HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOURS OF ADOLESCENTS IN URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS IN TWO SOUTH AFRICAN PROVINCES

A comparative exploratory study

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DECLARATION

I declare that unless specifically indicated to the contrary that this research dissertation is

my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts (Clinical Psychology)

at the university of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. It has not been submitted for any

other degree or examination at any other university.

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..15ᵗʰ..day of ...DECEMBER....2004

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the patterns of help-seeking of 64 urban high school adolescents in Grades 10 and 11 in two South African provinces, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. The type of problems faced by these adolescents such as interpersonal relationships, family and peer pressure, and whether or not they sought help for these problems was explored. Adolescents' preference for different sources of help for different problems is also discussed. Of concern was what mediated whether and where help was sought. This study also examined the role that the Life Orientation Programme and Guidance Programme played in the help-seeking behaviours of these adolescents. Data was collected using focus groups and individual interviews and analysed using a thematic method of data analysis. Adolescents across the two provinces seemed to have common problems and dealt with them in a similar manner. The adolescents' problems included peer pressure, family, academic anxiety and drug usage. To solve those problems adolescents seemed to prefer informal to formal sources to confide in. The Life Orientation Programme (LOP) seemed to play no significant role at this stage to the adolescents concerned.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Developmental theorists believe that people go through several stages of development. They further define development as "systematic changes and continuities in the individual that occur between conception and death, or from 'womb to tomb'" (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995, p.3). The following section will address stages from the prenatal period to adolescence, with a special emphasis on adolescence. It will also look at the questions that the present study attempts to answer in relation to help-seeking behaviours of adolescents.

Adolescents themselves go through several stages of development before they reach adolescence. They first get through the stage of infancy where, according to Sigelman and Shaffer (1995), tremendous amounts of growth and physical development occur. During this period infants are completely dependent on their caregivers. Sigelman and Shaffer stated further that at this stage parents have a great deal of influence on their children's development. The stage that follows is that of childhood in which, according to Sigelman and Shaffer (1995), general development is slower than in infancy. Colvelle (2001) argues that school begins at this stage and parents and educators try to devote much of their time to assisting and providing support to the children.

Eventually they reach adolescence where they experience a lot of changes and a growth spurt. Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) explained an adolescent growth spurt as a period where rapid and major developmental changes take place in adolescence. Their bodies change in height, size, and take on the proportions of an adult. Furthermore, adolescents also

experience puberty, which is "the point in life when an individual attains sexual maturity and becomes capable of producing a child" (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995, p. 128).

What the present study seeks to find out are the types of problems experienced by adolescents in urban high schools. One can say that adolescence presents many challenges as this period impacts strongly on adolescents' lives, or as other theorists (e.g. Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) may say, it is a period of storm and stress. During this period adolescents begin to develop their own identity and eventually have a need for autonomy. Whilst adolescents have to adjust to their physical changes on the one hand, they also have to deal with being involved in, and what comes with, interpersonal relationships on the other. These interpersonal relationships include family, peers, and other social environments that adolescents come into contact, and interact, with.

Most important in adolescents' lives, according to Lamborn and Steinberg (1993), is the kind of relationship they have with their parents. Parenting styles such as being too strict and failing to adjust to adolescents' needs for autonomy or, if parents fail to provide enough discipline and monitoring of their adolescents, can greatly influence the way adolescents respond to peer pressure (Brown, Mounts, Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993; and Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller & Skinner, 1991, cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995).

As stated before, some adolescents manage to get through this stage better adjusted than others. But then what happens to those who experience this stage with difficulty? Thus, the present study further seeks to find out if help-seeking for problems is common amongst adolescents in South African schools. Some authors (e.g. Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) claim that some adolescents may opt to seek help with problems experienced. Thus, although

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adolescents may be experiencing problems during this period, it does not, however, guarantee that they will seek help. This is because as Barker and Adelman (1994) reported, it seems that before adolescents can seek help they already have preconceived ideas of the situation. In essence, what adolescents make of the help-seeking situation before they can encounter it mediates whether or not they will actually go out and seek that particular help. Thus, as highlighted by Van der Riet and Knoetze (2004), there can be negative mediators as well as positive mediators.

In some contexts, such as in schools, attempts were made to introduce programmes such as the Guidance programme and Life Orientation Programme (LOP) in order to facilitate mediation of help-seeking to be able to deal with the problems learners encounter whilst at school. However, the question that still remains is whether these programmes deliver what they were intended to do and mediate the help-seeking activities of the learners. Thus, the role of the Life Orientation Programme will also be looked into in this research.

Thus, the study aims to look at different problems that trouble adolescents and how they go about dealing with those problems, if they do. It further looks at what mediates how adolescents go about dealing with those problems. This will also look at the extent to which adolescents utilise help from other sources, and what predicts whether and from whom help is sought. In an attempt to answer the questions raised above, findings from this study will be discussed and compared with findings from the literature review.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Help-seeking behaviours of adolescents

In this review of literature, the researcher will discuss general help-seeking behaviours of adolescents focusing mainly on adolescents in schools. The literature review will also examine why and where adolescents seek help.

In the life phase of adolescence, one of the main focuses is on building an identity, and learning social skills. This stage comes with many other challenges for adolescents to deal with. Amongst others they experience body changes that can be overwhelming for adolescents to adjust to. For instance, amongst other things, girls achieve menarche – which Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) explain as their first menstruation, and boys experience their first ejaculation usually emitted during a wet dream or masturbation. Although some adolescents handle this period effectively and feel better about their body changes, many are embarrassed and traumatised by the body changes they go through. Moreover, as Sigelman and Shaffer report, for some adolescents adjustment may take much longer. Gref and Ulman (1998, cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) note that girls typically become concerned about appearance and worry about how other people will perceive them. On the other hand, according to Richards, Boxer, Peterson and Albrecht (1990, cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995), boys' perception of their body images are more positive than girls' in adjusting to the body changes. Overall, there may be mixed feelings about body changes while some adolescents are a bit excited, as well as scared and confused.

Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) referred to this period as one of emotional storm and stress. Erikson's psychosocial theory labels this stage as that of identity versus role confusion (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1992). At this point adolescents are prone to mental health disturbances, and in this difficult period they need to develop coping skills. These coping skills will help them maintain their mental health (Allen, 1997). Health, according to the World Health Organisation (1984, cited in Boldero & Fallon, 1995), is not only the absence of a disease but a state of complete mental, physical and social well being.

Help-seeking

During this period and with the problems experienced, adolescents may seek help from different support groups or professional services, referred to as problem-focused coping (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995). In a study on help-seeking pathways for children and adolescents, Srebnik and Cauce (1996) found help-seeking to be a process that involves a series of decisions, rather than a single, planned choice. Some authors, such as Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1995) and Raviv, Sills, Raviv and Willansky (2000), mention that help-seeking is effective for some adolescents as it helps alleviate their problems, but not for others. This could be due to the extent to which adolescents are able to utilise different information resources. Thus, adolescents may seek help based on factors such as their understanding of their psychological processes. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Mau and Jepsen (1990), the choice of helpers for various problems affected how help would be delivered.

Adolescents' decisions about what to get help for may be accounted for by the social cognitive perspective (Boldero & Fallon, 1995). Help-seeking behaviour is also affected by factors such as problem definition, issues of confidentiality, and issues of trust in other

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people. Some adolescents seek help for problems that they think matter to them. This concurs with findings from Grayson and Miller (1998)'s study.

In their studies Bee-Gates, Howard-Pitney, LaFromboise and Rowe (1996) and Tishby, Turel, Gumpel, Pinus, Shlomit Ben, Winokur and Sznajderman (2001) found that some adolescents preferred not to talk to anyone about some serious problems. In his study Colvelle (2001) found that only when they believed that they would receive help for a particular problem, did adolescents seek help for that problem. Thus, preconceived beliefs about help-seeking also affected whether or not help would be sought. Boldero and Fallon (1995) also found that help was sought when, instead of accepting responsibility for the cause of the problem, adolescents attributed the problem to external causes. Raviv et al. (2000) reported that although adolescents were willing to seek help for minor problems, severity of the problem determined which source to go to.

Depending on how they define problems, adolescents prefer different sources for different problems.

Help-seeking as a coping mechanism

Rickwood (1995) conducted a survey on Australian adolescents to assess the effects of seeking help for problems on symptoms of psychological distress. Her finding revealed that for some adolescents seeking help might be ineffective although they may not be aware of it. She also found relying on oneself to be a better strategy than seeking help from any source. However, seeking help made no significant difference to those who sought it. Thus, Rickwood (1995) argued, seeking help is an environmental coping response and other forms of coping seem to rely on self and internal resources. On the other hand, Mayou

(1984, cited in Rickwood, 1994) mentioned that one way of coping with emotional turmoil is by seeking help, but that depended on what the problem is, regardless of the intensity. This is because what may seem very serious for one person may not necessarily be the same for the next.

Fallon (2001) supports Rickwood by arguing that seeking help with a problem tends to be seen as an adaptive mode of coping. Taplin, Yum, Jegede, Fan and Chan (2001) conducted a study at the Hong Kong University that compared the help-seeking strategies used by students identified as high achievers in courses and those identified as low achievers in an attempt to uncover any insight about successful help-seeking strategies that can be used by distance education students. Their findings revealed that effective help-seeking is an important strategy that is fundamental to successful coping. Barnes (1999) argued that help-seeking is a sign of constructive coping and self-enhancement. Even though adolescents do not usually seek help for minor problems, those minor problems "may remain psychologically salient over time and require continuing adaptive efforts which may ultimately be more taxing than efforts aimed at major events" (Seiffge-Krenke, 1993, cited in Fallon, 2001, p.4); hence the necessity of developing coping skills to maintain mental health. Schonert-Reichl and Muller (1995) argue that the tendency not to seek help might be because of external, extrinsic factors such as lack of adequate resources. However, Taplin et al. (2001) reiterated that some learners were found to be able to appreciate the benefits of help-seeking and viewed help-seeking as a positive strategy.

Predictors of help-seeking

Boldero and Fallon (1995) found seeking help to be predicted by problem type and gender, and problem type, gender and age further predicted the choice of help source. Although

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Fallon (2001) could not find an association between problem type and help-seeking, complex relationships between help-seeking behaviour, type of family, and problem type were reported. This is also supported by findings from Tishby, Turel, Gumpel, Pinus, Shlomit Ben, Winokur and Sznajderman (2001) in their study on help-seeking attitudes among Israeli adolescents. Amongst other things, whether or not help will be sought is determined by severity of problem and the way adolescents define their problems. Lin (2002) found that familiarity with the help source also predicted whether or not help would be sought.

Before they can decide on how to proceed with their help-seeking, adolescents already have preconceived ideas of the situation, whether the ideas are justified or not. In a study conducted in Durban on help-seeking behaviours for urban blacks, Pillay (1996) found that people's beliefs about health strongly influence their health and illness behaviours, thus influencing whether they treat themselves or consult family, friends or medical services. Clinical symptoms were found to be a powerful predictor of help-seeking and symptom severity influenced sources to go to (Srebnik & Cauce, 1996).

