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KWAZULU-NATAL**

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YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL CONTEXT: A
COLLABORATIVE EDUCATOR SELF-STUDY IN THE
UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
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BY

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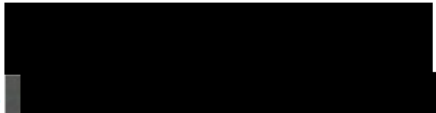
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DECLARATION

I, **Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi**, affirm that:

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On the 07th day of July 2024

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ABSTRACT

Substance abuse in primary schools is an emerging, sensitive and critical issue that is threatening South African youth who are the future of our country. The purpose of this study was to address substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences of substance abuse. The study was conducted in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district in Edendale, KwaZulu–Natal Province. Key findings revealed that my personal history contributed to my interest in substance abuse as an educator. The reflections with my colleagues (critical friends and I) also revealed our discovery of the commonly abused substance Zanex, violent behaviour of learners, lack of concentration and difficulty in disciplining substance abusers. The findings further highlight that driving forces behind substance abuse in our context include social media, individual experiences, family, community, poverty and unemployment. Lastly, the findings highlight that substance abuse can be mitigated through psychological support, community intervention programmes, departmental support, sister departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The study is significant as my personal growth and professional development have improved by engaging in collaborative self-study as a research design. The study recommends that greater attention should be provided to educator training on the implementation of policies and the collaboration of the community in mitigating substance abuse. This study also promotes self-study as a comparatively new genre of research, which has the potential to improve educator professional development and positive transformation of the learning environment.

Keywords: Adolescence, Driving Forces, Interventions, Personal growth, Self-study, Substance Abuse

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPF	Community Policing Forum
DoE	Department of Education
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
ISHP	Integrated School Health Programme
PSYD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
SANCA	South African National Council on Alcoholism and drug dependence
SAPS	South African Police Services
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This study sought to address substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences of substance abuse. By addressing the research questions, the study generates knowledge. It adds to scholarship on understanding substance abuse, the driving forces behind it, the challenges experienced, and possible intervention strategies that educators can employ. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), substance abuse is the harmful use of substances that are psychoactive, including alcohol and prohibited drugs. Both international studies (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2016) and African studies (Mohale & Mokwena, 2020; Morris, 2016) have highlighted the increasing prevalence of substance abuse among the youth. The study is located in the uMgungundlovu district in South Africa, where most of the population lives in rural areas with unemployment and poor service delivery. Post-apartheid South Africa has been battling many environmental stressors, including the democratic transition from the apartheid regime to the democratic era and fighting intolerable issues of crimes, poverty and unemployment and HIV/AIDS sickness (Dykes & Caskerb, 2021). This study adopts a self-study research design, which enables the researcher to critically evaluate their practice with the intention of enhancing professional practice, resulting in positive transformation at the selected school (Hernández-Serrano, 2021). Adopting a research design focusing on educators' self-reflection, this study makes a unique contribution as there is a scarcity of research on substance abuse among younger learners in primary school contexts in rural areas.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The background of substance abuse in South Africa is complex and multifaceted, influenced by historical, socio-economic, and cultural factors. South Africa has a record of substance abuse with traces to colonial times. During apartheid, certain substances were used as a means of control and oppression, particularly among marginalised communities. Additionally, the apartheid regime's policies led to socioeconomic disparities and social fragmentation, contributing to the prevalence of substance abuse. Sedibe and Hendricks (2020) conducted a

study on the residents who made a plea to the former President of South Africa to fight the participation of learners in issues of substance abuse and its widespread throughout the township areas. These inequalities are prevailing in the present economic climate in South Africa, where poverty, high levels of unemployment, inequality, and improper medical care facilities, as well as lack of access to education, contribute to substance abuse in South Africa. This occurs mainly in townships, as Sedibe and Hendricks (2020) describes townships as residential areas that are mostly occupied by Blacks and are mostly associated with poverty, crime, different substances abused like nyaope, Xanax, whoonga which often leads to violent behaviour and theft. Many individuals, especially those in excluded communities, abuse substances and alcohol because of their traumatic experiences and trying to overcome issues of economic struggles as well as social marginalisation.

