-centred orientation believe that children and adolescents are capable of self-direction and self-responsibility (Prout & Brown, 1983). Thus Rogers's theory is optimistic and asserts that the individual can exercise control over his/her environment.



### **2.2.3 The Quest for Personal Identity: Erikson's Psycho-Social Approach:**

Dear, dear! How queer everything is today! And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night? Let me think: Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is "Who in the world am I?" Ah, that's the puzzle! (From *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll 1864, 1971, pp15-16 in Purkey & Novak, 1996).

The search for identity usually reaches its climax in adolescence as the adolescent is able to think abstractly for the first time (Gerdes, 1988). Erikson's developmental theory is of importance in this study due to its focus on the adolescent's need to explore and accomplish a "personal identity" within the existing social structure. Erikson viewed psycho-social growth as consisting of critical periods when the 'parts' of the individual personality develop (McCown, Driscoll & Geiger Roop, 1996). It is these critical periods that define Erikson's eight stages of psycho-social development. At each stage a new aspect of an individual's personality develops. This usually presents itself as a dichotomy, for instance trust versus mistrust, which can lead to both positive or negative consequences.

In terms of this study, only the fifth developmental stage or crisis in Erikson's theory (1968) will be considered. This is due to its direct relevance to this study as many of the learners are adolescents and encountering the "identity versus role confusion" (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1995) stage termed and described by Erikson.

Erikson (1968) regards adolescence as very important for psycho-social development and especially as the basis for subsequent development in adulthood. The primary task during adolescence and youth is for the individual, on the basis of what s/he has learnt about him or herself and others, to develop a sense of identity that enables him/her to plan for future roles. Failing to develop a sense of identity results in role confusion, that is uncertainty about oneself, one's roles and one's place in society (Gerdes, 1988). Erikson (1968) also asserts that adolescent relationships may provide an avenue to explore issues of identity. He states:

Yet in this stage not even “falling in love” is entirely or even primarily, a sexual matter. To a considerable extent adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one’s identity by projecting one’s diffused self-image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified (Erikson, 1968, p. 132).

Havighurst (1972 in Rosenbaum & Laurie, 1994) expands the understanding of adolescent identity crisis by describing identity formation in three major areas: development of an adolescent peer group; development of personal independence, including career development; and development of a philosophy of life. Identity in this sense includes establishing a more autonomous sense of self, yet frequently within a peer group. According to Rosenbaum and Laurie (1994), adolescents need to experience a peer culture where they can express and experiment with the process of self-differentiation. The experience of universality, “I am not alone in my struggle” (Yalom, 1985 in *ibid.*) may be a critical factor within the peer group process. Elliott and Lambourn (1999) argue that influences pertinent to adolescent identity development include that of “sexual identity” as adolescents start to increasingly consider their sexuality, particularly in relation to their peer group.

Margaret Mead (1960 in Peters & Shertzer, 1969), in reference to problems facing the adolescent, wrote:

It is not surprising that among the most frequent themes today are the search for identity, the difficulties of identity formation in the changing society, and the extent to which identity and meaningfulness are tied up together... Today’s problem remains a search for a meaningful identity in a world which is seen as too large, too complex, too unpredictable, too likely to collapse into chaos to provide a framework for the individual’s life. As identity search becomes more acute and more persistent we become more conscious of our lack of provision for this search (p. 310).

This quote illustrates the challenges inherent in the adolescent’s search for identity. It suggests a universal struggle which most adolescents face in an increasingly complex world. The following section explores the importance of peer affiliation in adolescence and particularly the role of the peer group in navigating the identity crisis of adolescence.

#### **2.2.4 The Importance of Peer Affiliation in Adolescence**

“A friend is one who knows you as you are, understands where you have been, accepts who you’ve become and still invites you to grow” (Myrick & Erney, 2000, p. 85).

During adolescence, peer interactions expand beyond dyadic and small-group relationships, which comprise the locus of peer relations in earlier and later stages of life, to include school or neighbourhood-based electives commonly referred to as “peer-groups” (Bradford Brown, Eichert & Petrie, 1986). The emphasis in peer group interactions at this stage is on intimacy and shared thoughts and feelings as a basis for friendship (Hartup, 1983, in Petersen & Hamburg, 1986). Peer acceptance and approval are considered to be crucial elements in adolescent development as peers become an increasingly important source of influence and support for each other (Morey et al., 1989).

Young people prefer to be in the company of others within their own age group (Bradford Brown et al., 1986). There are many theories as to why this would be the case. Erikson (1968), from his life-crisis perspective, points out that friends offer constructive feedback and information on self-definitions and perceived commitments. Newman (1976 in Bradford Brown et al., 1986) reinforces this view, in stating that as emotional dependence upon parents is relinquished, the crowd becomes a basis for developing supportive relationships that provide the resources necessary to acquire a more autonomous sense of identity (in *ibid*). Social cognition theorists view peers as important because of their capacity to reinforce others (O’Connell, Pepler & Braig, 1999).

Nielsen (1996) lists a number of studies which emphasise the importance of peer relationships in adolescence. Adolescents who have close friends and get along fairly well with people are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, to break the law, or to quit school than those who are socially rejected or isolated. In addition, research shows that having a close friend seems to act as a buffer against serious mental disorders. In addition, Nielsen (1996) refers to Savin-Williams & Berndt’s (1990) research which emphasises the importance of peers in facilitating the adolescent’s maturation in issues of self-esteem and self-confidence.

Indeed, the development and/or enhancement of one's self-esteem cannot be accomplished in isolation. As Damon (1991 in McCown et al., 1996) puts it: "One cannot 'find' self-esteem in isolation from one's relation to others because it does not exist apart from those relations" (p.17). Other people therefore have a powerful influence on our sense of self.

Interacting with peers also encourages adolescents to develop relational skills which affect their subsequent relationships in adulthood. Nielsen (1996) argues that adolescents develop a more mature ego and more mature social reasoning through their interactions with their peers. Other adolescents can provide the opportunity to become empathetic, objective, tolerant, more forgiving, and more flexible.

Recent studies have also addressed the impact that young adolescents have on each other in the domains of education and career (in Young, Antal et al., 1999). Self-report studies indicate that adolescent friends share similar attitudes toward school, and demonstrate similar educational aspirations and actual achievements (Berndt, 1992 in Young et al., 1999). Young et al., (1999) propose that peers may serve as a resource to each other in terms of discussing their career aspirations with one another. They conclude:

Our study suggests that peer conversations provide such a forum that facilitates the process of self-refinement, and leads to the clarification of the adolescents' internalised goals and values. This process also serves to promote their self-confidence about career decision-making, which encourages further exploration (p. 537).

In addition Elliott and Lambourn (1999) emphasise the potentially significant role that peers can play in reducing the multi-dimensional problem of sexual risk-taking behaviour amongst adolescents.

The preceding section concerns the importance of peer relationships in the adolescent developmental phase. The literature suggests that peers are helpful in terms of self-definition and individuation processes, self-esteem levels and development of relational skills that affect subsequent experiences with others. In addition, the literature suggests that adolescents may be helpful to each other in career decision-making and in reducing sexual risk-taking behaviour amongst their peers.



### 2.2.5 Adolescents at Risk

It has been stressed that adolescence is a time of transition and adjustment for the adolescent. Petersen and Hamburg (1986) list some of the changes that adolescents encounter: biological changes linked to maturation and emerging sexuality; changes in cognitive processing, moral reasoning and psychological development (including the adolescent's self-concept, self-esteem levels and self-identity). An adolescent also develops in the realm of social interactions with their peers. They may experience changes in the contexts of their families, peer group and school environment, as well as the broader society.

Although the term, "students at risk" (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994, p. 21 in McCown et al., 1996), is a phrase frequently used by educators and the public, it is not clearly defined.

Generally, the phrase "refers to students who perform or behave poorly in school and appear likely to fail or fall short of their potential" (p. 21). According to these authors, some of the factors that place students or learners at risk for failure are the circumstances of their lives, such as homelessness, poverty or a dysfunctional family. Poor life circumstances often deny children or adolescents opportunities to develop and grow normally. A risk to health and safety can include the child/adolescent being exposed to violence and/or abuse.

Garmezy (1985 in Petersen and Hamburg, 1986) list the outcome of research into the risk and protective factors in adolescent development. Risk factors include: severe marital discord within the family, low social status and poverty, large family size, a pattern of criminality in the parents or in the child, psychiatric disorders (particularly in the mother), and care of the child by local authorities at some point. Protective factors are said to include: positive self-esteem, feelings of control, a view of the environment as predictable, a view of life as basically positive, the ability to elicit positive responses from the environment, a close personal bond with at least one family member, and a positive school environment.

Poverty in Southern Africa is very widespread (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997). Poverty may cause a negative cycle of difficulties for the adolescent. It may result in malnutrition in the child/ adolescent which may subsequently affect their cognitive functioning (Richter & Griesel, 1994). Under-resourced classrooms may create a disadvantaged contextual learning environment for the child/ adolescent. Donald et al., (1997) and Richter and Griesel (1994)

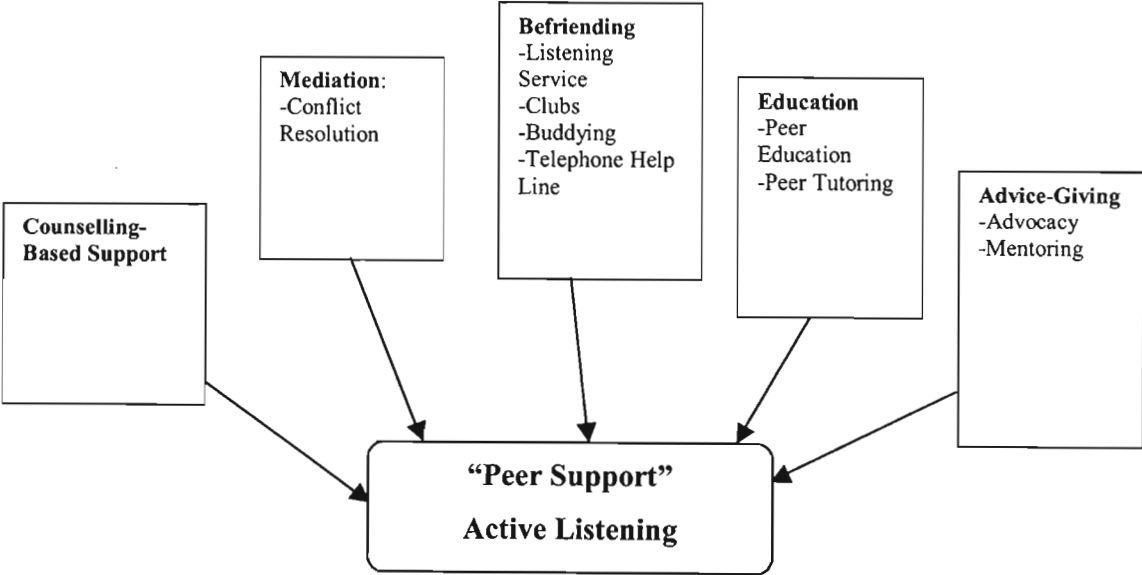
also draw a link between poverty and parenting, arguing that the stress placed on parents due to poverty may directly and/or indirectly affect their capacity to parent effectively.

The capacity of adolescents to cope with the situation they are in requires them to bring personal resources to the situation. In addition, social circumstances and environments may serve to strengthen or limit the individual’s development of a coping capacity.

The following section contains a brief introduction to the notion of peer help which attempts to draw practically on the positive resources inherent in peer relationships.

**2.3 PEER-HELP INITIATIVES**

There have recently been concerted efforts to use the natural resources that young people have to comfort, console, befriend, appease and negotiate with those who are alienated from others in some way (Cowie & Sharp, 1996). Such an evolving recognition has led to a number of peer initiatives developing in educational environments. According to Turner (1999), there are many forms of peer initiatives, with different titles including peer education, peer mentoring, peer tutoring, peer support, peer counselling and peer mediation (see section 1.5). Figure 2.1, represents the models of peer support generally recognised and available.



**Figure 2.1 Models of Peer Support**  
(adapted from Cowie & Wallace, 2000, p. 10)

### 2.3.1 Guidelines for School-Based Peer Support

Whilst the scope of this study cannot include an extensive background on the practical and procedural issues to consider in implementing a peer counselling programme, there will be a brief discussion on commonly recognised qualities of peer-led support programmes in schools. Turner (1999) provides a summary on such guidelines and commonalities generally present in peer-led support programmes. A number of writers in the field express similar guidelines for school peer counselling programmes (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Cowie & Sharp, 1996; Cowie & Wallace, 2000).

- Peer support acknowledges that all people have times of stress when it is useful to talk with a friend. As such, the process of peer support is normalised. Of importance is preventing the stigma of “having problems” and therefore of help-seeking.
- Peer support describes a process in which young people receive training in listening and basic counselling skills. The training also addresses confidentiality and child protection issues. Training may be given on specific requested issues such as sexual health, substance use, and self-harm. When and how to refer children is also covered in the training.
- Peer supporters or peer counsellors require the consistent support of a trained and available adult, as personal issues may be raised through exposure to helping someone they are supporting. Consistent and supportive adult supervision is therefore required without the adult taking over-responsibility for the process.
- Peer support is not a cheap or quick alternative to professional services. Peer support requires committed and skilled adult support to enable the smooth operation of the programme. Of great importance here is also that peer supporters are not required to handle complex psycho-social and emotional problems, which may be done inappropriately on their own. “Peer support is not automatically self-sustaining and organization, planning and persistence is needed for an effective initiative in the long-term” (Turner, 1999, p. 570).

Turner (1999) also emphasises that to be effective the activity must acknowledge and respect young people’s skills and contribution, and young people must determine the purpose of the activity. Adult support must be available, but not hijack the process to suit their own agenda.

### 2.3.2 Peer Counselling in a “Whole-School” Approach

Successful learning and development is dependent on the environment in which it takes place (Fraser, 1987 in Donald et al., 1997). According to the World Health Organisation, health is viewed as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease (Ottawa Charter, 1986 in *ibid.*). This would suggest that health involves promoting healthy experiences as well as preventing unhealthy conditions or experiences.

Donald et al., (1997) recognise that schools are organisations and that the elements that make up the organisation may contribute to whether or not the school achieves its goals. The recognition that schools are organisations has influenced the approach to the guidance and counselling programmes in the school. Watkins (1994) proposes that good school guidance is “total school guidance” (p. 134) which implies the need for the integration of the programme at multi-levels within the school, as well as the need for support for the programme. This approach to guidance in schools represents a shift away from a crisis-orientated approach to a more sustainable and health-promoting guidance system.

An awareness that schools are social systems or organisations implies that for a programme to be successfully implemented and sustained at a school, there needs to be an integration of the programme at different levels within the school. Peters and Shertzer (1969) developed a set of general organisational guidelines for the development and management of a whole-school guidance programme. These points may be useful guidelines for peer counselling interventions as well. These are:

- School staff being receptive to guidance
- The programme’s pervasiveness and articulation at all school levels
- The programme’s ability to serve students with all types of problems
- A means to evaluate the programme

Teachers need to be aware of the guidance programme and fairly supportive of it. Related to this, Cowie & Sharp (1996) point out that peer support programmes require a supportive school environment. Abu-Rasain and Williams (1999) found in their study that the school staff culture was antithetical to the school peer counselling programme. They concluded that



the positive effects of the programme might have been greater had the school staff been more receptive to the programme and had there been less staff-student tensions.

In addition to the school staff being receptive to counselling initiatives, the programmes also need to be pervasive and operate at different school levels. This may refer to an awareness of the programme at different levels of the school, such as the learner body, the learner leadership, the teaching staff, the school principal, and so on. In addition, it implies that the programme targets a variety of learners at the school, with a variety of concerns, and not only a certain age-group, academic level, and/or problem area. According to Carr (1994 in Cowie & Sharp, 1996) peer counselling seems to flourish in settings where there is an already established system for working together and in cooperation with one another and where people support the value of caring for one another.

Cowie and Sharp (1996) suggest developing the peer counselling service within the framework of a whole-school policy on social relationships within the school, and ensuring that the ethical and moral issues relating to the involvement of peers in counselling their fellow students have been attended to. In contrast, they note that:

If the peer counselling service develops in an arbitrary and unconnected way, in isolation from any social policy, then its effectiveness is likely to be diminished or haphazard. Without consideration of ethical and moral issues, the service runs the risk of creating more difficulties than solutions (Cowie & Sharp, 1996, p. 26).

Further advantages of the peer counselling programme being explicitly part of school policy, is the recognition of peer counsellors as school “endorsed” helpers. This demonstrates that the school places its trust in the peer counsellors (Cowie & Sharp, 1996). Inclusion of the service in school policy also ensures that the service is linked to other preventative and response strategies and, in this way, protects it from becoming an alternative to a supportive, listening teacher staff. Sustainability of the peer counselling programme through school policy is also an important consideration if one considers the rapid burn-out among counsellors leading peer counselling programmes (Painter, 1989; Reissman, 1990 in Erhard, 1999). Finally, Cowie & Sharp (1996) note: “In a practical sense, its inclusion ensures that time and consideration will be given to training and supporting youngsters and monitoring the quality of service delivery” (p. 32).

As well as being integrated into the school context in a constructive, overt and positively perceived manner, a peer counselling programme should also have in-built opportunities for evaluation. This ensures that the programme is running optimally and that changes may be made as the needs of the population it serves change.

The literature recommends the implementation of a peer counselling model through consideration of the school itself as an interrelated and organisational system. “Whole-school guidance” is a term used by Watkins (1994) to describe a holistic approach to guidance in the school environment. It follows that evaluation of the programme should necessarily include investigating the impact of peer counselling at a systemic level.

## **2.4 PEER COUNSELLING RESEARCH**

This section considers research in the literature regarding the implementation, maintenance, effectiveness, and related to this, evaluation of peer counselling programmes at secondary schools. This section will draw predominantly on American and Canadian research into peer counselling programmes over the past two decades. The section will conclude with research into peer counselling in the South African context.

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

Peer help programmes are a growing phenomenon which, under the guise of a variety of names, have developed out of the self-help movement of the late 1960's and 70's in the United States (de Rosenroll, 1989). Programmes of this nature are becoming more popular and are firmly entrenched in the United States, Great Britain and Canada, as well as numerous other countries including South Africa (Abu-Rasain & Williams, 1999; Cowie & Sharp, 1996; Dorrian, 1998; Gougeon, 1989; Henriksen, 1991; Keller, 1999; Motsabi, 2000).

The concept of peer counselling is based on the notion that a person will often seek out a peer when there is a concern, frustration or problem (Diver-Stamnes, 1991; France & Gallagher, 1984; Henriksen, 1991; McDowell, 1983). Students perceive peer counsellors as being more physically and emotionally accessible than professional or school counsellors (Morey, Miller, Fulton, Rosen & Daly, 1989). The nearness of their peers in terms of age, life experiences,

socio-economic status, educational level, and specific developmental concerns suggests that the “social distance” amongst peers is less than among non-peers (Giddan & Austin, 1982 in Locke & Zimmerman, 1987). Peers may therefore provide each other with the understanding and support unique to their phase and context of life. There is also an expectation that, as a peer, the individual will be able to listen non-judgementally (Motsabi, 2000). Carr (1992 in *ibid.*) argues that peer counselling provides students or learners with the opportunity to put their caring into practice. Thus peer counselling refers to a formalised process in which peers are provided with skills and resources in providing assistance and care to others in a specific setting.

Various roles of the peer counsellor in secondary schools include: assisting the adjustment of learners to the school environment (Morey, Miller, Rosen & Fulton, 1993), being “a big brother or sister” (McIntyre, Thomas & Borgen, 1982), befriending and being “buddies” to other learners (Cowie & Sharp, 1996), referral agents (Greenstone, Dunn & Leviton, 1995), and providing help for mild to severe social problems (Blain & Brusko, 1985).

#### **2.4.2 Rationale for Peer Counselling**

Schools exist to facilitate the education of people. Throughout history, the function of education has been seen as not only imparting knowledge, but also helping students to learn about themselves. Self-growth and self-knowledge are integral aspects of the education system (Cowie & Pecherek, 1994).

The rationale for using peer counselling in secondary high school settings is well documented in the literature. Peer counselling is recognised as forming an extension of support and professional services and not as a replacement of these services (Baiss, 1989). Persons trained as peer counsellors can therefore relieve some of the pressure on existing services. In addition, the peer counsellors are often more accessible than formally organised help and are able to act as troubleshooters, recognising problems before they reach the crisis stage (Baiss, 1989). Peer counsellors may be positive role models to other students (Gougeon, 1989) and contribute to a generally more positive school climate (Morrill et al., 1987). It is argued that, for the peer counsellor, there are multiple benefits including increased self-esteem from the knowledge that one has something to offer, decreased dependency, a sense of control that can be empowering, and a feeling of social usefulness (Turner, 1999). Affective gains due to

being a peer counsellor are reinforced by further research (Dorrian, 1998; Downe et al., 1986; France & Gallagher, 1984; Robinson, Morrow, Kigin & Lindeman, 1991). Students in the school may benefit from an atmosphere of social responsibility due to the presence of a peer help programme (Cowie & Sharp, 1996). In the USA there has also been research which suggests that peer counselling reduces cultural barriers that may exist between African American students on campus and the white professionals who usually dominate the traditional counselling and academic support services (Lee, 1982).

A further rationale for peer counselling programmes is their potentially useful role in primary prevention (Carr, 1992 in Motsabi, 2000). Peer counsellors may assist in immunising learners against harmful influences. These may include programmes against alcohol and drug abuse, education on safe sex to prevent HIV/AIDS, and so on.

Research into peer counselling has centred on a number of areas. These include: selection procedures, training, supervision and referral systems, implementation of peer counselling at the school level and the overall evaluations of programmes.

#### **2.4.3 Selection of Peer Counsellors**

According to Downe et al., (1986), many peer counselling co-ordinators have taken a “cavalier” approach toward the identification and selection of peer counsellors. They argue that the selection of peer counsellors should not be based merely on “sameness” (i.e. being the same as peers in terms of age, grade) or on popularity, as these do not necessarily correlate positively with a student being an effective helper. Some selection procedures include the following:

- Recruiting volunteers (Cowie & Wallace, 2000)
- Selection by previous peer counsellors (e.g. Henriksen, 1991)
- Selection by students (e.g. Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Robinson et al., 1991)
- Staff recommendations (e.g. Blain & Brusko, 1985)
- Selection based partly on attendance at pre-selection peer counselling training (e.g. Dorrian, 1998)
- Selection on academic criteria (cited in Motsabi, 2000)

Blain & Brusko (1985) emphasise the importance of selecting high functioning versus “popular” students. In their study they attempted to obtain a mix of students to represent the school population. Teachers were asked to recommend eligible peer counsellors. Traits such as friendliness, responsibility, maturity, social skill, leadership skills and general helpfulness towards others were stressed to these teachers in their recommendations for peer counsellors. Students who received two votes were invited for interviews.

Cowie & Wallace (2000) argue that peer nominations through voting for peer counsellors, has the advantage of increasing the credibility of the programme for the individual peer counsellors and the service as a whole. They state, “Clearly, this system shares with the volunteer method the advantage of empowering the young people to begin taking responsibly for their own service” (p. 66).

A number of researchers emphasise the process of selection as a critical issue in peer counselling programmes (Downe et al, 1986; Robinson et al., 1991). Peer counsellors need to be people who the learners relate to. However, they also need to have certain interpersonal skills whereby they may provide the learners with a supportive form of help within established boundaries.

#### **2.4.4 Training Issues**

A number of written resources are available as a basis for peer helping and counselling programmes. These include: The Peer Counsellor Starter Kit (Carr & Saunders, 1979 in Gougeon, 1989), Caring and Sharing: Becoming a Peer Facilitator (Myrick & Erney, 2000), as well as peer counselling training programmes for black youths in Soweto, Johannesburg developed by M. Letsebe (1988). Most peer-help training programmes are structured in nature and extend over several weekly training sessions. In addition, weekend retreats and workshop formats have been used with some success, especially with older learners (Pyle, 1977 in Downe et al., 1986).

Training often includes emphasis on basic counselling skills such as communication skills, reflective listening, understanding feelings verbally and non-verbally, problem-solving skills and ethical issues such as confidentiality, as well as some type of referral awareness process (Diver-Stamnes, 1991; McIntyre et al., 1982; Morey et al., 1993). Whilst some of the skills



taught emphasise active listening and problem-solving skills, peer counsellors are instructed not to give advice to the students (Downe et al., 1986). Some peer counselling programmes may choose to provide training in self-awareness for the peer counsellors. This might include topics of values, personal beliefs, expectations of being a peer counsellor etc (Rockwell & Dustin, 1979). They argue that this component of the training is very important to a trainee.

Peer counselling programmes may provide training for specific issues. These can include topics on drug and alcohol abuse, family problems, peer relationships, peer pressure, suicide prevention, gangs, sex and teen pregnancy, violence, death and dying, stress management, assertiveness and trust (Diver-Stammes, 1991). Downe et al., (1986) lists topics related to sexuality, family discord and divorce, and values. Gougeon (1989) recommends various “special issues” training topics. For example: relating to parents and siblings, getting along with teachers, building self-esteem, sexual abuse and sexual assault, and loneliness. However he stresses the importance of these training topics following from a solid training in basic listening and helping skills.

Cowie & Wallace (2000) argue that an important aspect of peer counselling training is that of relationship “boundaries” (p. 127). They stress that whilst peer supporters may intervene helpfully on a wide range of issues, there are some problems that should never be handled by peer supporters alone. These usually involve situations where there is a serious possibility of harm to the person seeking help or another person. The most common examples of these that they provide examples for are: sexual or physical abuse, suicide threats or attempts, serious self-harm, and mental illness.

The literature on peer counselling in schools emphasises the importance of experiential training in addition to didactic learning strategies, with studies indicating that students/learners prefer and therefore benefit maximally from experiential learning (Blais & Brusko, 1985; Gougeon, 1985).

#### **2.4.5 The Efficacy of Peer Counselling Programmes**

A wealth of research indicates that peer counselling is generally effective. However, the reported success of peer counselling programmes is often based on subjective statements (Blais & Brusko, 1985). Few studies are only evaluative in nature. de Rosenroll (1989)

asserts that the lack of research into the effectiveness of peer counselling programmes may be in part due to the facilitators not being trained in basic research and evaluation skills. In addition, Tindall (1980 in Carr, Yanishewski & de Rosenroll, 1989) argues that facilitators may simply not have enough time to research the effectiveness of a peer counselling programme.

Rockwell & Dustin (1979) argue that evaluation is centred around the programme's goals. Frequent goals for the peer counselling programme include:

- To increase the counselling effectiveness at the school. This may include peer counsellors assisting with administrative functions, running career workshops, talking with other students and referring them for adult help if necessary.
- Increasing the visibility of the counselling programme at the school. This refers to the integration of the peer counselling programme in the school life and structure and the extent to which the programme is "known".
- Increasing the amount of counselling occurring within the school.
- The psychological growth of the trainee should be facilitated by such a programme.

Research into the effectiveness of peer counselling in secondary schools suggests some of the following:

- Peer counsellors' responses to problem situations or personal comments indicated an increase in appropriate and empathetic responses (McIntyre et al., 1982)
- Peer counsellors were found to have increased self-satisfaction and well-being as well as benefiting from greater self-and other-awareness through learning new skills applicable to their life-context (Diver-Stamnes, 1991; Henriksen, 1991)
- Peer counselling improved the school climate (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Grady, 1980 in de Rosenroll, 1988)
- Peer counselling is perceived as a form of relief to the school counsellor and as a resource to the teachers (Blain & Brusko, 1985)
- Learners benefit in various ways from contact with peer counsellors (Fink, Grandjean, Martin & Bertollini, 1978 in de Rosenroll, 1989; Hamburg & Varenhorst, 1972 and McIntyre et al., 1984)
- Eighth-grade peer group facilitators were found to be effective in helping sixth-grade problem behaviour students (Tobias & Myrick, 1999)

- Adolescents do perceive the helping skills used by trained peer counsellors as more facilitative than those of untrained helpers (McDowell, 1983)
- Two studies cited in Cowie & Sharp (1996) found that peer help was very beneficial for adolescents dealing with bereavement.

Diver-Stamnes (1991) suggests that peer counselling in an inner-city school is an effective tool to increase levels of support to the learners. He wrote: “Especially of note in terms of inner-city schools, the program seemed to offer the kind of support system perhaps traditionally provided by family but all too often lacking in the ghetto” (p. 283).

Peer counselling has also been demonstrated to be helpful in adolescent discussions and decision-making around career issues (Young et al., 1999; Rosenbaum & Laurie, 1994). More broadly, peer counselling approaches have also been utilized successfully in working with the aged (France & Gallagher, 1984), with people who are HIV positive (Baiss, 1989), and in promoting the mental health of police (Greenstone, Dunn & Leviton, 1995).

Research on the practical and systemic implementation of peer counselling programmes at schools reveals a number of noteworthy findings. Henriksen (1991) found that 90% of the school staff felt they had a good understanding of the programme, whilst 60% felt peer counselling was benefiting the school. However, some teachers were unsure as to how peer counsellors could be utilized in their classrooms. Abu-Rasain & Williams (1999) found that teachers were generally unsupportive of the programme and were not enthusiastic to become involved with the peer counselling programme. Henrikson (1991), in his study of a peer counselling programme at a school, suggests that if teachers are given some direction about how to better utilize peer helpers in their classrooms the benefits of the peer helping programme will broaden.

Henriksen (1991) found that 13% of respondents in the study had talked with a peer counsellor. Abu-Rasain & Williams (1999) found that 12.6% of the school population had met with a peer counsellor. Morey et al., (1989) found that most people only met with a peer counsellor once or twice. They also found that relationship issues were the most commonly reported concern for those girls who had seen a peer counsellor (family, friends and boyfriend relationships) whilst the least frequently discussed topics included alcohol and drug



problems. With regards to the reasons that the learners met with the peer counsellors, Morey et al., (1989) found that the learners perceived peer counselling to be most useful when discussing plans for the future and general school problems. Areas of least perceived helpfulness were in specific problem areas indicating that peer counsellors are less effective in dealing with and resolving particular problematic issues. Most students did not report feeling embarrassed to see a peer counsellor but half of these students were unsure that the peer counsellors would maintain their confidentiality. Girls in this study were much more likely to approach a peer counsellor than boys, which Morey et al., (1989) attribute to the greater socialisation of females as confiders in others and vice versa. In a separate study, Robinson et al., (1991) echoed a number of these findings in showing that more female than male students were assisted by peer counsellors. In addition family and school concerns were found to be the most common topics for discussion with peer counsellors.

#### **2.4.6 Peer Counselling: The Criticisms and Recommendations**

Peer support programmes are not without their criticisms. Many writers in the field have emphasised the need for caution in implementing such peer-led programmes. In addition, many writers have emphasised the need for rigorous and evaluative research to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programmes (Morey et al., 1989).

Morey et al., (1989) and Lewis and Lewis (1996) explored whether peer counsellors are expected to provide a service for which they are neither adequately prepared, nor mature enough to handle. Peer counsellors' involvement in concerns such as suicidal behaviour, eating disorders, severe relationship conflicts, coping with loss, or drug and alcohol abuse, are topics, they argue, for which adolescent peer counsellors are developmentally unprepared. Lewis and Lewis (1996) note that:

Although our hearts often call out for immediate action, it seems only prudent to be careful about the ways in which we address some of the very serious and volatile issues of childhood and adolescence. We need to have strong evidence that programs are safe before they are incorporated into school settings. Otherwise our best intentions may result in harm to the very children we intend to help (p. 312).

They suggest the following guidelines: Peer counsellors should be carefully selected; their roles should be limited to academic and developmental issues; and peer counsellors should

receive adequate training and supervision for those limited roles. In addition, peer helpers should be given clear direction on referring potentially serious cases to an appropriate adult.