Sources of help-seeking

Whether or not adolescents seek help can be informed by preference for sources of help. In their study on mental health and help-seeking among ethnic minority adolescents in Los Angeles, Barker and Adelman (1994) found that the underutilisation of professional services was related to a negative attitude towards those professionals and preference for using informal sources. Although Fallon (2001) reports family as a possible source of help, negative and positive experiences of relationships in the family were found to be related to how the adolescent will cope. Skuy, Hoar, Oakley-Smith, and Westaway (1985) reported

that adolescents generally did not prefer adults as the best sources for help. It seems that if help is sought at all friends are preferred more than parents to confide in. In one study students generally preferred to consult with a doctor for health problems; parents for financial difficulties; a friend for socio-psychological, courtship, sex, marriage, and family problems (Mau & Jepsen, 1990). According to Srebnik and Cauce (1996), people tend to seek advice regarding problems from a range of sources until a resolution is found or all options are exhausted.

According to Nadler (1997, cited in Raviv et al., 2000), seeking help from professionals, such as counsellors, can be emotionally costly especially if it means acknowledging that a problem exists in the self, which might be threatening. However, seeking informal help, such as from friends and family, can be less threatening for adolescents. Furthermore, Barnes (1999) argues that help from informal sources is often all that is necessary to get adolescents back on the right track. Informal sources seemed to be preferred by learners in Bailey's (2003) study and help was sought from those sources to a considerably greater degree than from formal sources.

According to Tishby et al. (2001), younger adolescents seemed to prefer turning to parents for help whereas older adolescents seemed to prefer friends. Blos (1962, cited in Tishby et al., 2001) found fitness between adolescents' preference for friends as helping agents and their developing needs such as autonomy. This is because peers provide feedback that assists in the process of identity formation and enhances self-esteem. Grayson, Miller and Clarke (1998) assessed the barriers related to help-seeking behaviour of students enlisting assistance from tutors. They reported that seeking help from an unknown person or stranger was found to be a safer method of help-seeking especially in alleviating concerns such as

anonymity and getting an objective point of view. Contrary to Grayson et al.'s (1998) notion, Bailey (2003) found that even in a totally anonymous survey there was reluctance on the part of the learners to seek help.

Consequences of help-seeking

Prelow and Guarnaccia (1996) found that help-seeking from informal sources, by adolescents, was a protective factor for stress but not when used only for coping. This is because support from informal sources may prevent individuals from appraising events as stressful and therefore respond more appropriately. However, Rickwood (1995) argued that informal sources often offer interpretations of problems, which can be increasingly distressing, and increases anxiety. She argued that for some adolescents, help-seeking behaviour did not appear to be effective in alleviating psychological distress, and talking about their problems was found to have a possibility of intensifying rather than decreasing psychological symptoms, which might not be an adaptive form of coping. This concurs with findings from Taplin et al. (2001) that help-seeking was found to be counterproductive even among students who were prepared to seek help. On the other hand, Fallon (2001, p.1) reports "... seeking help can buffer one's reaction to stress, which in turn leads to better adjustment and fewer emotional and behavioural problems".

In their specific developmental phase adolescents seem to experience problems that may warrant help-seeking. Although help-seeking may be a helpful coping mechanism, this does not seem to be applicable to all adolescents as some may find help-seeking to worsen their situation. Although it appears that help-seeking can be predicted by different factors, adolescents do not always seek help for problems. Moreover, they tend to have an attitude,

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whether negative or positive, towards seeking help from professionals which impacts on their help-seeking behaviour.

2.2 Problem areas

Findings in most research (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Colvelle, 2001; Tishby et al., 2001), suggest that predominant problems experienced by adolescents are those in connection with interpersonal relationships, education, family, financial problems, and health problems. In their study with school-aged adolescents in Melbourne, Boldero and Fallon (1995, p.193) found that "most problems reflected family, interpersonal relationships, education, and health problems". In addition, Mau and Jepsen (1990) found that the top three most frequently encountered problems were health, academic and financial problems.

Prelow and Guarnaccia (1996) referred to problems experienced by adolescents as caused by life stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1984, cited in Prelow & Guarnaccia, 1996) report life stress to be a transaction between a person and the environment. Life stress is the total number of stressful events experienced within some specific period (Dohrenwend & Dohrenwend, 1984, cited in Prelow & Guarnaccia, 1996). Prelow and Guarnaccia (1996) found that some life stress categories differed between ethnic groups. This could be because different cultural groups appraise stressful events in different ways.

Although both males and females experienced somewhat similar problems as in Boldero and Fallon's (1995) study, it seems there was a difference between them in the problems that help was sought for. Males reported more issues that were not sensitive. Females

reported more personal and health problems. This was supported by findings in the survey conducted by Bee-Gates et al. (1996) on adolescents in the USA to find relationships among their help-seeking behaviours, psychological problems, and personal characteristics. In a study conducted on adolescents in two schools in South Africa, Colvelle (2001) also found that males reported less sensitive problems. Bee-Gates et al. (1996) reported in their findings that girls frequently included grades, family relationships and troubles with decision making. Boys, on the other hand, included future concerns, concerns about grades and decision-making. However, they reported that for both boys and girls family relationships, grades and future concerns were the most serious.

In addition to the problems that adolescents have, they also have to deal with being learners and the challenges that come with this. Adolescents are, in one way or the other, affected by the school environment (Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995), especially having to adjust to the demands of higher grades while at the same time preparing for their career paths. Educators have been concerned about a number of negative changes that often occur" (Eccles et al., 1993 cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995, p.434) when students have to adjust to the demands of higher grades. These negative changes include loss of interest in school, declining grades, increased trouble making, etc.

During this period adolescents potentially experience destructive and constructive interpersonal relationships. These interpersonal relationships include family, peers, and other social environments that adolescents come into contact, and interact, with. Some conflicting situations that take place in adolescents' lives relate to having to choose between family and peers. However, some authors disagree by stating that family and peers actually have different influences on adolescents (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993; Sigelman &

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Shaffer, 1995). Although Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) argue that parents have a reason to worry that their children will get into trouble by conforming to peer behaviour, they also state that the conformity usually declines as adolescents get older.

Most important in adolescents' lives, according to Lamborn and Steinberg (1993), is the kind of relationship they have with their parents. As mentioned earlier, parenting styles such as being too strict and failing to adjust to adolescents' needs for autonomy, or if parents fail to provide enough discipline and monitoring of their adolescents, can greatly influence the way adolescents respond to peer pressure (Brown et al., 1993; Dishion et al., 1991, cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995).

Although adolescents may be in a stage where they seek autonomy whilst at the same time extending their interaction with the external world, family remains their primary source of support. Galambos (1992, cited in Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993) argues that the belief that adolescents lose respect for their parents and feel less close to them simply do not hold up. Contrary to those beliefs, Furman and Buhrmester (1992) and Lempers and Clark-Lempers (1992) (cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) reported that the majority of adolescents view their parents as key sources of affection and support. However, concurring with Colvelle's (2001) argument, Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) found that in adolescents' quest for autonomy a lot of conflict between them and their parents arise. This conflict is, however, usually not severe. Maintaining a close attachment with their families is important even in the quest for autonomy because, as Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) stated, it is when parents consistently enforce their reasonable set of rules that adolescents are most likely to become autonomous and well adjusted.

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Apparently, adolescents with good family relationships are less likely to be affected negatively by peer pressure than those whose family relationships are poor. This is because parents have a great deal of influence on what kind of friends their adolescents interact with (Lamborn & Steinberg, 1993). Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) argue that problems for adolescents who end up being affected by negative peer pressure and engage in antisocial behaviours usually begin at home. According to Colvelle (2001), problems begin when adolescents need to fit in with a particular group of people. Unfortunately, sometimes for one to fit in with that particular group, one might have to break a few rules or laws in order to be accepted. Thus, healthy relationships between adolescents and their families might, to a large extent, help protect adolescents from such unhealthy peer influences.

Thus, in the period of adolescence, learners have to constantly adjust to their changing environment and interactions. Firstly, they need to adjust to their changing bodies and deal with their growing up. This can be a major problem for some to handle. Furthermore, interpersonal relationships also require some level of participation from adolescents that may result in better adjustment or conflicts for the adolescents. Although some conflicts are not seen as major, resolving them might not be simple. With all the problems that come up in this period, some adolescents may seek help while others may choose to sit with those problems no matter how severe they may seem.

2.3 Mediators of help-seeking behaviours

There are many mediators of help-seeking behaviours. Positive mediators serve to facilitate help-seeking and negative mediators serve as barriers (Van der Riet & Knoetze, 2004).

Positive and negative mediators to help-seeking are found by Srebnik and Cauce (1996) to be social and environmental supports and pressures that can occur at the individual, community, or broader political level. Thus, the community and political levels are included as potential external influences on help-seeking. Although there are many factors that mediate help-seeking behaviours, in this section the researcher will discuss how mediators can be barriers to, as well as facilitators of, help-seeking, focusing mainly on culture, context and the Life Orientation Programme (LOP).

Some of the barriers to help-seeking are "defining the problem as too personal, fear of lack of confidentiality, a preference for handling the problem autonomously, and the perception that no person or service could help" (Dubow et al., 1990, cited in Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick & Morrissey, 1997, p.639).

Bailey (2003) conducted a survey to determine the extent of students' need for help, the sources from which they sought help, and their reasons for not approaching librarians and professors for that help. In his findings he reported that even when the students were in those stages where they felt more frustrated and unsure of themselves there was considerable reluctance found on the part of those students to ask for help. Barnes (1999) conducted a study investigating the impact of providing anonymity to a group of undergraduate Computing students in order to encourage them to seek help for course related questions. In his findings he stated that adolescents' reluctance to seek help was due to 'social reservation'. Thus, while adolescents believe that they would be socially humiliated for seeking help, the more it is likely that they would not consult about their problems. Furthermore, if seeking help was viewed as a sign of weakness and shame (Lin, 2002), adolescents were not likely to seek help. Findings in Mau and Jepsen (1990)'s study

also indicate that personal problems and shortcomings were perceived by Chinese students as indicative of an individual's lack of resolve and determination and therefore resulted in a reluctance to seek help.

If help-seeking is seen as detrimental to their status, adolescents tend not to seek help even when necessary (Colvelle, 2001). This seemed to be especially the case if help was to be sought from professionals. This may lead to adolescents relying on informal sources such as family and friends. However, relying on family, friends and self were suggested to be barriers to help-seeking from formal sources.

Culture and context

Havighurst (1987) defines culture as "a set of common and standard behaviours and beliefs shared by a group of people and taught by them to their children" (p. 401). A person can be affiliated to different cultures, such as an ethnic culture, a religious culture and/or an adolescent culture. Within cultures there are also sub-cultures that Havighurst (1987) defines as "a culture shared by a subgroup in a complex society and different from the sub-culture of other subgroups in that society" (p. 401).

People experiencing the same or different problems might have different factors influencing their way of help-seeking. Those factors might be different or conflicting from context to context, such as from home to school, and from culture to culture. In fact, Kuhl et al. (1997) found a large body of literature that supported the concept that help-seeking behaviour is culturally determined. According to Gochman (1988, cited in Pillay, 1996, p.2) "cultural values, norms and expectations influence and shape beliefs ... ". These

cultural influences affect perspectives on health, illness, disease and other health-related behaviours (Pillay, 1996).

According to Prelow and Guarnaccia (1996), different cultures experience different life stress exposure, hence there is a different appraisal of negative impact of life stress and different social support received. Mau and Jepsen (1990) argue that each cultural group has its own characteristic way of addressing personal issues. In some contexts, adolescents might not be allowed to talk about some issues but be allowed to do so in other cultures and contexts. Srebnik and Cauce (1996) offered one example of religions. Some religions do not encourage seeking external help for problems, whereas others actively encourage such help. In addition, Narikiyo and Kameoka (1992, cited in Srebnik & Cauce, 1996) argue that for some ethnic/cultural groups the use of informal sources of support may even be more pronounced. Thus, depending on the type of culture that adolescents come from, they might 'normally' access help in a specific way. Potential problems arise when adolescents are confronted with situations where they are supposed to choose between opposing sets of behaviours. That is, if they are confronted with different norms across contexts, this may result in confusion about whether or not to seek help, from whom, and about what issues.