Furthermore, the accessibility and availability of harmful substances are a significant contributor to substance abuse. South Africa serves as a shipment hub for substance trafficking, particularly heroin and cocaine, due to its geographic location between drug-manufacturing regions and global markets. A study conducted by Sedibe and Hendricks (2020) explored substance abuse in townships as well as adolescent learners' involvement in taking different substances. The availability and accessibility of illicit substances contribute to the high rates of substance abuse in the country. Also, certain cultural practices and social norms may influence attitudes towards substance abuse in South Africa. For example, in some communities, alcohol consumption is deeply ingrained in social and ceremonial rituals, which can contribute to patterns of excessive drinking. Nzama et al. (2021) discovered that illegal drug intake in South Africa has increased rapidly than in any other parts of the world.

Similarly, a study conducted by Mokwena and Setshego (2021) highlighted that South Africa has a noticeably greater number of young people abusing substances whether they are attending school or are considered dropouts, which causes a decline in their academic and school context. Substance abuse has been linked with struggles in maintaining school discipline, violent and rebellious behaviour, as well as difficulty in managing classroom-acceptable conduct. Furthermore, South Africa is regarded as the highest country battling issues of HIV/AIDS, and taking prohibited substances is closely associated with the extensive spread of the HIV/AIDS virus. Injection substance abuse, in particular, poses a significant risk factor for HIV transmission, further exacerbating the public health challenges associated with substance

abuse. Another contributing factor is the shortage of mental health services for people with low incomes. Seeing that substance abuse is often associated with mental health disorders, such as sadness, worry, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Sewell (2015) revealed that humans have persistently resorted to using substances as a means of coping with their mental state. Hence, inadequate mental health services and resources in South Africa lead to underdiagnosis and insufficient treatment for people struggling with both their addiction to substance abuse as well as a mental sickness.

Although the South African government has implemented various initiatives to fight substance abuse, including programmes that fight and treat substance abuse, which will assist with strategies of harm reduction, one of the hindrances to these initiatives stems from limited funding, insufficient infrastructure, and stigma surrounding addiction that continues to impact the effectiveness of these efforts. A study conducted by Sahu and Sahu (2012) discovered that the use of liquor, cigarettes, and different substances remains problematic among youths, as well as the misuse of psychoactive substances, which needs to be regarded as a matter requiring national intervention. Substance abuse remains a significant public health concern in South Africa, requiring broad inclusion and sensitivity methods for prevention, treatment, and harm reduction. Efforts to address substance abuse must resume as early as possible, with education at the forefront. Educators play a crucial obligation in deriving strategies necessary for fighting substance abuse as well as providing support, orientation on abstinence and resources to learners, families, and communities. Substance abuse awareness prevention and support at schools may create environments where students can prosper and make conducive choices for themselves for constructive self-conduct. Therefore, this study attempts to address substance abuse in a primary school context.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The research purpose refers to the overarching goal of the study, while the objectives are specific by outlining the measurable components of the research purpose. Schools play an essential part in promoting learner welfare and safety, as the Department of Basic Education (2013) initiated the Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP) as a form of health education, which is currently being implemented nationwide. This programme comes with an expectation of school health teams to offer support, promote health education and provide information on alcohol and substance abuse to learners, which includes seeking support and prevention of substance abuse. The purpose of this study is to address substance abuse in a primary school in

the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences of substance abuse. By addressing the research questions, the study generates knowledge and adds to scholarship on understanding substance abuse, the driving forces behind it, the challenges experienced and possible intervention strategies that can be employed. The following specific research objectives and research questions guide the study:

1.3.1. Research Objectives

- To explore the parts of my personal history that have contributed towards me becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance abuse in the primary school context.
- To collaboratively explore the experiences and challenges that we have encountered with substance abuse in the primary school context.
- To collaboratively explore why substances are abused in the primary school context.
- To collaboratively explore how we address substance abuse in the primary school context.

1.3.2. Research Questions

- What parts of my personal history have contributed towards me becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance abuse in this primary school?
- What experiences and challenges have we encountered with substance abuse in the primary school context?
- Why are substances abused in the primary school context?
- How do we address substance abuse in the primary school context?