Another concern that is expressed in the literature is that peer counsellors are being overseen by “non-professionals” (Lewis & Lewis, 1996). Some researchers claim that non-professional counsellors may have limited knowledge of ethical and professional issues such as privacy, confidentiality, dual relationships, establishing appropriate boundaries, and risk assessment. They suggest that peer helping programmes should not be supervised by anyone other than a masters’ level counsellor or other similarly trained mental health professionals. This final comment seems impractical and elitist in the South African context where the school counsellor or guidance teacher may be a luxury (Dorrian, 1998) with school psychologists an even less practically feasible option.

Latham (1997) agrees with Robinson et al., (1991) in their recommendation that peer counselling programmes must be provided with a large enough budget for training and continuity, and that peer counsellors receive ongoing support and training. To Latham (1997): “This type of support is critical. Even the most mature and responsible high school peer counsellor is still a teenager, facing the same formidable challenges as his or her peers” (p. 78).

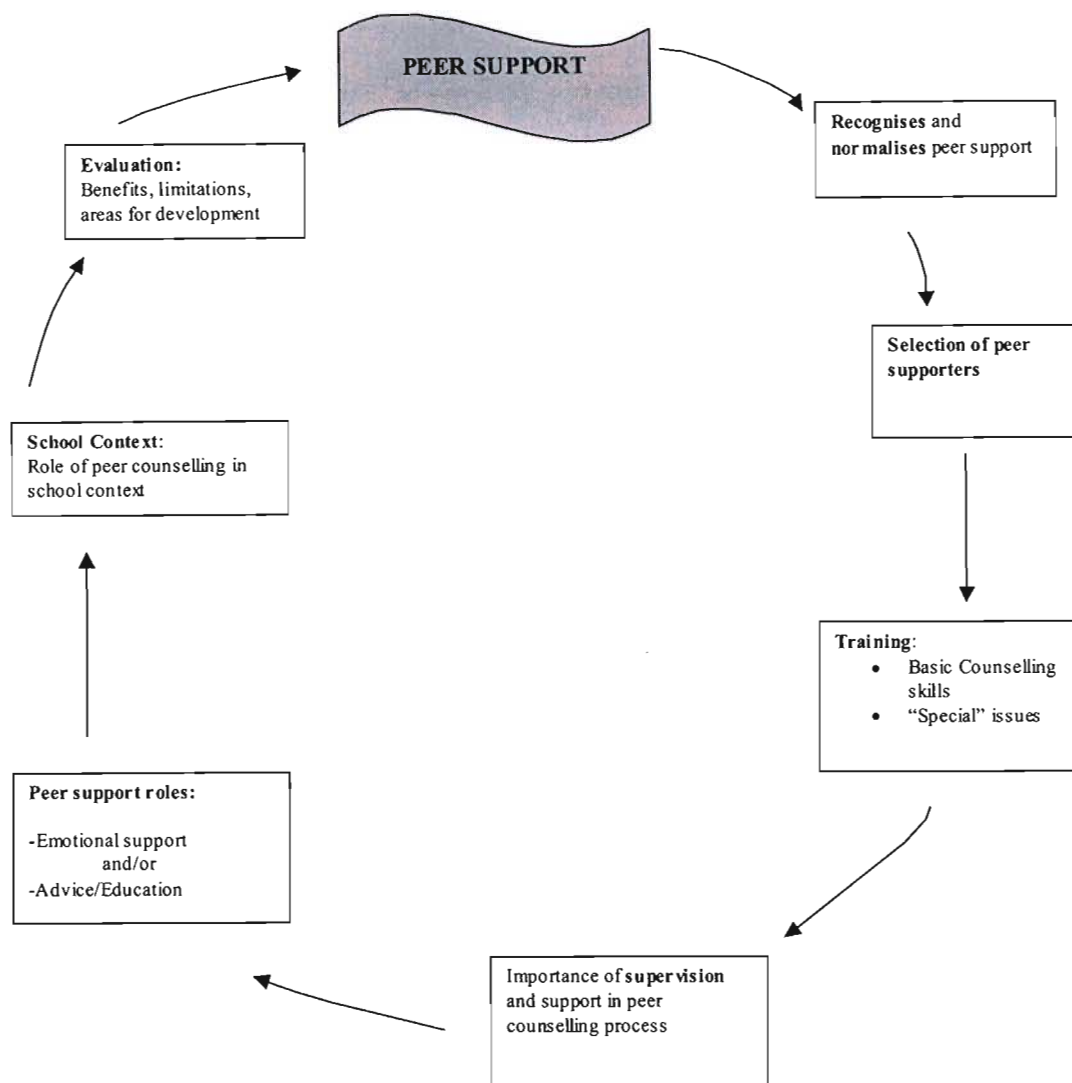
Further recommendations for peer help programmes in the literature include:

- For smoother running and ease of initiation, the development of peer help programmes should be attempted by school personnel rather than outside service agencies
- A number of school counsellors and teachers should be involved in the programme, particularly as it expands
- The peer counsellors should receive support to enable them to cope in their own lives
- Related to this, supervision and ongoing training should be a structured activity for the peer counsellors. These times can also be spent deciding on new activities or interventions that can be implemented to facilitate the development of the programme, as well as its visibility in the school

(in Robinson et al., 1991)

In addition to the above recommendations, de Rosenroll (1989) emphasises the need for research into peer counselling at every level of its development and practical implementation. A number of writers in the field have also suggested that research into peer counselling focus on the following areas: The impact of peer counsellors on the people they meet with (Carr, 1989 in Carr, Yanishewski & de Rosenroll, 1989); the effect of peer counselling on the school organisational system (Carr, 1989 in *ibid.*); and long-term research on the effects of being a peer counsellor on the peer counsellors themselves (Varenhorst, 1989; Erney, 1989 in *ibid.*). Varenhorst expresses the opinion that peer helpers will develop long-lasting relational skills: “..I am a great believer that those who are trained (as peer counsellors) will make better parents, will make better marriages, even will be more successful on their jobs” (p. 15). Cowie and Wallace (2000) recommend evaluative research into what the characteristics of the effective peer supporter are. Research into programme evaluation is suggested by Tindall (1989 in Carr et al., 1989) to gauge if the peer counselling programme is accomplishing its goals.

Figure 2.2 attempts to diagrammatically depict those aspects of peer support programmes discussed in the preceding section (section 2.4), that inform the implementation, practical running and efficacy of such programmes at the secondary school level.



**Figure 2.2 The Process of Peer Support**

#### **2.4.7 Peer Counselling Research in Southern Africa**

There has been a general lack of research into peer counselling at the secondary school level. In fact, Dorrian (1998) states that while a few South African secondary schools are running programmes, no research literature is available regarding the investigation of these programmes. In addition, the general unavailability of guidance and counselling teachers in South African schools impacts on the utilization of such programmes which are frequently recognised as involving time-consuming activities and commitments.

The presence of counselling centres at many tertiary education levels allows for more peer-led programmes to be developed, implemented and supervised in these contexts. A study by Motsabi (2000), found that 64% of surveyed technikon campuses indicated the presence of peer help programmes whilst over half of the universities surveyed had peer-led counselling programmes. The peer helpers in these institutions serve a variety of roles such as assisting during the orientation of new students, and dealing with students' personal and social problems. Dorrian (1998) argues that peer counselling still seems to be the domain of tertiary institutions, and remains an untapped resource for most schools.

Letsebe (1988) designed a manual for training peer helpers to work with township youth in pre-democratic South Africa. Her rationale for developing such a training manual was that black youth had few helping resources in the provision of psychological and social services. Especially during the predominance of the South African apartheid government, Letsebe (1988) stressed the increasing significance of empowering youth to assist, help, motivate and care for each other. Letsebe (1988) observed that the trained peer helpers became involved in running a local youth club and assisting its members with their personal growth problems. Letsebe's training model (1988) is useful in the South African context especially with its emphasis on the cultural implications of the various training topics.

Dorrian's (1998) research provides useful information about the implementation of a peer counselling programme at an urban, single-sex, government-funded secondary school. The main focus in her study was to assess changes that occurred in the self-concept of female adolescents undergoing an interpersonal skills training course which was incorporated into a peer counselling pre-selection training programme. Positive gains in self-concept were noted in the experimental group. In addition, the multi-racial nature of the group was a significant aspect and learners were encouraged to work with girls of different race groups. All members of the experimental group felt they had gained useful helping skills. In conclusion, Dorrian (1998) noted that due to the peer counselling programme, the profile of guidance and counselling in the school was raised. In concluding her study, Dorrian (1998) recommended that evaluation of the effects of peer counselling be broadened to include the learners who have used the service and to assess its effects within the school environment.

Carr (1999) evaluated a peer counselling programme at the same school as in the above study. She interviewed six female peer counsellors to assess their perceptions and evaluation

of the programme. She found that mostly junior grade learners visited peer counsellors, whilst those in senior grades only approached the peer counsellors for career information. The peer counsellors perceived the programme to be successful and affirmed its importance in the school system. Carr (1999) also found that peer counsellors felt confident in their ability to put their counselling training into practice. Career-related problems were the most likely issues for peer counsellors to deal with, which Carr (1999) suggests may be due to learners' preferences for advice-giving and problem-solving in the helping relationship. Carr (1999) also recommended that peer counsellors be further trained in the field of careers thereby increasing their confidence and competence in assisting their peers in this area.

An internet article by the World YWCA (2001) reveals that peer counselling and peer education programmes are being used with stated success in other African countries, such as Namibia, Kenya, and Botswana. The author of the article stresses the benefits of channelling young people's energy positively in a helping context. This, they argue, assists youths to feel better about themselves. They also emphasise the shocking reality of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the importance of empowering and encouraging the youth to be proactive and to have hope in terms of their future. The Namibia programme is currently in its second phase, focussing heavily on HIV/AIDS as it targets youth nationwide. This has included recruiting some of the peer counsellors who have finished their secondary school education as peer facilitators in the communities. Regarding the peer counselling training, one fifteen-year-old newly trained peer counsellor observed the following:

When we joined the group it was just another activity. After a few lessons, it changed us permanently. It opened our eyes and brightened our minds. We now know the importance of feelings, and how to help other teenagers. We now have confidence and courage to turn our lives around in a positive way. These lessons put something in us which is very important- that is to care for others and brighten the day for those whose days are darkened

(p. 2 of the internet article: Tackling HIV/AIDS Through Peer Counselling)

South Africa might benefit greatly through peer-assisted programmes, especially in communities with a lack of supportive and psycho-educational resources. Training school peer counsellors as peer facilitators in communities may be one way in which the peer counsellors skills and knowledge may be generalised to the community level.



## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

Whilst the value of caution in implementing and utilizing peer help programme cannot and should not be underestimated, there is still a need to consider the emotional and social support, guidance and care that adolescents require for healthy functioning and development. Cowie and Sharp (1996) express the opinion that schools are in a unique position to provide such assistance and that peer help programmes may be one way in which this may be achieved in a realistic and practical way. As Dorrian (1998, p. 33) writes:

South African schools cannot afford to ignore the peer counselling movement in a situation where learners are demanding opportunities to involve themselves in the process of education and where education is proving inadequate in meeting the needs of learners

The research literature into the implementation and efficacy of peer-led helping programmes in Southern Africa is sparse. This study aims to expand on and contribute to this area of research, and perhaps in so doing may facilitate the development of appropriate peer-helping programmes in other secondary South African schools.

The following section documents the data collection procedures and methodological approach used in the present research study.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This section outlines and explains the research design and methodology adopted and used in this research study. Section 3.1 describes the research setting in which this study was conducted together with the research aims for this study. Much of this information is provided by the school counsellor, the school principal and another academic teaching staff member. Section 3.2 covers the general methodological approach and tools used in this study, while Section 3.3 provides more specific information around the construction of the data-collection instruments and the research procedure. Finally, section 3.4 discusses the ethical issues considered in the present study. Chapter 4 will present the results of the data collected and the results of the study.

### ***3.1 RESEARCH SETTING***

The school at which this study was conducted is a secondary all-girls government school. It is based in the inner-city of Pietermaritzburg, however a large proportion of the girls that attend this school also come from neighbouring suburbs and communities such as Imbali, Edendale and the Grange. A large proportion of the girls live with extended family members.

There are approximately 515 girls attending this school. The majority of these girls are black with Zulu being the mother tongue of the majority of these students. Of the remaining girls there are approximately 30 girls of the race group previously designated “coloured”, five of Indian descent and twelve white girls. The Christian religion is reportedly the most common religious affiliation. The school fees are reportedly a great deal lower than other inner-city secondary government schools fees because most of the families whose children/dependents attend the school are within the lower socio-economic status bracket.

Apart from a wide variety of academic subjects that are taught at this school, there is also a life skills programme which is scheduled on a fortnightly basis for the various school classes. In the lower school grades, the initial focus is on sex

education and HIV/AIDS, whilst there is a greater focus on study and career issues in the more senior grades. The girls have the opportunity of participating in a number of sports at their school including netball, hockey, cricket and volleyball. Within the school there is also a strong emphasis on inter-house sport and cultural activities such as singing, drama plays, debating and general knowledge quizzes. The teaching staff consists of nineteen teachers who are predominantly white females with English or Afrikaans as their first language. Two of the full-time academic teachers are responsible for the co-ordination of the counselling programme at the school. With regards to their training, guidance counselling formed part of their post-graduate teachers qualification.

The school counsellor and principal maintain that a central aim at their school is not only the provision of academic learning opportunities, but also the provision of social support and education roles to their learners. The school motto, "Respect yourself, Respect others" reflects this humanitarian focus. The counselling department and recently developed peer counselling programme is an attempt to provide an explicit source of support to the learners at this school.

### **3.1.2 Research Aims**

The following research aims were developed:

- To gain an understanding of the context of the peer counselling programme. More specifically the aim was to investigate the needs of this secondary school and especially those of the learners, that the peer counselling programme may address.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of a particular peer counselling programme. This study aimed to encourage a reflective process in which the organisers of the programme, the teachers, the learners, and the peer counsellors identified the advantages and problematic areas of functioning in the programme in order to optimize its present and future functioning.

Based on the results of these aims, this study will also consider how peer counselling programmes may be generalised to other South African secondary

schools. It is hoped that this will provide useful information regarding the viability of implementing peer counselling programmes at other South African schools.

A number of research questions follow from the research aims in this study, namely

- How did peer counselling come to be implemented in this context? What were/are the aims of the programme?
- Who uses the peer counselling service and for what reason?
- How do the learners (users and non-users of the programme) evaluate the service?
- What are the teachers' perceptions of the programme?
- What is the effect of being a peer counsellor on the peer counsellors themselves? Related to this, how do they evaluate the programme?

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The present study seeks to evaluate a peer counselling programme at a local secondary school. This has involved observing the programme at a number of different levels, including those of the learners, teachers, and peer counsellors. This study has drawn on data-collection techniques such as interviewing, questionnaires and focus groups (to be discussed in more detail in Section 3.3) which allow for the collection of predominantly qualitative data. However, some of the data-collection procedures make use of numerically based indices to supplement the qualitative data-sets.

The present study has the school itself as the natural context in which the investigation is rooted. Thus the underpinnings of the research design in this study may be located in the 'naturalistic paradigm' (Durrheim, 1999, p. 42). This approach attempts to explain the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action. Naturalistic inquiry in this paradigm is a "non-manipulative, unobtrusive and non-controlling form of qualitative research that is open to whatever emerges in the research setting" (Durrheim, 1999, p. 48). Naturalistic inquiry can be contrasted to more positivistic research approaches which are usually concerned with gathering information about social facts in an objective manner and making use of predominantly quantitative research indices.

The link between qualitative research and a naturalistic research paradigm is highlighted in the following quote from Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p. 2):

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.

Commitment to understanding human phenomena in context, as they are lived, is foundational within the broad research tradition of interpretive analysis. In essence, interpretive analyses attempt to describe, explain and understand the lived experiences of people. This tradition relies on knowledge from the 'inside' which includes starting with and developing analyses from the view points of the experiencing persons. Such studies aim to capture the worlds of people by describing their situations, thoughts, feelings and actions and by relying on portraying the research participants' lives and voices (Charmaz, 1995). Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) note that many different analytic research traditions come under the umbrella of interpretive analysis, for example phenomenology (Kruger, 1979 in *ibid.*), thematic content analysis (Smith, 1992 in *ibid.*), and grounded theory (Charmaz, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

The present study aims to explore the notion of peer counselling from the viewpoints of all its participants and non-participants. The study does not approach the study with preconceived notions of its functioning, but is instead open to discovering the nature of the peer counselling programme from a number of different perspectives. The research design therefore reflects a naturalistic and interpretive focus in its approach to the research questions, its data-collection procedures, and the analysis of the data. A discussion of the data-analysis schedule which naturally follows from a discussion of the study's research design will be found in section 3.4 of this chapter.

Two integrative aspects of the study's research design, namely that of case study research and evaluative methodology, are discussed below.

### **3.2.1 Case Study Research**

Case studies are intensive investigations of individuals, organisations, communities and/or social policies (Lindegger, 1999). Case studies are usually descriptive in nature and provide rich information about individuals or particular situations. As such, case studies are frequently a form of naturalistic inquiry whereby the researcher bases his/her observations within the naturally occurring research setting. Related to this, case studies also follow the interpretive tradition of research - seeing the situation through the eyes of participants - rather than the more quantitative paradigm, though this need not always be the case (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Case studies may be a step to action. They begin in the world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to such use as staff or individual self-development, for intra-institutional development, formative evaluation, and educational policy making (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Robert Stake (1983 in *ibid.*) argues that case studies contribute both theoretically and pragmatically in educational research.

The research aims and objectives in the present study include evaluating one particular peer counselling programme at a local secondary school. This includes gathering information from the school principal, the school counsellor, the teachers, the learners, and the peer counsellors. Whilst the topic of peer counselling in the literature has been explored in Chapter Two, it does not form a basis on which hypotheses and theories are derived in the present study. Rather, this study takes the school and its peer counselling programme as the unit of study. The information that arises from the collected data is explored, and meaning sought in the context of the specific research setting. Specific recommendations may be made to the school in this study. Some findings may be generalised to other South African secondary schools, however this is not the central aim of the study.

### **3.2.2 Evaluation Methodology**

Evaluation methodology tracks the efficacy of social programmes in human and social terms (Potter, 1999). The kinds of programmes most commonly evaluated are those aimed at educational or social development. One purpose of evaluation



research is to analyse the ways in which those involved in social programmes go about their work, the issues they deal with, and the manner in which they confront these issues (Potter, 1999). The central goal of programme evaluation is more practical than it is theoretical: it attempts to answer specific practical questions about social programmes and their development. These questions normally focus on programme implementation and outcomes, as well as on the quality of service provided. According to Peters and Sherzer (1969), evaluation of guidance is the process by which judgements are made about whether the goals of guidance are being met. In their opinion, evaluation of guidance seeks to determine the value of guidance programmes. The practical nature of evaluation is captured by Morrison who defines evaluation as “the provision of information about specified issues upon which judgements are based and from which decisions for action are taken (1993 in Cohen et al., 2000, p. 2).

Evaluation research can differ in its focus. Formative evaluation focuses on the process of programme implementation, in order to inform programme decisions. The evaluator also attempts to identify aspects of the programme that are working well, aspects of the programme which are problematic, and aspects of the programme requiring modification or improvement (Patton, 1995; Potter, 1999). Summative evaluation is more concerned with determining whether the outcomes, effects or impact of the programme are being achieved through the use of observation and/or measurement. Potter (1999) observes that, in practice, these different forms of evaluation research are often combined in a single evaluation design.

The present study draws from both forms of evaluation research in attempting to assess the impact of the programme on the various school levels. Cohen et al., (2000) cite work by Merriam and Sturman who specify an evaluative case study approach with the aim of not only providing an estimation of the programme’s success or lack thereof, but being able to answer questions such as “why?” and “how?” the programme was successful or unsuccessful. With regard to the present peer counselling programme, these questions may lead to a number of potentially useful recommendations.

In summary, the research aims and objectives of the present study are concerned with the impact of the peer counselling programme on the school as well as the assessment of those aspects of the programme that are or are not working well. The use of interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups as data-collection tools are means through by which the research aims may be achieved.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES**

What follows below is a description of the research tools devised and used in the present study, as well as the rationale for using these particular research methods.

#### **3.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews**

According to Robson (1996, p. 229) the “rich and highly illuminating information” produced by qualitative research can be obtained through interviewing research participants in order to assess their beliefs, attitudes, values and knowledge surrounding the research topic. Interviews range from the formal interview, based on mostly closed and fixed questions, to the informal interview where the interviewer raises key issues in a conversational style. A common middle ground between these two approaches is the semi-structured interview which was utilised in this study.

It has often been claimed that the qualitative research interview lacks objectivity, due partly to the human interaction inherent in the interview situation (Kvale, 1996). However, within a naturalistic paradigm, the presence of a subjective researcher is integral to the research procedure. In addition Kitwood (1977 cited in Cohen & Manion, 1989) writes that in an interpersonal encounter people are more likely to disclose aspects of themselves, their thoughts, feelings and values, than they would in a less human situation. In learning about the development of the peer counselling programme in the present study, it was felt that an interview with the programme developer would allow the greatest scope and depth of investigation to inform further evaluative research.

Interviews were conducted separately with the school principal and the school counsellor regarding the peer counselling programme. These interviews involved gaining an insight into the general characteristics of the peer counselling programme as well as an understanding of the perceived functions of and goals for the programme within the particular school context. Abu-Rasain and Williams (1999), Elliot and Lambourn (1999), Erhard (1999), Shiner (1999), are some peer counselling researchers who suggest the use of interviews with the programme facilitators and school staff involved in the programme regarding some of the above-mentioned issues.

### **3.3.2 Teachers' Questionnaire**

Both teachers' and learners' questionnaires were developed to assess knowledge and perceptions of the peer counselling programme. These questionnaires provide space for both closed and open-ended questions. Whilst perhaps not reaching the depths of discussion that interviews might, questionnaires were seen as a time efficient and economical tool to collect evaluative information from a number of teachers and learners in the school. Cohen and Manion (1989) argue that because questionnaires are anonymous, they provide reliable information. One of the disadvantages is that for people with limited literacy, some misunderstanding of questions may result which cannot be clarified. In addition, the respondents' answers cannot be probed for further information.

A semi-structured questionnaire was constructed to assess the involvement of the wider school staff in the programme (see Appendix F). Many of the peer counselling research studies suggest the utility of questioning teachers about their views of the programme. Abu-Rasain and Williams (1999) for instance questioned teachers on the following: their attitude towards the programme; their observations of the effects of the programme on the students and the peer counsellors as well as the wider school climate; what qualities they think peer counsellors should possess; what the aims of the programme are; and finally their recommendations for the improvement of the programme. Henriksen (1991) also aimed a staff survey at the teachers' level of understanding of peer counselling; their experience with peer helpers; and their opinions about its effects on the school, including their attitudes

toward whether the programme should continue. These two studies in particular were useful in constructing the questions in the teachers' questionnaire in the present study.

All the teachers at the school (n=19) were asked to complete the questionnaire. Fourteen teachers' questionnaires were returned. A major aim in this questionnaire was to assess the teachers' knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of the peer counselling programme. The questionnaire aimed to encourage a reflective process in which the teachers were encouraged to share their views and recommendations regarding this programme at their school.

### **3.3.3 Peer Counsellors' Log-sheets**

The peer counsellors in the present study were asked to keep individual log-sheets (see Appendix D) of their interactions with learners in their role as peer counsellors for a school quarter (approximately 12 weeks). The rationale for utilizing peer counselling log-sheets can be related to several studies which incorporated the use of log-sheets (Abu-Rasain & Williams, 1999; Akita and Mooney, 1982 in Morrill et al., 1987; Diver-Stamnes, 1991). Abu-Rasain and Williams (1999) utilized peer counselling logs to assess the demographics of the population being served as well as the clients' reasons for participating in peer counselling. Some of the categories included were academic problems, making friends, relationships with teachers, family issues, shyness, isolation and leisure time. Other concerns listed on peer counselling log-sheets included school and academic issues, gang-related activities and violence, death and dying, racial tension, depression, and stress (Diver-Stamnes, 1991). The above studies were useful as a guide for deciding on the variables to be included on the log-sheets for the peer counsellors.

Diver-Stamnes (1991) recommends the use of peer counselling logs, asserting that this method will provide a strong portrait of the impact of the peer counselling programme on the school community. The author also argues that this method is preferable to observing actual peer counselling sessions which may be affected by the nature of direct observation. Log-sheets are therefore seen as a robust way to

evaluate the impact of the programme without interrupting that which would naturally occur in the peer counselling situation.

The rationale for using log-sheets was thus to gain an understanding of the issues that the peer counsellors are encountering in their role. For each learner consulting the peer counsellor, counsellors were asked to place their client's concern within one or more of the following categories: school concerns (including study concerns and interactions with teachers); future plans (career planning); opposite sex relationships; peer relationships (relationships with friends/other learners); pregnancy; HIV/AIDS; new school issues; family issues; and finally alcohol and/or drugs. Space was provided for the peer counsellors to add other concerns they encountered in their role and not covered by the categories listed on the log-sheets. Five log-sheets were returned with a total of 36 peer counselling interactions logged by these peer counsellors.

#### **3.3.4 Learner Questionnaire**

For the purposes of this study, it was decided that data collected from the learners' understandings, perceptions and experiences of the peer counselling system would provide a rich and vital source of information. According to Cowie and Sharp (1996) it is important to have some method for evaluating client satisfaction whilst still maintaining the confidentiality of the client/counsellor relationship. In fact Carr (1989 in Carr, Yanishewski & de Rosenroll, 1989) argues that examining the impact of peer counselling on the clients of peer counsellors is one of the most needed and useful areas for peer counselling related research. Cowie and Sharp (1996) caution that while it would be very time-consuming to follow up everyone at a particular school, following up a random sample of all pupils at the school or all pupils in a particular year group is a viable research option.

There are a number of peer counselling evaluation studies that use student questionnaires/surveys (Abu-Rasain & Williams, 1999; Elliot & Lambourn, 1999; Erhard, 1999; Fink et al. cited in de Rosenroll, 1989; Frisz & Lane, 1987; Henriksen, 1991; Morey et al., 1993). Most of these instruments were designed to collect demographic data from the users of the service as well as to assess how the



users of the peer counselling services evaluated the service they received. Frisz and Lane (1987) for instance handed an anonymous questionnaire to users of the service regarding some of the following: how they learnt of the service; their perceptions of the peer counsellors; whether the peer counsellors helped them deal effectively with their concern/s; and whether they would use the service again and/or recommend it to their friends. Their perceptions of the peer counsellors were rated on a Likert-scale (Kanjee, 1999) according to the peer counsellors' perceived receptivity, competence, ability to listen, and to understand students' concerns. Additional comments about the programme were also encouraged regarding the programme. Abu-Rasain and Williams (1999) and Morey et al., (1989) also included items related to the learners' feelings of safety and confidence in speaking to the peer counsellors (i.e. assessing confidentiality issues).

Once constructed, a pilot study of the learners' questionnaire was administered to a Grade 8 class in another local secondary all-girls school with a peer counselling programme in operation. Cohen et al., (2000) stress that the wording of questionnaires is of paramount importance and thus pre-testing is crucial to its success. The final semi-structured learners' questionnaire (see Appendix E) in this study comprised two sections. Section A is a general section in which the learners are questioned regarding the problems and concerns that they seek help for at their school. They are also questioned regarding their knowledge and perceptions of the peer counselling programme at the school. Questions pertaining to being able to contact a peer counsellor, the issues/concerns they would feel confident taking to a peer counsellor, as well as the reasons for not seeing a peer counsellor (for those learners who had not seen a peer counsellor), were explored in this section. Section B of this questionnaire was to be completed by those learners who had approached and spoken to a peer counsellor at the school. The reason/s for seeing a peer counsellor, how many times they had met with a peer counsellor, and whether they had chosen to see a peer counsellor themselves or had been referred by another person were explored in this section.

The learners' experiences of seeing a peer counsellor were explored through the use of both open-ended questions and Likert-scale rating questions. Likert-scale questions consist of statements or questions followed by a rating scale where



respondents indicate the degree to which they agree/disagree with the item. Kanjee (1999) argues that rating style questions are useful for measuring attitudes and perceptions as they can capture subtle gradations of opinion. Likert-scale questions on the learners' questionnaire included questions regarding the perceived helpfulness of their contact with the peer counsellor, their ability to be open with the peer counsellor, their feelings of safety in speaking to the peer counsellor, and whether they would recommend the service to their friends. Space was also provided for the learners to make recommendations regarding the peer counselling programme at their school.

#### ***3.3.4.1 The Learners' Sample***

Whilst it was beyond the scope of this study to administer questionnaires to all the learners in the school, the sampling strategy devised aimed to provide a representative sample of the learners in the school. To achieve this end, it was decided to administer the questionnaire to one class in each grade at the school (from Grade 8 to 11). This study used a random sampling approach to choose the targeted class groups. The aim of utilizing this sampling strategy was to obtain a broad spread of learners' knowledge, experiences and attitudes related to the peer counselling programme. The counselling teachers were asked to randomly select one class from each grade. They administered the questionnaires in the counselling classes. There are approximately 30-35 learners in each of these classes. Some of the grades are streamed according to subject choice. A total of 111 usable learners' questionnaires were collected and utilized in this study.

#### **3.3.5 Focus-group with the Peer Counsellors**

An important research aim in the present study is to explore the opinions, feelings and observations of the peer counsellors themselves towards the programme and particularly its effect on them personally. According to Cohen et al. (2000) focus groups might be useful to triangulate with more traditional forms of interviewing, questionnaires and observations. Focus groups may also allow for a more flexible data-collection process as the interaction between the group participants is

observed whilst they discuss a topic supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1988 in Cohen et al., 2000).

The focus group was arranged to follow on from the other data-collection procedures in the study for the following reasons. The issues that had arisen from the other data-sets could be introduced for discussion with the peer counsellors. The peer counsellors would have the opportunity to provide their viewpoints on these topics and they would also have the chance to introduce new topics that had not arisen in the other data-sets. Finally, they would also be provided with the time to discuss further concerns they might have as well as to make recommendations on the running and potential improvement of the peer counselling programme.

A total of six of the eleven peer counsellors were present at the focus group which was held towards the end of the year. Many of the Grade 11's had finished their exams and were consequently absent from school on the day of the focus group.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the data collected in ones study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In the present study, the data consists of interview transcripts, questionnaires, log-sheets, and a transcribed focus group. The majority of the data was qualitative data based on written or transcribed language. Descriptive statistics were used to depict the numerically organised data through the use of frequencies, percentages and graphical representations.

An important aspect of the data analysis has been that it is 'inductive', which involves: "Immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions and interrelationships" and this "...begins by exploring genuinely open questions rather than testing theoretically derived (deductive) hypotheses" (Durrheim, 1999, p. 43).

The qualitative data in the study was analysed using a coding analysis schedule developed by Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) and will be described below. These researchers locate the

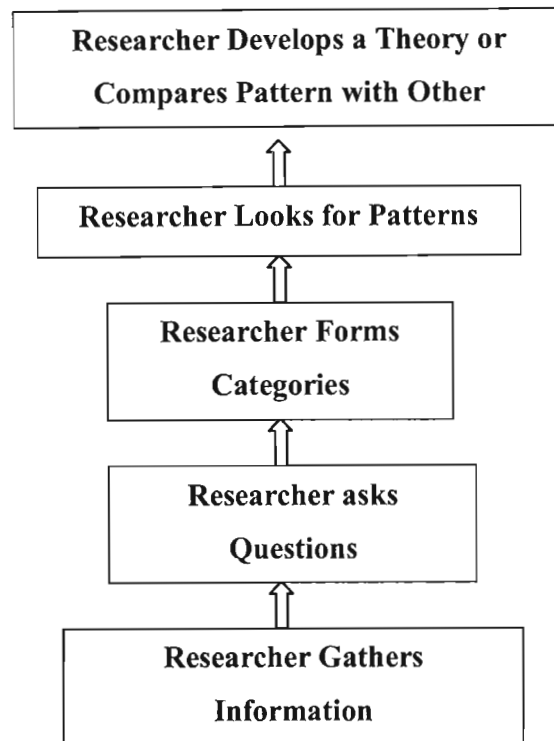
theoretical underpinnings of this coding schedule in the interpretive paradigm as discussed above and in section 3.2.