Shibusawa and Mui (n.d.) conducted a study addressing the relationship between social support and mental health among Japanese American older adults in Los Angeles. They reported acculturation to be an important predictor for help-seeking. Furthermore, those older adults who were less acculturated were reluctant to seek help from an individual of different ethnic and linguistic background. Thus, they preferred to seek help from somebody who spoke the same language as them and were more at ease with people of the same cultural background.

Life Orientation Programme (LOP)/Guidance Programme

Of particular concern in this study, is the relationship between adolescents' problems, their help-seeking behaviours and the Life Orientation Programme (LOP). The LOP is a programme offered at school level, which resulted from a transformation of the Guidance Programme. Since the LOP is a new component of the curriculum, how it relates to the problems and help-seeking behaviours of school adolescents still needs exploration. Therefore, this section will attempt to discuss the transition from the school Guidance Programme to the LOP.

Previously, as reiterated by Manganyi (1997), the Guidance Programme was aimed at facilitating student development in academic, career, and personal and social development areas. Those developmental areas were aimed at promoting and enhancing the learning process. Many aspects formerly included in guidance lessons provided both the content material and a learner-centred approach aimed at developing the potential of learners and to help them become self empowered (Akhurst & Ntshangase, 2002). School Guidance was, however, often seen as an extra class or subject and was thus neglected. Furthermore, during the classes or periods learners often engaged in activities other than the ones intended for the programme. Hence, in many instances those qualities and aims of the Guidance Programme did not operate as outlined by Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002). Ntshangase (1995) reported that learners found school guidance to be inadequate regarding helping with personal concerns. Teachers in the study tended to take it for granted that availability of guidance services at school was sufficient. According to Mbuyazi (1999), some teachers are allocated guidance classes to facilitate regardless of relevant qualifications. He continues to say that the teachers in this instance view their role as just to maintain control and discipline, and in turn they use those periods for other subjects and

not for the intended purpose. As a result, guidance does not seem to have played a role in providing help for learners.

In addition to this, a study conducted in a South African school context by Colvelle (2001) revealed that one of the constraints to adolescents' help-seeking behaviours was the educators' inability to get in touch with the needs and attitudes of the learners. Although Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002) outlined the qualities of a good and effective facilitator in school guidance as being non-judgemental, seeing good in each individual, and seeking to help each learner develop to their optimum potential amongst others, those qualities seem more ideal than the situation revealed by research.

According to Colvelle (2001), educators seem to be concerned about providing academically for the learners and not about the learner as a psychological being. Learners perceived the function of the educator as that of dealing only with social and academic problems (Ntshangase, 1995). This concurs with findings from Skuy et al.'s (1985) findings that adolescents in their research did not perceive Guidance personnel as having an important role to play as helping agents. According to Haffajee (1991, cited in Ntshangase, 1995), learners were found to have a negative perception of the guidance teacher, especially in terms of approachability. Skuy et al. (1985) also argued that the approachability of the Guidance educator played an important role in determining whether the learners would approach the educator for help or not. As a result learners found it hard to discuss personal problems with their educators. It is interesting, as Mau and Jepsen (1990) found, that even in the post-school phase, students did not perceive, nor use counsellors, as a source of help with problems experienced. They comment that "the less frequent use of counsellors and counselling services may have been due to several

circumstances..." (p. 6). This may be due to students feeling that their problems were not important enough or appropriate to discuss with a counsellor, or they may not have known of the resources of counselling services. Although the Mau and Jepsen's (1990) study does not state the age range of the subjects under investigation, the same circumstance may apply to adolescents' less frequent use of educators.

Although previously most Guidance educators in their initial teacher training took a Guidance specialisation, it did not necessarily apply to all educators (Mbuyazi, 1999; Skuy et al., 1985). Thus, whether educators are equipped, or whether educators have had the relevant training, to meet the intentions of the programme in relation to learners remains questionable. Although participation in the LOP is compulsory for all learners, there is no clear policy directive about how to train educators in the provision of the LOP. In addition to this there is relatively little research on the LOP.

According to Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002), many learners have not had opportunities for discussions, self-discovery and skills development amongst other things. That was because schools were more oriented towards 'teacher-tell' styles. Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002) further state that successful living in the modern world requires, amongst other things, individual self-awareness, assertiveness, and the ability to relate constructively to others. These skills were included as part of the critical outcomes and scope of the LOP as listed in the *National Curriculum Statements: Life Orientation draft* (Department of Education, October, 2002). The implementation of the LOP can thus be viewed as an improvement to the guidance programme as it pays more attention to the holistic nature of an individual.

In implementing the LOP the idea was to incorporate many activities of the Guidance Programme, as well as other relevant and important topics (Akhurst & Ntshangase, 2002). This can be seen in some of the aims of the Guidance Programme that are reiterated in the LOP aims. For instance, the Guidance Programme was aimed at dealing with the physical, emotional and social development of all individuals, whereas the LOP is aimed at changing the emphasis on cognition alone and attempt to include emotional and social aspects in all learning activities (Akhurst & Ntshangase, 2002). Furthermore, the Guidance Programme aimed at helping to link curricular school activities and extra-curricular activities outside school. The rationale of the Life Orientation Programme, according to Manganyi (1997), is to empower learners to live meaningful lives. It is also aimed at promoting achievement of individual learners' potential by strengthening and integrating their self-concept, their ability to make informed and responsible decisions, and their survival and coping skills (Lotz, Tselane & Legiet, 1998) amongst other things. Thus, the scope of the Life Orientation Programme includes guidance (Curriculum 2005, cited in Dyasi, 1997).

Of importance here is how the LOP is being implemented to meet its rationale and the needs of the learners in terms of help-seeking. As the LOP has only recently been introduced, the way in which it is being implemented in schools or how the educators are therefore being trained has not been extensively researched. Some research argues that it is how the educator experiences or interprets aspects of the curriculum that dictates the implementation of the programme (Dyasi, 1997).

It is clear that within the framework of the school, attempts are being made to provide resources in terms of help-seeking needs. The LOP could be argued to be attempting to facilitate individuation and freedom. However, the facilitator of the programme might not

encourage this. This may make it difficult to approach that educator for help. What the Life Orientation Programme aims to communicate as appropriate, permissible and relevant help-seeking behaviours, as well as what educators promote and their approachability, will thus have an effect on help-seeking strategies of adolescents at school.

Educators as prominent adults in the adolescent's context could play a central role in the provision of help. Help-seeking behaviours differ across contexts (Colvelle, 2001) and also across relationships with different adults. For example, seeking help from parents and seeking help from educators is affected by the norms and conditions for adult-child relationships in different contexts. In some contexts, adolescents may not be allowed to talk about some issues with adults, yet at school they may be encouraged to. This may confuse adolescents, particularly in the way in which they seek help and from whom they seek it.

As can be seen from the literature reviewed above, help-seeking behaviour is affected by factors such as problem type and the degree of seriousness of the problem. Moreover, adolescents' perception of the source of help affect whether and where help will be sought. Preference for informal sources as helping agents also contributes to the underutilisation of formal sources. It is important to examine the role of the LOP in this help-seeking behaviours of adolescents. As a new component of the curriculum, however, the role of the LOP was not found effective in addressing adolescents' help-seeking behaviours still needs to be researched further.

CHAPTER 3

AIMS OF RESEARCH

This research is aimed at finding out the kind of problems adolescents in urban schools experience. It is also aimed at discovering what help-seeking behaviours those adolescents engage in in an attempt to deal with those problems, if they do seek help, and what mediates their help-seeking behaviours. Furthermore, it seeks to discover the role of the LOP/Guidance Programme in mediating help-seeking behaviours.

3.1 Research Questions

This research will address the following questions:

- Which problems do adolescents in urban schools experience?

- Do adolescents engage in any kind of help-seeking behaviours in order to tackle their problems?

- What help-seeking behaviours do they engage in dealing with their problems?

- What mediates adolescents' help-seeking behaviours?

- What is the role of the LOP/Guidance Programme in mediating adolescents help-seeking behaviours?

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research design

Research design is the science and art of planning procedures for conducting studies in order to get the most valid findings (Cooper & Emory, 1995). In addition, it provides the researcher with a more detailed plan to guide and focus the study in order to fulfil the objectives of the research.

This study engages in an exploratory qualitative approach in examining adolescents and their help-seeking behaviours. In exploratory research the focus is on gaining insight into the subject area, the practical possibilities, and the definition of some concepts (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). This type of study calls for a degree of flexibility to enable the researcher to follow through a new lead and to move the study into new areas as the study proceeds, and the researcher gains more knowledge about what is being studied. According to Page and Meyer (2002), words expressing ideas (concepts) and perceptions (cognitions and feelings) of research participants, provide qualitative knowledge in research. Qualitative research is useful in exploratory studies, provides in-depth data, and facilitates an in-depth understanding of the subject. According to Neuman (2000), qualitative research is more than just data collection. It allows for the discovery of new ideas and a range of evidence as soon as the researcher engages with the data. In this study data was captured through audio recording of interviews and discussions.

4.2 Sampling

Previous research (Colvelle, 2001) has compared adolescents in urban and rural schools. In this study two urban schools, from two different provinces, were the focus of the research. In selecting the provinces, the focus was on convenient access to the schools for the researcher. So the researcher selected KwaZulu-Natal Province as it was her area of study, and Limpopo Province was chosen as it was her home. The two urban schools (henceforth referred to as School A and School M) were used in order to examine the mediation of help-seeking behaviours in similar contexts. School A is in the KwaZulu-Natal Province and School M is in the Limpopo Province. Both schools were multiracial and co-educational. They were also former model 'C' schools and were moderately well resourced.

Initially permission was requested from the principals to use the schools for the research, which was granted. The Life Orientation Programme educator and, in one contexts, the Guidance educator were requested to work collaboratively with the researcher in order to facilitate the research. Note that the researcher will keep referring to the LOP and Guidance educators in this case because at the time of the interviews the educator from school A was educating LOP, while the educator from school M was still regarded as the Guidance educator. All the correspondence requesting permission to use the school, and informing participants about the research, sampling and procedures were presented in writing and orally to the parties concerned (see Appendices).

Previous research has utilized a qualitative approach with two focus groups per school, one male and one female group (Colvelle, 2001). To expand this research, four focus groups at

each of the two schools were sampled. The sample was randomly drawn from grades 10 and 11 from the two schools mentioned above. In consultation with the Life Orientation and the Guidance educators the focus group members were randomly selected from the class list of those above-mentioned grades. Numbers were assigned to each name on the register and then eight numbers were drawn randomly from a hat. The numbers were linked with numbers on the register, and the resultant names made up the members of the focus groups.