1.4 RESEARCH RATIONALE

The rationale of a study is usually a statement of how the researcher became interested in this topic and why this research is worth carrying out (Vithal & Jansen, 2012). According to Mokwena and Setshego (2021), there are limited studies conducted in South Africa on substance abuse, and their main focus is on high schools found in urban areas. Studies conducted on substance abuse mainly focus on high schools in urban areas. For example, Mohale and Mokwena's (2020) study probed the experiences pertaining to abuse of substances at a high school in an urban southern suburb of Johannesburg. Further, Mokwena and Setshego's (2021) study investigated issues in the rural Setsoto municipality in the Free State but mainly focused on High Schools in the area. However, rural areas and primary schools are

also experiencing a growth in substance abuse among learners. This accounts for the gap in research and the need for this study.

The rationale for this study is also motivated by my professional experiences as an educator. Drugs are negatively destroying the lives of many school learners. Brown et al. (2011) revealed that the use of alcohol and other substances remains a primary cause of injury and death in young people. It is particularly concerning that learners at the primary school level are abusing substances. The impact of substance abuse is a concerning factor since I have witnessed some of the rapid changes that occur in the lives of our young learners who are abusing substances. My main concern is their consuming prohibited substances and how their self-conduct changes as they become rebellious when influenced by drugs. This type of behaviour has become a new norm for our learners as they are fascinated and believe people perceive them as cool. They do not consider the consequences of academic results, which is concerning as they decline from lack of concentration during lessons.

As an educator, I am concerned about this behaviour and how it might be addressed. It is a concerning issue that is extremely sensitive and prevalent, which is not easy to address with parents as they are not supportive and also cannot accept learners' exposure to substance abuse. The concern to probe the matter emerged in 2019 when I transferred to my current school, where I was staffed in the senior phase as a grade 7 educator. I discovered that my learners were always behaving oddly, either displaying signs of exhaustion or being drowsy. At first, I thought it was tiredness from playing during break time, as the problem became persistent and worrisome. I decided to probe it, not only as an educator but also as a mother who was concerned. As educators, we are obligated to provide parental care to our learners. One can assume they are consuming water instead of water or juice mixed with a cough mixture to create Incika, which is a Zulu term 'to lean'. Even the first experimental process on substances can have tragic consequences that are fatal or can cause injury Brown et al. (2011). I had great concerns about minors abusing substances, which I discussed with my Supervisor based on the community and the dangers the issue of substance use entails. She was very supportive of the study and guided me to pursue a self-study, which is not only be a reflective experience as an educator advocating for change but also as a tool to assist me in comprehending teaching and addressing critical issues in my journey as an educator. Our discussion also directed me to pursue a collaborative self-study in exploring this issue with my critical friends.

1.5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology serves as a blueprint for the research study and guides the research procedures. Among other factors, the research paradigm, approach, and design are integral parts of the research methodology. Firstly, the paradigm describes a researcher's philosophical positioning, and this has important impacts on decisions reached in the research process (Saliya, 2023). The research paradigm I used is an interpretivist paradigm, which offers comprehension and interpretation of the experiences of my critical friends and myself. Secondly, I adopted a qualitative approach as it allows researchers to gain a rich understanding of social meanings and processes. Thirdly, I elected to do a self-study as my research design. According to Tidwell et al. (2009), as a research design, self-study is acknowledged as providing a means for investigating the messages we give in comparison to what type of message we are converging, corresponding with a crucial need for self-investigation, regarded as the centre of converge messages. Through self-study, I could finally observe my practice as an educator and utilise the information I acquired to improve my teaching practice and transform my self-conduct. Through self-identification I realised my potential to make a positive impact and contribute to the education system and lives of my friends and improve myself. Self-study allows me to tackle concerns that I have as an educator, and it allows me the opportunity to explore it, with the aim of assisting me to research this concern to understand it, but at the same time to identify ways in which I can address this issue of substance use and therefore make a difference. For my data collection, analyses, and interpretation, memory work was my method of reflecting on past occurrences, making notes using a reflective diary, and taking photographs as prompts. My study assisted me in revisiting my past as well as my present life and how memories are crucial in my journey as an educator concerned with substance abuse in primary school. I was able to generate data using various tools like memory work, dialogue and collage. I maintained trustworthiness and professionalism throughout my study to ensure its credibility and validity this ensured that the public, lawmakers and other researchers will have confidence in my findings. Since substance abuse is a sensitive and volatile issue, I complied with ethical considerations and ensured there was no violation nor revelation of identity.