In essence, this process involves firstly familiarising oneself with the text in order to start making links. The researcher is constantly asking questions of the data. This usually involves immersing oneself in the data, which may include written transcripts, questionnaire responses, recorded observations and so forth.

Inducing themes and coding are the next steps which Terre Blanche and Kelly (1999) suggest. Coding is the process in which the researcher attributes labels to certain sections of the text. A code is described by Robson (1996) as a symbol applied to a group of words to classify or categorise them. “Codes are retrieval and organising devices that allow you to find and collect together all instances of a particular kind” (p. 385). Initially first level coding was attached to a group of words. This is frequently followed by secondary level coding where the initial groups are coded into a smaller number of patterns (Robson, 1996).

Thematizing involves discovering the organising principles that ‘naturally’ underlie the material (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). This is the opposite of a top-down approach where one makes use of pre-determined categories to analyse the text or data. Finally, the analysis leads to an interpretation of the findings. This is a written account of the phenomenon under study, in this case the peer counselling programme, which frequently uses thematic categories from the qualitative analysis as sub-headings.

There is much overlap between these data analysis steps discussed above and the grounded theory research approach for data analysis (Charmaz, 1995). The key similarity lies in the induction of themes and codes from the data itself. In the present study, theory emerged from the data and was not imposed on it. Figure 3.1 depicts how theory may be developed through such inductive data analysis models.



**Figure 3.1 The Inductive Mode of Research in a Qualitative Study**  
(from Creswell, 1994, p. 96)

Appendix G and H depict the themes and codes developed in the present study from analysing the learners' and teachers' questionnaires.

What follows below is a discussion of the ethical issues that are to be considered in collecting this data.

### **3.5 *ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS***

#### **3.5.1 Undertaking the Research**

Developments in the field of social science in recent years have been accompanied by a growing awareness of the attendant moral issues implicit in the work of social science researchers and of their need to meet their obligations with respect to those involved in, or affected by, their investigations (Cohen et al., 2000). According to

Bogdan and Biklen (1992), most academic specialities and professions have codes of ethics that set forth a number of guidelines and even rules to regulate the conduct of the members of these groups. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue that two issues dominate recent guidelines for ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm. These guidelines attempt to ensure firstly that subjects enter research projects voluntarily with an understanding of the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved, and secondly, that subjects are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive from their participation. The principle of informed consent arises from the subject's right to freedom and self-determination. This concept also includes the subject's right to refuse participation in the study or to withdraw from the study at any time if they so wish. The notion of informed consent was incorporated in two ways in this study. These will be briefly discussed below:

The principle of informed consent was applied to the initial stages of the research project; that is of access to the research institution where the research will take place, and the acceptance by those whose permission one needs before embarking on the task (Cohen et al., 2000). In the present study, access to the school was initiated by a phone call to the school counsellor followed by a letter detailing the nature of the study and intended research procedures (Appendix A). After this, the researcher met with the school counsellor and the school principal officially to provide further verbal and written information about the proposed study. The study's research proposal was also made available to the school. The school principal signed a consent form (Appendix B) stating the school's consent for this particular research to be conducted.

Secondly, informed consent was obtained from the teachers who would be completing the questionnaires. This consisted of requesting that the teachers complete a short questionnaire regarding the peer counselling programme at their school. The actual questionnaire contained an introductory page describing the proposed research, information about the researcher, and the intended use of the results of the study (see Appendix F). The anonymity of the questionnaires was also assured. This was felt to be important as the confidential nature of the questionnaires would possibly allow for more open and honest responses. It was

also expected to reduce any level of threat that the teachers might experience due to possible concern about how their responses could be viewed by other staff members. As such, the teachers were asked not to put their names on the completed questionnaires and to place their completed questionnaires in a confidential box in the staff room to which only the researcher had access. Cake was provided in the staff room as a gesture of the researcher's appreciation for the time and effort the teachers had provided in completing the questionnaire.

The informed consent of the learners was also sought in the study. According to Cohen et al. (2000) the informed consent procedures for asking minors to participate in research involves consulting and seeking permission from those adults responsible for the prospective subjects and also approaching the young people themselves. The adults in question can be, for example, parents, teachers or youth leaders, depending on the research context.

In this study, the school principal and school counsellor were first approached for permission to collect data from the learners. Once this was gained, a letter was sent home to the parents of those learners who were asked to participate in the study. The aim of this was to inform the parents or guardians of the study and to provide them with the opportunity to raise any queries and/or objections to the intended research (see Appendix C). A two-week interval was allowed from the time this letter was sent to when the learners were approached for their consent to participate in the research. The learners' informed consent was then sought. On the actual questionnaire, the learners were provided with information about the research aims, how the information would be used and, importantly, the confidential nature of the study. The learners were asked to tick a box on the first page of the questionnaire if they decided to complete the questionnaire as an indication of their consent to participate (see Appendix E). Each member of the participating classes was provided with a small chocolate in thanks for their participation. The learners were asked to place their completed anonymous questionnaires in the confidential box. They were also assured that only the researcher would have direct access to the completed questionnaires.



Of concern was that the content of the information requested in the questionnaire would raise potentially sad or distressing emotions in the learners. They were therefore encouraged by the school counsellor to approach herself and/or the peer counsellors should they need to talk about any of these concerns.

### **3.5.2 Conclusion**

The present study concerns an evaluation of a peer counselling programme. Strike (1990 in Cohen et al., 2000), offers two broad ethical principles which may form the basis of further considerations in the field of evaluation. These are the principle of benefit maximisation, and the principle of equal respect. The former principle requires researchers to identify a suitable population and the benefits for that population, as well as the benefits that they wish to maximise for that population. The latter principle requires respecting the equal worth of people.

This study recognises that its evaluation of the school's peer counselling programme is an opportunity to bring about some level of benefit "maximisation" (Cohen et al., 2000) to the learners and the wider school context through a number of affirming observations and recommendations.

To conclude the section on ethics in this study, it can be said that honest, sensitive and constructive feedback to the school in this study provided a suitable ending to the process of this particular research at this school. Indeed, maximising the utility and effectiveness of the present programme was one of the more important and practical aims of the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a written account of the results of the data collected in this study. The chapter is organised according to the research questions listed in Chapter 3, section 3.1.2. In essence, the study seeks to investigate the needs and issues which the learners at the school in this study may appreciate or need help with. The peer counselling programme is evaluated systemically through the comments, opinions, and perceptions of the organisers of the programme, the teachers, the learners and the peer counsellors. The respondent's comments are noted in italics in this chapter. The broader aim of the study is to speculate about the efficacy of similar peer help programmes functioning in other South African secondary schools.

### **4.2 THE ROLE OF PEER COUNSELLING AT THE SCHOOL**

A central research aim in this study was to define the functions of a particular peer counselling programme within its specific context, namely the school at which the programme was developed. Assessing the effectiveness of a particular peer help programme will by its nature require an investigation into the needs, concerns, and issues that this programme aims to address, as well as those needs identified by the learners. This section draws on items from the learner's questionnaire regarding their perceived helping needs and identifies those concerns for which help is available at the school. In addition this section makes use of recorded and transcribed interview data obtained from the school principal and the school counsellor regarding the context and perceived role of peer counselling in their school.

#### **4.2.1 Background to the Development of the Peer Counselling Programme**

According to the school counsellor and the school principal, the idea of developing a peer counselling programme arose out of the recognition of the school itself as a support system for their learners. It is recognised that many of the learners have difficult life circumstances,

and the teachers and the peer counsellors wish to offer support for these. The humanitarian emphasis at the school is reflected in their motto: "Respect yourself, Respect others". Assisting, supporting and motivating the learners and encouraging their respect for themselves and others is seen as integral to the school's ethos.

#### ***4.2.1.1 Issues Facing the Learners Attending the School-the School Principal's and Counsellor's Observations***

According to the school counsellor, personal, family, and boyfriend issues were claimed to be some of the central issues and concerns facing the girls at the school. Personal issues included issues of low self-esteem, a frequently disadvantaged economic background, and related to these, a lack of motivation regarding future hopes and plans. In addition, the school counsellor referred to a "Western mind-set" in the educational sphere which can also pose some adjustment difficulties for the learners who come from different cultural backgrounds. Family issues were strongly linked to socio-economic problems. The school counsellor said:

*If you're dealing with family, it's mainly socio-economic problems. It's the fact that they're orphaned, it's the fact that their fathers beat them, the fact that their mums are abused. Alcoholism, drugs, um you know, people being murdered and basically trauma counselling. Rapes... That's the family side, (and) indicative of their socio-economic backgrounds.*

Opposite sex relationships were emphasised as potentially the greatest issue and challenge facing the learners. The school counsellor stated:

*But then on the boyfriend issue, it's massive-massive! Because as soon as they start dating they're expected to sleep with them and then they (the boyfriends) double-date..they have two or three girlfriends each..*

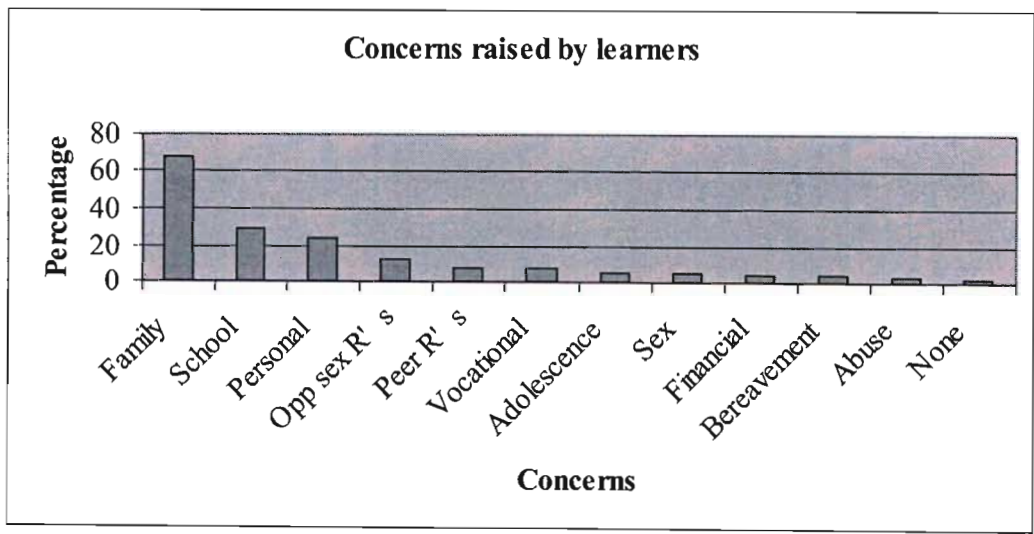
The likelihood of pregnancy and resulting abortions was cited as a consequence of sexual activity at this age, in addition to the reality of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STD's) and HIV/AIDS from having unprotected sex.

In summary, the school counsellor highlighted the predominance of personal and relationship issues as impacting on the learners. Family relationships pose frequent concerns whilst

boyfriend relationships are seen as posing the greatest immediate “threat” to these female learners particularly in terms of the consequences of unprotected sexual relations. Finally, socio-economic factors are perceived as impacting pervasively on the learners academic potential and their psycho-social functioning.

**4.2.1.2. Issues Facing the Learners Attending the School-the Learners’ Perspective**

Chapter 3 describes the data analysis that was used in this study. In essence, the written data from the questionnaires was coded into groups to categorise a broad concept within the questions (first level coding). During second level coding, these codes were sub-coded into a smaller number of pattern or themes. Thus qualitative thematic analysis of the learners’ questionnaires (Section A, Question1; see Appendix E) revealed a number of themes that provide insight into those concerns for which the learners expressed the need for help, and particularly those concerns for which the school offers help. Who or where learners would go to at school if they need help, was also explored. Please note that since the learners could provide more than one stated concern for this question, the total is more than 100%. Figure 4.1 depicts these stated concerns together. Appendix G lists the themes and codes developed in this study.



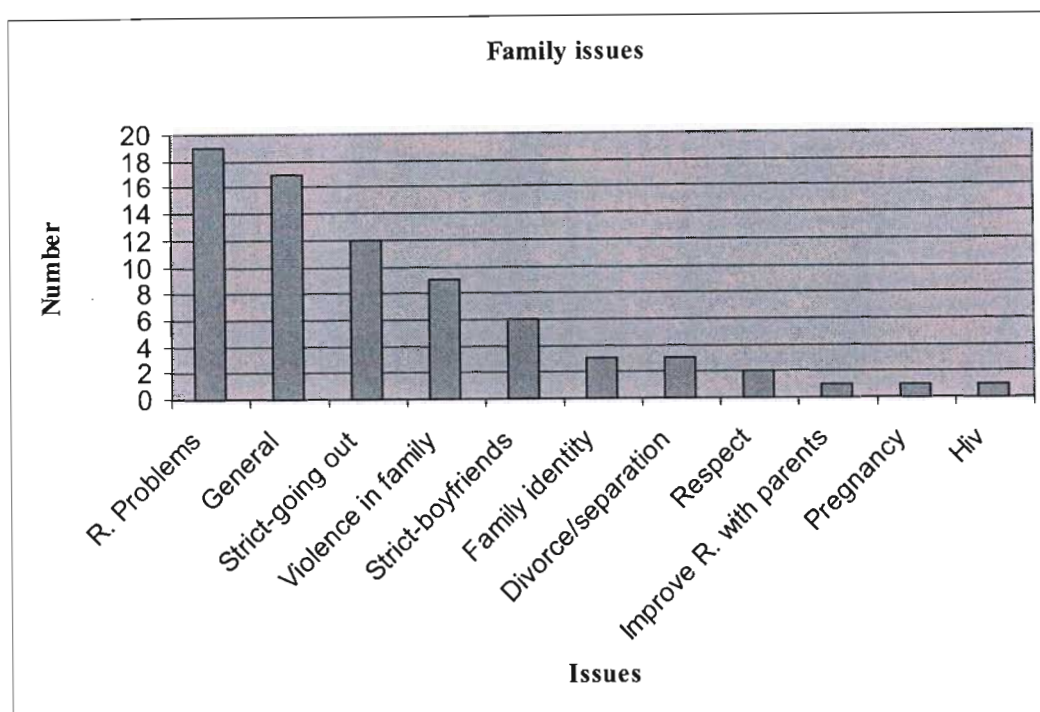
**Figure 4.1 The Learners’ Stated Concerns**

The greatest concern for which the learners reported needing help, was issues related to their families. Out of a total of 111 learners, approximately 67.5% of the learners cited a family issue or concern for which they would like help. The next highest concern for which the learners reported needing help were academic and schoolwork related concerns with 28.8% of the learners citing difficulties with school related work. Personal/ emotional issues that learners would like help with followed at approximately 23.4%. Boyfriend relationship difficulties/concerns followed at approximately 12.6%. Peer relationships, vocational (career-related concerns) and general adolescent developmental concerns followed at 7.2% and 5.4% respectively. Less frequently mentioned concerns were sex, bereavement, financial and abuse concerns. The least frequent response was “no problems” with only two of the learners stating the absence of any problems for which they would like help

These results corroborate the school counsellor’s and school principal’s opinions that family relationships and personal issues are frequent concerns amongst the learners. School concerns are the second highest stated concern by the learners. This includes difficulties with learning, bad behaviour at school, general school difficulties, and concern with academic performance.

As mentioned above, the highest reported concern was that of family issues. Figure 4.2 displays the sub-themes that constitute the broader theme of family concerns and issues.





**Figure 4.2 Family Concerns**

The highest family concern relates to relationship problems in the family. These include difficulties with certain family members, arguments in the family, and feeling uncared for by the family. These difficulties appear to range from minor disputes and arguments in the family, to more severe family difficulties. One learner indicated her response to family difficulties:

*Well it's about my health, cause everytime if I had argued with someone at home, I just take the overdose. Cause I think that's the solutions for me (meaning killing myself).*

Some learners expressed their difficulty dealing with their parents' imminent divorce, or separation. Related to relationship problems in the family, is the theme of violence and abuse in the family, with 12% of the family concerns comprising this theme. This includes abuse, rape, and "fighting" in the family.

The presence of HIV and pregnancy in the family as a perceived difficulty, was only mentioned by one learner



Two central themes within the broad family concerns, is that of parental/family strictness and/or lack of understanding regarding their child’s need to spend time outside the family socialising with their friends. Approximately 24% of the learners who mentioned family concerns, wanted help with the issue of family/parental strictness regarding a perceived lack of social autonomy. As one learner stated:

*I would like help with my parents, to be more understanding so that I am a teenager and give me little time to enjoy myself.*

Some learners complained that their parents do not give them enough freedom to go out and some learners criticized their parents’ lack of trust regarding their going out with friends. Three learners felt that their parents don’t understand “teenagers need” for a social life. Closely related to this is the learner’s complaint that their family/parents are too strict regarding the issue of having boyfriends.

**4.2.1.3 Concerns/ issues for which Help is Available to the Learners**

The table below depicts those issues for which the learners felt help was available at their school. The data below is derived from the learners’ questionnaires (See Appendix E; Section A, Question 2a and 2b). The results were obtained using thematic analysis of the learners’ answers (described above in section 4.2.1.2 and in Chapter 3). Once again, please note that since the learners could give more than one concern or issue for which help is available at the school, the total is more than 100%

**Table 4.1 Concerns/ Issues for which the School Offers Help**

<b>Concern/issue which school offers help for</b>	<b>No. of learners N=111</b>	<b>% of learners</b>
School-related	24	21.6
Sex/Hiv/Pregnancy/Abortions	19	17.1
Family/home relationships	17	15.3
General; anything	14	12.6
Friendship relationships	11	9.9
Boyfriend relationships	10	9
Adolescence	6	5.4
Don't know	5	4.5
Nothing/none	5	4.5
Don't trust help	5	4.5
Don't have problems	3	2.7
Never asked for help	3	2.7
Financial	3	2.7
Careers	3	2.7
Abuse/rape	3	2.7
Bad behaviour	2	1.8
Health issues	2	1.8
Stress	2	1.8
Relationships in general	2	1.8

School-related concerns were the most commonly recognised issues or concerns for which help is available at school (21.6%). These include study issues or problems, school work and performance, and subject choice. The next most commonly mentioned concern relates to matters of “sex, pregnancy, abortions” which may indicate that the learners perceive the school to be effective in providing information and help for such matters. Family/home relationships were the third most commonly mentioned theme at 15.3%. 12.6% of the learners in this study stated that help is available for “anything” at school versus 4.5% of learners who felt that no help was available at the school for their concerns. One learner’s

response indicates the broad range of issues and/or concerns for which help is perceived to be available at school:

*Relationships, family, career, study, life, health issues, pregnancy, death, friends.*

School help for friendship and boyfriend relationships was also recognised by 9.9% and 9% of the learners respectively. Less common responses that are nonetheless noteworthy include some learners stating that they don't trust the help available. School assistance for financial and career matters was also mentioned. Help for more personal matters such as abuse, bad behaviour, health issues and stress was also perceived to be available at the school. Finally, singular responses include that help is available for motivation, bereavement and personal problems at the school.

Family, friendship, and boyfriend relationships together (at a cumulative total of 34,2% of the learners) represent the highest concerns for which learners perceive school help as being available. This echoes the previous results that learners consider family issues to be their main concern for which they would like help. The second most commonly reported concern for which help at school is perceived to be available, are school-related concerns. This correlates with the results of the previous question, where learners indicated that school-related concerns were the second highest concern for which they would like help. Of interest is the extent to which learners perceived school-help to be available for sexual matters, including sex, HIV, pregnancy, and abortions. A number of the learners therefore appeared to recognise the school's support, education or specific help for sexual matters.

The learners were asked to indicate the sources of help at the school. This information was drawn from Section A, question 2b of their questionnaires (Appendix E). Table 4.2 below, has tabulated this information.

**Table 4.2 Places, People and Helping Contexts in the School Environment**

Sources of school-help	No. of students	% of students, N=111
Peer Counsellors	56	50.4
Counselling teachers	44	39.6
Teachers in general	43	38.7
Friends	11	9.9
The counselling room	8	7.2
Teachers-specific	7	6.3
Sister/nurse at school	7	6.3
School Principal	4	3.6
No-one	4	3.6
Peer counselling groups	3	2.7
Person you can trust	3	2.7
Professional counsellor	2	2.7
Other	10	9

Peer counsellors are perceived by approximately half of the learners as being an important source of help. It should be noted, however, that the term “peer counselling” was mentioned in the introduction of the learners’ questionnaires. This reference to peer counselling may have heightened the learners’ awareness of this helping programme in the school and thereby increased the extent to which learners claimed peer counselling to be a personal helping resource available to them at the school. The counselling teachers and the school teachers were the next most frequently identified sources of help available to the learners at their school, at 39.6% and 38.7% respectively. Friends were the next highest source of help mentioned by 9.9% of the learners in this study. Less frequently mentioned sources of help available include: the counselling room (7.2%); the sister/nurse who visits the school (6.3%); the school principal (3.6%); and the peer counselling groups (2.7%). ‘Other’ refers to singular sources of help, such as, a prefect and “someone who is older”, and the learner’s sister, whilst singular references to places at school where one can find help include the

counselling room (the peer counselling room), the tennis court, the library, and the notice board at school.

Peer counsellors, the counselling teachers, and other teachers in the school are therefore seen as the most “available” for help with the learners’ stated concerns.

#### ***4.2.1.4 The Role of Counselling and Life Skills in the School Context:***

The counselling and life skills component of the learners’ school experience is seen as crucial, with the school counsellor expressing the opinion that it is vitally important for the learners’ social, emotional, and academic functioning. This is seen as especially pertinent in the light of family structures collapsing and the lack of role models in many of the learners’ lives. In referring to the perceived significance of the counselling component in the school context, the school counsellor states:

*..especially in the light of the family structures crumbling and having no role-models and no moms coming in and we’re not talking promoting one faith above the other but obviously you have a spiritual side too. They’ve got to connect with that...they have to, or else they’re left with one big brain and nothing else..*

The school principal emphasises the following life skills that are promoted in the school: assisting the learners to start looking at the world of work; enhancing their self-esteem; encouraging them to achieve; teaching them membership and commitment skills; and helping them to think responsibly and to consider the consequences of their actions. The school aims to help the learners’ to develop life skills as well as academic skills in equipping them for life within and outside of school. School is seen as a support system that is an extension of the child’s home. The school counsellor also reported that the life skills and counselling programme is given high priority in the school context. Referring to the life skills aspect of the school, the school counsellor stated that:

*...I mean our management totally supports what we do. Totally. They are 100% behind us and give us priority.*

Of interest is the school counsellor’s opinion that her school’s positive and encouraging attitude to guidance and counselling in the school is not common. In fact, she argued that many schools do not have a life skills component, and that those schools with life skills incorporated into their curriculum frequently do not value this component of the learners’

education. This “under-valuing” of guidance in the schools is, in the school counsellor’s opinion, frequently echoed in the learner’s negative perceptions of guidance in such schools. Boys especially, she argues, may be less receptive to guidance and counselling in schools. The school counsellor describes this lack of attention to the life skills in schools in the following statement:

*So you see if management, if management doesn’t get someone who is steering the ship, um, and has a vision for where this counselling department is going to go, it’s not going to go anywhere.*

The above section emphasises the school’s positive attitude towards counselling and guidance in the school environment. However, other schools do, not necessarily share this affirming attitude to the counselling component apparent in the school in this study. The school in the present study not only viewed counselling in a positive light, but also as a necessity in preparing and equipping the learners for their lives outside of the school context.

#### **4.2.2 The Development of the Peer Counselling Programme**

##### ***4.2.2.1 Rationale for Implementing a Peer Counselling Programme***

The above discussion highlights the school’s approach to counselling and life skill programmes in the school. It is out of such a context that the peer counselling programme appears to have originated. According to the school counsellor, the rationale for implementing a peer-led programme at the school in this study was that the learners required additional support beyond that which the frequently overburdened teachers and school counsellors could provide. In addition, it was noted that the learners at the school frequently required long-term care, that is, not only the short-term/crisis counselling that the school teachers/counsellors provided. It was also recognised that, although the learners could be referred to other helping agencies and professional groups in more “severe” cases, peer counsellors could also provide on-going support and encouragement to learners who needed it. An example was provided where a learner whose father had died was linked to a peer counsellor who had experienced a similar loss. As the school counsellor put it:

*..it’s the more long-term being a sister, an older sister, it’s support.*



Another motivation for implementing the peer counselling programme in this school was that peer counsellors are of similar ages to the learners they see in their peer counselling role. It was thought that this would aid the helping process as peers can frequently relate better to each other than to adults, by whom they may sometimes feel intimidated. In addition the school counsellor also recognised that the peer counsellors often come from difficult backgrounds themselves, and thus can relate to a number of the issues that are brought to them in their helping role.

The value of the peer counselling programme in providing additional support to the learners is central. Furthermore, the Grade 11 peer counsellors were not seen as a “problem-solving group” as evident in the school counsellor’s observation that peer counsellors are not equipped themselves with the necessary emotional and social skills for solving the problems that many of the learners face in their lives. This, she believes, takes the pressure off the peer counsellors in that they are not expected to solve problems, but rather to provide support and a “listening ear”.

The school counsellor noted that the peer counselling programme is potentially an opportunity to train a group of learners to use their natural resources such as kindness, compassion, and listening skills, as well as their networking skills. In this way, peer counsellors are afforded with the opportunity to learn and grow as people by learning to give to others. As the school counsellor stated:

*They (the peer counsellors) have compassion and kindness,.. and listening skills is a universal thing that people need to have. So I see it as actually as a people resource, and I see it as an opportunity to train eleven people to network. Because one day they’re going to go into their communities and they won’t know the answer, but hopefully they’ll know how to find them.*

It was therefore felt that the peer counselling training would be beneficial to learners in their present and future lives, and more broadly, these skills could be used to enrich the peer counsellors’ communities.

The rationale for developing the programme is closely linked to the programme’s goals. The discussion above identifies these as: providing long-term care for a number of learners who need this kind of support. Therefore, increasing the level of counselling and support-giving in

the school may be seen as a goal in this peer counselling programme. In addition, training a group of people in “life skills” such as listening skills, teamwork and networking is another goal of the programme. Ultimately the long-term goal is to enrich the communities that these girls live in through the skills that they have acquired as peer counsellors.

#### ***4.2.2.2 Implementation of the Peer Counselling Programme***

The school counsellor’s idea of implementing a peer counselling programme was said to be influenced by a closely situated all-girls secondary government school with a peer counselling programme in operation. This school counsellor proposed the implementation of the programme which was agreed to by the school management team. The peer counselling programme in this study began tentatively near the end of 2000 and operated on a voluntary basis where Grade 11’s could volunteer as peer counsellors. In 2001, learners who wished to be peer counsellors volunteered themselves and were then voted for by the Grade 10’s, 11’s and 12’s. Based on this, ten peer counsellors in Grade 11 were chosen, whilst the five Grade 12 peer counsellors from the year before were also involved. The Grade 12 peer counsellors also became a “managing committee” with administrative responsibilities, such as keeping an information board in the school foyer up to date with information regarding careers, helpful contact numbers, and so on. The school teachers were not involved in the process of selecting the peer counsellors. The school counsellor described the implementation of the programme as something that evolved rather than a pre-planned procedure. In hindsight it seems that the learners were not widely consulted in the initial planning phase of the peer counselling programme. It is possible that this may have influenced an insufficient awareness and knowledge of the programme later.

#### ***4.2.2.3 The Training, Supervision and Activities of the Peer Counsellors***

The process of training the peer counsellors in their role included meeting once a week in the first term. The school counsellor who implemented the programme also coordinated the peer counsellors’ training. The purpose of the initial training sessions was to introduce these learners to life skills and basic counselling skills, such as listening skills and body language. Role plays, in which the peer counsellors enacted counselling situations with each other whilst the others observed and provided feedback, was also part of this training in the first term. How to access and relay career-related information was also included in these weekly

sessions. No specific peer counselling training resources (such as a peer counselling training kit) guided these sessions.

From the second term, these weekly training sessions evolved into weekly meetings in which the Grade 11 and Grade 12 peer counsellors met once a week to discuss how things were going and whether there were any problems. The following week would also be discussed in terms of any new career-related information that the school counsellor had received. Other plans were also discussed, such as what discussion groups the peer counsellors would run, what training they needed, and so on.

Supervision opportunities were not provided in these weekly meetings due to issues of confidentiality. However, if a peer counsellor had problems with a case and was unsure of how to manage it, they could consult with the school counsellor directly for private supervision. However the peer counsellors could discuss hypothetical case scenarios in this group setting, for example, what to do if a child wants to run away from home.

The school counsellor also spoke of a more “hidden” supervisory purpose to these meetings, namely that of testing morals. She conveyed the importance of ensuring that peer counsellors would not provide unsound advice. The quote below illustrates this point:

*It's also testing morals. I know it's a bit of a hidden agenda, but I want to make sure that what's coming out of them is good and sound...so we try and encourage them to find a core set of values that they all agree on... I mean, you don't want them to promote dating actually, because they're saying, 'go ahead-sleep with the guy'*

From this it is clear that the school counsellor did not discretely separate the process of training and supervision.

Apart from spending one-on-one counselling time with the learners in their role as peer counsellors, the peer counsellors have also regularly led discussion groups that are open to the learners and advertised in advance. Topics that the peer counsellors have encountered in their time with the learners have been included in these discussion groups. The topics of the groups were discussed in the preceding weekly meetings with an emphasis on the underlying values that the peer counsellors may promote.

The topics raised have been mostly controversial (for instance: “You can’t live without a man!”) and aimed to inspire the learners to participate in the groups. Other topics for these discussion groups have included one about family life, one’s hopes for the future, Women’s Day, and so on. The groups have been held in the school counsellor’s classroom and about four or five peer counsellors have usually led the discussions. No teachers or school counsellors were present at these discussion group meetings. Frequently, learners were encouraged at these meetings, to visit the peer counsellors on a one-on-one basis. About five learners would usually see the peer counsellors following these groups, regarding issues that the discussion groups had raised, such as problems with their families, problems with their boyfriends and fighting with siblings.

**4.2.3 Users and Non-Users of the Peer Counselling Programme**

An important research objective was to discover who the users of the peer counselling programme were and, related to this, their reasons for using this programme. The research tools used for this purpose included the learners’ questionnaire (Section A, question 5, see Appendix E), and especially Section B, which was completed by those learners who had consulted with a peer counsellor. In addition the peer counsellors’ logs also provided data regarding the users of the programme and their reasons for seeking the help of a peer counsellor. Table 4.3 depicts the users and non-users of the peer counselling programme.

**Table 4.3 Users and Non-Users of the Programme**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Have seen a peer counsellor</b>	<b>Haven't seen a peer counsellor</b>	<b>Have not heard of the peer counselling programme</b>
Grade 8 N=28	3	17	8
	11%	61%	29%
Grade 9 N=27	6	17	4
	22%	63%	15%
Grade 10 N=29	9	20	0
	31%	69%	0%
Grade 11 N=24	8	12	4
	33%	50%	17%
<b>TOTAL</b>	26	85	16
N=111	23.4%	76.5%	14.4%

The above table shows the proportion of learners who had indicated in the questionnaire that they had met with a peer counsellor, as well as the proportion of learners who indicated that they had not met with a peer counsellor. Those who “have not heard of the peer counselling programme” are also included in this table of comparison.