Previous research on help-seeking has also focused mainly on late adolescents in their final year in secondary school in Australia (Rickwood, 1992) and adolescents in grades 7, 9,and 11 (Fallon, 1997). In South Africa, little research has been done on help-seeking behaviours of adolescents in schools (e.g. Colvelle, 2001), especially on grades 10 and 11, thus requiring further investigation for adolescents in those grades. Hence the focus of this study is on adolescents in grades 10 and 11. These grades were chosen because learners would have had some experience of help-seeking in the school context. The participants in the sample ranged from 14 to 19 years of age (see Table 4.1 for detail). The sample consisted of an equal number of both male and female learners. There were four groups per school, two male groups (one Grade 10 and one Grade 11) and two female groups (one

GRADES		Number of Learners	AGES					
			14yrs	15yrs	16yrs	17yrs	18yrs	19yrs
BOYS	10		0	6	8	2	0	0
	11		0	0	6	7	3	0
GIRLS	10		1	7	5	2	1	0
	11		0	0	9	6	0	1

Table 4.1 Total sample and age range of grades 10 and 11 in both schools.

Grade 10 and one Grade 11), with eight learners per group. The total number of focus groups across both schools was eight and the total sample size of learners was sixty-four.

In addition to the focus groups there were five individual interviews who were conducted in order to collect further data, and that required more time. For these individual interviews learners were requested to volunteer to be interviewed. This was done with the aim of preventing situations where learners feel compelled to participate, which may increase their levels of anxiety. Hence, volunteering was encouraged in order to increase levels of participating. These individual interviewees were: two 16 year-old female learners from Grades 10 and 11 (School A); one 16 year-old female learner from Grade 11 (School M); one 16 year-old male learner from Grade 11 (School M), and one 15 year-old male learner from Grade 10 (School M). Having volunteers come forth to be interviewed proved to be difficult as learners preferred not to be interviewed alone. According to Boyatzis (1998, p.58, citing Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1969):

> Because providing information for qualitative research often involves asking a person for more time than completing a questionnaire ... often people are asked to volunteer. A sample of volunteers is potentially contaminated with all of the factors that have been shown to be distinctive about volunteers versus random samples of individuals...

In addition, two relevant educators, one from each school were also interviewed. These educators were the Guidance/Life Orientation programme educators for the grades in question. They were interviewed to add a more objective point of view about the learners' experiences and their help-seeking behaviours.

4.3 Research process

Robson (1993) argues that understanding the research process thoroughly enables the researcher to establish a sequential process involving several clearly defined steps. The way in which the steps in the research process are structured sets the direction of the research. In this section the researcher will explain the steps that took place in this research process.

Participants were informed about the research and told to meet at a particular venue where the research would take place. For school A the meetings took place in the staff meetings' room, and for school M the meetings were held in an empty office. The learners were briefed about the purpose of the study before they played an ice-breaking game. The game was played in order to relax both the interviewer and the learners before the discussions started.

In collecting the data, focus groups were conducted first, then individual interviews with the learners, and finally interviews with the educators for their opinion on the learners' experiences. All of the discussions were captured on audio-tapes and later analysed.

4.4 Data collection

Data was collected through focus group discussions and individual interviews. These methods were used as little qualitative research has been done on this topic in South African schools. In addition, focus groups accessed general experiences of the subjects in

the study while individual interviews were useful in getting detailed responses from individuals' experiences. To obtain the data in both interviews a set of questions was used to guide the interviews (attached in Appendices). Those questions were constructed from findings from the literature. In addition, the researcher added further questions that would assist in finding out about the LOP/Guidance Programme and its impact on the learners, a relatively new area of research. The questions for the educators were also constructed with an aim to elicit the educators' experiences of the learners, the LOP/Guidance Programme, and their contribution in mediating help-seeking (interview schedule attached in Appendices). Although the home language of the learners from School M was Zulu, and for the learners from School M was Northern Sotho, the schools were both English-medium schools. When asked about their preference for the language medium of the focus group, they said that they felt comfortable speaking in English. The medium of the focus groups and interviews was thus English.

To initiate the data collection process the learners were given pieces of papers and asked to write down the problems that they as adolescents experience. These problems could be either first person and/or third person experiences. The learners were then asked to rate these problems in terms of their seriousness, with one being the most serious problem and two the least serious problem. This helped the researcher focus on the more serious problems in the focus group discussion. The researcher collected these pieces of paper and used this data to examine the relationship between problem types and levels of seriousness. After this, a formal focus group discussion was conducted. This was guided by an interview schedule used together with the listed problems. The discussions lasted for 60 minutes. During the discussions the learners identified how, if ever, and where they sought help.

In addition to the pieces of papers that the learners were writing on, data from the focus groups and interviews were also captured and recorded on tapes. The tapes were then transcribed and the transcripts were used for data analysis. The researcher personally transcribed the tapes as she was there in the interviews. The transcription process was difficult due to technical constraints because a dictaphone was used for both recording and transcribing, and it was time consuming.

Focus groups

According to Bauer and Gaskell (2000) a focus group can be characterised as "a debate open and accessible to all; the issues at stake are common concerns; inequalities of status between participants are disregarded; and the debate is based on rational discussion" (p. 49). This method was used because it offers a face-to-face method of interaction with the participants and allows for probing for a deeper understanding of problems at hand. The method is also suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic (Gibbs, 1997). In the focus groups the participants raised and discussed issues that according to them were being experienced by adolescents. Although the focus groups lasted sixty minutes not all issues could be covered within the time allocated for the groups (as discussed in Section 4.6), and the learners listed additional concerns in their written notes.

Individual interviews

Individual interviews were designed for a more in-depth discussion of personal experiences. According to the report from Cooper and Emory (1995), the opinions of the individuals in individual interviews, and the motivations for their opinions can be discovered without those opinions being influenced by others. These interviews were conducted following the focus group interviews in order to get more detailed responses as

mentioned earlier. This method allowed participants to feel comfortable to respond as confidentiality was assured, and they were freer to participate on a one-to-one basis than in a group. These individual interviews lasted 30 minutes per interview.

Two educators of the Life Orientation Programme and guidance were also interviewed for their experience of the problems experienced by adolescents, their help-seeking behaviours, the design and implementation of the Life Orientation Programme, and their own training in the Life Orientation Programme. These educators were interviewed, and not necessarily selected, on the basis that they were the only educators of the LOP and Guidance at the time for grades 10 and 11s in both schools.

4.5 Data analysis

According to Durrheim (2002), qualitative methods start by identifying themes in the data and relationships between those themes. Data analysis involves repeatedly reading through data, breaking down the data into themes and categories, and elaborating and interpreting the data (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2002). Furthermore, the themes ideally arise naturally from the data being analysed. Data was analysed using a thematic analysis method. It was also analysed in order to:

➢ categorise major problem types experienced by the participants;

➢ analyse the patterns of their help-seeking behaviours and who they go to for help;

➢ describe the implementation of the Life Orientation Programme in each school; and

➢ explore what help-seeking behaviours are promoted by the Life Orientation Programme.

Thematic analysis

In analysing the data a thematic method of data analysis was used. Thematic analysis, according to Aronson (1994), is focussed on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviours. Boyatzis (1998), on the other hand, described thematic analysis as a process for encoding qualitative information that requires an explicit code. This may be in a pattern found in the information that can describe or organise possible observations and interpret aspects of a phenomenon. Thus, themes are generated from the information or data gathered. Boyatzis (1998) argues that themes can be directly observed (they are manifest themes) in the information that has been collected or they can be underlying a phenomenon (that is, they are latent themes). Hence, the themes can be inductively generated from the raw information.

Data analysis was conducted on the transcribed interviews and focus groups. From the data in the transcripts, themes and codes were developed from grouping similar themes and using either code names from the data or from words that covered the meaning of all themes.

Themes in this research were inductively generated, and according to Boyatzis (1998), this method provides the most fundamental method of theme and code development. Boyatzis (1998) reiterated the qualities of a good thematic code as one capturing the qualitative richness of the phenomenon and one that is usable throughout the research. In addition, it will maximise the probability of producing high interrater reliability and validity.

As outlined by Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis involves the ability to perceive and identify patterns in what appear to be arbitrary events and random information, and that ability to perceive improves with practice. This requires openness and flexibility on the part of the researcher to be able to perceive the patterns. Furthermore, tendencies to project and impose one's own values, feelings, thoughts and competencies may hinder the generation of themes. This, according to Boyatzis (1998), happens often when qualitative information is ambiguous.

In this research, comparison between, and across, samples was done simultaneously and not independently because the raw data was relatively descriptive. Although it proved to be a difficult task, an attempt was made to look for patterns without imposing any theoretical framework

4.6 Constraints

In this research, some conditions existed when data was being collected that compromised certain dimensions of the research design. For instance, only five learners from both schools could be interviewed, rather than eight individuals, one from each focus group. This could influence the reliability and accuracy of the research. This compromise happened for a two main reasons: learners could not see the purpose, and point, of the individual interviews, and it was exam time and they were eager to get to the next lesson. In addition to this constraint several factors influenced the way in which the focus groups were conducted. For instance, in one school before the groups could commence learners had to fetch chairs for the group, and this wasted valuable time. There were also constant

interruptions during the focus group interviews. In school M, for instance, some educators kept calling for learners in the group. In both schools, the sound of the intercom also interrupted the discussions and disrupted the flow of the discussion. The researcher was sensitive to the fact that the focus groups and individual interviews took place close to exam time and during school hours, therefore the school's time had to be respected.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

This result section will present the data in three sections. First, the types of problems experienced by adolescents, second, help-seeking patterns, third, the sources that adolescents use for help-seeking, and lastly, the role of the Life Orientation Programme/ Guidance Programme on hep seeking behaviours of adolescents.

5.1 Problem types

Although some of the problems raised by learners in this research were similarly identified in other research, there were some differences as well. The problem types that will be discussed here were compiled from the focus group and individual interviews transcripts, and from the lists that learners provided.

In responding to the questions, learners provided a range of problems that they thought adolescents experienced. These problems were ranked from what they thought were the most serious to what they thought were the least serious. It appeared that there was consensus in problems as reported by males and females. Although there were problems that males reported and females did not report and vice versa, there were also problems that both males and females reported to experience. Only those issues perceived as the most serious amongst all those listed were discussed due to the time constraints outlined above.

All the problems that were highlighted were grouped into categories according to their similarities. Each category was given a descriptive label. Thereafter the problems were compared across schools and across genders to assess if there were similarities and/or differences between them. The frequency and seriousness ranks were also compared across schools and across genders. However, making the comparison was not easy, as some issues seemed related. Moreover, the subfields in the categories seemed to fit in more than one category. Nonetheless, as can be seen in Table 5.1 below, an attempt was made to tabulate those categories in terms of their frequency and the degree of seriousness. To calculate the frequency of the responses the researcher counted the number of times each problem was stated as a problem. For the degree of seriousness of the categories the researcher identified the level of seriousness of each problem that was reported by the learners.

From the findings in the results as per grouping it seems adolescents experienced six categories of events as problematic. From grouping the categories the titles that emerged were: interpersonal peer relationships, misconduct, substance use, family, academic anxiety, and teenage pregnancy. The first category of interpersonal peer relationships refers to social environments that adolescents come into contact for example, opposite gender relationships and issues of peer pressure. Secondly, a 'misconduct' category includes what adolescents regarded as unacceptable behaviour. In addition to this there was a need for a third category which included more serious 'misconduct', such as substance use by adolescents. Family problems and conflicts were put in the fourth category of 'family'. As a fifth category, academic anxiety consists of issues that affect adolescents' academic world and scholastic life. Finally, a sixth category was teenage pregnancy.

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Problem Types	Frequency	Degree of Seriousness
	1 = Most Frequent	1 = Most Serious
	6 = Least Frequent	6 = Least Serious
Interpersonal Peer Relationships	1	1
Substance Use	2	2
Family	3	4
Teenage Pregnancy	4	3
Academic Anxiety	5	5
Misconduct	6	6

Table 5.1 Types of problems, the frequency with which they are experienced and the degree of seriousness.