1.6 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

I adopted Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory because it allowed me to explore valuable insights into comprehending the complex factors that influence substance abuse

among primary school learners. I was able to take into consideration factors that include peers, schools, family structures, communities and societal background as playing a vital role in fighting or promoting substance use. By examining ecological levels, I was able to identify both threats and protective factors related to substance abuse in a school context, as well as identify interventions that will assist in dealing with underlying issues contributing to substance abuse and derive strategies that will help in promoting a healthier, safe learning environment for our learners. Understanding the ecological context of substance abuse can help develop effective intervention and prevention strategies, targeting multiple levels of influence. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises cultural sensitivity in understanding human development. Incorporating ecological systems theory into substance abuse studies enhances the seriousness and extensiveness of a need to develop policies and recognise all the influences that promote substances, especially in minors.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF DISSERTATION STRUCTURE

Chapter One introduced the focus and purpose of the study, as well as the rationale and background for the study. The main research questions were introduced, and a synopsis of the research process was given. The chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of this dissertation.

Chapter Two presents an overview of the literature analysed during this research and compares the findings of studies like this study. It examines differing views and arguments put forth by various authors around the topic of substance use in primary schools. Chapter two also outlines the theoretical framing of the study of ecological systems theory.

Chapter Three discusses the methodological choices of the study and the justification for these choices. A detailed explanation ensues of the interpretive paradigm, qualitative approach, research design, methods of data generation, data analysis techniques, sampling method and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four discusses the key findings of the research study on substance use in primary schools. To comprehend the concern of substance abuse and the educator's role in fighting it. I elaborate on the parts of my personal history that have contributed towards my becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance use in primary school. I discussed issues

of my exposure to alcohol and my role as a community leader. I have discussed issues and experiences of violent behaviour. Concentration in learners is also affected when learners are intoxicated with substances. Failure to maintain consistency in us as educators in disciplining learners abusing drugs. Key findings show that learner behaviour is also affected by social media, peers, and community, as well as unemployment and poverty in their family structures. Recommendations were also discussed on how we can address the issue of substance abuse, like the implementation of policies and interventions from various departments and non-government organisations.

Chapter Five provides the conclusion of the study, its strengths and weaknesses, and recommendations for forthcoming researchers in the field. These findings reflect the nature of my study on substance abuse in a primary school context and aligned with the objectives of why it was essential to conduct the study.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the purpose, rationale as well as background of this research study. The chapter further summarises and emphasises the theoretical framework, essential concepts, and research questions and describes the adopted research approach that guided the study. An outline of the five chapters in my dissertation on substances abused in primary schools was presented, concluding the chapter. A description and analysis of the literature and theoretical framework used in this study will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The study focuses on addressing substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences. By addressing the research questions, the study generates knowledge and adds to scholarship on understanding substance abuse, the driving forces behind it, the challenges experienced and possible intervention strategies that can be employed. In the previous chapter, I introduced you to my research, which included the contextual background, research purpose, rationale, summary of theoretical perspective, research methodology and the overview of the dissertation. This chapter reviews the literature on the prevalence of substance abuse, provides an explanation of substance abuse, and discusses the rise of substance abuse globally and locally. In this chapter, I also explored the driving forces behind substance abuse among the youth, which include social environments, adolescence, peer pressure, socioeconomic factors, mental health, as well as accessibility and availability of substances. This chapter also outlines interventions to mitigate substance abuse in schools, addressing social media and its influences and establishing educational and awareness programmes. Early intervention and screening, peer support and parental involvement, as well as ensuring educators are trained and policies are properly developed and enforced is also discussed. Additionally, this chapter outlines Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory as a framework.