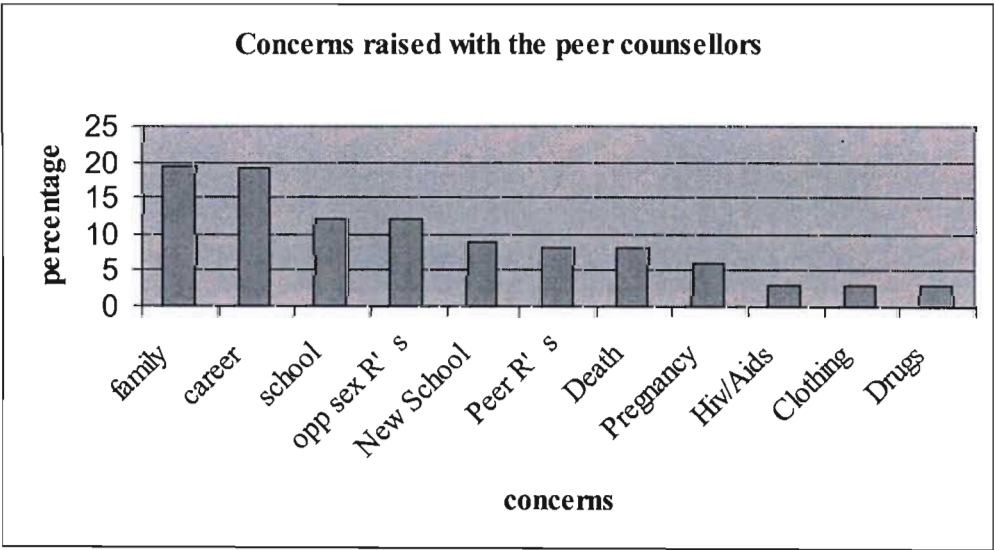
In total, 76,5% of the learners who participated in the present study had not seen a peer counsellor as compared to 23.4% of the participants who had talked with a peer counsellor. From the above table, it is apparent that users of the peer counselling programme increase in number from Grade 8 through to Grade 11, with 11% of Grade 8's having spoken with a peer counsellor, 22% of Grade 9's, 31% of Grade 10's, and 33% of Grade 11's.

The highest percentage of learners who had not heard of the peer counselling programme were in Grade 8. 29% of Grade 8's had not heard of the peer counsellors, compared to 15% in Grade 9, and 0% in Grade 10. Interestingly, 17% of Grade 11's claimed not to have heard of the peer counsellors, which is surprising considering that the peer counsellors themselves are in Grade 11. This may be that, although they know of the peer counsellors, the formal title of the "peer counselling programme" sounds unfamiliar to them.

Two thirds of learners indicated that they would know how to contact a peer counsellor/s whilst less than a third of learners replied that they did not know or were unsure how to contact a peer counsellor.

**4.2.3.1 Concerns/ Issues Taken to the Peer Counsellors**

The log-sheets that the peer counsellors were asked to complete for the period of approximately 3-4 months provided information regarding the concerns that the users of the peer counselling programme take to the peer counsellors (refer to Appendix D). Figure 4.3 depicts this information.



**Figure 4.3 Concerns Raised with the Peer Counsellors**

These results were derived from adding together the specific issues/concerns the peer counsellors had ticked for each client on their log-sheets. This total was then divided by the total number of learners who the peer counsellors had seen, and converted to a percentage.



Family and career issues and/or concerns were the most likely issues to be discussed, followed by school-related concerns and opposite sex relationships. Less common topics of discussion with peer counsellors included issues of death and bereavement, peer relationships, adjustment issues to a new school, pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, clothing advice, and drugs. These indicate a wide variety of issues discussed with peer counsellors.

Data from the learners’ questionnaires (in Appendix E, Section B, question 4) also provided information on the issues/concerns discussed with peer counsellors. Table 4.4 displays this information:

**Table 4.4 Issues/ Concerns Discussed with the Peer Counsellors**

Concerns	Number (n=26)	Percentage (n=26)
Future career plans	10	38.4
Personal issues	9	34.6
Family issues	7	26.9
Friendship issues	6	23.07
Boyfriend issues	6	23.07
Study issues	5	19.2
School issue	5	19.2
Death of a loved one	4	15.3
Health issue	2	7.6
Bad behaviour	1	3.8
Contraception	1	3.8

This data indicates that, of the learners who had seen a peer counsellor in this study, the most common issue for discussion with the peer counsellors were career concerns. Personal issues follow, and then family, friendship, and boyfriend issues at decreasing frequencies.

The relationship issues added together (family, friendship, and boyfriend relationships) represent the most common issues for discussion with a peer counsellor. This links with the information from the peer counsellors’ log sheets, which showed that relationship issues were

the most common reason for discussion with a peer counsellor. Family relationships specifically are common topics for discussion with peer counsellors. In addition, talking about career plans was also a typical reason for approaching a peer counsellor for assistance according to the log-sheets and the learners' questionnaires. School and study issues were discussed less frequently with peer counsellors. Topics with decreasing frequencies in both the log-sheets and learners' questionnaires included seeking assistance from peer counsellors for the death of a loved one, health issues, bad behaviour, and contraception.

### **4.3 EVALUATION OF THE PEER COUNSELLING PROGRAMME**

This section concerns the evaluation of the peer counselling programme from the perspective of the learners and the teachers. The learners' evaluation comprised both a general evaluation which all the learners completed, as well as an additional evaluation by those learners who had consulted with a peer counsellor. The teachers' evaluation was drawn from the questionnaire that they completed. Finally, evaluative comments drawn from the interview with the programme coordinator (in this case the school counsellor), has been included in the overall evaluation. These included the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the programme, as well as considered areas for development within the present peer counselling programme.

#### **4.3.1 Learners' Evaluation of the Peer Counselling Programme**

##### **4.3.1.1 Learners' Understanding and Perceptions of the Programme**

All the learners in this study were asked to describe their understanding of what peer counsellors do (Section A, question 3 in Appendix E). Appendix G provides the list of themes and codes which the thematic analysis of the data generated. Section 3.4 provides a discussion of the process of qualitatively analysing the data in this study. The following table lists the most common themes derived from this question.

**Table 4.5 Understanding of What Peer Counsellors Do**

Understanding	No of learners, N=111	% of learners
Help-general	55	49.5
Advice/solving	45	40.5
Listen/understand	17	15.3
Space to talk	12	10.8
Confidentiality	9	8.1
Comfort help	8	7.2
Practical help	6	5.4
School help	5	4.5

From the above information it is apparent that about half of the learners in this study recognised that the peer counsellors provide a general helping function in the school. An interesting finding was that peer counsellors were perceived by 40% of the learners in the study as providing an advice-giving and solution generating based form of help. A learner wrote:

*..they try and solve your problems by giving you advice*

This is in contrast to the school counsellor's account of the peer counsellors' roles as excluding a solution-based form of help. In addition, only two learners specifically stated that peer counsellors do not give advice or tell them what to do.

17% of the learners saw peer counsellors as providing a listening and understanding role, and about 10% of the learners saw peer counsellors as offering a space to talk about general issues or concerns that were worrying them. One learner indicated the helping nature of this form of help:

*I've heard that it helps cause you can always speak out your problems then keeping them inside you*

This indicates a less directive form of help that peer counsellors are understood to provide. Related to this, peer counsellors were also seen as providing a form of comfort and help to the learners in a time of emotional need. As one learner stated

*They are there to help and counsel. They are shoulders to cry on when you need one and they are there to listen when no one is there to hear you*

The belief that peer counsellors would keep what they were told confidential was expressed by approximately 8% of the learners.

Less common understandings of peer counsellors included a less directive practical help, such as providing confused learners without another view point, and helping them to sort out problems. A small percentage of learners (4.5%) indicated that peer counsellors provide help for school issues, including school problems and their studies. Peer counsellors were also perceived as providing help with personal and family issues by about 4.5% of the learners. A few learners indicated that they did not know much about the programme, with one learner stating: "I don't understand anything because you can't trust them". This may indicate a reluctance to consider peer counsellors as a viable form of help and/or a distrust of peer counsellors due to a lack of information about their role in the school.

In a related question (see Appendix E, Section A, question 6), the learners were asked to mention what they had heard about the peer counselling programme in an attempt to elicit further common understandings and particularly perceptions of the programme. (Please note that the total number of learners answering questions 6-11 in Section A, was 95. Those who indicated they had not heard of the peer counselling programme in question 5, section A, did not answer these questions). The understanding and perception of peer counsellors as providing general help to the learners was again a predominant theme. Many learners felt that peer counsellors are available to help with "anything" (14.7%). Peer counsellors were also perceived as being very willing and available to help (8.42%). One learner wrote:

*They are very passionate about their work. They enjoy to help people and feel good about it. They do not tell your personal issues to anyone else*

The broad theme of 'non-scholastic related help' referred to a variety of specific non-school related issues that peer counsellors were perceived by 19% of the learners as providing assistance for. Such specific help ranged from help with 'sex, pregnancy and abortions' (8 learners), and relationship issues (5 learners), help with HIV/AIDS (3 learners) and help with drug and alcohol problems (2 learners). 17.8 % of the learners perceived peer counsellors as being able to provide directive advice and problem solving skills.

The ability and obligation of peer counsellors to maintain what they are told in confidentiality was also a fairly common theme (14.7%). Related to this, 10% of the learners appeared to affirm the ability to trust and be open with the peer counsellors.

Peer counsellors were also said to be friendly and kind by a number of the people in the study. A few learners mentioned that they had heard that peer counsellors help specifically with school-related concerns. Least common themes included some of the following perceptions: that peer counsellors could help with minor issues and teen issues; that they counsel teens who are if unable to approach an adult, and that they help with issues of careers.

**4.3.1.2 *Concerns/ issues about which learners would consult a Peer Counsellor***

All the learners in this study were asked to tick those issues that they would consider seeing a peer counsellor about (see Appendix E, Section A, question 4), the results of which are displayed in Table 4.6. Those who had seen a peer counsellor versus those who had not met with a peer counsellor were compared for potentially significant differences.

**Table 4.6 Issues and Concerns that the Learners Would Discuss with a Peer Counsellor**

Issue/concern	Have seen a PC, N=26, in %	Haven't seen a PC N=85, in %	Total, N=111 In %
Personal issue	61.5	51.7	54
School issue	65.3	54.1	56.7
Friendship issue	80.7	45.8	54
Family issue	50	54.1	53.1
Study issue	73	58.8	62.1
Boyfriend/relationship issue	80.7	58.8	63.9
Future career plans	69.2	65.8	66.6
Contraception	30.7	24.7	26.1
Death of a loved one	53.8	42.3	45
Health issue	34.6	36.4	36
None of the above	0	2.3	1.8
Other: lack of confidence	4		.9
Pregnancy	3.8		.9
Weight problems	3.8		.9
Divorce	3.8		.9
Problem with teachers	3.8		.9
Rape/abuse issues		1.1	.9
Guidance		1.1	.9
Financial issues		1.1	.9
Lesbian relationships		1.1	.9
A crush		1.1	.9

In general, those learners who had seen a peer counsellor were approximately 10-12% more likely to see a peer counsellor about one of the above issues than those who had not seen a peer counsellor. This may indicate that having seen a peer counsellor could motivate the learners to utilize the peer counsellors more.



Overall the most “popular” topic to see a peer counsellor about was careers, with 66.6% of learners listing this. The next most common issue to see a peer counsellor about was boyfriend relationship issues and concerns at 63.9%. About half the learners reported that they would see a peer counsellor about family and friendship issues. Just less than two thirds of the learners stated that they would see a peer counsellor about a study issue, while half of the learners said that they would see a peer counsellor about a school issue. Half of the learners would also see a peer counsellor about a personal issue. Less than half of the learners also reported that they would see a peer counsellor about the death of a loved one. Less common issues to see a peer counsellor about were health issues and contraception concern at 36% and 26.1% respectively. This question provided space for learners to state ‘other’ issues or concerns that they would see a peer counsellor about. These “other” issues included: lack of confidence; pregnancy; weight problems; divorce; problems with teachers; rape and abuse issues; the need to be guided; financial issues; lesbian relationships; and having a “crush” on a member of the opposite sex.

This suggests that learners in the study might consider seeing a peer counsellor about a variety of issues, some of which may be potentially difficult and challenging concerns for the peer counsellor to assist with. Only two learners who had not seen a peer counsellor claimed that they would not see a peer counsellor regarding any of the issues. The results of this question reinforce the results from the peer counsellors’ records (see section 4.2.3.1 above). Relationships, and particularly family relationships, were issues that a large majority of the learners in the study reported their willingness to discuss with the peer counsellors. In addition, career issues were particularly common issues for discussing with peer counsellors.

Noteworthy differences between those learners who had seen a peer counsellor versus those who had not (taken here to refer to a discrepancy of more than 15%) were around friendship issues and boyfriend/relationship issues (refer to Table 4.6). This may indicate that those learners who had seen a peer counsellor were more open to discussing these relationship issues than those who had not seen a peer counsellor.

#### 4.3.1.3 Learners' Criticisms of the Peer Help Programme

All of the learners who had heard of the peer counselling programme were asked to describe or explain any aspects of the peer counselling programme that they felt were problematic. In addition, they were asked if they had any suggestions for the improvement of the peer counselling programme. These open-ended questions provided space for the learners to express their own "evaluation" of the programme (See Appendix E, Section A, questions 8 and 9). Their responses were coded for themes and these may be viewed in Appendix G.

In response to the question that asked learners to describe any things about the peer counselling programme that they did not like, half of the learners indicated that they had no objections to the programme. In addition, 11 of these learners qualified their answers with positive comments regarding the peer counselling programme. One learner wrote:

*No, I think what peer counsellors' are doing is very good because there are many pupils in the schools who come across problems and don't have anyone to talk to. Peer counsellors are life-savers*

Regarding the learners' objections toward, or criticisms of the programme (question 8), 11.6% of learners did not reply to this question and 5% of the learners replied "not really". Such a neutral response may indicate a general ambivalence and/or lack of awareness with regards to the programme. Of the more explicit responses to this question, the most prevalent theme was the respondent's fear that peer counsellors would not maintain the confidentiality of what the learners might tell them in private (21%). Related to this theme is 'lack of trust' (9.4%). One learner wrote

*Rumours' say that once or twice before that a peer counsellor has talked about what they have been told in confidentiality*

This quote illustrates a more hypothetical fear of peer counsellors not maintaining confidentiality rather than being based on evidence that supports this fear. Comments regarding the peer counsellors talking to and laughing with their friends about learners' problems, and the concern that the information told to a peer counsellor would spread around the school, were common responses within this theme. Only one learner mentioned an incident in which her friend had told the peer counsellor something which was in turn apparently related by the peer counsellors to others.

Four learners complained about the crowdedness of the peer counselling room. As one learner put it:

*The room is too crowded their friend come in and chat with them sometime you have to act like you were going to the tuck shop*

Three learners were concerned about the dual nature of peer counsellors also being their class mates. One learner wrote:

*A lot of peer counsellors are our friends and our class mates and we don't feel comfortable to talk confidential matters with them and we don't trust them. Who knows, maybe they'll go around spreading rumours about us*

This theme is related to the lack of trust that some learners reported having in the peer counsellors.

Some learners (3.1%) indicated that peer counsellors lack a certain integrity in their role, for instance not being honest, not knowing what they should be doing and laughing at the learners. Two learners indicated a fear of being stigmatised as having problem/s.

*...when ever you go into room some people that saw you just quickly assume you have a problem*

Singular responses include that peer counsellors are “too big for their boots” and therefore arrogant; that the learners might not like some of the peer counsellors; and that peer counsellors don't advertise what they do. However, two learners stated that peer counsellors are trustworthy and one learner wrote:

*No there are not things that I don't like about them. Sometimes learners need somebody their own age to talk to, who is experiencing the same thing*

Most of the learners indicate a generally positive perception of the programme. The greatest concern raised by the learners related to fears that their confidentiality would not be honoured.

#### **4.3.1.4 Learners' Recommendations Regarding the Peer Counselling Programme**

Question 9 of the learners' questionnaire (Appendix E, Section A) provided space for the learners to make recommendations regarding the peer-help programme in their school. Their

responses were thematically analysed in order to provide an indication of how many learners made certain suggestions for the improvement of the peer counselling programme.

**Table 4.7 The Learners’ Recommendations Regarding the Programme**

Recommendation	No. of learners, N= 102	Percentage of learners
No recommendations	28	27.4
No reply	20	19.6
Trustworthy	8	7.8
More private, accessible place to meet	8	7.8
Non face-to-face contact	6	5.8
Must advertise	6	5.8
Teachers/outside help	4	4
Voting	3	3
Group work	3	3
No trust	2	2
Reliable and friendly behaviour	2	2
More peer counsellors	2	2

The table above lists the themes obtained from this question. The most common response was ‘no recommendations’ and then ‘no reply’ at 29.4% and 21.05% respectively. Once again, such responses may indicate a general satisfaction with the programme or a general ambivalence towards the programme as a whole.

The most common recommendations that learners made included that peer counsellors must always be trustworthy and keep what has been told to them private, and the need to meet the peer counsellors in a more private and accessible place. One learner listed her recommendations as:

- 1. I think they should have another room to talk privately in*
- 2. The peer counsellors' room should not be crowded with their friends because it makes it difficult to approach them*
- 3. They should earn our trust by example so that we can see they are trustworthy*

Several of the learners endorsed the need to meet with peer counsellors in a less crowded and “public” room. This concern would seem to relate to learners’ feelings of distrust and fear of their confidentiality not being honoured.

Six learners suggested that they meet with peer counsellors without revealing their faces and therefore their identities. One learner explained this as follows:

*Well I think there must be a room where I can go and the counsellors would not see me. He/she will hear my voice (It must be like Roman churches where you go and speak with the minister)*

Some learners stressed that peer counsellors need to advertise what they do in order to encourage the learners to meet with them.

*They must be more “in you face” not just in their room where people know who they are but are afraid or shy to talk to them because they seem so reserved*

This would seem to indicate that greater awareness of the programme may encourage the learners to see the peer counsellors by making it a more “explicit” and known process. It may also engender a sense of trust in the peer counsellors. A few learners expressed that teachers and/or outside help should be available to help learners with problems rather than peer counsellors.

Three learners suggested that the peer counsellors should meet with groups of learners instead of providing a mostly one-on-one contact.

*Maybe it should be a group of people to talk to each other. Getting to know one another much better so that it will be easy for some people to know they are not the only person with that problem they are ten other people*

This theme suggests that sharing problems or concerns with other learners in a group setting might be a more comfortable situation for some learners. This might be related to their problems being normalised in such a group context.

Singular responses included the following: peer counsellors must not tell learners to use condoms; they must tell learners not to “sleep around”; and they must identify those children who are doing badly at school and speak to them to uncover any potential problems in their lives.

The learners’ recommendations provide useful direction for formulating recommendations in the present study. These are discussed in section 5.3.

#### ***4.3.1.5 Why Learners Had Not Seen or Would Not See a Peer Counsellor***

The learners who had not seen a peer counsellor (75% of the total sample and N=85) were asked to provide their reasons for this (see Appendix E, Section A, question 11). This question was also aimed at eliciting evaluative feedback from the learners. Their responses were categorised into themes.

The most common theme, with just less than half of the learners indicating a similar response, was ‘reliance on family/teachers/adults’ rather than the peer counsellors. Many learners felt that they did not need peer counsellors because they had family members whom they could speak to. Some learners indicated that they would rather speak to a trusted adult or a teacher than the peer counsellors if they had a problem. Furthermore, a tenth of the learners in this study expressed the need to rely on themselves for issues of privacy and self-sufficiency rather, than approaching a peer counsellor. One learner wrote:

*I like to sort out my own problems and I don't like bringing my personal life problems to school*

The next highest theme related to a ‘distrust-fear of non-confidentiality’ that was frequently related to the learners’ concerns about their confidentiality not being honoured by a peer counsellor. One learner expressed her feelings of distrust poignantly:

*They say love them all but trust no-one. It's very hard to trust someone in ourdays, so what I always tell myself is that I should trust myself since I don't have a mother. You have to think carefully before you trust anyone*

Within this theme, four learners expressed a shyness and/or distrust in talking with the peer counsellors due to the fact that they were their peers. One learner wrote:



*I was worried about my problem staying private..I don't trust females my age  
especiall if I see them for the first time*

A quarter of the learners indicated that they had not seen a peer counsellor due to 'shyness'. This appears to incorporate several meanings and, as such, a number of sub-themes elaborate on the meaning of this broader theme. 'Shyness general' refers to a general difficulty in sharing problems with someone due to being a very introverted or private person and feeling afraid of telling someone unknown their problem. 'Shyness due to peer counsellors' responses-intrinsic' includes some learners' fear of being judged, laughed at and not taken seriously by the peer counsellor. Even the peer counsellor's knowing about a learner's problems resulted in some learners feeling shy and reluctant to talk with a peer counsellor.

*"I'm sure that your peer counsellor will judge you just not aloud. I just wouldn't  
feel comfortable when I see them around school" and "I felt too shy to see a peer  
counsellor because they would think I'm parthetic and dum"*

Finally, two learners expressed their fear of the consequences of disclosing information to the peer counsellors. Thus shyness due to 'fear of peer counsellors' responses-extrinsic' has also been included as a sub-theme. Of serious concern was one learner's expressed need for assistance but her fear of the possible consequences of this:

*I was scared to see a peer counsellor because I had a blue eye from my mother  
because I had visited my friend. I was worried that maybe they could send my  
mother to jail. I need help but I am scared what the law will do to my mother.  
Maybe I need a peace order from the court. But how can I get it?*

Another learner expressed shyness due to what others might think when they see her approaching a peer counsellor. Thus shyness due to fear of 'stigma' was also included within this broad 'shyness' theme.

40% of learners indicated a 'doubt in their (peer counsellors') ability to help' with the problems they face. This included a general sense that the peer counsellors could not help them with their problem/s, as well as feeling that their problem was too big. One learner wrote:

*Even if I went to them they couldn't talk to my parents which I have a problem with  
them*

indicating that peer counsellors could not help her deal with a larger more systemic problem. A third of the learners within this theme expressed a concern that peer counsellors would be

unable to help them because they were a similar age to the learners ('peers can't help'). Some reasons for this included that peer counsellors were perceived as having no specific helping abilities that made them different from the other learners, and were therefore not in a position to help the learners. Similarly, it was felt that, because the peer counsellors are only teenagers themselves, they have a lack of experience in dealing with problems. The following response demonstrate these concerns:

*-I didn't think they could help me with my problems..because they are not mature enough and the fact they've got similar problems why can't they help themselves first*

*-I had no need to see a peer counsellor..I didn't want to speak to a person my size about my problem*

*- I don't see how peer counsellors can help others not help herself. Because surely she goes through what we do. How different is she from me, what qualities does she have that I don't?. We are all the same as her so why don't we all be counsellors (point being – I don't trust them)*

12.9% of learners expressed having no need to see a peer counsellor due to an absence of problems ('no current need') or to not having serious, and even "life or death" problems. This suggests a perception of peer counsellors as dealing with only serious problems. One learner expressed not having a need to see a peer counsellor as she had no current difficulties with her studies.

A few learners indicated that they had not seen a peer counsellor due to a lack of awareness of the programme. Finally, one learner wrote that she did not see a peer counsellor because teenagers should not have any problems in their lives. Yet another learner expressed that,

*..maybe I should see one (a peer counsellor) cos life is getting too complicated*

The themed responses generated from this question demonstrate the diverse reasons that learners had for not seeing a peer counsellor. Many of these learners expressed not needing to see a peer counsellor due to an ability to rely on themselves and/or other helping sources. However, many learners had not seen a peer counsellor due to mistrust in the peer counsellors' abilities to maintain confidentiality and in their ability to help. Some of the responses indicate that the peer counsellors were not trusted due to being a similar age and in a similar position to the learners. Thus it appears that the dual nature of being both a peer

counsellor and a learner may be an obstacle to the utilisation of peer counsellors as a helping resource in the school.

#### ***4.3.1.6 Evaluation of the Peer Counselling Service by those Learners who had seen a Peer Counsellor***

An important aspect in evaluating the peer counselling programme at the school was questioning the learners who had seen a peer counsellor about this experience. Section B of the learners' questionnaire (Appendix E) provided space for those who had seen a peer counsellor (N=26) to comment on the process and experience of seeing a peer counsellor.

The majority of the learners who had seen a peer counsellor, approached the peer counsellor themselves. Some of these learners visited the peer counselling room in order to meet with a peer counsellor. One learner reported seeing a peer counsellor's name badge and then approaching her to make a time to meet. One learner said she made an appointment with the peer counsellor. Four of the learners reported having a pre-existing relationship with the peer counsellor and thus approaching them for assistance occurred very naturally. One learner told a prefect that she wanted to speak with a peer counsellor, and, finally, one learner was approached by the peer counsellor: "She (the peer counsellor) saw my attitude change and decided to guide me".

Regarding issues of referral, i.e. how the learners came to meet with a peer counsellor, most of the learners reported that they had decided to see the peer counsellors themselves (i.e. 'self-referred'). A number of these learners emphasised that they should be the ones to approach the peer counsellor if they had a problem. One learner wrote:

*I decided myself- it's nobodies business*

The peer counsellor approached one learner personally; one learner was referred by the teacher due to her poor school performance; and one learner was told about the peer counsellor and decided to see her.

About two thirds of the learners had seen the peer counsellors once or twice. 12% of learners had seen the peer counsellor 3-5 times, and 2 learners reported having seen the peer counsellor for a longer period of time. One learner reported that she would talk to the peer counsellor in class.

The learners were asked to describe the experience of meeting with a peer counsellor. The most common theme relates to issues of 'openness' with 34.6% of these learners describing the peer counsellor's openness with them and their openness with the peer counsellor. For instance, the peer counsellors were described as open and showing concern, being open and friendly and the learners reported feeling open, concerned and friendly, and the learners reported feeling open and free to talk about anything with the peer counsellor. This response was often in response to the peer counsellor's genuine concern and openness with the learners. Two learners also expressed their ability to trust the peer counsellor, with the one learner stating:

*Well she was a very open person, though I was kind of nervous that she mite spread my private stuff but I felt safe again because she was the person I trust*

Related to this was the response of three learners that they had felt initially afraid and even frustrated, but were able to relax with the peer counsellor.

Some of the learners described feeling relaxed during and after meeting with a peer counsellor. As one learner described her experience:

*It's like talking to an old friend that you've known for years. And when you talk together you feel free to talk about anything or to ask*

The above mentioned themes of mutual openness, being relaxed with the peer counsellor, and being able to trust the peer counsellor, are important aspects of a positive helping encounter.

Another 28% of learners described their experience of meeting with a peer counsellor as generally positive, with learners describing the experience as "fine", "very nice", "good". 16% of the learners described the experience as 'okay'. Another 16% of the learners noted that they felt understood by the peer counsellors and that the peer counsellors had listened to them ('listen/understanding'). One learner wrote:

*It was very good because she understands the situation you are in*

Two learners described how they felt good afterwards, another two learners described the experience as enjoyable/fun. Two learners felt they had gained useful information from their time with the peer counsellor. Two learners described the experience as 'normal/as usual'. Finally, singular response themes include that the extra programmes are helpful (taken to

refer to the discussion groups), and that the experience was too brief and finally one learner expressed that she doesn't intend going back to the peer counsellors.

Finally, those who had seen a peer counsellor were asked to make recommendations for the improvement of the peer counselling programme. The two questions on the questionnaire that relate to the learners' suggestions for the improvement of the programme (Appendix E, Section B, questions 8 and 9) were combined with the information that learners provided on this issue. This is due to the fact that the two questions revealed very similar information. About a third of the learners did not have any suggestions or recommendations. Three learners suggested that the peer counsellors 'need more exposure' in terms of advertising their activities and being more active in meeting with the learners. Three learners recommended that peer counsellors should always be honest, trustworthy, and maintain the confidentiality of what the learners tell them. Two learners felt that there should be more peer counsellors in other grades. Singular response themes included that peer counsellors could offer 'moral instruction' (helping learners to know what is right and wrong), that peer counsellors could assist with 'teacher problems' and with 'dating behaviour'. Further recommendations put forward by the learners included: having proper facilities; by having outside people talking to the learners about their experiences; and having the peer counsellors help with studying. In addition, peer counsellors could show 'life skills videos' at break times and that peer counsellors should display 'kindness' to the learners to prove their willingness to listen to the learners.

The Likert -scale question in the learners' questionnaire (Appendix E, Section B, question 7) provides useful quantitative information regarding the learners' experiences of seeing a peer counsellor. Table 4.8 displays the results of the learners' rating of their experience of seeing a peer counsellor.



**Table 4.8 The Learners' Ratings of the Experience of Seeing a Peer Counsellor**

	<b>Agree/strongly agree (%)</b>	<b>Neutral (%)</b>	<b>Disagree/strongly disagree (%)</b>
Was helpful	84.6	12	0
Felt understood	84.6	12	4
Felt shy	24	16	44
Felt safe	68	8	44
Able to be open	76	8	12
Worried about privacy	28	28	40
Reached a solution	64	28	4
Would recommend	80	12	0

The majority of the learners who had seen a peer counsellor felt that their experience of seeing a peer counsellor had been helpful and that the peer counsellor had understood them.. Just less than half of the learners expressed not feeling 'safe' in speaking with the peer counsellor, and a further 28% of the learners indicated a fear that what they told the peer counsellor would not remain private. This may demonstrate mistrust or fear regarding issues of confidentiality. A quarter of the learners felt shy to see a peer counsellor as opposed to just less than half of the learners who did not express any feelings of shyness in talking with the peer counsellor. Three quarters of the learners felt that they were able to be open with the peer counsellor. Two thirds of the learners felt that the peer counsellors had helped them to reach a solution to their problem, whilst over a quarter of the learners remained undecided about this. 80% of the learners would recommend the programme to their friends, which may indicate a general satisfaction with their experience of seeing a peer counsellor.

The general result of this rating indicates that peer counselling is perceived positively by those who have seen a peer counsellor. Concern over privacy issues, feeling shy with the peer counsellor, and feeling unsafe with the peer counsellor, indicates issues related to trust.



### 4.3.2 Teachers' Evaluation of the Peer Counselling Programme

The teachers were also asked to complete a questionnaire (see Appendix F) related to their perceptions and comments about the programme, as well as further suggestions and recommendations regarding the programme. Their responses were analysed for themes relating to their understandings, perceptions, and evaluation of the programme. These may be viewed in Appendix H.

#### 4.3.2.1 Perceptions of the Peer Counselling Programme

Question 1 of the teachers' questionnaire asked teachers to express their perception of the peer counselling programme at the school. 64.2% of the teachers indicated a positive perception of the peer counselling programme, with comments ranging from mildly positive to very enthusiastic about the programme. In referring to the programme, some teachers commented that it was: "*a huge success*", "*working well*", "*good idea*", "*with merit*", "*seems to be good*", "*a very necessary plus*".

Over a third of the teachers commented that they were mostly unaware of the programme, and could thus not provide specific comments.

A quarter of teachers indicated a general apprehension about the programme. One teacher stated:

*I believe it has its merits, but it is open for abuse. I do not trust the advice of some of the girls and therefore think the topics should be made more low key (e.g. subject choice, teacher disputes rather than sex and pregnancy)*

About a fifth of the teachers felt that the programme was not well used by the learners at the school, versus 14.2% of teachers who believed that the programme was well utilised: As one teacher stated:

*Peer counselling has been a huge success at my school. The pupils have really taken to the programme and have been very responsive*

Some of the singular themed responses were that peer counselling was 'useful in careers' and it has 'positive effects on the peer counsellors'.

The teachers were asked to comment on their possible involvement with the programme (see Appendix F, question 2). The highest theme was 'no involvement suggested', with teachers either leaving the question blank, or writing NA (not applicable), or answering "No" to the question. Singular responses from the teachers included, knowing a peer counsellor who was in difficulty, hearing positive comments from the girls, and experiencing the peer counsellors as very reliable. One teacher referred a learner to the peer counsellor but she did not go, while another teacher reported referring a learner to the peer counsellor and she did go. This teacher felt that the whole issue was well handled:

*I had a very sad case of home problems and I referred it to the peer counsellors, who handled it responsibly and confidentially*

#### **4.3.2.2 Impact on the Learners, Peer Counsellors, Teachers and Wider School Context**

The teachers were asked to describe their impressions of the impact of the peer counselling programme on the learners, peer counsellors, themselves as teachers, and the wider school context (see Appendix F, question 3).