According to the educator from school A, girls' problems included lack of communication at home, trust, parents treating siblings differently, and not being allowed to go out with friends.

Interpersonal peer relationships

The interpersonal peer relationships category was the most frequently category referred to, and the majority of the learners from both school A and school M ranked it as the most serious (Table 5.1). This category refers to social environments that adolescents come into contact with. As a result it includes friends/peers, opposite sex relationships, etc. According to the learners, interpersonal relationships are very significant in adolescents' lives. Interpersonal relationships are also reported by the learners to affect adolescents in their daily functioning, especially cognitively. For instance, according to one female learner from school A, interpersonal relationships

> ... are important for us teenagers because we learn from them and they
> contribute in some way in our lives...

Some learners, however, reported the downside of those relationships. They reported to experience a lot of conflict between family and friends in relation to those relationships. According to one female learner from school M,

> Although I agree that these relationships can be good for us ... we also experience too much conflict in them ... because we constantly have to chose between our friends and our families.

The educator from school A commented that some of the problems experienced by the learners were in relation to interpersonal relationships and issues of identity and peer pressure. Furthermore, learners had problems with rumours being spread especially about their sexual status. They were stressed by being labelled as homosexuals. She reported that,

> Some learners are constantly stressed because of rumours that they are gay, especially if they do not have boyfriends, or about their boyfriends.

According to the educator "this often happens when a learner does not comply with peer expectations". This educator commented that girls, more frequently than boys, reported interpersonal peer relationship problems likes these.

Peer pressure

Peer pressure referred to when adolescents found themselves compelled by peers and peers' behaviours to do things they do not want to do. According to the learners, peer pressure is a serious problem in adolescents' life and it has a significant impact on their lifestyle. Pressure from peers was experienced in the form of wanting acceptance versus

rejection by peers, and caring about peer opinion. Learners said that they gave in to peer pressure because they had a need to identify and belong with a particular group. As reported by a male learner from school M,

> Most of the time conforming to a particular group is done because adolescents are in a state of identity crisis, and identifying with a certain group, whether it's good or bad, provides meaning for them. And at least after being with that group they have also fulfilled their sense of belonging coz now they do belong.

Furthermore, a female learner from school A said,

> Sometimes adolescents go to lengthy extends in order to belong to a group. For instance, ... friends ... can influence you so much that if you don't do what they expect you to do they start teasing you ... you'll feel so bad and inferior ...and you end up doing that thing because you want to belong with them and not feel inferior.

Individuality versus inferiority appeared to be especially a problem for girls. Another female learner from school A reported,

> ...sometimes you want to be your own person but others tease you ... because you don't do what they are doing and you end up feeling inferior...

This seemed to be a problem especially for girls from both schools. Boys did not comment much on it nor did they emphasise it as a problem. The educator from school M reported further that according to his perception, the learners, like any teenagers, tend to get drawn into peer pressure and the need to please in order to 'fit' in with peers. Although he reported to have had no learners reporting issues of peer pressure, he has observed in the classes that a lot of what took place was peer influence.

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Opposite gender relationships

Another problem under interpersonal relationships that adolescents highlighted was relating to the opposite gender. In this case opposite gender relationships will refer to mutual attraction between males and females for affection or sexual relations. Although opposite gender relationships were experienced by both boys and girls as a problem, one group of males at school M did not highlight it as a problem. Opposite gender relationships were reported as a problem because the participants thought that most adolescents got involved in opposite gender relationships for the wrong reasons. According to one male learner from school M,

> Some … teenagers become involved in opposite gender relationships because of peer pressure. If everybody in the group, for instance, has female companions you'll also have to have a female companion … to prove to the … group that you are not a coward.

This learner's report concurred with other reports from most of the learners in both schools. Other motivations for problems in opposite gender relationships were rejection by members of the opposite gender and being betrayed in relationships.

In these relationships adolescents have to deal with issues of commitment, levels of seriousness in relationships and loss. For example, a learner commented that,

> the problem is that at that young age adolescents think they know what love is all about, and they think they can commit themselves in a relationship, especially girls, whereas they are still going to go out there and meet other people whom they might like better.

Both male and female learners agreed with a statement from one learner that,

[girls] bounce in and out of relationships because after breaking up they go out looking for other relationships.

A view that was shared by all the Grade 11 males from both schools was that boys handled relationships and commitment differently. As one male learner from school A stated,

We [adolescent boys] are not as yet serious about relationships as girls. We still need to explore and experiment in order to prepare for future relationships.

Sex

Although for both genders, engaging in sexual intercourse at such an early age seemed to be a cause for concern, girls seemed to worry about it more than boys. This also included having sexual intercourse with older and married men for secondary gains, and the irresponsibility that goes with engaging in sexual acts at that age. According to a female learner from school M,

... dating and sleeping with older men is done for all the wrong reasons such as wanting monetary gains, and so that the man can buy you fashion clothes...

However, only learners in school M highlighted dating older men as a problem.

Substance use

This category was rated the second most serious problem experienced by adolescents. Although drugs and alcohol are seen as a serious problem amongst adolescents, learners seemed to perceive the use of drugs as a more serious problem than alcohol. The use of

drugs and alcohol was attributed to peer pressure. A male learner from school M stated that,

> It is a problem ... and it is wrong for us teenagers to use drugs and alcohol but we do it anyway. But it all boils down to peer pressure because you only want to experiment with them [drugs and alcohol] after you've seen your peers do it.

Primarily, the adolescents argued that one needs self-control when confronted with drugs and alcohol in order to know how well to respond.

Family

This category will refer to all problems and conflicts that adolescents experience within a family. Although the family was reported to be the most supportive environment in those adolescents' lives, there is also conflict experienced as adolescents find themselves struggling to find a balance between their own needs and family's expectations. Female learners in Grade 11 from both schools commented on the expectations their parents had on them. According to the one learner, their parents

> ... started going out and soon got married at the age of 15 back then, and now it means we must do the same and get married as well if we want to explore opposite sex relationships.

With the Grade 10 male and female learners from school A, expectations from family were experienced in a form of being compared to one's siblings. For example, one male learner commented,

> If you have a brother at the school and you don't get the same marks as he does, and maybe at school you just don't get good marks or grades, you get compared to the brother...

The problem is that, according to the female learner in the same grade,

> ... family... expects too much of you and you can't always give them what they want.

This statement agreed to by the other participants in the group who stated that the balance between their own needs and family's expectations was impossible. The inability to meet the family's expectations was stated as a challenge for adolescents, which sometimes lead to experimentation. A female learner said that, the problem with

> ... us teenagers ... [is that] ... if my mom tells me 'don't do this' you become so curious and then you end up doing exactly that thing.

Learners reported a lack of communication between parents and adolescents as a problem which resulted in a lot of misunderstanding. Learners complained about parents who treated them like children, while they would have preferred to be spoken to "openly and maturely". According to a female from school M,

> Parents would not admit that their little girl or boy are starting to go out now with people of the opposite sex,

and one male from school A,

> ... parents shouldn't lie to their kids and they shouldn't hide things. They [parents] should talk openly to their kids. Parents should give reasons for why things should not be done...

Another problem that learners identified was of parents' overprotectiveness over their children. The learners mentioned that in trying to be overprotective of their kids, parents tend to become strict towards them. Other problems that were mentioned were not getting along well with family members, especially siblings, and conflict between members of the extended families. Some families were reported by the learners to be irresponsible and unstable with inadequate parental care and guidance, and these families also had an impact on adolescents' lives.

Teenage pregnancy

This was the fourth frequently referred to category and refers to when adolescents fall pregnant in their teen years. Most girls viewed teenage pregnancy as a serious problem as it may lead to problems at home and in interpersonal relationships and drastic actions on the part of the adolescent. Furthermore, one female learner from school M commented that,

> Teenage pregnancy can lead to mental instability for adolescent girls as they can end up committing suicide.

Another said that,

> Some of the decisions that adolescents may resort to after discovering they are pregnant are deciding to abort the pregnancy without anybody knowing they are pregnant. ... this may in turn be hazardous as they [adolescents] tend to use dangerous and unprescribed substances to terminate the pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy was also associated with lack of communication at home, irresponsibility and teenage curiosity. A female learner from school A reported,

> ... if parents do not communicate with their adolescents about issues such as sexuality ... they [adolescents] might not have many options to consider in their decision-making [about sexuality issues].

Furthermore, another female learner from school M stated that,

> Teenagers tend to be curious in their nature and they might just go out ... and explore ... and have sex and end up being pregnant anyway.

Academic anxiety

This category refers to anxiety that adolescents experience as a result of academic demands and expectations. Although some learners seemed to experience academic anxiety as a problem, it was however one of the least serious problems they were experiencing. Although academic anxiety was mostly related to passing exams, other problems were in relation to passing grades and competition amongst peers. Some of the anxiety they mentioned stems from family pressure and high expectations about scholastic performance. According to one adolescent in school A,

> The other thing is that when exams approach we tend to doubt ourselves and become all of a sudden incompetent...

According to the educator, most learners failed grades because they did not have the skills of how to study. They needed a system that could help them know what and how to study, he reported further. Furthermore, "most learners just get to read and they do not really learn."

Learners also experience problems with managing their time especially in terms of knowing when to study and balancing enough time or even sharing time between activities, according to the educator. He stated,

> ...many of the learners were not particularly familiar with the concept of time management as they used time wastefully.

This, he continued, was because he thought learners spend more time focusing on things that were not particularly relevant.

Misconduct

This category was perceived as the least serious of the problems that adolescents experienced. Misconduct in this case refers to all behaviours that adolescents engage in that are illegal, and perceived by adolescents as not appropriate and acceptable given their age, levels of responsibility and accountability. This includes lack of respect for adults and illegal acts.

Boys were the ones who highlighted engaging in illegal acts as a concern. These illegal acts included committing crimes such as stealing, involvement in fights, and dishonesty. According to a male learner from school A,

> These criminal acts that adolescents commit are so bad and illegal that they [criminal acts] can land them in jail.

Lack of respect for adults in general was highlighted by adolescents in school M as a major problem facing them as adolescents at school. Although this is also attributed to peer

pressure and the way one has been brought up at home, it seems it is happening excessively and affects mostly boys. One girl in the focus group stated,

> You find that students don't respect teachers and when you ask why they tell you he's not my mom or dad.

In the male focus group, one boy stated,

> It's so pathetic the way we don't respect teachers and we think we are playing smart.

5.2 Help-seeking patterns

Help-seeking

It seemed from the focus group interviews that adolescents acknowledged that they experienced a lot of problems that they would need help dealing with. However, that did not predict that they would seek help. Although some sought help, it seemed the type of problem and the degree of the problem predicted whether and where to seek help. For instance, for most serious problems some may seek help. For others, however, seeking help was not an option under any circumstance. Keeping the problem to oneself and solving it personally, was perceived and supported by both genders in both schools as the safest means of dealing with the problem. The learners reported at times finding that the problems are too big for them to solve on their own, even though that may be their preference.

Keeping the problem to yourself

"Keeping your own matters to yourself" was supported by all the learners in all the groups. They stated that if one wants to live peacefully with personal problems the best solution is not to tell your problems but to live with the problems yourself. The reason they provided was that no other person can be trusted with another person's secret. It also emerged that the learners might be functioning in an environment that did not encourage help-seeking. There was an emphasis on individuals being responsible for their own problems.