The most common response themes regarding the impact on the learners, were that the programme was 'generally helpful'; that the learners benefited from the peer counsellors' 'helpful advice' and that peer counselling was 'helpful for careers'. These responses indicate a common theme of 'helpfulness' among two thirds of the teachers who participated in this study.

21.4% of teachers commented that learners were able to share problems with their peers, which was perceived as beneficial. Certain teachers commented that many of the learners were unaware of the programme, whilst a small group commented that the programme was well used by the learners. One teacher expressed her perception that there was no real trust in the seniors at school. As she put it:

*Careers-good. Juniors-benefit by "sisterly" advice but there is no real trust in the seniors*  
28.5% of the teachers had 'no comments'.

With respect to the impact on the peer counsellors, the teachers most commonly claimed that peer counsellors benefited 'inter and intrapersonally' from being peer counsellors, including

learning valuable life skills, learning how to relate to others, and gaining in self-confidence.

One teacher commented:

*They probably benefit the most! They learn skills and learn to relate. It's given them an avenue for leadership and care*

A number of the teachers felt that the peer counsellors benefited from their 'sense of membership and contribution to the school community'. Having a sense of responsibility, status, and self-worth in serving the school community were some of the responses within this theme. Similarly, certain teachers felt that the peer counsellors were 'motivated and responsible' in terms of their role as peer counsellors. One teacher expressed her opinion that peer counsellors are too young for the level of responsibility required of them.

In response to the question about the impact of the programme on the teachers, a third of the teachers noted that the programme decreased their load, as well as the load on the counselling teachers. One third replied that there was no or very little impact on them, whilst the rest did not reply to this question. One teacher commented that the programme helped the teachers by resulting in happier learners.

Regarding the impact of peer counselling on the wider school context, half the teachers responded with 'no comment', either by not replying to the question or by indicating their uncertainty regarding this impact. Half of the teachers commented that the school benefited from a more caring environment, and that there was a happier school environment due to the peer counselling programme. As one teacher wrote:

*For those involved I think it generates an atmosphere of trust and a sense of 'family' responsibility and accountability, and fits in well with what we would like the ethos of the school to be*

One teacher commented that peer counselling can only be a 'positive help', whilst another teacher felt that there was very little impact on the wider school context.

#### ***4.3.2.3 Teachers' Opinions of how the Selection and Training of Peer Counsellors should be Managed***

The teachers were asked to comment on how they thought the selection of peer counsellors should be managed (see Appendix F, question 4). Two thirds of the teachers felt that learners should vote for the peer counsellors that they trust and have confidence in, but some qualified their statements by claiming that this should be done in consultation with the counselling teachers. It was believed that this would add an objective and mature decision-making process to the selection of peer counsellors. One teacher stated that the selection of peer counsellors should not be based on popularity (i.e. only via the learners' votes) as she felt that this was not necessarily an indication of counselling abilities. A quarter of the teachers felt that the peer counsellors should volunteer themselves. Two teachers felt that the selection of peer counsellors should be based on important interpersonal and intrapersonal qualities, with another suggesting that the learners should be aware of what personal qualities are important in a peer counsellor before voting. In response to this question, one teacher simply stated that peer counsellor selection should be done *"Very carefully"*.

The teachers were also asked to comment on what they considered to be important personal attributes and qualities for a peer counsellor to possess. The most common theme that arose was 'intrapersonally sensitive qualities', which included being wise, patient, thoughtful, honest, insightful, and so on. Another central theme was 'interpersonally sensitive qualities'. This included qualities such as compassion, understanding, sincerity, being genuinely concerned about others, likeable, and not judgemental. A sub-theme within this theme was 'empathy', i.e. being compassionate, empathetic, and having a sympathetic ear. 'Interpersonal-counselling skills' were also recommended, with over half of the teachers listing qualities which they felt that peer counsellors should possess, such as being able to communicate, listening, not being too bossy, and not too quick to give advice.

'Interpersonal-confidentiality' was another theme with responses including that peer counsellors should "not given to gossip" and they should be "discrete". Related to this was the 'intra-inter-personal: ethical moral' theme, with a number of teachers stressing that peer counsellors need to possess high morals and standards. The theme 'intra-inter-personal: confidence' refers to the emphasis that teachers placed on the confidence and personal

strength of peer counsellors. Finally, 'intra-inter-personal: responsible' was another theme requiring peer counsellors to be reliable, responsible, available, and to display leadership skills. The following excerpt from one of the teacher's questionnaires demonstrates the extent of the skills and abilities that some of the teachers felt that peer counsellors should possess:

*Integrity, honesty, sincerity. Must be able to communicate. Must be wise, thoughtful and available at all times. Caring and genuinely concerned about other people.*

With respect to the training needs of the peer counsellors (question 5), half of the teachers expressed the need for peer counsellors to have 'counselling training'. Suggestions included having workshops about the problems that peer counsellors were likely to encounter; training on when advice should be given; career training; training in responding to disclosures and requests for help; and listening and counselling skills. Specific training on sex/abuse, HIV/AIDS and bereavement was recommended by a number of the teachers. Training in 'referral' was felt to be important, with 21.4% of teachers expressing the need for peer counsellors to be trained in referring learners to appropriate staff members if needed, referral contacts, and included within this theme, knowing when to refer. One teacher felt that the peer counsellors should only act as referral agents

*..I think it is too much to do counselling at that age-perhaps given the chance to put the person on to the correct staff member or organisation*

The above discussion identifies teachers as an important source of information and help when looking at issues relating to the training and selection of peer counsellors. Most teachers recognised that the selection of peer counsellors should be done in consultation with counselling staff, but also that learners should vote to ensure that the peer counsellors who were chosen were liked and/or trusted by the learners. Many of the teachers emphasised that peer counsellors should possess qualities of sensitivity, responsibility, and the ability to maintain confidentiality, as well as knowledge of certain issues that they would encounter as a peer counsellors.



#### ***4.3.2.4 Perceived Disadvantages of the Programme and Recommendations regarding its Development***

64.2% of the teachers provided no answer to the question regarding the perceived disadvantages of the peer counselling programme (question 7, see Appendix 1) or alternatively expressed their inability to answer this question. One comment from a teacher may provide insight into this lack of response:

*..not sure if there are any as it is almost too low key, in my mind, to be effective or destructive*

The next most common theme related to ‘lack of awareness’ with a number of the teachers stating that the peer counselling programme was not well utilized or known by the learners or the teaching staff. Another perceived disadvantage reported by two teachers was the learners’ fear of their confidentiality not being honoured. Finally, one teacher felt that peer counsellors were too involved in other activities, while another felt that the ‘learners’ misconceptions’ of the programme, namely that they have to have a serious problem to see a peer counsellor, were disadvantages of the peer counselling programme.

The teachers were also asked if and how the peer counselling programme could enhance their functioning as teachers in the school setting. Approximately half of the teachers had ‘no comment’ which suggests some difficulty with this question. 21.4% of the teachers indicated that the peer counselling system could be helpful in creating happier learners in their classrooms by providing another available support system to the learners. As one teacher stated:

*A student with problems becomes inattentive and often a behaviour problem, if peer counsellors can solve these problems or work towards it, it can only enhance a teacher’s ability to function*

Singular responses included the following; ‘improves the atmosphere of the school’, ‘empowers learners’, and is ‘helpful to school counsellor’. One teacher felt that the programme could be helpful but would need thinking through. Finally, one teacher felt that the peer counsellors could organise a buddy system which would be helpful for the learners who were in individual counselling.



All of the teachers in this study indicated their support for the continuation of the peer counselling programme (question 9). They were asked to provide reasons for this and a number of themes emerged. 'Learners need support' was one such theme. One teacher expressed this as follows:

*Many of the girls come from very difficult backgrounds and need every possible kind of help and understanding*

Related to this was the observation of a group of the teachers that many learners could feel more comfortable with 'peer versus adult support'. A further group replied with a 'vague positive' response, such as that peer counselling could only be beneficial, and that it had its merits. Some teachers were of the opinion that the peer counselling programme was 'good and still developing'. Others felt that it was an 'empowering' programme for the learners and peer counsellors, and that it 'teaches life skills' to those involved. Finally, a few teachers indicated the following respective themes in their responses: Peer counselling results in 'happier people'; and it has taken the 'load off educators'. One teacher qualified a 'vague positive' response with the additional theme of the 'need to be realistic' in what could be achieved with the peer counselling programme.

Finally, teachers were asked to provide any additional recommendations regarding the peer counselling programme. Unfortunately, over half of the teachers made no comment regarding these suggestions and recommendations. One teacher indicated the following:

*Peer counsellors need regular training, meeting together and meeting with other schools. They need strict boundaries and LOTS of assistance (which we as teachers don't have!!)*

A group of teachers suggested that peer counsellors should be trained and 'equipped with skills and knowledge' in a general sense, and also in terms of practical topics such as marital contracts and financial matters. One teacher felt that there needed to be greater awareness of the programme amongst the staff. Another teacher reinforced this point, but added that this may have negative repercussions because increasing the programme's "visibility" amongst the staff could reduce the feelings of ownership and responsibility that the learners and peer counsellors have experienced in relation to the programme.

### **4.3.3 The School Counsellor's Perspective regarding the Development of the Peer Counselling Programme**

The school counsellor believed that one of the major benefits of having a peer counselling programme at the school, was the awareness that it raised about counselling and people's need to talk about issues that were bothering them. Learners were more likely to encourage a friend who seems down or depressed to visit the school counsellor or the peer counsellors.

Some of the drawback mentioned included other learners being jealous of the peer counsellors, and critical of their perceived self-promoting behaviours. Another drawback became apparent when one of the peer counsellors became generally very aggressive at school in response to difficult home circumstances. The school counsellor dealt with this occurrence strictly, as it was expected that the peer counsellors themselves should be role models to the learners in the school.

According to the school counsellor, one of the areas where the programme needed developing was the involvement of peer counsellors in school awareness drives, such as HIV/AIDS or drug awareness weeks. However, the school counsellor claimed that the educational campaigns in the school were not overtly reducing risk-taking behaviours. For instance, the pregnancy rate had not decreased over the last few years. As the school counsellor put it:

*I'm not sure that we are scratching where it itches..we need to know how we can impact the girls' lives*

The school counsellor expressed concern that the learners' risk-taking behaviours did not appear to be decreasing as a result of the school's educational programmes. This suggests that the peer counsellors' roles could be extended to include innovative health promotion strategies that would prove beneficial to the learners.

### **4.4 THE PEER COUNSELLORS' OBSERVATIONS OF THE PROGRAMME AND ITS EFFECT ON THEM PERSONALLY**

This section contains the results of the focus group with the peer counsellors. The aim of this focus group was to elaborate on some of the emerging themes from the learners' questionnaires and to gain the peer counsellors' viewpoint on these themes. It was also an

opportunity to discover how being a peer counsellor impacted on them personally. The focus group was held in November, 2002, in the peer counselling room. Eight peer counsellors were available for the focus group. This section will be organised under headings related to the structure of the focus group.

#### **4.4.1 Becoming a Peer Counsellor: Aims, Motives and Expectations**

A number of the peer counsellors felt that they themselves had experienced difficulties in their lives and that there were a number of learners with similar problems. Being a peer counsellor has provided them with an opportunity to relate to and help the learners. One felt that being a peer counsellor was helpful to her since by providing information to the learners about, for example, careers, she was also learning useful information. Another so mentioned that peer counselling provided an opportunity to perform a service to the school, for example through the groups that the peer counsellors run on relevant topics. She said:

*Like we used to have meetings in Mrs (name withheld) office which are open to the school, people get a chance to talk. Sometimes they cry. They are very nice, very intense.*

#### **4.4.2 The Peer Counsellors' Perceptions of Being Helpers**

The peer counsellors felt that their role was to provide a 'listening' support to the learners and that they were not an advice-giving group. One peer counsellor indicated that, as they were teenagers themselves, their role was more akin to friendship. One stated:

*I think it's better helping them as a teenager because sometimes they are afraid to go to teachers or someone older. So talking to us is better since we are not old, but we are like friends who you can tell anything to. So you don't need to be scared or to think, 'What is she going to say?'. You generally don't expect much from us 'cos we are just there to listen*

Another felt that the learners expected that the peer counsellors would tell them what to do, which prevented them from approaching the peer counsellors for help. In addition, the problem-centred focus had the effect of making the learners fear that the peer counsellors would gossip about them. One said:

*and we do encourage them to not only come in about their problems, but to come in and say, 'Hi' and 'How nice is your day?', something like that*

This could be seen as the peer counsellor's attempt to informalise the helping process.

One said that if the problem brought to them by a learner was too big, she would accompany the learner to the teacher for further assistance.

#### **4.4.3 What Concerns/ Issues are they Addressing as Peer Counsellors?**

A number of peer counsellors claimed that they mainly encountered relationship difficulties in their meetings with the learners. One stated: *"Relationships, from boys to mothers and friends"*. One said that she dealt mostly with career-related concerns or questions, as well as with study-related concerns, such as learning for exams.

Two peer counsellors spoke about two cases that they had had difficulties dealing with. One seemed particularly happy that she had helped the learner to resolve the issue without having to consult with the teachers. Another spoke about a learner who had home difficulties that were proving hard to deal with. She encouraged the learner to see the teacher, but the learner was reluctant:

*I got a problem at the moment which I'm trying to deal with, with a child who's having problems at home and every time something comes right, something falls down again and so it's very bad, if I can say that. So I am trying to get her to talk to a teacher or someone but she sees it as there's no help, there's no way out of it.*

This statement may illuminate the difficulties that peer counsellors can face, and their limited capacities in dealing with large-scale problems such as this one. Of particular concern was this peer counsellor's "inability" to access teacher support due to the learner's reluctance to do so.

#### **4.4.4 The Counselling Framework**

The peer counsellors spoke about their counselling training in terms of what they had learnt. They appeared to benefit from the listening exercises and the role-play exercises that they all took part in. Specific counselling skills learnt included picking up on "clues" that the person may provide while telling their story, and repeating what the learner said back to them. One peer counsellor emphasised that they did not provide advice:

*...and another thing, we're told never to give them advice. Because what might not necessarily work for me, might work for them, so we had to give them options, we make them make their own decisions*

This emphasises the importance of listening skills and a more non-directive counselling approach.

#### **4.4.5 The Peer Counselling Groups**

The peer counsellors were asked to speak about the way in which the peer counselling groups operated. These groups started with the peer counsellors meeting and discussing what topics were relevant to the learners, taking into consideration the issues they had been dealing with in their one-on-one meetings with the learners. Examples of group topics addressed were: "Are men dogs?" and "Women's day". Other topics included family issues, and one on "Where are you going?". This latter motivational topic involved a group discussion around the learners' dreams and where they wanted to go in life. A group of peer counsellors led the groups.

*...and about four peer counsellors will be leading the meeting and then we kind of tell them the topic and see how it goes, we don't really have a plan. You just go in and get talking and then at the end you try to come up with some conclusions to close it up*

The groups also had the indirect effect of encouraging the learners to see the peer counsellors if they needed to talk further about the emotions or concerns that the groups had raised. The school counsellor noted that these discussion groups provided the peer counsellors with exposure as helpers, should the learners have need to talk about something.

#### **4.4.6 Trust: Why do Some Learners not trust the Peer Counsellors?**

The peer counsellors were asked to provide insight into why many of the learners were distrustful of the service they provide. One peer counsellor replied:

*I think they are insecure in their situation. They are too scared to let someone know so they use it as an excuse*

Another thought that many of the learners were afraid of getting into trouble by talking to peer counsellors, as they had heard rumours that some peer counsellors tended to gossip.

One peer counsellor said that many learners seemed to feel afraid of being judged, and that was why they distrusted the peer counsellors. In addition, it was recognised that because this school was fairly small, rumours could spread quickly around the school, thereby heightening learners fear and/or distrust in telling the peer counsellors private information.

A peer counsellor also recognised that it may feel strange to talk with someone that one does not know. As she put it:

*..I know that when I wasn't a peer counsellor I thought, "Oh no ways, I'm not going there – I don't even know these people", but then I understood that sometimes people just need to talk to someone that they're not used to*

In summary, the peer counsellors suggested that the learners' insecurities about approaching them for help was due to their fear of disclosing private information. This was also believed to be related to the learners' fear of their story spreading through the school, and of being judged by the peer counsellor, as well as to learners' awkwardness in approaching someone they did not know for help.

#### ***4.4.6.1 The Peer Counsellors' Suggestions regarding gaining trust in the School***

One peer counsellor felt that a way to gain trust would be for peer counsellors to introduce themselves to the learner(s), and to even disclose some information about themselves.

Another peer counsellor expressed the importance of beginning with the issue of trust in the relationship with the learner:

*I think it's better to start with the trust part, telling the person, 'you can trust me' and telling her what you're like and let the person much more confident with herself so that she can talk to you much more easily*

In addition, the peer counsellors felt that the space provided for them on one of the school notice boards was helpful as it had allowed them to introduce themselves as peer counsellors to the learners in the school. They had not announced who they are or what they offered in assembly, although one peer counsellor spoke about a play that the peer counsellors were going to do at assembly,

*We were supposed to do a play once in assembly, ja (laughter), but um, it was a rush that day and...*



The peer counsellors did not report having approached the learners in their class-room context.

#### **4.4.7 The Peer Counsellors' Recommendations regarding the Programme**

The peer counsellors were asked to describe the valuable and useful aspects of their time as peer counsellors, as well as the less useful aspects. The aim of such a question was to formulate practical recommendations for the improvement of the programme.

The peer counsellors felt that the career files had been very useful to them in their meetings with the learners. In addition, one said that having a peer counselling room where the learners and peer counsellors could meet had also been valuable. However, another felt that the room could also get crowded, making it difficult to talk privately with a learner about more personal matters. The participating school counsellor recommended that the peer counsellors used another room to talk more privately, a suggestion that the peer counsellors agreed with enthusiastically.

Regarding the topic of how learners approach the peer counsellors, a peer counsellor mentioned that they had duty rosters up at school to aid the learners in approaching them. However, the school counsellor, felt that she the learners were mostly unaware of this and that more publicity is needed.

Another peer counsellor felt that the group discussions had been very useful. One peer counsellor expressed the need to meet more with peer counsellors from other schools to find out what they were doing. One also felt that whilst the workshops after school had been useful to them, the time was usually quite short. She suggested a weekend away in which the peer counsellors could have the chance to learn important information, but to also get to know each other better. One noted that keeping logs of to what issues the peer counsellors were encountering in their meetings with the learners was useful. When they met together as a group, they were then able to discuss these topics further.

*..and then when we meet on Tuesdays we can see this topic is coming up...so we can talk about it or share ideas and that sort of thing*

Practical resources in their role (the career files), their visible “presence” in the school (such as their space on the school notice-board, their own peer counselling room) and their training as peer counsellor, have been advantages in their experiences as peer counsellors. The suggestion that they could benefit from further training in the form of weekend workshop formats and meeting with other peer counsellors from other schools, were useful recommendations in the present study.

#### **4.4.8 Being a Peer Counsellor: How it has influenced them Personally**

The peer counsellors were asked to comment on the personal influence of being a peer counsellor. One peer counsellor expressed a greater awareness of the need to be positive and proactive.

*...with me, I've realised that you've got to be a more positive person. You've got to have more positive attitude, because when I've counselled I found that a lot of people were negative and they need to be more positive and change their circumstances*

A predominant theme related to their growth as people. A number of the peer counsellors spoke about the positive effect that helping people had on them personally. Impacting the learners' lives in a constructive and helping manner, understanding and supporting them, and even learning from their mistakes, were some of the ways the peer counsellors felt that their role had enabled them to grow as people. A poignant example of this theme is evident in the following quote:

*You grow as a person. (Others, agreement). Because somebody comes to you and at the end of the day when you've finished talking to them, you both have come up with some solutions and some help for something. Or you've helped someone to smile when they've come in like really down. That like makes you grow as a person because you think "Wow, I'm capable of many things", not only am I capable but I've been able to help someone and that makes you just grow as a person when you meet with somebody and spiritually too so, it's just a growth period*

Difficult moments that the peer counsellors had experienced in their role as peer counsellors included the following. One expressed her disappointment when two learners came in for help but then they could not talk about what was bothering them and left. The peer

counsellor described feeling “sad” after this experience. Feeling rejected as a helper seemed to be a difficult experience for some of the peer counsellors. Another peer counsellor described an experience in which she thought a learner was joking with her about an issue. The peer counsellor laughed at the learner only to discover that she had been serious about the issue that was bothering her. The peer counsellor described feeling disappointed in herself as a counsellor. She also said:

*You have to sometimes be really serious so people can take you seriously*

This highlights some of the difficulties inherent in being a peer counsellor, as this role frequently requires a more serious approach to people on the whole.

The peer counsellors agreed that being a peer counsellor had affected them positively. The positive effects ranged from gaining more career information for themselves; impacting the learners on an individual and group level; and growing and maturing emotionally and spiritually. The experience of being peer counsellors seemed to empower them by encouraging them to be positive in the face of difficulties. The peer counsellors recognised their difficult life circumstances, whilst expressing their determination not to become the victims of these circumstances. Some of the peer counsellors had encountered challenging times in their role. Of concern was the extent of the problems which they could be expected to handle. Finally, the peer counsellors recognised their need to respond seriously to people and their difficulties, no matter how trivial these may seem. People were bringing them serious problems which they needed to respond appropriately to.

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has attempted to explore the role of the peer counselling programme within its specific school context. This involved gaining information about the programme as well as the opinions and perceptions of the school principal, school counsellor, the learners, and the peer counsellors. In summary, it appears that the peer counselling programme did contribute to a positive and supportive school environment. In the following chapter, the role and practical implementation of this programme will be discussed with reference to the literature on peer counselling. Recommendations are also made in keeping with the evaluative goals and aims of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that the evaluation of a school-based helping programme demands a holistic framework (see Section 2.3.2). Watkins (1994) uses the phrase “whole-school guidance” to describe an attitude and practical approach to guidance and counselling. In essence, he proposes that, to be effective, a school guidance programme needs to receive strong support, contribute to the atmosphere of the school, and permeate the curriculum. This “whole-school” guidance approach follows the contemporary trend in education away from crisis-oriented guidance towards a more permanent and prevention-oriented guidance.

Section 1.2.3 discusses the new life skills curriculum within the nationwide Outcomes Based Education system in South Africa. This educational system is attempting to incorporate life skills into secondary schools in a visible, sustainable, and prevention-oriented way. This study attempted to evaluate the peer counselling programme through a recognition of the whole-school context in which the peer counselling programme operates. To this end a discussion of the results will necessarily involve considering the perceived and expressed role of peer counselling at the school; its impact on the learners, peer counsellors, teachers, and school counsellor; and its overall integration into the life of the school.

This chapter aims to make links between previous research into the development and efficacy of peer help programmes, and the results of the present study. A number of recommendations for the improvement of the present peer counselling programme are also discussed. Section 5.4 will attempt to conclude the evaluation of the present peer counselling programme through consideration of the general goals for peer led counselling programmes. Finally, Section 5.5 will also review the limitations identified in the present study.

## 5.2 A “WHOLE-SCHOOL” APPROACH TO EVALUATION

### 5.2.1 School Learners’ Needs

A starting point in this evaluation was to determine the concerns that learners at this school might have. Section 4.2.1.1 and 4.2.1.2 provides the concerns of learners according to both the school counsellor and the learners themselves.

Personal, family, boyfriend, and school issues were among the concerns that were mentioned. The school counsellor’s and learners’ observations of their concerns are strikingly similar. Of note here is both the school counsellor’s and learners’ recognition of the systemic issues the learners face. The school counsellor also stressed socio-economic factors as a pervasive challenge facing these girls in the context of their family lives and their hopes for the future.

Family issues/difficulties in particular appeared to be the most commonly cited cause for concern by the learners. It could be argued that family difficulties may, in part, stem from an adolescent’s need to establish an identity in their social network and parents’ frequent reluctance to allow this (Ntshangase, 1995). The adolescent’s response may be one of dissatisfaction and frustration.

Related to the above discussion is that the learners’ concerns in this study might indicate their entry into an identity-forming process in which they are attempting to establish a sense of identity in their social networks (see section 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 for a discussion of these aspects of adolescence that are recognised in the literature). An emphasis on family, peer, and boyfriend relational concerns points to the centrality of relationships in the adolescent’s developing sense of self.

Some of the family concern themes suggest that some adolescents might be battling with a family in conflict (see Appendix H, question 1). McCown et al. (1996) discussed the concept of adolescents at risk (Chapter 2, section 2.2.5). Their discussion suggests that some adolescents’ circumstances place them at risk due to their experiences within their family context in particular. This may affect their ability to reach their potential (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1994 in McCown et al., 1996).

In addition, the emphasis on family relationship difficulties was recognised by the school counsellor as being strongly related to pervasive socio-economic difficulties that the learners experience. The literature suggests that poverty and dysfunctional family relationships are variables that place learners at risk for academic and personal difficulties (Petersen & Hamburg, 1986). A link has also been drawn between poverty and parenting (Richter, 1994) with the recognition that poverty may directly or indirectly affect the ability to parent effectively.

A positive and helping school environment may be a source of support and therefore resilience especially for adolescents at risk (Garmezy, 1985 in Petersen & Hamburg, 1986). The following section discusses the role of helping and support in the school.

## **5.2.2 The Role of the School in Helping the Learners**

### ***5.2.2.1 Guidance and Counselling in the Life of the School***

The school counsellor and school principal emphasised the importance of the life skills and counselling component in the school (see section 4.2.1.4). The school counsellor also recognised that the counselling component of the school curriculum was given priority. She added that the school management provided “100%” support for the counselling activities in the school. The significance of this support is discussed further in section 5.4 of this chapter. Of relevance here is that the peer counselling programme had developed and is operating in a context that supports the value of guidance and counselling in the school. Cowie and Sharp (1996) emphasise that peer counselling is more likely to thrive in supportive and proactive environments where the value of caring for one another and oneself is actively reinforced. This indicates that a peer counselling programme, such as the one in the study, is more likely to be successful and sustainable within a context of helpfulness and support at the school.

### ***5.2.2.2 Support in the School Environment: The Learners’ Perspectives***

The learners seemed to view their school as a helpful and supportive context in which to address their concerns. The learners indicated that the school provided help for a variety of concerns (these can be viewed in Table 4.1). Only a very small proportion of learners indicated that their school did not offer help for any of their concerns. A large majority of the



learners indicated that the peer counsellors, counselling teachers, and teachers in general provided help for their problems. More than half of the learners recognised peer counsellors as a form of help available to them. This suggests an awareness and recognition of the helping role of the peer counselling programme. However, it may be that reference made to peer counselling in the introduction to the learners' questionnaire, increased the mention of peer counselling as a source of help in the school more so than if it had not been included in the introduction.

Research into the perception of school counsellors as agents of help to learners in secondary schools (Haffajee, 1991; Ntshangase, 1995) reveals that learners' peers, and not the school counsellors, are the first source of help sought. In this study, peer counsellors were the most commonly recognised sources of help, followed closely by counselling and academic teachers. Learners therefore recognised the help available to them through peer counselling programme and the other teachers at the school. This in itself seems to confirm previous research findings that peer assistance is often the first source of assistance sought by adolescents. However, the present findings also appear to contradict earlier research that learners infrequently seek counselling teachers out for assistance. In the present study, the school environment seemed to provide learners with a supportive help-seeking context. The availability of both peer and adult help was recognised by the learners.

### **5.2.3 The Development of the Peer Counselling Programme: Goals and Expectations**

Section 4.2.2.1 describes the rationale and goals of the peer counselling programme in the present study. These included providing long-term care for the learners who needed this kind of support. Therefore, extending the counselling services in the school beyond that provided by the overburdened counselling and academic teachers, appears to have been one of the goals of this peer counselling programme. In addition it was hoped that training a group of people (the peer counsellors) in life skills such as listening skills, teamwork, and networking, would be of personal benefit to them. Related to this was the long-term goal or hope that this training would assist the peer counsellors to enrich the communities in which they lived through the skills that they acquired as peer counsellors.

The goals of the programme in this study correspond closely to those goals described by Rockwell and Dustin (1979) for peer counselling programmes (section 2.4.5). Section 5.4

concludes this chapter with a discussion of these goals in relation to the peer counselling programme in the present study.

#### **5.2.4 The Practical Implementation of the Peer Counselling Programme**

In the present study, the selection of peer counsellors involved potential peer counsellors volunteering themselves and the learners voting for them. Such selection processes are recognised in the literature (see section 2.4.3). Cowie and Wallace (2000) refer to recruiting volunteers as peer counsellors and Blain and Brusko (1985) refer to learners voting for peer counsellors. However, Blain and Brusko (1985) also emphasise the importance of selecting high functioning versus popular students. Some researchers suggest the importance of involving teaching staff in this process. However, it could be argued that too much teacher involvement may reduce the autonomy of the peer help initiative.

Cowie and Wallace (2000) emphasise the importance of fostering young people's involvement and therefore investment in the peer counselling programme through the process of "peer nominations". In the present study, the Grade 11's and learners were given most of the autonomy in the final selection of peer counsellors. One teacher in the study (Section 4.3.2.3) recommended that before voting, the personal traits of a "good" peer counsellor should be explained to the learners. This may serve to enhance learners' votes as they are more aware of the helping qualities that an effective peer counsellor should possess to some degree.

The peer counsellors in the present study were trained on a weekly basis for the first term (approximately 8 times). No specific peer counselling training resources were used. However, their training topics correspond closely to the literature on training peer counsellors (see Diver-Stamnes, 1991; McIntyre et al., 1982; Morey et al., 1993 in section 2.4.4). There was a strong emphasis on the peer counsellors being non-directive in the helping encounters, which is also strongly recommended in the literature (Downe et al., 1986). Active role-playing and experiential exercises were emphasised in the training as recommended by the literature (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Gougeon, 1985). The peer counsellors were advised to discuss or refer a case they felt unequipped to handle to the school counsellor. This is an important aspect of peer counselling training emphasised in the literature (Diver-Stamnes, 1991; McIntyre et al., 1982; Morey et al., 1993).

Teachers recommended that more specific training on sex/abuse, AIDS, and bereavement was needed. These issues were recognised as impacting on a number of the learners at the school (see Section 4.2.1.1).

Some researchers stress the importance of including self-awareness in the peer counselling training. This might include topics of values, personal beliefs, and the expectations of being a peer counsellor (Rockwell & Dustin, 1979). This might be a recommendation worth considering with respect to the aim of peer counselling programmes to have a positive impact on the learners themselves. Related to this, the literature also suggests the usefulness of weekend retreats and workshops in peer counselling training (Pyle, 1977 in Downe et al., 1986). In the present study, a peer counsellor herself suggested the value of having a peer counsellors' weekend away with the aim of learning information in a less time-pressured way, and in order to get to know one another better (Section 4.4.7).

Following the 1<sup>st</sup> term training, the peer counsellors met weekly. Whilst these were not "supervision" groups due to issues of confidentiality (Section 4.2.2.3), these meetings provided a platform to discuss new career information, to consider topics for the group, and, in some cases, to discuss hypothetical case scenarios. The importance of structured, on-going meetings and training with peer counsellors is stressed in the literature (Robinson et al., 1991). The possibility of introducing some training material into some of these meetings might be advisable.

In addition to the one-on-one counselling role that peer counsellors performed (Section 4.2.2.3), the peer counselling programme included peer counselling led discussion groups. This is an innovative aspect of the peer counselling programme and will be discussed below.