According to the learners, when one has problems, they should 'keep quiet and let go' of the problem. The response to this point in the focus groups indicated that many were functioning in that mode anyway. The learners also reported that when one experiences problems, they should ignore the effect thereof and eventually the problem will subside. Some learners disagreed, stating that if you try to ignore the problem, the problem might never stop, and it may haunt you for a long time until something is done about it. Even so, they supported that problems should be kept to oneself.

Others also acknowledged that the more the problems are kept to oneself the more the likelihood of people blaming themselves for those problems they experience. For example, they also stated that things could get damaged because there is a likelihood of making wrong decisions. Taking wrong decisions or drastic actions, such as suicide, seemed to be attributed to the perceived lack of support from anybody. Sometimes, as reported in the focus groups, adolescents tend to think they cannot find solutions to their problems. This happens mostly if they have not confided in anyone about their problems and they think suicide is the final solution. Furthermore, some mentioned that instead of talking about their problems they resorted to reading a lot. They reported that reading makes them forget

momentarily about the problems, but the problems do not disappear. The learners seemed to think that external help should only be sought if problems are very serious.

In responding to the question of what could be the reason that determines what adolescents do with their problems, some mentioned lack of knowledge of problem solutions. Passivity and rigid thinking on the part of adolescents might account for this lack of knowledge. According to the learners "most adolescents are uneducated and uninformed about the problems they experience," hence they do not know how to deal with those problems. This was attributed mostly to lack of communication by parents with their children. The learners stated that "if parents could learn to communicate with their children then that, on its own, can communicate to their children that they are available to talk to". Furthermore, "adolescents would also have knowledge of what they are getting themselves into and they would not have so many problems." As mentioned earlier, the perceived lack of support by adolescents prevents them from seeking help. It seemed others were scared to talk about their problems because they feared being judged, and shouted at by their parents. It also emerged that parents' anticipated reaction contributed a lot in determining whether to keep problems to oneself or not. Some learners also stated that sometimes there is no one besides one's parents to go to. This was also to some extent attributed to lack of awareness of sources of help, otherwise adolescents would have a lot of options of who to go to. It was also attributed to the type of family and parenting style one was exposed to.

Adolescents' perception of the seriousness of their problems seemed to determine whether they would seek help. Although that may be, some stated that regardless of the intensity of the problem they would not seek help. This was emphasised mostly by boys.

Gender

There seemed to be slight differences in the way both boys and girls think of approaching their problems even though most of their approaches were similar. According to the educator from school A, even though boys do experience behaviour problems and do not cope with the problems, they still do not seek help and they hide their problems. However, she reported further that "… those problems do affect other aspects of their lives such as in school".

5.3 Sources of help

What, in general, are the sources which adolescents turn to? There seemed to be conflicting ideas as to who to consult for which problems. Others thought that consulting family members, or known people, was safe while others thought consulting with strangers was much safer. However, there seemed to be different reasons for consulting with different people such as trust, anonymity, confidentiality and support. It emerged from the interviews that adolescents would consider confiding in both informal sources (e.g. friends, strangers, family, and relatives) and formal sources (e.g. doctors, educators and school counsellors). There were also disadvantages to consulting with these sources. These are discussed below.

<u>Informal sources</u>

Friends

This is the second most preferred source after keeping the problem to oneself. Friends are preferred because as one adolescent stated,

> ...they are peers and they share the same sentiment of what we are going through, most probably because they are going through the same thing themselves.

Friends reportedly understand better, always have answers, and do not interrogate one as parents would and in this way they are more supportive. It was also stated that friends offer more valuable advice especially if they have gone through the same problem themselves. However, adolescents qualified this by saying that it depends on the kind of friends one has. Thus, as one male learner from school M stated,

> If one has good friends they can advise that you seek help if you have problems, or they can provide some kind of solution themselves...

They reported that the friends' familiarity with and experience of the problem determined whether one would seek help from them. A distinction was made between same gender friends and opposite gender friends.

Some adolescents had a preference for same gender friends because they were in a better position to understand and relate to the problems. Some also mentioned that it is easier to relate to and trust them. However, others found it to be a disadvantage to talk to same gender friends, especially females, as there were issues of confidentiality and competition

that emerged. Adolescents commented that females tended to gossip and in the process of gossiping they "distribute" whatever was confided in them. This worsens the situation. Same gender friends are also found, especially by females, to be jealous and as a result they might not offer you beneficial advice. As a result, some learners expressed a preference for confiding in members of the opposite gender. These friends were reportedly preferred because they are less judgemental and they take time to listen when you talk to them. According to one female learner from school M, opposite gender friends

> ...really contribute to your growth, and they don't compete with you on
> any level.

Strangers

Strangers in this instance refer to people whom the adolescents had never met and those whom they did not know. Although some learners preferred advice from strangers, some disagreed with the notion declaring it dangerous. Preference for strangers is seemingly for the sake of security, confidentiality, and anonymity. According to a male learner from school A,

> At times when you meet strangers they [strangers] do not need to know the details and the background of the problem, but they just offer advice the best they can.

Furthermore, as reported by a female learner from the same school,

> Strangers do not even need to know you or where you come from before offering advice, and the probability is high that that person might not even remember you next time nor might you even meet them again.

All those factors stated above, according to the learners, make it easier to talk to strangers about personal problems. The learners' main concern was with confidentiality. A female learner from school M asked,

> What if that person happens to be a close friend of your mother's that you don't know and have never met before?

Another one agreed stating, " Ja ... because you can never know all the people your mother hangs out with".

Family

It appeared that there were ambivalent feelings about consulting with family members about problems. It seems that adolescents need to separate family life from their other social life by not discussing social life matters with family. Family members can be supportive, understanding, communicative, overly protective and/or helpful. However, other learners believed the opposite to be true about families. Family members seen as sources of help to talk to included parents and siblings

Consulting with parents was found by the learners to be the last resort when all else has failed. That is because parents were at times reported to be so strict that no matter how hard the problem is, consulting with parents was under no circumstance an option. To begin with, parents did not expect their adolescent children to engage in inappropriate behaviour. Hence, requesting help from parents about taboo, or inappropriate behaviour, would not be possible. The example that the learners provided was in terms of relationship problems. If you tell your parents that you have a problem in that regard when they do not expect you to

have a relationship with the opposite gender partner, they might even chase you out of the house.

Learners in dual parent families mentioned that if they had a choice they would consult with their mothers as they are viewed as far less strict than their fathers. A female learner from school M reported,

> Sometimes both parents can be similarly very strict, but you still would go to your mothers when experiencing problems...

Gender also played a role in preferences for sources of help. By the same token another learner reported that,

> ...not necessarily that your father once hit you or said anything harshly to you that you would not speak to them, but merely because he is a man that you would not go to him...

In cases of confiding in parents the ambiguity was very strong because parents can have all sorts of reactions, according to the findings from the focus groups. For instance, some people found it appropriate to confide in mothers. However, it seemed those who would confide in mothers were from single parent families. This seemed to be the case in both schools. It seemed in single parent families, according to the learners, that one parent tends to be a friend to their children. Nonetheless, some children from single parent families would still not confide in their parents "because they [parents] can be very strict."

Another factor which made it difficult to talk to parents was lack of communication between adolescents and parents because parents think they know everything and they just

'tell you how to do things' without listening to your opinion. This is reportedly mostly applicable to parents who are older. Furthermore, when they say something their word is final and they do not even negotiate. The consensus from the learners was, however, that there are issues you can consult with parents about but some issues are strictly kept away from parents, such as smoking, or loss of virginity.

According to the educator from school A, it seems that there is a lack of parent-child communication at home which makes children ill-equipped to deal with problems. As a result the learners tend to go out and explore with peers often with negative consequences. The educator seemed to find this lack of communication to be a serious problem as it affects the future and decision making of the learners. As she reported,

> Parents seem not to realise that these learners are in a stage where they are more curious and need to find things out, and not talking to them is not a solution.

She commented that the constraints placed on learners, for example, not being allowed by their families to go out, particularly with peers. She reported that,

> that happened especially in families that are very conservative and that do not talk to their children. As a result the learners feel deprived of their social life.

The educator reported that this led to feelings of exclusion and marginalisation, which had a negative effect on the learners' academic progress at school, and

> …in turn, learners feel left out and feel that they do not fit in with their counterparts. Hence, when they get to school they do not concentrate on academia but they use the time to explore their social world.

The educator reported further that another problem is that some learners were being treated differently at home from their siblings. This put pressure on the learners and affected their academic performance. Learners report to her that parents do not accept that their children are not equally gifted which lead to favouritism. This affects the learners' trust and relationships in their families and with their siblings.

Siblings

In the family, siblings were preferred as a source of help because they have had similar experiences and can relate better to the problem. Siblings are found to be supportive and to be able to listen. They can attempt to help you with problem solving and offer some kind of advice. Talking to siblings about problems seemed especially comfortable for girls. Boys, on the other hand, did not highlight any preference for consulting with siblings.

Relatives

According to some of the learners, relatives do not have that strict authority over you if they are not your parents and this makes it easier to talk to them and to trust them. This was in special reference to aunts, uncles, and cousins. Most girls mentioned being closer to their aunts and cousins than members of their own families. They mentioned that sometimes when talking to aunts and cousins, problems may be entertained informally or with a sense of seriousness, but at the end "you get your advice or even the solution". At times, cousins or aunts facilitate discussion by initiating the kinds of topics that adolescents are having trouble with, thus providing adolescents with an opportunity to talk about their problems.

Those who were against talking to relatives feared a break in confidentiality. They argued that those aunts, uncles, and cousins might tell your parents about your problems. According to the learners, if the relatives know that they do not have authority over you, they may tell your problems to your parents if they want to have you punished.

Formal sources

Most adolescents did not consider consulting with professionals. Professionals referred to people who are competent and qualified to deal with the problems that adolescents experience, for example, doctors, educators, and counsellors at the school. A few mentioned that if their problems were far greater than they could handle they might consult with professionals. Professionals were preferred for professional attention, such as a doctor for medical attention rather than as a source to confide in.

A few learners reported that they would consult with doctors only when they had a medical and/or psychological condition caused by those problems experienced. For instance one male adolescent from the focus group in school M stated, "When you are depressed you go to a doctor." However, there was a consensus that doctors should be consulted with but not confided in. There was a concern that parents can easily get information from doctors.

Only a few adolescents, and only boys from school M, mentioned consulting with a school counsellor as an option. They argued that counsellors are trained to help people with their problems and that confidentiality is guaranteed. However, it should be borne to mind that only learners from school M had a counsellor to go to.

It seemed from the group discussions that educators are not the help source of choice. Although a few boys from school A stated they might consult with an educator, this was on condition that the problem affected them so much that it disturbed their concentration in class or if "the problem has anything to do with family and nothing else."

Girls disagreed with consulting with an educator saying that the problems you report to educators might influence their perception of you, for example, in terms of conduct at school and the educators' ratings of them. They also reported a concern about confidentiality, commenting that educators have a tendency to discuss learners in the staff room.

According to the educator from school A, girls consulted more with her than boys. However, she reported further that "younger boys were also more likely than older boys to consult and were more open". The Guidance educator from school M was also still new at the school and he reported that thus far he had not been consulted that much by the learners. The previous Guidance educator was no longer at the school. In summary, he did not have much experience with learners particularly from school M.