#### ***5.2.4.1 Peer-led Discussion Groups***

Few studies have utilized peer led counselling groups. Tobias and Myrick (1999) found utilizing peer counselling facilitators in group work with problem behaviour children, to be successful. Young et al. (1999) refer to the importance of peer conversations about career issues in assisting adolescents to achieve greater “self-refinement” (Section 2.2.4). The school counsellor and the peer counsellors in this study were of the opinion that the groups represented a successful aspect of the peer counselling programme. The groups were very popular, with a number of learners attending them. They also allowed learners to grapple with relevant issues, such as boyfriend and family issues, and their hopes for the future. The school counsellor and the peer counsellors also recognised and affirmed that the discussion groups could encourage learners to visit the peer counsellors. The groups therefore also served to “advertise” the peer counsellors’ helping and facilitative role in the school. Finally, a number of learners in the study recommended that peer counsellors engage in more group work with the learners (Section 4.3.1.4).

In the present study, it was suggested that peer counselling group work provided learners with a platform to engage with developmental issues in the context of their peer group. According to Rosenbaum and Laurie (1994), adolescents need to experience a culture where they can express and experiment with the process of self-differentiation. The experience of universality, “I am not alone in my struggle” (Yalom, 1985 in *ibid.*) may be a critical factor within the group process. Grappling with difficult issues together not only normalises the adolescents’ experiences, but also facilitates the process of identity development, with its emphasis on “who am I in the context of my relationships and my hopes for the future?” It is felt that these discussion groups allow for greater self-refinement through the process of peer conversations (Young et al., 1999).

These groups may affirm Havighurst’s (1972 in Rosenbaum & Laurie, 1994) understanding of the identity crisis in adolescence. Adolescents may engage in issues of identity development through grappling with career issues and aspirations and developing a philosophy of life. These groups may facilitate the adolescents’ development of an autonomous sense of self, yet within the context of their peer relationships (see sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4).



### **5.2.5 Users and Non-Users of the Peer Counselling Programme**

In the present study, 23.4% of the respondents had seen a peer counsellor. This percentage is higher than in some studies in which 13% and 12.6% of school learners had consulted with a peer counsellor (Abu-Rasain & Williams, 1999; Henriksen, 1991). Grade 11 learners appeared to be the most frequent users of the programme, which might be explained in terms of their consulting the peer counsellors most about career-related information. Grade 10's were the next most frequent users of the programme with Grade 8 and 9 being the least frequent grades to consult with peer counsellors (see Section 4.2.3).

The highest number of learners who claimed not to have heard about the peer counsellors, were in Grade 8. This might be because Grade 8's were the newest to the school, and might not have yet become familiar with the peer counselling programme. One could argue, however, that Grade 8's could benefit greatly from such a programme in terms of adjusting to a new school environment. Advertising the programme to the new Grade 8's might increase both the awareness and usage of the peer counselling resources.

Section 4.2.3.1 also documents the concerns/issues taken to the peer counsellors. Together, relationship issues (family, opposite sex, and peer relationships), followed by career issues were the most common reasons for seeing a peer counsellor. The findings are echoed by Morey et al. (1989) who found that relationship issues (family, friends, and boyfriend relationships) were the most commonly reported concerns for those girls who had seen a peer counsellor.

Study and school issues were fairly frequent concerns taken to the peer counsellors. Least common concerns included pregnancy, contraception, HIV issues, and drugs. The issues that peer counsellors encountered were very varied, requiring them to bring a number of skills to the counselling situations. Seeing a peer counsellor for career-related information suggests a more information-giving interaction between the peer counsellor and the learner, whilst family and personal concerns suggest a more counselling-related interaction. In addition, some of the learners' concerns might require further counselling intervention in the form of

adult help especially. The notion of referring some learners to other help-givers should form a vital and necessary aspect of their training (Cowie & Wallace, 2000; Robinson et al., 1991).

#### **5.2.6 The Learners' Opinion**

Section 4.3.1.1 lists the themes which categorised the learners' understandings of what peer counsellors do. One of the most frequent themes was that peer counsellors provide advice and/or a solution-based help. This may indicate the learners' preference for this form of helping behaviour and/or their perceptions of help-giving as an active and advice oriented process. This is in contrast to the school counsellor's account of peer counselling as excluding a solution-based form of help to the learners, and therefore suggests a misconception of the peer counselling programme. The peer counsellors also stated that their role was to provide a "listening" support service to the learners, and that they were not an advice-giving group (see sections 4.4.2 and 4.4.4 respectively). Listening to and understanding learners, providing learners with the space and privacy to talk, and providing them with comfort, emphasises the role of peer counsellors as an emotional resource and support to the learners. This form of supportive help is affirmed in the literature with regards to the peer counsellors' roles (Baiss, 1989).

A number of learners stated that peer counsellors should keep what is told private, and, related to this, that learners were willing to be open with the peer counsellors, which suggests knowledge (but not necessarily a practical trust) that the peer counsellors maintained confidentiality. A number of learners felt that peer counsellors were available to help with "anything", whilst only a few learners noted that peer counsellors were available to deal most frequently with more minor concerns. This may indicate a "vote of confidence" in the peer counsellor's ability to help. However, it might also demonstrate an unrealistic expectation that peer counsellors could assist with any concern or problem. In advertising the peer counsellors' service to the learners therefore, it might be necessary to provide examples of what they are able to assist with, and to emphasise that if they cannot provide the learners with assistance, learners will be taken to someone who can help.

The above discussion demonstrates the learners' recognition of peer counsellors as "help-givers" in the school.



#### ***5.2.6.1 Concerns/ issues about which Learners would consult a Peer Counsellor***

Section 4.3.1.2 describes what the learners would see a peer counsellor about. Career issues were a common reason for seeing a peer counsellor. This is supported by Carr's (1999) study, which attributes this to learners' preferences for advice giving and problem solving in the helping relationship. Equally, however, it might suggest that learners need to explore the world of work. Naidoo's study (1999) emphasised learners' needs for career related information in their school context. Carr's (1999) recommendation that peer counsellors be further trained in the field of careers, thereby increasing their confidence and competence in assisting their peers, is a useful recommendation in the light of these research findings.

Together, relationship issues (boyfriend, friendship, and family) were the *most* common reason for seeing a peer counsellor. This in itself suggests that learners need to obtain support and assistance in order to cope with their relationships.

Obtaining assistance for opposite sex relationships suggests that learners were grappling with an emerging aspect of their identity, namely their sexual identity. According to Elliott and Lambourn (1999), this is an important aspect of navigating the identity crisis of adolescence. Friendship and family issues may also be representative of the learners' need to define their sense of self in relation to the family group and the peer group. Havighurst (1972 in Rosenbaum & Laurie, 1994) argues that identity formation occurs in three major areas: development of an adolescent peer group; development of personal independence, including career development; and development of a philosophy of life. Identity in this sense includes establishing a more autonomous sense of self, yet frequently within a peer group. In the present the learners' indications that they would see a peer counsellor about career and relationship issues could be related their search for identity in terms of career issues ("what I am going to do in the future, what am I good at, what will make me happy?"). It could also be indicative of their need to discover who they are as their dependence upon parents is relinquished (Ntshangase, 1995) and more emphasis is placed on the peer group (male and female) for support and self-definition (Havighurst, 1972 in Rosenbaum & Laurie, 1994).

Study issues and school issues were identified as fairly common reasons for seeing a peer counsellor, suggesting that peer counsellors may be a resource for more practical and school-

related issues. A number of learners also said that they would see a peer counsellor regarding the death of a loved one. Cowie and Sharp (1996) cite two studies which found that peer help was very beneficial to adolescents dealing with bereavement. With the threat and incidence of HIV/AIDS reaching epidemic proportions (see Section 1.2.1) and the resulting fatalities from this disease, peer support for this kind of loss might be a valuable resource in a school such as the one in this study.

#### ***5.2.6.2 The Learners' Objections of the Peer Counselling Programme and Recommendations for the Programme***

Sections 4.3.1.3, 4.3.1.4, and 4.3.1.5 described the learners' criticisms and/or objections to the programme, the reasons why some of them had not seen a peer counsellor and, related to this, their recommendations for the programme.

Many learners responded that they had no objections to the programme and qualified their answer with a positive statement about peer counselling. These comments generally emphasised peer counselling as a support to the learners in the school (see section 4.3.1.3). Such responses revealed a positive perception of peer counselling on the part of these learners. A number of learners did not reply to this question, which makes it difficult to hypothesise whether such a lack of response implies that learners have no objections to the programme. In addition, the lack of a specific objection to the programme does not necessarily imply a positive perception of the programme but might reveal a latent mistrust of the programme in itself. This was clearly explored in the question which asked learners to explain why they had not seen a peer counsellor.

The greatest complaint, objection or fear among learners, concerns a lack of trust in the peer counsellors. This may be related to a number of variables: a general mistrust of the peer counsellors; a lack of trust because the peer counsellors were their classmates; the belief that peer counsellors might judge or laugh at them; and the explicit fear that peer counsellors would not maintain their privacy. There is perhaps a link between a lack of trust in the peer counsellors and the shyness theme, with some of the learners describing feeling shy due to a fear of the peer counsellors' response.

A lack of trust in the peer counsellors may be related to the learners' doubt that they would be able to assist them. Some learners indicated that the peer counsellors were not "different" to them, and they were therefore not perceived as having any special helping qualities. This might be related to the misperception of the peer counsellors as a therapeutic group of learners who would provide advice and guidance to the learners at the school. In some instances, therefore, the term "peer counselling" appeared to be misleading, and engendered a sense of suspicion and mistrust in the learners (see Section 1.5.2).

Related to this, some learners felt no need to see a peer counsellor due to not having serious or "life or death" problems. This represents a potentially significant misconception which prevented learners from seeking the help of peer counsellors. It may also be a perception that served to stigmatise those who approached peer counsellors for help, since it appeared to prevent learners from approaching peer counsellors due to their fear of being labelled as having "problems". One peer counsellor (Section 4.4.2) encourages the learners to come in and just talk about their day. This seemed to be an attempt to normalise the helping process. Turner (1999) emphasises that peer support programmes should acknowledge that all people have times when it is useful to talk about concerns or stresses. Normalising the process of peer support is essential in avoiding the stigma that can be related to help-seeking behaviours (see Section 2.3.1).

One peer counsellor felt that learners used the "excuse" of not trusting the peer counsellors because they were insecure in their situations and afraid to talk to the peer counsellors. Many of the learners were noted to have extensive and severe problems (see Section 4.2.1.1). One learner wrote:

*They say love them all but trust no-one. It's very hard to trust someone in our days. So what I tell myself is that I should trust myself since I don't have a mother. You have to think carefully before you trust anyone* (See Section 4.3.1.5).

Perhaps the thought of confronting painful emotions also prevented learners from seeking their peers' assistance. In addition, the thought of exposing these concerns to someone their age, could be a daunting prospect. Fear of judgement, ridicule, and the additional vulnerability that some learners could experience from exposing themselves to the peer counsellors, may therefore be possible deterrents to seeking this form of help.

This seems to contradict Motsabi's (2000) suggestion that peers are perceived as providing non-judgemental listening. In fact, it is argued that some learners may distrust peer counsellors more, because they fear the judgement of their peers at a stage in life in which they are seeking acceptance and popularity from their peers (Morey et al., 1989).

Many of the learners in this study expressed reliance on other relational (usually adult) support. This indicates that some learners felt that help for certain concerns was best sought in the context of family, teacher, and other adult relationships. Such responses suggest that the learners were able to seek help from others. One learner noted that her problems required an adult's help. Seeking help from different contexts might imply a lack of trust in the peer counsellors' help. Equally, however, it might show that the learners approached different people for help in different contexts, and that this was dependent on the problem that they were experiencing.

The learners' recommendations for the peer counselling programme also revealed areas of dissatisfaction with the programme. Many learners said that peer counsellors should be more active in the school environment; that they should not be so reserved; and that they needed to earn the trust of the learners. These recommendations may suggest that the learners mistrusted the peer counsellors because their role was not sufficiently defined.

Interestingly, some learners recommended that they should be able to meet with the peer counsellors without revealing their faces or their identities. This is a good example of the level of vulnerability that learners seemed to fear. Talking about themselves may not only have been a new experience, but also a vulnerable experience. Ways of creating a safer "space" for the learners; emphasising the role of confidentiality in their meetings with the peer counsellors; and putting their fears at ease, are thus useful considerations.

Some practical ways of achieving a safer place to meet with the peer counsellors arose from the learners' recommendations (see section 4.3.1.4). These included the suggestion that the peer counselling space should be less crowded and therefore less daunting for those learners wishing to speak with a peer counsellor. One learner suggested the use of another room in which the peer counsellor and the learner/s could talk privately. Finally, some learners suggested that peer counsellors should meet with groups of learners who were experiencing similar difficulties. Such meetings could serve the purpose of providing support to the



learners in the normalising presence of their fellow peers. This implies that one-on-one contact was not always the preferred choice of help for those learners seeking assistance from peer counsellors.

#### ***5.2.6.3 The Experience of Seeing a Peer Counsellor***

While most of the learners in the study approached the peer counsellors themselves for assistance, there was reported instance when a learner in difficulty was approached by the peer counsellor. This seems to imply that the peer counsellor acted as a “big sister” to this learner, providing support to her at a difficult time. In addition, the peer counsellor might have prevented further emotional or behavioural difficulties in the learner. This is considered to be an important rationale of peer counselling programmes, namely that peer counsellors may act as trouble shooters by identifying problems before they reach the crisis stage (Baiss, 1989).

Of the 26 learners who had seen a peer counsellor, only one reported being referred by a teacher. Teachers are frequently in a position to observe the behavioural manifestation of their learners’ emotional difficulties. In considering the whole-school nature of a successful school guidance programme (Section 2.3), it might be worth considering how to actively involve teachers in linking learners with the peer counsellor/s.

Most of the learners only saw the peer counsellor a couple of times. This finding is consistent with similar reports in the literature (Morey et al., 1989). Most learners indicated that their experience with a peer counsellor had been positive. One learner wrote of the experience: “It was very good because she understands the situation you are in”. A number of writers emphasise that peer help is frequently sought due to peers identifying with one another in their respective situations (de Rosenroll & Day, 1990; Locke & Zimmerman, 1987). In addition, there may be less social distance between peers than between peers and adults (Giddan & Austin in Locke & Zimmerman, 1987).

The most common theme related to a feeling of openness in the peer counselling situation. This referred to feeling relaxed and open with the peer counsellor, and perceiving the peer counsellor as concerned, open, and relaxed herself. It might be that the peer counsellors’ feelings of confidence and care had a positive impact on the learners, who themselves could

then feel relaxed and free to be open with the peer counsellors. This observation appears to be consistent with Carr's study (1999) which found that the peer counsellors felt confident to put their counselling skills into practice.

A few learners reported feeling initially anxious in the peer counselling situation, but that with time, they relaxed and were able to be open with the peer counsellor. In this sense, "openness" might be taken to refer to a feeling of trust in the peer counselling situation. Initially, there could be feelings of distrust and/or anxiety, but the nature of the interaction with the peer counsellor frequently allays any fears. McDowell (1983) argues that it is particularly important for adolescents who are seeking help that trust and security are present when discussing their inner thoughts and feelings. To be effective, the peer counselling situation must engender the learners' trust in this helping process.

Regarding the learners' rating of their experience of seeing a peer counsellor, the majority rated the experience as being helpful and that they had felt understood by the peer counsellor. Most of these learners would recommend the service to their friends, indicating a general satisfaction with the programme. However, some of the learners were concerned about their privacy in the peer counselling situation. This finding is similar to Morey et al.'s study (1989) which found that half of the learners in the study were unsure that the peer counsellors would maintain their confidentiality. Ways of increasing the "safety" of the counselling situation should be considered.

Section 4.4.6.1 described the recommendations that the peer counsellors made regarding gaining the learners' trust. Having a separate room for the one-on-one counselling was one of the practical suggestions. A peer counsellor also suggested that peer counsellors should spend time sharing information about themselves with the learner before starting the counselling situation. Discussing issues of trust explicitly at the start of the counselling session was yet another recommendation. Some peer counsellors suggested doing plays or talks at assembly to increase learners' awareness of the peer counsellors and thereby increasing a sense of confidence in them. Cowie and Sharp (1996) refer to the importance of peer counsellors as school "endorsed" helpers. Perhaps the involvement and visibility of the peer counsellors in the various school contexts may assist this process.



## **5.2.7 The Teachers' Views**

### ***5.2.7.1 Perception of the Programme***

While most teachers indicated a positive perception of the programme, a number of teachers commented that they were mostly unaware of the programme, whilst others expressed apprehension about the programme (see Section 4.3.2.1). This is likely to have an impact on the functioning of the programme, as teachers who are unsure about how the peer counsellors work or are suspicious of the role they play, will not necessarily encourage learners to visit with the peer counsellors. Lack of awareness of the programme also implies a lack of understanding of the programme's functioning. This differs from Henriksen's (1991) findings that 90% of the staff had a good understanding of the programme.

### ***5.2.7.2 Perceived Impact of the Programme at the School***

Most teachers affirmed the role of peer counselling in the school, arguing that the learners benefited from the peer counsellors' helpful or sisterly advice. Most teachers indicated that they had no personal involvement with the programme, whilst two teachers had referred learners to peer counsellors. Henriksen (1991) suggests that if teachers are given some direction about how to better utilize peer helpers in their classrooms, the benefits of the peer helping programme will broaden.

Some teachers reported that the peer counselling programme reduced the load on the teachers and counselling teachers. This was a central rationale for having a peer help programme at the school (see Section 2.4.2). Less than half of the teachers noted that the school itself benefited from a more caring and happier environment. Half of the teachers, however, provided no comment in response to this question, implying no/little observation of the impact of the peer counselling programme on the school atmosphere. Some studies suggest that the school climate improves due to the presence of a peer help programme (Blain & Brusko, 1985; Grady 1980 in de Rosenroll, 1989). One teacher specified that it provided a family-like atmosphere of mutual responsibility and accountability, which complemented the ethos of the school. This suggests that peer counselling enhances the school's provision of support to the learners.

### ***5.2.7.3 Critical Evaluation of the Programme and Recommendations for its Functioning***

Some teachers indicated that the lack of awareness about the peer counselling programme amongst staff and learners was a disadvantage. Peters and Shertzer (1969) argue that school-based counselling programmes should be pervasive and operate at all school levels. In the context of whole-school guidance, this was taken to refer to a holistic approach in which a programme is known, developed, and utilized through its interaction with the various school levels (see Section 2.3 for more details). Awareness of the programme may not only aid acceptance of the programme, but also its utilization. A programme that is not well known might instil a sense of mistrust in the programme. As Cowie and Sharp (1996) note, the inclusion of peer counselling in school policy endorses the role of the programme at the school and the trust that the school places in the peer counsellors themselves.

One teacher expressed her view that peer counsellors should not be doing counselling at their age, and should only act as referral agents. Towards this end, it was argued that peer counsellors should be trained in the process of referring learners (including when to refer, how to refer, and what to refer for). However, it is the opinion of the author, that this suggestion may undermine the programme's rationale, which included providing learners with additional support beyond that which the counselling teachers and teachers were able to provide, and providing a more supportive school ethos through learners' responsibility for and provision of care for one another (see Section 4.2.2.1).

All of the teachers in the study provided their support for the continuation of the peer counselling programme. The reasons for this included the following: that the learners in their school needed the additional support and that peer counselling extends the amount and level of support available to them at school; that peer counselling empowered the learners and the peer counsellors in the school to assist one another; and that learners might be more comfortable approaching their peers for help rather than adults. The following quote by Cowie and Sharp (1996) encapsulates the above-mentioned "reasons" for the peer counselling programme continuing at the school:

We believe that peer support begins with the natural willingness of most young people to act in a cooperative, friendly way towards one another. Peer counselling

and support systems build on this intrinsic quality and create structures which facilitate the young person's potential for responsible, sensitive, empathic caring. ...Adults need to acknowledge that young people have something distinctive to offer their peers in distress. (p. v)

Teachers were asked to provide recommendations regarding the programme. Half of the teachers did not respond to this question, which may reveal a lack of investment in the programme. Of the teachers who responded to this question, a number indicated the need for providing the peer counsellors with further training. One teacher expressed the importance of raising awareness of the peer counselling programme at the school. Finally, one teacher listed the importance of the following: regular training, meeting together, meeting with other schools, strict boundaries, and lots of teacher assistance. These recommendations are emphasised in the literature (Robinson et al., 1991). Of concern was this teacher's reference to having a lack of time to facilitate or reinforce the above-mentioned recommendations, since such peer help programmes require this kind of assistance and commitment. As Turner (1999) states: "Peer support is not automatically self-sustaining and organisation, planning and persistence is needed for effective initiative in the long-term" (p. 570).

The school counsellor believed that one of the most pressing psycho-social concerns that learners were facing at the school was related to health behaviour and, in particular, risk-taking behaviours. There was no recent reduction in the pregnancy rate at the school, and the school counsellor questioned how the programmes at the school could more effectively reduce such risk-taking behaviours. This is clearly a topic requiring urgent attention.

Motsabi (2000) discusses the role that peer counsellors may assume in immunising learners against harmful influences (section 2.4.7). Learners may assist in school programmes on alcohol and drug abuse and in education on safe sex to prevent HIV/AIDS and pregnancy. Indeed, some peer counselling programmes have been found to include specific topics on drug and alcohol abuse, sex, and teen pregnancy in their training (Diver-Stamnes, 1991). One of the teachers in this study (see Section 4.3.2.1) however, expressed her discouragement of the peer counsellors' involvement in sensitive issues such as sex and pregnancy. Whilst it is recognised that such topics may be personally, emotionally, morally and ethically laden, the peer counsellors' involvement in such issues might be warranted. The possibility of

expanding the peer counsellors' activities to providing peer education in the school context (see Section 1.5.1) might also be worth considering.

#### **5.2.8 The Peer Counsellors' Experiences**

A number of these peer counsellors were motivated to become peer counsellors because of the problems they had experienced in their lives. Helping others provided them with an opportunity to care for others. Perhaps in a sense, they were nurturing and assisting themselves through relating to others in a constructive and caring fashion. Peer counselling was also perceived as having the opportunity to provide a service to the school. The feeling of social usefulness in the school context, may be a particularly motivating and rewarding experience.

Peers are recognised in the literature in playing a very important part in the development of the adolescent. Newman (1976 in Erhard, 1999) argues that the peer group becomes a basis for developing supportive relationships that provide the resources necessary to acquire a more autonomous sense of identity. In addition, Nielsen (1996) emphasises the importance of peers in facilitating the adolescent's maturation in issues of self-esteem and self-confidence (see Sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4). It may be that peer counsellors were motivated to become helpers in the school because the role assisted them in finding answers to the question of "who am I" in a relational and occupational sense. "Helping" peer interactions may also have assisted these peer counsellors' growth in terms of self-esteem and self-confidence levels.

Most of the peer counsellors said that peer counselling had enabled them to grow as people. Some stressed the significance of helping people and the positive impact it had on them. This was also related to a sense of capability that comes from positively influencing the learners' lives. Affective gains due to being a peer counsellor are reinforced by research (Diver-Stamnes, 1991; Dorrian, 1998; Downe et al., 1986; France & Gallagher, 1984; Henriksen, 1991; Robinson et al., 1991). More specifically, Dorrian (1998) found positive gains in the self-concept of the female adolescents undergoing a peer counselling training programme in a local South African secondary school. Whilst the peer counsellors' self-concept levels were not investigated in the present study, based on their comments it would appear that they have gained in self-confidence and self-esteem.

It is argued that the peer counsellors' role in the present study may encourage a sense of motivation and empowerment with regards to their own life circumstances. Being a peer counsellor may decrease the likelihood of passively accepting one's negative life circumstances and increasing the possibility of defining oneself outside of these experiences. A link between self-esteem and qualities of responsibility and self-initiative, is made by Purkey and Novak (1996). They argue that with low self-esteem levels, learners may easily succumb to apathy, dependency, and a loss of self-control. One of the peer counsellor's observations of her ability to be a more positive person seems to reflect a growth in self-esteem levels, and this finding is thus consistent with the literature.

The literature suggests that peer interactions facilitate the development of greater ego strength and social reasoning skills (Nielsen, 1996). Turner (1999) identified some of the psychological benefits of being a peer counsellor: increased self-esteem from the knowledge that one has something to offer; decreased dependency; a sense of control that can be empowering; and a feeling of social usefulness. The above-mentioned social and intrapersonal skills that result from general and/or peer interactions could explain the positive effects of the peer counselling programme on the peer counsellors in this study.

Two peer counsellors described their separate experiences of dealing with difficult issues (see Section 4.4.3). The one peer counsellor felt that she had dealt well with the case without consulting a teacher for assistance. The other peer counsellor's experience seemed more complicated due to the fact that the learners' home environment was very unstable and the learner was described as feeling hopeless. The learner also seemed to be reluctant to talk with a teacher. Turner (1999) stresses that it is of great importance that peer counsellors are not required to handle complex psycho-social and emotional problems. Based on the information provided by the second peer counsellor above, it would appear that this case might have required systemic and professional intervention in the form of the counselling teacher's intervention and/or psychological professional assistance. Such cases should be referred to an adult, not only for the learner's well-being, but for the peer counsellor's well-being.



### 5.3 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The rationales behind peer-led counselling programmes are many and varied. An evaluation of a peer counselling programme, such as the one in this study, seeks to determine the actual efficacy of such a programme. In this study, this was done through using a whole-school guidance evaluation (Peters & Shertzer, 1969; Watkins, 1995). This evaluation will be concluded by considering the goals that Rockwell and Dustin (1979) recommend for a peer counselling programme (see section 2.4.5).

These goals have been modified and adapted (see below) for the purposes of the present peer counselling programme evaluation. These goals were chosen and modified, based on their similarity to the school counsellor's expressed goals for the programme (see section 4.2.2.1).

- *To increase the counselling effectiveness at the school.* This point may raise the following questions: how do peer counsellors aid the process of counselling being done in the school? How effective is what they do?

The discussion groups are recognised for their perceived usefulness and popularity in the school context. Also, the comments and ratings from those learners who had visited a peer counsellor demonstrated that learners found talking with a peer counsellor to be a positive and helpful experience. The overall “effectiveness” of the individual peer counselling seems to be demonstrated. However, issues of trust and confidentiality might require further consideration to enhance the learners' feelings of safety in talking with a peer counsellor.

In addition, the peer counsellors facilitated the provision of career-related information to the learners, which was practically useful to the learners and relieved some of the pressure on the school counsellor.

- *To increase the visibility of the counselling programme.* How does peer counselling “advertise” the value of help seeking? From a more systemic view, what is the involvement of the school community in the peer counselling programme. Related to this, to what extent is peer counselling integrated into the life of the school?

The school counsellor and teachers' observed that learners were more aware of the need to seek help for their concerns and problems due to the presence of the peer help programme. With respect to whether the peer counselling programme was "known" and integrated into the life of the school, the study indicated that the learners were mostly aware of the peer counselling programme in the school. Grade 8's however, seemed to be the least aware of the programme, which indicates the need for more input in the form of information and motivation concerning the peer counsellors' role in the school. Some learners recommended that peer counsellors should be more active in demonstrating their willingness to help and their trustworthiness to the learners.

Regarding the "visibility" of the counselling programme at the school from the teachers' perspective, many teachers felt that they were not well informed about the peer counselling programme in the school. Some teachers had referred learners to the peer counsellors, but otherwise there was very little teacher involvement in the programme. One teacher felt that this was an advantage because the peer counselling programme remained more learner-driven. However, it is argued that teacher awareness is a necessary precursor to a greater acceptance and therefore utilization of the programme. Teachers may also be a valuable referral source.

The availability of a designated peer counselling room; the peer counsellors' badges; and the space they had on the school notice board were practical ways in which the peer counsellors' role in the life of the school was reinforced. The opportunity that peer counsellors had of using the school counsellor's "big" classroom for their group discussions, was also a way that the peer counselling programme was integrated into the life of the school. The peer counsellors' idea of performing a play at the school assembly was also a valuable suggestion for raising awareness of what help the peer counsellors offer in the school environment.

- *Increasing the amount of counselling occurring within the school.* Does the peer counselling programme extend the amount of support and assistance available to the learners?

Just less than a quarter of the learners in the study had seen a peer counsellor, which indicates that a significant number of learners were seeking some kind of assistance and/or support from the peer counsellors.

In addition, a variety of learners' concerns and/or queries were dealt with by the peer counsellors. Many of these learners might not have sought the school counsellor's assistance for a variety of reasons, including the school counsellor's busy time schedule. The school counsellor and the peer counsellors, and to some extent the learners, recognised the popularity and perceived usefulness of the peer-facilitated discussion groups. Many learners attended these groups and some of these learners sought out the peer counsellors after the groups. This suggests that the amount of counselling occurring within the school did increase due to the presence of the peer counselling programme.

The teachers also recognised that the peer counselling programme extended the support and help available to the learners. In addition, a few teachers and the school counsellor herself observed a decrease in the load of the individual counselling that the school counsellor had to manage.

- *Finally, has the psychological growth of the peer counsellors been facilitated through their role?* What is the impact of being a peer counsellor on the peer counsellors themselves? How do the peer counsellors benefit from their training and role in the school? What skills do they acquire from being a peer counsellor?

It is suggested that there are definite psychological benefits to those learners who had been peer counsellors. Most peer counsellors affirmed the effects that helping learners had had on them. These included: learning useful information; a sense of responsibility and affirmation that comes from having a helping role in the school; assisting the learners in groups or on individual terms; and learning from others' mistakes. Developing self-esteem levels and the capacity to be positive and proactive in their lives appeared to be the significant psychological benefits of being a peer counsellor.

This study has attempted to evaluate the efficacy of a peer counselling programme at a local all-girls secondary school. The above discussion highlights the extent to which the programme has contributed to the life of the school, whilst acknowledging the ongoing development of this dynamic programme. A whole-school guidance approach suggests that the programme is operating effectively, especially at the level of the learners and the peer counsellors. However, the extent to which the teachers' role in the peer counselling

programme may be further facilitated requires some exploration. Further developments in increasing its visibility may assist the extent to which the programme is known, trusted, and utilized by the teachers, learners, and wider school body.

The following recommendations are provided as suggestions to aid the development of the peer counselling programme at the school in this study. They are based on a whole-school guidance evaluation of the programme, and more specifically, on the goals of the programme.

- It is argued that the term “peer counselling” may be a misleading title in what it conveys to the learners at the school. The term “counselling” might convey to the learners that peer counsellors provide a solution and advice-based counselling service. It may engender a sense of suspicion in some of the learners who doubt the peer counsellors’ ability to counsel them. In emphasising the role of support-giving and assistance to the learners in the school, the term “peer helper” is recommended. This term may also reduce certain teacher’s reservations regarding the counselling ability of the peer counsellors.
- With regards to the training and supervision of peer counsellors, it is proposed that some of the peer counselling training should involve a focus on self-awareness. In addition, a weekend workshop away at the beginning of the year is recommended to the extent that it may assist the peer counsellors in getting to know one another, their motivations for being a peer counsellor, and the basic counselling skills they may develop.
- Encouraging outside agencies (Lifeline, Childline, Survivors of Violence) to present information to the peer counsellors may also expand peer counsellors’ awareness and sensitivity to certain adolescent issues. It may also be a way of making peer counsellors aware of the helping networks that exist in the wider community. Finally, it may reduce the school counsellor’s load in terms of the peer counselling training.
- Linking with peer counsellors from other schools is a further recommendation. Peer counsellors may share resources and experiences and even expand their helping role to community settings.
- The use of a buddy-programme might prove to be a valuable addition to the peer counselling programme (this idea was raised by the school counsellor). Some of the learners with more “serious” difficulties may be seen for counselling by the school



counsellor or an outside professional, and supported in the everyday school context by a peer counsellor.