5.4 Life Orientation Programme (LOP)/Guidance Programme

All learners from both school A and School M reported that the LOP and Guidance Programme served no significant purpose for them. They reported that during the lessons, they (the learners) engaged in activities inappropriate to the lesson such as doing

homework for other lessons, chatting, making a noise, and sometimes even the educators were absent in these lessons. The learners commented that the educators' attitudes to the lessons affected how they were valued. This included the way in which the lesson was conducted and the content of the lesson. The learners also mentioned that some topics are repeated and they get boring, HIV\AIDS topics in particular. Some learners also commented that,

> the problem with educators is that if they bring these topics ... to class, they make the lesson ... an information feeding class. We never get to discuss anything or raise our views... we get them, we keep quiet and listen that's it.

Learners also questioned the expertise of the educators arguing that they (the learners) know more about the topics than the educators do. Thus, the overall impression of the LOP lesson and the Guidance Programme was that even if these programmes were presented as a means of help with their problems, learners would not use them to discuss problems or seek help.

Although those were the experiences of the LOP and Guidance Programme learners, there seemed to be a contrast with what the educators reported. The educator from school A reported that "some learners did enjoy the LOP" but others did not seem interested. She stated further that "the LOP was beneficial to the learners" and that "they learnt a lot during the lesson."

Thus, this section reported on the problems as experienced by the learners. It also looked at how adolescents respond to those problems and the sources that are used when seeking

help. This section also incorporated the educators' opinions of the learners and their experiences. In the following section the findings as reported in this section will be discussed and compared to the literature reviewed.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

According to the findings in this study, the adolescents sampled share similar problem categories, sources of help-seeking, and mediators to help-seeking in comparison to results from other research. In this section, results from the data will be discussed in relation to findings from other research as discussed in the literature review.

6.1 Problem types

As stated in the previous chapter, the problem types that are experienced by adolescents in this research study are interpersonal relationships, misconduct, drugs and alcohol, family, academic anxiety, and teenage pregnancy. In general, these findings support the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Mau and Jepsen (1990), Boldero and Fallon (1995), Colvelle (2001) and Fallon (2001) argued that most adolescents' problems were experienced in the areas of family, interpersonal relationships and education. According to Colvelle (2001), the similarity of problems found in most research findings confirms the universality of learners' problems and behaviours regardless of gender and location.

Interpersonal relationships

Interpersonal relationships for adolescents in this study were found to play an effective and crucial role in their lives. That is, they influence adolescents' decision making and how they relate to other people in their environment Although these interpersonal relationships

are said to be very effective in adolescents' lives, they can have negative effects in the adolescent's daily functioning, especially cognitively. Colvelle (2001) similarly found that a lot of misunderstanding also occurs in adolescents' interpersonal relationships.

Peer pressure

Some of the problems reflected in interpersonal relationships were in relation to peer pressure. In the present study peer pressure was found to be the most serious problem affecting adolescents. This finding supports findings from the general literature discussed earlier. What also affected adolescents significantly was having to conform to groups. This finding is in accordance with Colvelle (2001) and Sigelman and Shaffer's (1995) report that in order to fit in with a particular group sometimes adolescents might have to break a few rules. According to Sigelman and Shaffer (1995), peer group norms are particularly rigid concerning what is acceptable and what is not during adolescence, and being viewed as a weirdo who does not fit in can be even worse. This conformity to groups was done for reasons such as the need for identity, the need to belong, and popularity. Adolescents were also under pressure of wanting acceptance versus rejection by peers that they had to conform. In agreement with Sigelman and Shaffer's (1995) findings, it also appeared that peer pressure was at the base of most decisions that adolescents had to make.

Family

In the present study the family was found to play an important role, and to be a good support system, in adolescents' lives. However, the family and relationships in the family can be experienced as a problem. The family exerts many demands on adolescents. Participants in the present study argued that parents sometimes had impossible expectations

of them. This supports the finding of Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) that if adolescents experience a very strict environment at home, this can contribute to alienating them (adolescents) from the family. Fallon (2001) also found that experience of relationships in the family was related to how adolescents will cope. Findings in this research reflected that communication between parents and their children was a crucial factor that determined the kind of relationship adolescents will have with their parents. Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) and Fallon (2001) also found that a family environment that has effective and positive communication, with a democratic parenting style, provides adolescents with a growing sense of competency and makes them less susceptible to influences from peer pressure.

Misconduct

Misconduct as explained earlier refers to all behaviours that adolescents engage in that are illegal, and perceived by adolescents as not appropriate and acceptable given their age, levels of responsibility and accountability. This includes lack of respect for adults and committing illegal acts. Misconduct seems to be a problem that affected most male adolescents. Although lack of respect for adults by adolescents was emphasized by learners in this study to be a problem experienced by adolescents, other literature did not identify it amongst their findings which makes it a relatively new finding.

Substance use

Although the use of drugs and alcohol by adolescents was attributed to peer pressure most of the time, it was also attributed to adolescents' curiosity. As a result, they engage in activities such as using drugs and alcohol. In accordance with Sigelman and Shaffer's (1995) findings, alcohol is the most used drug amongst adolescents. Adolescents in the

present study reported substance use to be bad for adolescents given their age. On the contrary, Shedler and Block (1990, cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) found that as a matter of fact adolescents who experimented with drugs were in many ways more psychologically well adjusted and had better family relations than either frequent users or abstainers. Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) assume that substance usage is part of the larger process of experimenting to form an identity and peer acceptance. Similarly in this research, adolescents reported to use substances in order to impress, get acceptance and belong to a certain group of peers.

Teenage pregnancy

As with drugs and alcohol usage, learners in the present study attributed teenage pregnancy to peer pressure and adolescents' curiosity. They also attributed teenage pregnancy to lack of communication at home and parenting style. Teenage pregnancy was also reported to affect adolescents' interpersonal relationships and relationship with the family. Thus, if parents do not communicate with, and educate, their adolescents especially about sexuality the adolescents might just 'run off' to explore on their own. Unfortunately, for adolescents in the present study this exploration at times means engaging in the activities yourself, e.g. having sex without protection and ending up pregnant. Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) view teenage pregnancy as a casualty resulting from unsuccessful adjustment to sexual involvement. According to the learners in the present study, some adolescents engage in sexual activities for no better reason than peer pressure. The findings here support findings by Lamborn and Steinberg (1993) who found that the kind of relationship adolescents have with their parents, and parenting style, influence the way in which adolescents respond to external pressures. If the family environment does not limit adolescents from discussing sexuality with their parents, it might decrease chances of teenage pregnancy.

Academic anxiety

With academic anxiety it seemed adolescents are mostly concerned about imminent learning difficulty in their study progress, which make them anxious. The anxiety was especially in relation to passing grades, exams and peer competition. Sigelman and Shaffer (1995) report that adolescents are affected by the school environment, especially when they have to adjust to the demands of higher grades while at the same time preparing for their career paths. These authors further argue that having to adjust to the many and varied changes of the adolescent period (Sigelman and Shaffer, 1995), can affect adolescents' grades, and self-esteem. This is because with higher grades comes a good deal of choice regarding learning activities, the hardships of obtaining good grades, rigid discipline, etc. As a result, Eccles (1993, cited in Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) viewed the relationship between developmental needs and school environment to have an important influence on adolescents' adjustment to school. Some of the pressure was reported to stem from the pressure and demands exerted from home and having to meet their (family's) expectations.

6. 2 Help-seeking patterns

Predictors of help-seeking

According to the findings in the present study, adolescents experienced problems, but that on its own did not seem to predict whether or not adolescents will seek help. This concurred with findings from Tishby et al. (2001) who did not find a direct relationship between level of distress and an individual's willingness to seek help. However, if adolescents did seek help, the type of problem and the degree of the problem predicted whether and where to seek help. This finding supports findings in Fallon (2001)'s study

that found complex relationships between problem type and help-seeking behaviour. Although some literature found help-seeking to be associated with individuals' weakness and shame (e.g. Lin, 2002; Tishby et al., 2001), this was however, not evident in this research. Learners in the present study were more concerned about confidentiality than any other factors.

Some of the mediators to help-seeking behaviours identified in this research were also identified in other research (Colvelle, 2001; Dubow et al., 1990 cited in Kuhl et al., 1997). Amongst these mediators, in the present study and other research, were the way in which adolescents defined their problems, thus defining the problem as too personal, and reliance on informal sources. This reliance on informal sources seemed to hinder seeking help from formal sources.

Keeping the problem to oneself

Keeping the problems to oneself and consulting with friends was presented on a continuum. This is because the adolescents felt that if their problems are minor and manageable, and if the problems were under a threat of being exposed, then keeping the issue to oneself was an option. This finding concurs with findings in Raviv et al. (2000)'s study that adolescents thought it was worthwhile to deal with minor problems themselves, and they thought that seeking help for severe problems was more beneficial. The consensus among all the learners in both schools was that the first person to deal with one's own problems is oneself. It seemed learners would choose not to reveal their problems if there was a possibility that they could be ridiculed or if they feared their problems might be known by other people. This supported previous research (e.g. Colvelle, 2001) that if seeking help was seen as detrimental to their status, adolescents would not seek help. That

is, they preferred not to tell their problems but to deal with them themselves. However, if the problems were really hard to resolve then going to friends was considered the first option.

6.3 Sources of help

There appeared to be consensus between this research and other literature (Colvelle, 2001 and Lin, 2002) in terms of adolescents' seeking help from both formal and informal sources. Learners in the present study reflected a preference for seeking help from informal sources. This preference for informal sources is consistent with findings of Mau and Jepsen (1990), Barker and Adelman (1994), Lin (2002) and Bailey (2003). There also were different reasons reported for preference for those different sources.

Informal sources

Parents

Some of the learners perceived consulting with parents as the best option, which is similar to the findings of Bailey (2003), Skuy et al. (1985), Rickwood (1992) and Colvelle (2001), especially compared to consulting with their educators (Bailey, 2003; Skuy et al., 1985). However, in this research, consulting with parents was conditional on the type of relationship they had with their parents. Only those adolescents who felt they had a close and an open relationship with their parents mentioned confiding in parents as an option. For those who felt their parents were being strict and conservative, consulting with their

parents was not an option. The parents' conservatism was experienced as control over who the adolescents socialised with and limiting the way in which adolescents expressed their opinions. Adolescents in these contexts preferred to keep their parents out of 'adolescents' business' and therefore did not see parents as a source of help.

On the other hand, some adolescents confided in parents especially when they had a close relationship with their parents. According to Lamborn and Steinberg (1993), the kind of relationship that adolescents have with their parents is important in adolescents' lives and in decision-making. A significant finding of the present study is that a single parent family or dual parent family impacted greatly on whether or not to confide in parents. Apparently, single parents are easier to approach with problems and to confide in.

Friends

It became evident from the findings in the present study that friends were preferred above any other source to confide in. This preference for friends as helping agents is consistent with findings of Rickwood (1992), Srebnik and Cauce (1996), Raviv et al. (2000), Colvelle (2001), and Tishby et al. (2001). According to Colvelle (2001), learners predominantly tend to prefer using their peers as help resources. According to the adolescents, friends are more supportive and understand better since they have the same experience. Furthermore, friends were reported to be less judgemental and to offer valuable advice. Although in the present study a distinction was made between a preference for same gender and opposite gender friends to confide in, most literature did not report similar findings.

Strangers

The literature reveals that seeking help from an unknown person or stranger was found to be a safe method of help-seeking especially in alleviating concerns such as anonymity and getting an objective point of view (Grayson et al., 1998). Although some of the adolescents in the present study supported this view, for some, consulting with strangers was reported to be just as risky as consulting with anybody else. Bailey (2003) also found that even if the source was anonymous learners were reluctant to seek help.