- It is proposed that the peer counselling programme be further incorporated into the school life. Mission statements, lists of services available at the school and letters to parents and sponsors are examples of ways that this might be achieved. Perhaps a joint meeting with peer counsellors, teachers, and school counsellors could be arranged to discuss ways in which peer counselling is meeting the learners' needs and ways in which the peer counsellors and teachers can assist each other.
- In considering the positive effects of the peer counselling training on the peer counsellors, it might be worth designing a pre-selection peer counselling programme which assists those learners who are interested in developing skills of relating to others. Such a training programme could be available to those Grade 10's who are interested in becoming peer counsellors in Grade 11. In addition, this might serve the function of assessing which learners are interested in developing helping skills, thereby facilitating the selection process. This also gives a greater number of learners the opportunity to learn skills of relating to others in a positive and helpful manner.
- In order to gain the learners' trust in the school environment, it has been suggested that peer counsellors' roles and functions should be further defined. Discussing issues of confidentiality at the beginning of a peer counselling interaction might also be beneficial. In addition, the number of people in the peer counselling room should be kept to a minimum. Having a separate room for more personal counselling interactions should also be considered if this is practically possible.
- Perhaps the peer counsellors could also occasionally assume a "peer education" role. They could distribute health related information through awareness days, through eye-catching displays on their notice board, and/or through additional group discussions. They might organise for speakers to come to the school to provide information or to speak about their experiences. This might be an appropriate way that peer counsellors could take responsibility for raising health and safety awareness in the schools.

#### **5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

An initial limitation of the present study was the lack of other peer counselling research studies conducted in the South African secondary school context. The extent to which



research links may be made between the present study and other South African studies, was therefore very limited. It is hoped that further research into peer counselling in South African schools will contribute to the research literature on this topic. Research into secondary school peer counselling programmes in our local context may also serve the purpose of informing the implementation, training, and supervision needs of these programmes. In addition, it could inform decision-making regarding how to increase the effectiveness of such programmes within our unique South African context.

Another limitation of the present study relates to the generalisability of the results. The investigation was undertaken at one school in the area and, as such, the findings are not necessarily generalisable to other schools. There are a number of factors that may vary from one school to another. An important distinction might be the role of life skills and guidance in the school in the present study. The school counsellor and school principal are noted for their commitment to meet the learners' psycho-social as well as their educational needs. Other schools might not have such a supportive school context in which to implement a programme.

The role of language comprehension and expression was another potential limitation in the study. Most of the learners in the school were English second-language speakers. Learners may have experienced difficulty in expressing themselves within an English written modality. It is possible that the learners may have lacked the necessary written language skills to effectively articulate their viewpoints with regards to the peer counselling programme at their school. In addition, it may be that the term "peer counselling programme" was unfamiliar to a number of learners. This may have led to some confusion and served to inflate the number of learners who claimed not to have heard about the programme.

In addition it is felt that the techniques for analysing written language in this study may have concealed important aspects of the learners' lived experiences. Perhaps more observational and non-verbal data-collection procedures would have yielded more contextualised information. Observations of learners' behaviours in and around the peer counselling room (in terms of the learners coming, going and/or avoiding the room due to its "crowdedness") might have provided very useful non-verbal information. In addition, observing actual peer counselling sessions and/or the peer counselling discussion groups through the use of audio-visual equipment, might have also provided more contextual, and to some extent, objective

observations of the peer counselling interactions. The extent to which these research procedures would influence the natural situation and the ethical considerations of such research methods, would obviously need consideration.

Another limitation relates to the research design and data-analysis used in the present study. Qualitative analysis requires interpretive reading. The researcher's interpretation was influenced by her subjective life-world perspective. Perhaps follow-up interviews with a sample of learners and/or teachers would have provided clarity on learners' helping needs and the learners' and teachers' perceptions and observations of the peer counselling programme.

Related to the above limitation, it is argued that the "researcher as outsider" may have influenced the way in which the peer counselling programme was presented. It is possible that the learners and teachers wanted to present a very positive perception of the peer counselling programme to the researcher due to its evaluation. This may have led to a slightly more positive account of the programme in its representation to the researcher.

The lack of more objective measurements of the peer counsellors' experiences, limits the conclusions one can make about the impact of their role. Performing pre-and post-test research with the peer counsellors might have allowed for more conclusive observations regarding their growth in terms of self-esteem and self-concept levels. Dorrian's (1998) study provides useful direction for a pre-and post-test research design with regards to measuring changes in the peer counsellors' self-concepts.

Finally only half of the peer counsellors participated in the focus group. Therefore, the results from the focus group may not be indicative of the whole peer counselling group. It might be that the most motivated peer counsellors were available for the focus group, which may have positively skewed the results of this data-collection procedure.

A number of these research limitations are related to suggestions for future peer counselling research studies. These are presented in the following chapter, which also serves to conclude the present study.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Adolescence is recognised as a time of excitement, stress, adjustment, and transition. An adolescent's experience varies due to the situational and social contexts which are inherent in daily life. The school environment is an example of one such context. Schools have for some time been recognised as central sites for prevention and health promotion (Green & Kreuter, 1991 in Donald et al., 1997). A supportive and health-promoting school environment is recognised to provide critically important life learning for its school-goers. The Consortium for the Promotion of School Based Competence writes:

Schools as organisations enjoy unequalled influence- both formalised and unformalised- in children's lives with respect to social, moral, intellectual and behavioural development. With respect to social adjustment, schools are particularly well suited as sites to promote children's development (Consortium, 1994, in Cowie & Sharp, 1996, p. 145)

In particular, South Africa is recognised to have experienced rapid changes in the process of its transition to an emerging democracy. The school environment is recognised for its roles and responsibilities within this process. The term "whole-school guidance" provides a framework for incorporating the role of emotional support, guidance, and the facilitation of life skills into the school curriculum, structure, and general school ethos. The new Outcomes Based Education system compels all South African schools to provide an accountable and visible Life Orientation programme. The implementation of peer-help programmes is one way that South African schools can actively involve the learners and wider school context in the educational process, which includes preparation for life outside of school. Dorrian (1998) asserts that peer counselling is a form of participative management, by learners, for learners, and is based on a model of social responsibility.

The traditional role of the school counsellor is thus extended from providing the majority of the psycho-social support in the school, to training others to share this responsibility. Such a form of participative management and social responsibility in the school is perhaps a reflection of the democratic principles underlying the new Outcomes Based Education System and, more generally, South Africa's emergent democratic government.

The emphasis in this study has been on a whole-school evaluation of a peer counselling programme in operation at a local secondary school. A wealth of literature exists regarding the development, implementation, and reported efficacy of peer help programmes, especially in American, Canadian and British secondary schools. Although peer counselling is a relatively new approach in South Africa for providing psycho-social support in school settings, it offers some definite benefits for learners and the school staff.

The development of an effective peer counselling programme can provide a school with a cost effective vehicle for broadening the range and variety of helping formats offered in the existing school guidance programme. In addition, it allows the counselling service to address problems that might be less effectively handled in an adult-child relationship (Downe et al., 1986). The benefits for the peer counsellors themselves include a sense of self-esteem arising possibly from the prestige of being selected and having a useful and constructive role in the school. The benefits of helping and assisting others are also well documented as providing these peer counsellors with a sense of self-confidence and satisfaction. The interpersonal skills that they acquire in their training are perceived as useful and may be transferred to their other relationships and life experiences. Benefits for the learners themselves are also evident. Learners may benefit from talking and sharing experiences with someone whose similarity in age may allow for greater empathy. The added element of social support in the school has also been discussed in the way that it contributes to the support and perception of help-availability in the school setting.

It is suggested that the peer interactions that characterised the present peer counselling programme, enabled the learners (both peer counsellor and help-seeker) to navigate their psycho-social development in a socially responsible and empowered way. Learners could engage with the developmental tasks of identity formation in the context of the supportive helping environment and supportive relationships which the peer counselling programme was perceived to offer. It is argued that, in the present study, the peer counselling groups were a particularly innovative and useful idea for engaging the learners in the developmental tasks of adolescence.

Peer counselling allows learners to have a more active voice in the school. Learners are recognised for their role in assisting, supporting, and encouraging one another. The school counsellor's load is relieved to a certain extent as learners assume responsibility for one another. Peer counsellors assume a "social responsibility" role in the school and encourage the value of caring for one another in a visible and recognised way.

However, it is argued that peer-led approaches cannot be the only component of the guidance and counselling aspects of the school. Indeed, if peer-led approaches are to be successful they must be one part of a panoply of approaches (Elliott & Lambourn, 1999). In addition, the peer counselling programme cannot develop in isolation, and requires a school context that values and supports its learners. The incorporation of peer counselling into school policy may be one such way of recognising and endorsing it as a form of help available to the learners in the school.

It is felt that the effectiveness of the present peer counselling programme has been demonstrated. A number of recommendations and suggestions for further development have been made in keeping with the aims of a formative evaluation.



## **6.1 INDICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The purpose of an evaluative study is to inform both process and content related decisions for the development and improvement of the programme being evaluated. In the present study, a number of recommendations were made. A useful study might be to follow-up the school and its peer counselling programme at the end of 2003 to assess whether any changes have occurred as a result of the evaluation. This might be achieved by interviewing the school principal and school counsellor again. Perhaps another focus group with the peer counsellors would also provide useful information on the development of the programme.

A cross-sectional research study might be conducted at a number of local schools with peer counselling programmes where the selection, training and supervision of peer counsellors may be observed and compared. The useful versus less useful aspects of such programmes may be explored through observing and comparing the effectiveness of such programmes. One of the outcomes of this research may be the development of a uniquely South African peer counselling training document that can be used in a variety of South African secondary school settings.

Related to the above recommendation, is the potential value of investigating the usefulness of a peer counselling programme in South African schools with limited infrastructure and educational resources. Perhaps the needs of learners in such formerly disadvantaged schools would be different to those identified in this study and therefore the programmes that are implemented at such schools need to be adapted accordingly. Researching peer counselling in such school contexts may be useful in identifying those aspects of peer counselling programmes that are appropriate in the diverse South African secondary school contexts.

Finally, in terms of the peer counselling mode of support, further research is recommended in the following areas:

- Assessing changes in the self-concepts of learners who participate in peer counselling training and/or experience the role of being a peer counsellor. An effective research design for this type of study would be a pre-post test experimental research design with an experimental and a comparison group of learners.
- Conducting peer counselling research at a co-educational and/or all boys school/s. Research questions that could guide these studies include: What is the role of gender in terms of the effectiveness of such programmes? Do peer counselling programmes need to be adapted for use in co-educational and/or an all-boys school?
- An action research design may be effectively utilized to investigate the implementation and development of a peer helping programme and to provide feedback at the various levels of its development. The advantage of such a research-design strategy is the extent to which the specific contextual features of an institution (a secondary school for instance) are taken into account and used to adapt the programme to a particular research setting.

It is argued that peer-helping programmes represent an innovative way that South African secondary schools can meet the psycho-social and educational needs of their learners. Research into such programmes may serve to contribute to a currently somewhat deficient body of research and thereby inform and guide the effective development of present and future programmes of this kind.

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## APPENDIX A: CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE SCHOOL

Child and Family Centre  
University of Natal  
Private Bag X01  
Scottsville, 3209  
Tel: (w) 033 260 5367  
E-mail: osheak@nu.ac.za

School Address Omitted:

15 April 2002

To the School Principal and the School counsellor (names omitted)

### **Re: Peer Counselling Research**

This letter is with reference to a telephone call between myself and Ms (name omitted) on the 10th April 2002, regarding research into the peer counselling programme at your school.

I am in the process of completing my Masters in counselling psychology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. I have had discussions with Ann Dorrian from Pietermaritzburg Girls' High School and Jacqui Akhurst (my supervisor at the University) about doing research into peer counselling. I have since formulated a research proposal. The title of the intended study is: An investigation and evaluation of a peer counselling programme in a local South African secondary school. Ann Dorrian suggested I might conduct this research at your school as a number of research studies have already been conducted at her school regarding the peer counselling programme and as such another school may benefit more from this research.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold. Firstly it aims to inform you regarding this proposed study and the research data that needs to be collected as part of the study, and secondly to request your approval/consent to conduct research at your school.

The type of research I am hoping to collect at your school is as follows:

- An interview with yourselves regarding the peer counselling programme that has been developed and implemented at your school as well as general information regarding your school (2nd quarter)
- To ask the present peer counsellors to keep log-sheets of the type of concerns they encounter in their role as peer counsellors. Confidentiality measures will be devised to protect these learners' identity (2nd quarter)
- To devise and administer questionnaires for learners and teachers regarding their perceptions of the peer counselling programme (3rd quarter)
- To hold a follow-up focus group with the peer counsellors and/or teachers which will allow for further discussions regarding the peer counselling programme. These discussions would focus especially on the issues raised in the questionnaires as well as recommendations for improvement (3rd-4th quarter)

The outcome of this research would be provided to you in verbal and/or written format. I hope to complete this research by December of this year.

Please would you indicate to me, whether this research at your school is acceptable. Should it be acceptable, I would also like to make an appointment to interview both of you regarding the peer counselling programme at your school.

Please feel free to contact me regarding any queries and/or the research in general.

Yours sincerely

Kelly O'Shea

**APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE  
SCHOOL**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (the School Principal), hereby provide my consent for  
Kelly O'Shea to conduct research into the Peer Counselling Programme at,  
\_\_\_\_\_ School.

Signed this day 03/03/2002

\_\_\_\_\_

The School Principal

\_\_\_\_\_

Witness

## APPENDIX C: CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE PARENTS

University of Natal  
P/Bag X01  
Scottsville  
3209

August 2002

Dear Parent/Guardian

I am presently doing my Psychology Masters degree at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. As part of this degree, I am conducting research on how the learners at the school receive help for any problems they experience. I am especially interested in how the peer counselling programme at their school, might provide assistance to them.

This research will involve asking the learners to fill out a questionnaire. This questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and is completely confidential. This means that the learners will not be asked to write their names on the questionnaires and therefore no information that they provide will be linked back to them specifically.

I am hoping to hand-out these questionnaires to the learners in the week of the 2 - 7th of September 2002. If you have any concerns, questions or objections to this research, please feel free to contact me directly at the Child and Family Centre on (033) 2605367, or please contact the school counsellor at (name of school and contact number omitted)

Many thanks  
Yours faithfully

Kelly O'Shea

## APPENDIX D: THE PEER COUNSELLORS' LOG-SHEETS

Dear Peer Counsellors

I am doing a study of the peer counselling programme that exists at your school as part of my Masters in psychology. The aim of my research is to investigate your peer counselling programme. I hope to be able to observe a number of aspects of this programme with a potential aim of making some useful recommendations. An important aspect of my study is confidentiality. That means that no names will be mentioned in the study (such as the learners, the teachers or the peer counsellors). Even the name of the school itself will not be used. The research that will involve you (the peer counsellors) will consist of the following:

### **1. Survey of issues/concerns that you deal with as peer counsellors.**

What are the problems/concerns that the learners bring to you? (2nd quarter)

An important aspect of this research is the confidentiality of the learners you see. Names will not be used for this reason. Please could you rather use their initials together with a number. For instance if you meet with Lindiwe Zulu, you would write 'LZ1'. If Busi Dlamini saw you next you would write 'BD2'. If Lindiwe Zulu comes back to you 5 days later, her code will still be 'LZ1'. This is so we can get an idea of how many learners are seeing you, for what reason and how many times they see you.

Please can you tick the boxes that apply to the learners you see in your role as peer counsellor.

Please write their initials and their number in the first box. If they return to you at a later stage, write the same number and initial in this box.

1. Date and Code
2. Are they referred by a teacher (school authority figure) or themselves?
3. Is this their first visit, or a repeat visit?
4. Could you tick or write in the box or boxes (provided on the following page) that apply to the topic/s they wish to discuss with you. The full description of these boxes are provided below:

- ☐ School concerns (learning, teacher relationships, grades)
- ☐ Future career plans
- ☐ Opposite sex relationships
- ☐ Peer relationships (relationships with friends/other learners)
- ☐ Pregnancy
- ☐ HIV/AIDS
- ☐ New School issues (i.e. adjusting to a new school)
- ☐ Family issues
- ☐ Alcohol use
- ☐ Drug use
- ☐ Other (please specify in the space provided)



Date/Code	Ref?	1 <sup>st</sup> or rep	School	Future	Opp Sex	Peer R's	Preg	Hiv/Aids	New School	Family	Alcohol	Drugs	Other

## **APPENDIX E: THE LEARNERS' QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE LEARNERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE PEER COUNSELLING PROGRAMME**

Dear Learners,

You have been asked to fill out this questionnaire as part of my research for a psychology degree. I am hoping to learn about some of difficulties you experience for which help is or is not available at your school. I am especially interested in learning about the peer counselling programme at your school. Please note that all that you fill in on this questionnaire is confidential. That means that you don't have to write your name on the questionnaire and so any information you provide can't be linked back to you. Please answer the questions in a way that describes what you think and feel.

I am very grateful to those who fill out this questionnaire. Your time and effort is appreciated.

If you understand the above and decide that you will answer the questionnaire, please place a tick in the box below:

--

Please note that this questionnaire is organised into two sections, Section A and Section B. Everyone is asked to complete Section A whilst Section B is only to be answered by those who have talked with a peer counsellor.

**SECTION A (for everyone to answer)**

Please fill in the following information in the boxes provided:

Age:

Grade:

Question 1: Please describe some of the things or problems in your life that you would sometimes like help with? (this can refer to personal issues, school issues, family issues etc). Please write your answer in the box below.

Question 2 a): What concerns/problems do you have that your school offers help for?

Question 2 b): What places or people at your school can you go to for help with some of these concerns/problems?

Question 3: What do you understand of what peer counsellors do?

Question 4:

Of the following, please could you tick those things that you would consider seeing a peer counsellor about?

- |                         |                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a personal issue.....   | a boyfriend/relationship issue..... |
| a school issue.....     | future career plans.....            |
| a friendship issue..... | contraception (e.g. condoms).....   |
| a family issue.....     | death of a loved one.....           |
| a study issue.....      | a health issue.....                 |

none of the above.....

Other (please write in the space below)

Question 5: Have you heard of the peer counselling programme at your school?  
Please tick the box with your answer in it.

Yes	No
-----	----

If you have answered no to this question then please go straight to Question 11 of Section A

Question 6: What sort of things have you heard about this peer counselling programme?

--

Question 7: Would you know how to contact a peer counsellor?

Yes	No/Unsure
-----	-----------

Question 8: Are there any things about the peer counselling programme that you don't like?  
Please explain.

--

Question 9: Do you have any suggestions for the peer counselling programme that, in your opinion might make it better for you and other learners at your school? Please write these in the space below.

--

Question 10: Have you seen a peer counsellor?

Yes	No
-----	----

If you have answered yes to the last question, please continue to Section B on page 5.  
If you answered no, please answer the following question on the next page.

Question 11: Why have you not seen a peer counsellor? Please tick the answers that apply to you and explain your answer in the box beneath. Please note that you can tick more than one answer.

I had no need to see a peer counsellor.....

Please explain

I felt too shy to see a peer counsellor.....

Please explain

I didn't think they could help me with my problem.....

Please explain

I was worried about my problem staying private.....

Please explain

I have not heard of the peer counsellors.....

Please explain

Other reason/s. Please write in the space provided below

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please would those of you who have talked with a peer counsellor now continue to Section B.

**SECTION B (for those who have talked with a peer counsellor)**

Question 1: When did you first see a peer counsellor? \_\_\_\_\_

Questions 2: How did you contact the peer counsellor? \_\_\_\_\_

Question 3: How many times have you seen a peer counsellor? \_\_\_\_\_

Question 4: What was your reason/s for seeing the peer counsellor? Please tick the answer/s below that apply to you.

- |                         |                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| a personal issue.....   | a boyfriend/relationship issue..... |
| a school issue.....     | future career plans.....            |
| a friendship issue..... | contraception (e.g. condoms).....   |
| a family issue.....     | death of a loved one.....           |
| a study issue.....      | a health issue.....                 |
| none of the above.....  |                                     |

Other (please write in the space below)

--

Question 5: Did you decide to see the peer counsellor yourself, or did someone send you to see a peer counsellor? Please explain.

--

Question 6: Please tell me what it was like to talk with a peer counsellor?

--

Question 7: Please tick the box that applies to your experience of seeing a peer counsellor where 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree

I found the peer counsellor helpful:

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I felt understood by the peer counsellor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---



(1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree and 5=strongly disagree)

I felt shy to see a peer counsellor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I felt safe to speak to the peer counsellor

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I was able to be open with the peer counsellor?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I was worried that what I said to the peer counsellor might not remain private?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

The peer counsellor helped me to reach a solution to my problem?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

I would recommend seeing a peer counsellor to my friend/s at school

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Question 8: Do you think there are other ways that the peer counselling programme could help you at school? If so, in what ways?

----------------------

Question 9: Finally, do you have any suggestions/recommendations for the peer counselling programme at your school? Please write these in the space below.

--

Thank you very much for your time and effort taken in completing this questionnaire. I hope that your answers will enable me to understand how people feel about the peer counselling programme in particular.

Have a good day!

## **APPENDIX F: THE TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear Teachers

You have been asked to fill out this questionnaire as part of my research for my Masters degree in psychology. I am hoping to learn about some of the issues which the learners at this school face and sources of help which are available. I am particularly focussing on the peer counselling programme that is in use at your school.

Please note that you do not have to write your name on this questionnaire. As such no comments that you make would or could be linked back to you. The information obtained from these questionnaires is to be used in a general and informative way in my research write-up.

I hope the results of these questionnaires will assist me to understand your views on the peer counselling programme. These may be incorporated into later recommendations regarding this programme.

Please help yourself to the cake I have provided as a gesture of my appreciation for your participation in my research. Please put your completed questionnaires in the black box provided in the staff room.

Many thanks

Kelly O'Shea  
(Intern Counselling Psychologist)

Question 1: What is your perception of the peer counselling programme at your school?  
Please write your comments in the box below.

--

Question 2: Could you describe any experience that you have had of the peer counselling programme.

--

Question 3: Please comment on your perceptions of the impact of the peer counselling programme at your school in the following categories:

- a) Impact on the learners?
- b) Impact on the peer counsellors?
- c) Impact on the teachers?
- d) Impact on the wider school context?

Question 4: Please describe how you think the selection of peer counsellors should be managed?

--

Question 5: What personal qualities do you think peer counsellors should possess?

--

Question 6: What, in your opinion, are the specific training needs of peer counsellors at this school?

--

Question 7: In your opinion, what, if any, are the disadvantages of the present peer counselling programme?

--

Question 8: Are there any ways that a peer counselling programme does or could enhance your functioning as a teacher at this school?

--

Question 9 a) Would you support the continuation of the peer counselling programme?

Yes	No
-----	----

9b) Please give a reason(s) for your answer in the space below.

--

Question 10: Finally, please make any recommendations regarding the continuing development and improvement of the peer counselling programme at your school?

--

---

Many thanks for your participation in this research. Your time and effort are greatly appreciated!

## APPENDIX G: A LIST OF THEMES AND CODES: LEARNERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

### **Key to themes:**

LEFT ALIGNED CAPS = Main Theme

RIGHT ALIGNED CAPS = Sub theme

(n = Tally of cases coded under sub-theme

(n) = Total cases under broad theme

Left aligned lower case = Raw text from questionnaire (mostly original, but occasionally paraphrased for conciseness)

### **Question 1 – a list of themes**

#### **FAMILY (75)**

Family issues general

FAMILY ISSUES GENERAL (17)

Homesickness/missing mother (1)

HOMESICKNESS (1)

Realising deceased father as not real father (1)

FAMILY IDENTITY (3)

Fear that father is not real father (1)

Which surname to use as parents unmarried (1)

Parent's divorce (2)

DIVORCE/FAMILY SEPERATION (3)

Desire for family to be together (1)

Abuse in family (3)

Rape in family (1)

VIOLENCE/ABUSE IN FAMILY (9)

Fighting in family (3)

Abuse by mother (1)

Rape by father (1)

How to respect parent's more, to gain love (1)

RESPECT IN FAMILY (2)

Lack of respect to gran who lives with (1)

Communication problems at home due to not being real family (1)

/need for parents' to listen to her (1)

Arguments in the family (1)

RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS IN FAMILY (19)

Father's drinking problem (1)

Not getting on with family (1)

Questioning parent/s love for her (1)

Feeling mother/family doesn't care about her (2)

Feelings of irritation at home (1)

How to cope with parents/ problems with parents (2)

Difficulties coping with family members (2)

Family problems regarding being a teenager (2)

Family problems (1)

Suicide attempts as related to family difficulties (2)  
 Fathers other wife's dislike of her (1)

Wanting parent's to understand her feelingsfor boyfriend (1) PARENT/S NEG  
 Fear of mother's response to having a boyfriend (1) ATTITUDE/S TO &  
 Parent's prohibition of relationships with boys (1) STRICTNESS REGARD-  
 Parents' unacceptance of secret relationship (1) ING OPP SEX r'S (6)  
 Parents' rules regarding dating-too strict (1)  
 Lack of parental freedom in having boyfriends (1)

Lack of parental freedom in social life/need for more (5)

Lack of parental trust in going out/wanting them to trust her (3) PARENT/S/G'S  
 Not allowed to stay out late (1) STRICTNESS  
 Parental lack ofunderstanding regards teenagers (1) REGARDING  
 need to go out, enjoy self (2) SOCIAL  
 LIFE (12)

How to build a stronger relationship with parents' (1) TO IMPROVE R WITH PARENTS (1)

Sisters' pregnancy (1) SISTER'S PREGNANCY (1)

HIV in family (1) HIV IN FAMILY (1)

ACADEMIC/SCHOOL WORK (32)

Problems with school since meeting boyfriend (2) SCHOOL PROBLEMS DUE TO HAVING  
 BOYFRIEND (2)

Exams (2) LEARNING GEN (8)  
 Study/learning issues (6)

Bad behaviour in classroom (1) BAD BEHAVIOUR ATSCHOOL (1)

School issues/problems (8) SCHOOL ISSUES/DIFFICULTIES  
 School work(3) GENERAL (12)  
 School work a mess (1)

Help with certain subjects (4) SCHOOL ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE (6)  
 How to do well in studies (1)  
 Low grades (1)

Teacher thinks dum (1) SHAME REGARDING ACADEMIC PERF (3)  
 Shame regarding repeating a grade (1)  
 Being laughed at by peers for not doing well (1)

PERSONAL /EMOTIONAL/INTERNAL (26)

Lack of self-confidence/self-esteem (4) SELF-CONFIDENCE (4)

Hurt/anger (1) NEGATIVE INTRAPERSONAL (6)  
 Depression (2)  
 Way feel when shouted at (1)  
 Loneliness (2)



Personal problems/issues general (7)	PERSONAL GENERAL (7)
Past life haunting her (1)	PAST HURTS AFFECTING PRESENT (3)
Dealing with past hurts/pains/exps (2)	
Fear of failure (2)	FEAR OF FAILURE (2)
Feeling misunderstood by others (1)	INTER/INTRA PERSONAL DIFFICULTIES (4)
Feeling unloved (1)	
Shyness (2)	
BOYFRIEND/RELATIONSHIP ISSUES (14)	
Boyfriend issues (6)	BOYFRIEND ISSUES GENERAL (8)
love life/to know more about love (2)	
Choice between two boyfriends (1)	
Being ignored by boyfriend (1)	
Being dumped (1)	BOYFRIEND DIFFICULTIES (6)
Being cheated on (2)	
Unsure if can trust boyfriend (1)	
VOCATIONAL (8)	
Career choice / plans (6)	
Goal setting/making right decisions (2)	
PEER RELATED ISSUES (8)	
Friends/friendship issues (2)	
Fighting with friends (1)	
Peer pressure (2)	
Being laughed at by peers because of low marks (1)	
Need to be understood/supported by friends (1)	
Being fought over by friends (1)	
SEX (6)	
safe sex(1)	
how to prevent pregnancy and STD's (1)	
to talk about sex (2)	
parent's reluctance to talk about it (1)	
same sex relationships (1)	
MATURITY/BEING A TEENAGER (6)	
Teenage stuff (1)	
Period attitude (1)	
Way I feel about being mature (1)	
Identity issues/who I am (1)	
Hard teenage life (1, 1)	
BEREAVEMENT/LOSS (5)	
Loss (1)	
Death of family member (3)	

Loss of family members (1)

FINANCIAL (5)

Ashamed of being poor/feeling judged (2)

ISSUES ABOUT POVERTY (2)

Financial problems (1)

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS (2)

Lack of financial provision from deceased father (1)

Getting a bursary (1)

BURSARY (1)

COPING WITH RELATIONSHIPS (4)

How to avoid/handle conflict in a relations(1

How to deal with rejection/avoid being hurt (1

Problems in relationships (1

Trust (1)

ABUSE (3)

Child abuse (1

Being raped (1

Being hit (1)

NO PROBLEM (2

GENERAL

People thinking she's younger than she is (1

How to respond when a boy proposes to you (1

Weight problems (1

For others to be more open (1

Older men attracted to one (1

Stealing problem (1

**Question 2a- A list of themes**

HEALTH ISSUES (2)

Health issues (1

Feeling sick at school (1

GENERAL: ANYTHING (14)

Everything, all issues and problems/all kinds of problems, many (10

A whole lot, and many more, etc (2

Everyday difficulties (1

Life (1

SCHOOL-RELATED (24)

Study problems/studying (6

Exam anxiety (1

School issues (teacher and subjects) (4

School work (6

School grades, (1

Advice from teachers (1

Problem teacher (1

Subject choice (1)  
Choosing your studies (1)  
Changes in the school (1)  
Concentration in class (1)

#### FINANCIAL (3)

Financial (1)  
School fees (1)  
Bursaries (1)

#### CAREERS (3)

#### STRESS (2)

#### SEX/HIV/PREGNANCY/ABORTIONS (19)

##### AIDS/HIV (4)

Facts on your love-life status  
Sex, sexually active people (5)      Pregnancy, (6)  
Responsibility of being pregnant (1)  
Abortions (1)  
STD's/ (1)

#### RELATIONSHIPS (40)

Love relationships/boyfriend issues (9)  
Losing boyfriend (1)

RELATIONSHIPS: BOYFRIENDS (10)

Relationships, (2)

RELATIONSHIPS: GENERAL (2)

Family, (13)  
Home, (3)  
Divorce (1)

RELATIONSHIPS: FAMILY/HOME (17)

Friendship issues, (5)  
Peer pressure, (4)  
Fights, (2)

RELATIONSHIPS: FRIENDSHIPS (11)

#### ABUSE: RAPE (3)

Date rape/rape, (2)  
School helped by arresting father who raped her (1)

#### ADOLESCENCE (6)

Teenage life/teenage difficulties/ (2)  
How to face life reasonably (1)  
How to deal with our periods, (2)  
Difficult adolescent phase (1)

#### DEATH(1)

#### PERSONAL PROBLEMS (6)

#### DON'T HAVE PROBLEMS (3)

Don't have problems so don't know (1)  
Don't have a big problem at the moment (1)  
Don't have problems at school (1)

DON'T KNOW (5)

NOTHING/NONE (5)

NO REPLY (14)

BEHAVIOUR (2)

To behave myself (1)

If you have a problem and start to do bad things (1)

DON'T TRUST HELP (5)

No help because don't trust anyone/ at school (3)

Don't trust anyone except best friend and teacher (1)

Can't trust a peer counsellor (1)

MOTIVATION (1)

NEVER ASKED FOR HELP (3)

Never asked for help, (2)

Too shy to ask for help (1)

GENERAL

?Not believing in myself and keeping bad things to self

?Lots of people look down on people who are saved

?Have a pc at school that can talk to

? Peer counselling

?Can't even concentrate at school, just feel full of hate

### **Question 3: A List of Themes**

HELP GENERAL (55)

Help you/people with problems (32)

Determined to help you (1)

Helps people who are stressed about issues (1)

Help you within a heart beat (2)

Help you (5)

Can help you with lots of things about life (1)

PC helps you with things you feel are your fault (1)

Help you in a time of need (6)

Help you to deal with problems/face problem/get through (6)

ADVICE (24)

Give advice (20)

Give advice if learners afraid to talk to anybody else (1)

Counsel you/if you have a problem and need advice (3)

SOLVING/SOLUTIONS (21)

Help you to solve problems (13)

Help you learn what to do to make problems better (1)  
Can solve your problems (1)  
Try to find solutions for you, (2)  
Help you to find solutions for problems (1)  
Help you make decisions (3)

#### LISTEN/UNDERSTAND (17)

Understand you (4)  
Help you to understand (4)  
Listen to you (5)  
Bring out pain/anger in your mind (1)  
Listen without passing judgement (1)  
Don't criticize (2)

#### SPACE TO TALK (12)

Can talk to them about issues putting strain on you/problems (2)  
Give you time to talk about how you are feeling (1)  
You can get anything off your mind /express your feelings (2)  
Talk to/with you about your problems/ (6)  
Can talk about anything in life (1)

#### CONFIDENTIAL/TRUST (9)

Keep what you talk about confidential (8)  
You can trust them (1)

#### COMFORT HELP (8)

Shoulders to cry on/lean on (2)  
Comfort you (1)  
Encourage us (1)  
Make you feel better (3)  
Support you (1)

#### PRACTICAL HELP (6)

Help to put you on the right track with your problem (1)  
Give you some tips/suggestions (2)  
Help you to sort out problems (1)  
Provide you with other angles to tackle problem (1)  
Provide you with another point of view when confused (1)

#### PERSONAL/FAMILY ISSUES (6)

Help you with problems at home/family and outside of school, (2)  
Help with personal issues, (3)  
Can talk about personal problems (1)

#### NO REPLY (6)

#### SCHOOL HELP (5)

Help you with school problems (1)  
Help you with your studies (1)  
Help you get through problem without school work being disturbed (1)  
Helps you to feel self-confident to cope with studies (2)

KNOW VERY LITTLE (4)

Don't know/know nothing/know very little (4)

HELP PEERS (4)

Help children/teenagers their own age (2)

Help to resolve issues from a teenagers point of view (1)

WILL REFER TO TEACHER IF NEED TO (3)

If they can't help, will take you to someone who can/counselling teacher (2)

If they can't help you then ask a teacher about it (1)

NON-ADVICE/AUTHORITY (2)

Wouldn't expect any real advice (1)

They can give you choices, but not tell you what to do (1)

GOOD (2)

Pc's are good (1)

Some of them are good helpers (1)

EVERYTHING (2)

I understand everything they do (1)

Everything she told me and the way she treated me (1)

RIGHT/WRONG (1)

Will tell you what is right and wrong (1)

MUST ANSWER PC HONESTLY (1)

HELP CAREERS (1)

NO TRUST (1)

Don't understand anything because you can't trust them (1)

### **Question A6: A List of Themes**

HELP NON-SCHOOL SPECIFIC (18)

Help you/ dealing with if you have boyfriend issues (1)

Can stand on own without bf

Help you if you have a problem with your family (1)

HELP: RELATIONSHIPS (5)

Dealing with/preventing Aids (1)

To be friendly to those suffering from Hiv/Aids

HELP:HIVAIDS (3)

To have one boyfriend and abstain

Dealing/ helps with pregnancy (1, 1)

How to face your problems like the responsibility of being pregnant

Sex , 1

Abortions

HELP: SEX/PREGNANCY/ABORTIONS (8)

Dealing /helps with with drugs

They help you if you have an alcoholic problem

HELP: DRUGS/ALCOHOL (2)



DIRECTIVE/ADVICE/SOLVING (17)

Tell you what they think (1)  
Tells you why it is happening (1)  
Good/give advice (8)  
Solve problems, (3)  
Help you to solve problems (1)  
Give solutions (2)  
Help a lot in making decisions (1)

CONFIDENTIALITY (14)

Don't tell their friends/keep everything confidential

HELP: GENERAL (14)

Help those who need it/are helpful (11)  
Help teenagers with problems (1)  
Try and help you (2)

CAN HELP WITH ANYTHING (14)

Can help with any problems (13)  
Helps you deal with things you can't handle

TALK ABOUT PROBLEMS/ANYTHING (13)

Discuss problems with you (3)  
Talk to anyone who comes to them with problems (2)  
They talk about things (1)  
That it helps to talk about your problems (2)  
Can talk about any personal/ problem (4)  
Can talk about anything (1)

TRUST/OPENESS RE P.C'S (12)

You can trust them, (2)  
They are easy to open up to (1)  
Good to tell someone you trust (1)  
They are open (1)  
Can talk to them about anything you feel/can tell them (4)  
They are open to the girls to speak about anything (1)  
Can tell counselor about your problem (2)

NO REPLY (8)

FRIENDLY/KIND (8)

They are kind/very nice people (4)  
They are friendly (1)  
Great to all people (1)  
Are also a friend (2)

LISTEN/SUPPORT/UNDERSTAND (8)

Listen to you (kind to hear your problem (5)  
Support you (1)

Guide you (1)  
Understand you (1)

EAGER AND AVAILABLE TO HELP (8)  
Available 24 hours (1)  
There for you all the time (1)  
Is there to help anyone who would like to talk anytime (1)  
They want to know how they can help us (1)  
They will do anything in their power to help you (1)  
They are passionate about their work (1)  
They enjoy helping people/willing to help, (2)

NOTHING (5)  
Nothing, (2)  
Don't know (3)

SCHOOL WORK (5)  
Subject choice (1)  
They help you to concentrate very well (2)  
Help you to make time to learn/study for exams (2)  
Help with school work (1)

HOW THEY WORK (5)  
They are a group of girls who have volunteered to help other girls (1)  
Sit in the PC room (1)  
Are available during break times (2)  
Book time to see her (1)

HOW TO MANAGE LIFE (2)  
Knowing how to live your life/how to face life (1)  
How to take care of yourself (1)

COUNSELLING (2)  
Counselling (1)  
Counsel people with programmes (1)

HELP WITH MINOR/ ISSUES CAN HANDLE (2)  
Help you if you have minor problems (1)  
Help with personal issues they can handle (1)

COUNSEL TEENS IF UNABLE TO TALK TO ADULT (1)

DON'T WANT TO TALK TO THEM (1)

TEEN ISSUES (1)

CAREERS (1)

NA (1, 1, 1,1, 1, 1, 1

**Question A7: A List of Themes**

YES (62)

NO/UNSURE (22)

UNSURE (6)

NO REPLY (5)

NA (8)

**Question A8 – A List of Themes**

NO (34)

FEAR/THREAT OF PC’S GOSSIPING (20)

Some girls think the pc’s are gossipers even though they are not (1

Yes, when they talk or could talk to friends about others problems and laugh about it (1

Yes, I’ve heard that they talk abt what they heard when the pc’s are tog having tea (1

Yes, counsellors talk about people’s problems at their homes (1

She is going to spead what you told her around /tell the whole world (3

Talk to their friends about you (1Some go behind your back and talk about you (1

Rumours that Pc’s have once or twice spoken about what was said in secret (1

Fear that they will tell their friends about it (1

They are very talkative so wouldn’t like to discuss a personal problem with them (1

They are hyperactive - the news will spread around the school (1

Fear that they won’t be able to handle what told and will tell their friends (1

May /fear that spread rumours about us/talk about us (4

Fear pc will tell friend who will use info against her if they have a fight (1

Related incident of friend’s disclosure to the pc being told to others (1

LACK OF TRUST (12)

Unsure whether can trust them (1, 1, 1

Can’t trust them/some of them (1, 1, 1, 1

MISTRUST GENERAL (9)

Feel that pc’s can’t be trusted because also students (1

PC’s are our friends and classmates – not comfortable talking to them (2

LACK OF TRUST AS PC’S ARE CLASSMATES (3)

NO REPLY (12)

NO, IT IS GOOD-GENERAL (11)

No, I like it all (3

No, what they are doing is very good (1

Doing great / like their method very much (2

No, I like everything because it’s for my/students own good (2

No, they say things to help you (2

Everyone looks happy (1

NOT REALLY (5)

Not really / never been to one before (4)

No objections, just know that they are there (1)

WHEN ROOM IS CROWDED (4)

Yes, when the room is full of their friends and it hard to talk/no privacy (4)

PC POSITIVES-SPECIFIC (4)

They don't tell anyone else, it's just between you and the pc (3)

TRUSTWORTHY(3)

Sometimes learners need someone their own age to talk to (1)

NEED TO TALK TO  
PEOPLE OWN AGE (1)

LACK OF INTEGRITY (3)

Sometimes they are not honest (1)

Some of them don't know what they're supposed to do as pc's (1)

Laugh at you (1)

STIGMA OF HAVING PROBLEMS "KNOWN" (2)

Yes, because if you see them everyone asks you about your problem

That person will know what you are like and you might have wanted to keep it private

DON'T ADVERTISE WHAT DO (1)

PC'S MUSN'T TALK ABOUT CONDOMS ETC (1)

ARROGANT? (1)

Too big for their boots

MAY NOT LIKE THEM (1)

They might be people I don't like

NA (8)

### **Question A9 – A List of Themes**

NO/NOT REALLY (28)

No (27,

Not really (1)

NO REPLY (20)

TRUSTWORTHY (8)

Just choose and talk to the person you trust (1)

Pc's must be people feel safe to tell problems to (1)

Pc's must earn trust by example (1)

Must keep issues personal (1)

Must not gossip (1)

Musn't talk to anyone about what you tell them in private (3)

#### MORE PRIVATE /ACCESSIBLE PLACE TO MEET (8)

They should have another room to talk privately in (1)

There must be one pc at a time cos otherwise you feel shy (1)

Each pc must have a set place where you can find them so you know where they are (1)

Keep PC room for PC's only, not their friends/not crowded (2)

Must be able to book times to see pc and so won't be disturbed, (2)

Must have a big space when we can see them properly (1)

#### NON-FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT (6)

You must be in different rooms and talk to each other-more comfortable (2)

Thick curtain to divide room and talk to pc on other side without needing to make eye-contact -don't know who student is (2)

If you see a pc you musn't show her your face (1)

Phone a number for help, so other PC doesn't know who it is and won't tell friends (1)

#### ADVERTISE (6)

The pc's must have posters in school explaining what they do, times etc to the learners (1)

They must remind us who they are and how to keep in contact with them (3)

They must do plays in assembly etc to get our attention and make us want to see them (1)

#### TEACHERS/OUTSIDE HELP INSTEAD (4)

Must have people from outside the school we don't know coming to help/must be people not from our school (2)

Must be teachers/counselling teachers (2)

#### VOTING (3)

Training/trial period for pc's to assess trustworthiness, how well they cope with problems and ability to communicate-voted for after that , (1-Quote)

Pc's should be voted for at school so pupils can trust them(1)

For each class to vote for 3 pc's that they know and can go to (1)

#### GROUP WORK (3)

Start games and put girls into groups so they can help each other (1)

Talking to other learners in groups (1)

For 5 pc's and 5 learners to meet and talk about what they want to (1)

#### MORE PEER COUNSELLORS (2)

We must have more peer counselling so they can help us (1)

Must be more counsellors (1)

#### NO TRUST (2)

No suggestions, don't care because don't trust anyone (1)

Are doing fine, but I don't trust them (1)

#### RELIABLE, FRIENDLY BEHAVIOUR (2)

To act more mature and not go with their moods (1)

To always show a smile to the learners (1)

TALK ABOUT LOVE RELATIONSHIPS (1)

Yes, for them to talk to us about love relationships and not AIDS 'cos we've heard about that (1

"MORAL"INSTRUCTION (1)

PC's must tell learners that it is not good to sleep around (1

TO IDENTIFY AT-RISK CHILDREN (1)

I think they need to speak to a child who is not doing well at school because they might have a problem (1

MUSN'T ASK TOO MANY QUESTIONS (1)

### **Question A11: A List of Themes**

RELIANCE RATHER ON FAMILY/TEACHERS/ADULT (40)

No need to see a PC because I can solve problems with self , friends/ family (29

Don't need to see pc because can talk to teacher (1

I needed help from family, not peer counsellors (1

No need to speak to pc because I can speak to sister/mother/family/friend (6

Rather speak to mother, than a stranger (1

If I had a problem I would see the teacher (1

I don't think they can help me with my problem because my problems sometimes need a trusted adults help (1

DISTRUST- FEAR OF NON-CONFIDENTIALITY (37)

Shyness linked to lack of trust (4

Don't trust P.c's (5

Worried about problem staying private (20

Don't trust people, they need to earn trust (3

No need to see a pc because don't trust them (1

Shyness because pc are also class mates so would be uncomfortable to see them (1

Was worried about problem staying private as pc's are also students at school (1

It is hard to trust them because they are school kids and class mates (1

I don't feel comfortable going (1 SHYNESS>DISTRUST AS PC'S THEIR PEERS (4)

Don't trust females own age (1

DOUBT IN THEIR ABILITY TO HELP (34)

I don't think they can help me with my problem (13

I don't think they can help me/understand me with my problem because it is too big/difficult(5

CAN'T HELP WITH PROBLEM (19)

Even if I went to them, they could not speak to my parents who I have a problem with (1

Don't think they can help with my problem, How can people my age help me / lack of experience (7

Can't help me with my problems because only teenagers (1

Don't think they can help me with my problems-Pc's are just like me, they have no special qualities (1

PEERS CAN'T HELP (12)

They have their own problems so they must help themselves first/who's helping them with their problems (2

It is not a good way of solving problems for me (1

I don't think they can help me with problem because can give wrong advice (1



WRONG ADVICE (1)

Can't help me with my problems because some of them don't like me (2)

PC'S "DISLIKE" OF LEARNERS (2)

SHYNESS THEME (24)

Shyness/ very private person (10)

Very sensitive/introverted person, difficult to talk to someone abt problems (1)

Shyness as hard to be open with someone you don't know (1 SHYNESS GENERAL (12)

Shyness: Fear of counsellor knowing these things about you/judging you/looking at you in a different way (5

FEAR OF PC'S RESPONSE-INTRINSIC (8)

Shyness: Fear of being laughed at (1

Shyness due to thinking the pc's might not take her seriously (1

Shyness due to fear of wasting PC's time (1

Shyness: Was scared to see pc because had a blue eye from mother (1

I didn't think they could help me with my problem if they found out I was lesbian the school would kick me out (1

FEAR OF PC'S RESPONSE- EXTRINSIC (2)

Shyness: What will others think when sees walking into PC room? STIGMA (1)

Shyness as scared to tell

SHYNESS-FEAR OF TELLING (1)

NEED TO RELY ON SELF (9)

Need to rely on self / sorts out problems by self (4

Don't like bringing personal problems to school (1

Keep things to self because very secretive about life (1

No need to see a PC because problems are private and nobody else's business (3

NO NEED TO SEE PC AS NO SERIOUS PROBLEMS (6)

NO CURRENT/ NEED (5)

I didn't need to see a pc because time healed my wound (1

Am undoubtedly happy, but would not hesitate to go to a PC if needed (1

No need to see a pc because no problems at the moment (3

NO REPLY (5)

LACK OF AWARENESS (3)

Have not heard of the peer counselling programme (2

Unsure of how they work (1

TEENAGERS SHOULD NOT HAVE PROBLEMS IN THEIR LIVES (1)

Teenagers should not see pc's because they are not supposed to have problems in their life (1

WOULDN'T SEE PC (1)

NO NEED AS NO PROBLEMS WITH STUDIES (1)

NEED TO SEE ONE (1)

Maybe I should see one cos life is getting too complicated

**Question B1-Themes: When saw a PC**

FIRST HALF OF YEAR (10)

THIRD TERM (2)

THIS YEAR (2)

AT SCHOOL (2)

YEAR/2 AGO (8)

No reply (1)

**Question B2-Themes: How Learner Contacted the PC:**

APPROACHED PC PERSONALLY (6)

You don't need to make appointments (1)

Approached her in classroom (1)

I asked her if she had time-it was easy (1)

Went to pc personally (1)

Told her I would like to speak to her at lunch break (1)

Calling her house (1)

WENT TO PC ROOM (5)

PRIOR FRIENDSHIP/RELATIONSHIP (4)

She was a close friend/a friend (2)

Speak to them as friends (1)

She's my playmom and easy to chat to (1)

AT SCHOOL (3)

She's in our school (1)

Here at school (1)

School has the pc's (1)

NO REPLY (2)

SAW HER NAME BADGE (1)

TOLD PREFECT WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO HER (1)

FINE (1)

MADE APPOINTMENT (1)

PC APPROACHED LEARNER (1)  
She saw my bad behaviour (1)

**Question B3-Themes: How Many Times Seen a PC**

ONCE-TWICE (17)

3-5 TIMES (3)

MONTHS (2)  
For 8 months last year  
about 7

UNSURE (1)

CASUAL (1)  
Just talk to her in class

NO REPLY (1)

**Question B4-Themes: Reason for Seeing a PC:**

CAREER (10)  
PERSONAL (9)  
FAMILY (7)  
FRIENDSHIP (6)  
BOYFRIEND (6)  
STUDY (5)  
SCHOOL (4)  
DEATH (4)  
HEALTH (2)  
SUBJECT CHOICE (1)  
BAD BEHAVIOUR (1)  
CONTRACEPTION (1)

**Question B5- Referred by Whom**

SELF-REFERRED (20)  
Self (13)  
Myself because I had the problem (1)  
Self, because of the death of mother (1)  
Decided self because I was feeling hurt (1)  
Self because needed someone to talk to (1)  
Self, because really needed someone else's advice (1)  
Self, it's nobody else's business (1)  
No (1)

NO REPLY (1)

TOLD ABOUT PC (1)

Someone told me about her so I decided to go

PC APPROACHE LEARNER(1)

Pc saw my attitude change and decided to guide me (1

FRIEND'S SUGGESTION (1)

TEACHER (1)

Teacher took her because doing badly in school work (1

### **Question B6- Themes: Experience of Speaking with the PC**

POSITIVE GENERAL (7)

Fine as you go along (1

Fine (1

Very nice (1

It was great (1

Very nice (2

Very good because she understands the situation you are in (1

RELAXED (6)

Like talking to an old friend that you've known for years (1

Comfortable (1

Non-intimidating people (1

Relaxing (1

Made me feel free and relaxed (1

They make you feel free and comfortable (1

MUTUAL OPENESS:PC & LEARNER(5)

She was a very open person/open to me (2

She was open and showed concern (1

She was open and friendly (1

Felt open to pc because she was nice to me (1

Could open up to pc (1

After that was free and open (1

With pc's help was free to talk to her (1

Feel free to talk about anything (1

LISTEN/UNDERSTANDING (4)

Listen with all ears (1

They understand things because they are also human (1

She understood me very well (1

She understood situation (1

INITIALLY AFRAID/FRUSTRATED (3)

Frustrated at first (1

Afraid at first (1

Scary at first till you see her friendly smile (1

OK (3)

TRUSTING OF PC'S (2)

Nervous at first that might spread stuff around, but realised could trust her (1

Fine because I knew it was just me and nobody else could hear my problem (1

ENJOYABLE/FUN (2)

Enjoyed talking to her (1

Fun (1

HELPFUL (2)

They offered me the help I needed (1

The peer counsellor helped me (1

FELT GOOD AFTERWARDS (2)

Felt relieved and stress free afterwards (1

Made me feel good about myself (1

USEFUL INFO (2)

I didn't find what I was looking for but I found some other info (1

Told me good facts that I had never thought (1

NORMAL (1)

EXTRA PROGRAMMES HELP (1)

DON'T INTEND GOING BACK (1)

TOO BRIEF (1)

AS USUAL (1)

She's my friend, so talked to her as usual (1

NO REPLY (1)

### **Question B8 & B9-Themes: Other Ways PC's Could Help**

NO REPLY (8)

NO/NOT REALLY (5)

Maybe, but they are trying really hard (1

No, like it the way it is (1

No, they are doing alright (1

Not really (1

No (1

MORE EXPOSURE (3)

Need more exposure (1

Yes, by being more out there and being nice to people (1

PC's must be frank and active to encourage the learners to be so too (1

STUDYING (2)

Yes, helping study for exams (1)

Studying (1)

MORE PEER COUNSELLORS (2)

To have peers in Grade 9 (1)

To make more students peer counsellors because at same stage as you (1)

TO BE HONEST/TRUSTWORTHY WITH LEARNERS (2)

Most pc's are helpful and trustworthy, but some aren't (1)

To be honest with us (1)

CONFIDENTIALITY (1)

Must learn not to tell principal/class teacher(1)

LIFESKILL VIDEOS (1)

Watch lifeskills videos at break times (1)

PROPER FACILITIES (1)

By providing proper facilities (1)

BETTER USAGE OF PROGRAMME (1)

Yes, perhaps if all the children can use the programme, but some think it's stupid

OUTSIDE PEOPLE (1)

To bring outside people to talk to us about experiences (1)

DEBATES HELPFUL (1)

Carry on holding debates which are good (1)

MORAL INSTRUCTION (1)

It could help you to know what is right and wrong

TEACHER PROBLEMS (1)

Yes if you have a problem with the teacher you can talk to them (1)

DATING BEH (1)

To teach you how to behave like a lady when going on dates (1)

MORE ISSUES (1)

Yes, they must add more issues (1)

KINDNESS (1)

Yes, help us by being kind, so know they are prepared to listen to us

Other "Peer counsellors"

Nurse who comes to school

Loveline telephone counsellor

Counsellor at hospital



## APPENDIX H: THEMES AND CODES: TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

### **Key to themes:**

LEFT ALIGNED CAPS = Main Theme

RIGHT ALIGNED CAPS = Sub theme

(n = Tally of cases coded under sub-theme

(n) = Total cases under broad theme

Left aligned lower case = Raw text from questionnaire (mostly original, but occasionally paraphrased for conciseness)

### **Question 1-Themes: Perception of PC Programme**

#### POSITIVE ASSOCIATIONS (9)

Seems to be good/running well/a very necessary plus/running smoothly (4

Huge success (1

Working well (1

Good idea (1

Started well (1

Has its merits (1

#### LACK OF AWARENESS (5)

Little to do with it/haven't been too involved (1

Mostly unaware of it/works discreetly (1

Unable to comment due to having little to do with programme (1

Teachers' should be more in touch with the programme (1

#### CAUTION/SUSPICION RE PC (4

Open to abuse (1

Don't trust advice of some of the PC's (1

Concerned abt counselling skills lack in PC's (1

Topics should be more low key like subject choice and teachers (1

#### OBSERVED AS NOT WELL USED (3

Not well used by girls (1

PC's are under utilized (1

The learners think they need to have a serious problem to go to PC (1

#### OBSERVED AS WELL USED(2)

Pupils have taken to the programme/responsive (1

Many girls have used and found pc helpful (1

#### POSITIVE EFFECT ON PC'S (1

Children value honour of being a PC (1

#### USEFUL IN CAREER (1

Seems useful in career guidance and counselling (1

### **Question 2-Themes: Experience of PC Programme**

NO INVOLVEMENT SUGGESTED (10)  
No response given (4)  
Not applicable (1)  
No/none (5)

KNEW A PC IN DIFFICULTY (1)  
Know of a PC who was in difficulty herself (1)

STARTED PROGRAMME (1)  
Started programme in 2000 and ran it for 2 years (1)

REFERRED LEARNER TO PC-DIDN'T GO (1)  
Suggested a learner see pc with similar difficulty-didn't go (1)

REFERRED LEARNER TO PC-POSITIVE RESULT(1)  
Referred learner with difficulty to a PC-very well handled (1)

POSITIVE COMMENTS FROM GIRLS (1)  
Girls mention it positively (1)

PC'S AS RELIABLE (1)  
PC's have been reliably and consistently involved (1)

**Question 3-Themes: Impact of PC Programme**

Impact on learners:

HELPFULNESS (8) Think it has helped them (1) Good (1) Provides an emotional resource lacking at home (1) Sense of security (1) Feeling nurtured (1)	HELPFUL TO LEARNERS (5)
Juniors benefit from sisterly advice (1) Additional source of advice (1)	ADVICE HELPFUL (2)
Helped matriks in career related issues (1)	HELPFUL-CAREERS (1)
Unable to judge/no comment (4)	NO COMMENTS (4)
Can share problems with peers if unable to approach adults (1) Able to share problems/opens up to being able to talk (2)	ABLE TO SHARE PROBLEMS (3)
Many of girls don't know about it (1) Grade 8's know little about it (1)	LEARNERS UNAWARE (2)
Lack of trust in seniors (1)	LACK OF TRUST IN SENIORS (1)

Well used/received by learners (1	WELL USED (1)
Freedom to choose	
<u>Impact on Peer Counsellors:</u>	
Chance to develop self-worth in serving school community (1	
Gives them an avenue for leadership/care in school (1	
Forget about themselves (1	SENSE OF MEMBERSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOOL COMMUNITY (6)
Felt more responsibility (1	
Respected position/status in school (2	
Teaches integrity (1	TEACHES INTERPERSONAL/LIFE SKILLS (5)
Learn useful life skills /skills (1	
Learn how to relate/understanding others (1	
No comment/unable to judge (5	NO COMMENT (5)
Building up experience (1	
They probably benefit the most (1	POSITIVE INTRAPERSONAL (5)
Instils confidence/gained in confidence (2	
Helpful (1	
Are responsible and patient with the learners(1	
PC's are enthusiaistic (1	PC'S AS MOTIVATED/RESPONSIBLE (2)
PC's give up a lot of time-unsure if should/can be dedicated so young (1	TOO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY (1)
<u>Impact on the teachers:</u>	
Pressure eased/possibly decreases counselling load (2	
Takes pressure off counselling / teachers as PC another support system (1	
Pressure off counselling teachers to deal with more serious problems (1	DECREASES COUNSELLING TEACHERS' LOAD (4)
No comment (4	NO COMMENTS (4)
Don't see it as involved in life (1	NO/LITTLE IMPACT (3)
Not much impact (1	
Not aware of full impact (1.	
Don't feel much due to lack of knowledge and/or mistrust of programme's effectiveness (1	FEEL VERY LITTLE/ MISTRUST (1)
Happier pupils as problems are shared (1	HAPPIER PUPILS (1)
<u>Impact on the wider school context:</u>	
No comment / can't say / unsure (7)	NO COMMENT/UNSURE (7)

Atmosphere of trust for those involved (1)	
Generates a sense of family responsibility and accountability (1)	
Develops caring pupils (1)	
Happier environment (1)	HAPPY & CARING SCHOOL
Free atmosphere (1)	ATMOSPHERE (6)
School has benefited due to having happier less troubled learners (1)	
Can only be a positive help (1)	POSITIVE HELP (1)
It probably has some effect but not a great effect (1)	NOT A GREAT EFFECT (1)

#### **Question 4-Themes: Selection of PC's**

VOTING BY LEARNERS+COUNSELLING STAFF'S CHOICE(4)  
Through learners' vote (learners trust/confidentiality) and in consultation with concerned staff (aware of what skills are required (4)

VOTING BY LEARNERS (4)  
Learners voting from the Grade 11 volunteers (2)  
Voting by learners for most trusted Grade 11's (2)

VOLUNTARILY (3)

BASED ON PC'S QUALITIES (3)  
Based on the integrity the pupils have shown staff (1)  
PC's must be open hearted, strong, patient (1)  
Pupils must understand qualities needed for a PC before voting (1)

NO COMMENTS (2)

VERY CAREFULLY (1)

NOT BASED ON POPULARITY (1)

#### **Question 5-Themes: Qualities for PC's to Possess**

INTRAPERSONALLY SENSITIVE QUALITIES (16)

Wise (1)  
Patience (3)  
Thoughtful (1)  
Integrity (6)  
Honesty (3)  
Insightful (1)  
Self awareness (1)

INTERPERSONALLY SENSITIVE (15)

Empathy/compassion/sympathetic ear (8)                      EMPATHY (8)

Understanding (1)  
Sincerity (2)  
Open hearted (1)  
Genuinely concerned about others (1)  
Likeable (1)  
Not judgemental (1)

INTERPERSONAL- COUNSELLING SKILLS (8)  
Able to communicate (1)  
Listening (5)  
Not too bossy (1)  
Not too quick to give advice (1)

INTERPERSONAL-CONFIDENTIALITY(5)  
Confidentiality/not given to gossip (4)  
Discretion (1)

INTRA-INTERPERSONAL: RESPONSIBLE (4)  
Reliable (1)  
Responsible (1)  
Leadership (1)  
Available (1)

INTRA-INTER PERSONAL: CONFIDENCE (3)  
Confidence (1)  
Strong (1)

INTRA-INTERPERSONAL ETHICAL/MORAL (3)  
High morals/standards (3)

### **Question 6-Themes: Training needs of PC's**

COUNSELLING TRAINING GENERAL/SPECIFIC (8)  
Listening skills (2)  
Counselling techniques (1)  
Workshops on problems likely to encounter as a PC (1)  
Workshops on understanding oneself and motives (1)  
Training on when advice should be given (1)  
Trained in responding to disclosures and requests for help (1)  
Career training/guidance (1)

C. TRAINING SPECIFIC ON SEX/ABUSE/AIDS/BEREAVEMENT (5)  
Sex education (1)  
Women abuse (1)  
AIDS training (1)  
Bereavement (2)

UNSURE/DON'T KNOW (5)

REFERRAL (3)

Too much to do counselling at age, so trained in referring child to appropriate staff member (1

Referral contacts (1

When to refer (1

RESOURCES (1)

Need to know organisations in the area (1

### **Question 7-Themes: Disadvantages of PC Programme**

NO COMMENT (9)

Unable to answer/no comment/not sure (9

LACK OF AWARENESS (4)

Girls' don't know much about it/not well used (2

Not everyone knows about it (1

Non-counselling teachers don't know much about it (1

CONFIDENTIALITY ISSUES (2)

Girls' fear of confidence not being honoured(2

PC SELECTION (1)

PC's must be carefully selected and monitored until proved capabilities

LEARNERS' MISPERCEPTIONS (1)

Learners think they have to have a serious problem (1

PC'S INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER ACTIVITIES (1)

PC's are often involved in other activities (1

### **Question 8-Themes: PC and Teachers**

NO COMMENT/UNSURE (6)

TEACHERS WOULD TEACH HAPPIER LEARNERS (3)

Yes, would teach more relaxed, happy, problem free learners having shared their concerns with a PC/helping learners to cope (3

IMPROVES SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE (1)

Can improve atmosphere of the school through service (1

EMPOWER LEARNERS (1)

Empower learners' role in each others lives (1

BUDDY SYSTEM (1)

Yes, girls in counselling can be put in a buddy system (1

HELPS COUNSELLOR (1)

Helps counsellor (1



IDEA WOULD NEED THINKING THROUGH (1)  
Yes, could be of value but the idea needs to be thought through (1)

**Question 9a: Should PC Continue?**

YES: 14  
NO: 0

**Question 9b-Themes: Why?**

NEED SUPPORT (3)  
Great need to provide learners with support for problems (1)  
Many girls have difficult backgrounds-need support (2)

PEER VERSUS ADULT HELP(2)  
Many girls feel more comfortable approaching peers than adults (2)

TEACHES LIFE SKILLS (2)  
Communication is the key to problems in our society (1)  
Teaches valuable life lessons such as how to support each other and seek help (1)

VAGUE POSITIVE (2)  
It has its merits (1)  
Can only be beneficial (1)

GOOD AND STILL DEVELOPING (2)  
In principle, good; but needs work (1)  
The programme is developing and going from strength to strength (1)

EMPOWERING (2)  
Empowers learners and counsellors through knowledge (1)  
Teaches responsibility (1)

NEED TO BE REALISTIC (1)  
but need to be realistic about what can be achieved (1)

HAPPIER PEOPLE (1)  
Has assisted in making people happier (1)

LOAD OF EDUCATORS (1)

**Questions 10-Themes: Recommendations**

NO COMMENTS (8)  
No comment (7)  
Not sure (1)

PC'S NEED INPUT-SKILLS/OTHERS (4)  
PC's need regular training/meeting (1)

PC's need to meet with other schools (1)  
PC's to go on development courses to equip them with skills (1)  
Workshops on marital contracts and financial matters-prevent problems (1)

PC'S EVERY GRADE (1)  
Counsellors for every Grade (9-12) chosen carefully (1)

NEED SUPERVISION (1)  
PC's need strict boundaries (1)  
PC's need lots of teacher assistance, not readily available (1)

INCREASE STAFF AWARENESS (1)  
Make PC more known to staff (1)

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