Formal sources

Professionals

Colvelle (2001) found that whether or not learners believed problems could be kept confidential contributed to their help-seeking behaviour. The adolescents in the present study did not seem confident in trusting the confidentiality of professionals such as doctors and counsellors. They expressed the concern that these professionals would reveal information to their parents. However, the learners seemed to prefer consulting with doctors for health problems and not for emotional problems.

Educators

The learners in this study expressed a lack of confidence in educators. According to them, educators struggle to maintain confidentiality, and are judgemental. The learners reported to believe that whatever one reports to educators about personal problems can be used against them when deciding whether they pass or fail.

6.4 Life Orientation Programme (LOP)/Guidance Programme

The LOP and Guidance Programme have been introduced to schools fairly recently. As reported in the results section learners' predominant experience of those programmes was negative. They felt that those programmes were irrelevant and served no purpose, and they reported that during the LOP and Guidance Programme lessons they engage in activities that are irrelevant to the lessons. The learners' experience of the LOP and Guidance Programmes as not being used for their specific purposes supports the findings of Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002).

The learners in the present study did not see any significant role that was being played by the Programmes. According to the learners, these programmes were just extra periods on the time-table where everybody engaged in anything they liked unless the educator presented to class, which happened rarely. In agreement with findings from Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002), learners reported also that at times what educators bring to class is a one-way lesson and not a participatory one. According to Akhurst and Ntshangase (2002), educators used a "teacher-tell" approach that did not provide learners with the opportunity to participate and express their opinions.

A consistent argument amongst the female learners was that the LOP and Guidance programme educators were still educators, and for as long as they meet with other educators to discuss learners, they were not confident to trust the confidentiality of the educators. This negative attitude towards the educators concurs with the finding from Barker and Adelman (1994) who reported a negative attitude towards professionals to be

related to the underutilisation of professional services. As a result, consulting with those educators was not an option. However, amongst the male learners the consensus was that the LOP and Guidance programme educators may only be utilised when one has 'only' family problems, and when those problems seem to interfere with academic problems. For other problems other sources were preferred.

In some research (e.g. Skuy et al., 1985) attempts to determine whether, and in which areas of concern, the school guidance was perceived as a preferred helping agent, revealed contradictory results. These contradictions were supported by findings in the present study when looking at the impact of the LOP and Guidance Programme on the learners. Although in the present study the adolescents felt that the LOP and Guidance programme served no relevant purpose, the educators perceived those programmes as contributing effectively to the learners' emotional development and the programmes were viewed positively. According to the educators, the programmes offered assistance with vocational concerns similar to findings from Skuy et al. (1985). Thus, the LOP and Guidance Programme were overrated by educators as positive mediators for the learners in both the present study and in the general literature. This was the case in both schools in both provinces.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Adolescents are in a developmental stage where they experience a lot of changes in their lives. For some, changes are easier to overcome, while for others changes bring about minor to severe problems. The problems that they encounter are also embraced differently. Some adolescents may opt to seek help with their problems whilst others will not, no matter how severe the problems may seem. That is because, in resolving their problems, adolescents have a lot of preconceived ideas of the help-seeking situation that might turn out to be true, or be unfounded. Those ideas are most important mediators whether or not help will be sought.

It is evident from this study that adolescents, regardless of context and gender, experience similar kinds of problems. It also appeared that whether adolescents experience the problems themselves or whether the problems were experienced by another person, affected adolescents similarly. With the problems adolescents experience, it seems interpersonal relationships are the most serious. Most of all it emerged that peer pressure had some kind of influence in every aspect of their lives. However, the challenge that faces adolescents is how they respond to peer pressure. According to some authors, the type of family that they come from determines how adolescents will cope with peer pressure. Some of the problems adolescents experience include academic anxiety, substance use, family, teenage pregnancy and misconduct.

For the problems they experience, adolescents seemingly need to be helped by an individual or individuals that they can trust, who is/are understanding and non-

judgemental, and who can assure them of confidentiality. Although those characteristics in most cases predicted whether help would be sought from formal or informal sources, adolescents indicated a strong preference for using informal sources. Of the informal sources that adolescents reported, friends were preferred more than any other source. It became clear that friends understood better and were less judgemental. Although some adolescents were able to confide in parents, some had reservations about confiding in parents. It seemed some adolescents would rather keep their parents at bay regarding their problems. That is because some parents can be irrational and do not understand easily. Unfortunately, with all the problems that adolescents experience, some authors argue that for parents to talk or discuss those problems with their adolescents is regarded as unacceptable (Seiffert & Hoffnung, 1994 cited in Colvelle, 2001).

It emerged that the learners in this study found the LOP and Guidance Programme irrelevant to them. It also became apparent that the educators' attitudes to the programmes, and how the programmes were conducted, affected how the learners valued the programmes. Perhaps if groups could be introduced in the schools to help adolescents share and discuss their experiences and problems, this might help adolescents express their problems. These groups could be conducted with the help of an 'outside' source, such as a member of the community who does not particularly fall under the category of formal sources or professionals. This is because learners prefer informal sources to educators. An outside source might alleviate learners' concerns such as confidentiality, and their fear that their problems will be discussed in the staff meetings. The fact that threats to confidentiality play a major role in adolescents' help-seeking behaviour has implications for the underutilisation of professionals and more reliance on informal sources. Therefore,

it might also be worthwhile for the schools to make use of peer focus groups to discuss problems and to get as many views as possible on the solution for problems.

Although those were the experiences of the LOP and Guidance Programme learners, the educators reported that these programmes were very fruitful and rewarding to the learners. Considering that this study was conducted during the transition from the Guidance to the LOP, more information is still required on the impact of the LOP on the learners. Further information is also required on how the LOP is implemented and what role it plays in facilitating the learners' help-seeking behaviours.

Some conditions existed that compromised certain dimensions of the research design. Those included the lack of learners for individual interviews, time constraints, interference from the intercom, and wasting time in order to get the interview venue ready. As mentioned earlier, the interviews took place close to exam time thus requiring some sensitivity on our part and to respect the schools' time.

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APPENDICES

1. <u>Letter of request for permission to utilise the school for data collection</u>

<u>DATE</u>

<u>RECIPIENT'S ADDRESS</u>

TO: THE PRINCIPAL

<u>REQUEST TO DO RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL.</u>

My name is .... I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and I'm doing research on adolescents in high schools. Basically what I need to find out in my research is the kinds of help-seeking behaviours that teenagers engage in and how they deal with the problems they experience.

Here I am writing to request your permission to collect some of my data from your school. I hope my request will be highly appreciated.

NB. Attached please find a summary of the aims and proceedings.

Thanking you in anticipation,

....

2. A summary of the aims and proceedings

To whom it may concern.

The following is the outline of the research that will be conducted in your school.

Research Topic: Help-seeking Behaviours of Adolescents in Schools.

Objectives: i) to identify problems faced by adolescents,

ii) to identify help-seeking behaviours in relation to those problems,

iii) to explore aims of the Life Orientation Programme, and

iv) to find the relationship between problems, help-seeking behaviours and the Life Orientation Programme.

Sample: From grades 10 and 11,

To be drawn randomly from the class lists.

Size of (8 subjects x 4 groups).

One learner from each group for individual interview.

Relevant educator(s).

Time: Each group will be required to meet for approximately 1.5 hours per session. Individual interviews will be approximately 45 minutes.

Consent: There will be individual consent forms provided for each participant to sign.

The research will be conducted by ...., and
The supervisor is ....

3. Consent Form

I .... consent to participate in the conducted research based on the understanding that:

a) all my information will be treated confidentially;

b) I will, together with the information that I provide, be kept anonymous and private;

c) I have the right to withdraw from the research at any point; and

d) I can withdraw my information from being used in the research.

_____   _____

Participant's signature   Date

4. Focus Group Interview Guide

Good morning, my name is .... I am from the University of Natal. I am conducting a research study trying to understand the kind of problems that adolescents experience. I have requested for you to join me in this discussion to help me understand those behaviours because I do not know much about them. I would like to know from you what those problems are that you think adolescents like you experience, and if anything is being done about those problems. I would appreciate it if the issues we are going to discuss here remain among us (i.e. confidential).

Before we can start with our discussions, I would like us to completely relax. Now in order to do that, we will first play a game to get to know each other. The name of the game is 'Guess what I like most?'

In this game one member asks the rest of the members to guess the one thing s/he likes most in a particular category. If somebody gets the answer correct, s/he will be the next to get a turn and his/her name will be called out.

Questions

Teenagers your age experience various types of problems. I would like you to think for a moment of any kind of problem that adolescents experience.

1. What are the problems that you think adolescents experience?
   On the pieces of papers that were provided to you please write down all the problems you can think of. The problems can be either experienced by you or those that you know other adolescents experienced

2. When we are all done, please give those problems a rating between one and two, with one being the most serious problem and two as the least serious problem experienced by adolescents.

3. Now let us go around discussing those problems you have got. Which ones would you say are the most serious? How serious is it?

4. The rest of you, have you had similar problems? Could you share your experiences?

5. When you have problems like that who or where do you go to? Or do you not do

anything?

6. If you did not go anywhere, why not? Then what happened?

7. Whether or not you did something about your problems, was it helpful? Why/why not?

8. What kinds of problems would you seek help for? Why?

9. Are there any problems which you would not seek help for? Why?

10. How do you find, and feel about, the Life Orientation Programme/Guidance
   Programme?

5. Individual Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this further interview. In this interview I would like to discuss with you about some of the issues we discussed in the focus group earlier. The difference here is that now we will talk about you and your personal problems. Anything you say here will remain, as I mentioned in the focus group, between us. However still, the information that I am gathering here will be used in my research project.

Questions:

1. What are some of the main problems you experience at your age?
2. Can you give me an example of one and elaborate?

   When did it happen?

   What led to the problem?

   Then what happened?
3. How does the seriousness of the problem affect what you do or did about it?
4. Think about one serious problem you have experienced, what did you do or who did you go to for help?
5. How do you feel about people finding out you sought help with your problems?
6. Are there any problems you would not want people to find out you are experiencing? Why?
7. Who are the first people you would consider telling your problems to? Why?

6. Interview Guide for Educators

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this interview. I would like to discuss with you about some of the issues or problems that are experienced by adolescents. Your observations and thoughts will be of help. I would like to first discuss the kinds of problems that you observed the learners in question to have, and those they consult with you on. Furthermore, I would like to discuss what you think the impact of the LOP/Guidance Programme is on the learners and on their problems. I would also like to know how the LOP/Guidance Programme is being implemented to cater for the learners in question. Your input as the LOP/Guidance Programme will be of great help in this regard, and the information that I am gathering here will be used in my research project. Your name will in no way be linked to the information you provide.

Questions

1. Since you have been involved with the adolescent learners, what are the problems that they seem to be experiencing?
2. Do they always come to you with their problems?
3. How serious do you think the problems they experience are?
4. What do you think causes those problems?
5. What do you think they do with their problems? Why do you think they do that?
6. I understand you are the LOP/Guidance Programme educator. What training have you had that is relevant to the programme you are educating?
7. What is the role of the LOP/Guidance Programme?
8. How is the programme being implemented?
9. How do you think the programme impacts on adolescents? How do they respond to the programme?
10. Do you think anything should be done in order to address the problems of the adolescent learners more?