2.2. What is a literature review?

A literature review is a procedure of compiling and assessing appropriate research literature that is accessible on a certain matter, together with providing context for new research. A literature review is a broad investigation of the literature related to the topic that is researched (Ndille, 2020). A summary combining the opinions and thoughts of researchers as well as providing a thorough comprehension of the theoretical knowledge and procedures contributing to a topic at hand (Janeesh et al., 2019). Literature reviews integrate what others have done and said, criticise previous scholarly works, build connections between related topics, and identify the central issues in a field. It permits allowance of criticising previous scholarly works; most dissertations and theses serve to integrate literature, organising it into a series of

relative topics (often from universal topics to contracted ones); it provides permission to provide clarification of the literature by pointing out fundamental issues (Creswell, 2012). Cohen et al. (2018) suggest the vital goal of the literature review is to provide the basis of theory for the research, assist in improving the focus of the research, and guarantee that the planned research work is not a repetition nor replica of previous studies. Literature review proves that the scholar has ‘done his/her homework’ and keeps abreast with new theoretical developments, research methodology, conceptual framework, and problems that the research plans on addressing. It is also responsible for providing clarification of matters and terms as well as addressing issues and key concepts by displaying literature gaps and basic requirements for the study to be conducted. Cohen et al. (2018) believe that a literature review provides clarity on where new ground has to be broken in the field and indicates where, how and why the proposed research will break that new ground. It provides the researcher with critical judgement on prior research or theoretical matters in the field and, indeed, delivers new theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and substantive insights and issues for research.

2.3 The Prevalence of Substance Abuse among Adolescents

Substance abuse is a growing issue that is attacking adolescents all over the world. I reviewed several pieces of literature to try to comprehend the issue and address it in my school.

2.3.1. What is substance abuse?

Substance abuse is a growing concern in different contexts. A study conducted by Sahu and Sahu (2012) describes substance abuse as the dangerous use of psychoactive substances and harmful use of substances, including liquor and cigarettes. Substance abuse refers to the harmful or wrong use of psychoactive substances, including alcohol and illicit drugs (Osadolor, 2022). Substance abuse affects someone developing an addiction as well as having a habit of administering substances and hindering consciousness. When administered, substances will impact body functionality and structure (Abdullahi & Sarmast, 2019). Substance abuse, also referred to as drug abuse, has various examples of substances, namely liquor, marijuana (ganja), bhang, hashish (charas), various kinds of cough syrups, self-medication and pills tablets, heroin, cocaine, tobacco (cigarette, gutka, pan masala). Substance addiction can cause neuropsychiatric disorder, considered as a frequent craving to continue taking the drug despite harmful consequences. This drug-seeking behaviour is associated with craving and loss of control (Hall et al., 2016). Milin and Walker (2015) regard substance use disorder (SUD) in

adolescence as a severe mental health and social problem which can yield results of illness and death. Substance abuse has spread from the more rebellious, not afraid to take risks and underprivileged communities to influence a population of younger people who are likely to suffer from substance use disorder (Milin & Walker, 2015). Zou et al. (2017) suggest that loss of control and seeking to feed drug cravings are associated with substance abuse.

2.3.2. Substance Abuse - a Global Concern

Adolescence is a crucial time for biological formation as well as social and psychological development. It is also a time when substance addiction and its adverse effects are more likely to occur. Adolescents are mainly vulnerable to the adverse long-term effects of substance use, including mental health issues, poor academic performance, illness resulting from substance abuse and accelerated substance addiction from marijuana and alcohol (Nath et al., 2022). One of the most popularly abused substances among adolescents is cigarettes and alcohol. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), alcohol consumption among adolescents contributes to a myriad of health and social problems, including impaired brain development, risky sexual behaviour, academic underachievement, and involvement in accidents or violent behaviours. The use of illicit drugs, such as marijuana, cocaine, and opioids, poses significant threats to adolescent health globally WHO (2018). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlights the increasing occurrences of substance abuse by young people worldwide, with adolescents particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of substance abuse due to their ongoing physical and psychological development (UNODC, 2020). Research by Cerdá et al. (2017) revealed a link between adolescent marijuana use and long-term adverse outcomes that result in cognitive impairment and mental health disorders. Nath et al. (2017) also discovered that substance-abusing learners are likely to engage in criminal activities that include violent behaviour and bullying other learners. Substance abuse is also associated with psychological issues impacted by substances abused. Globally, incidences of substance abuse continue to be dominant among males compared to females, with an estimated two in three people who use substances being males. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) conducted a study in western countries that revealed a noticeable closure of a gap in occurrences of substance abuse between males and females. They discovered incidents of substance abuse in females to be equivalent to 69% of the occurrence among males, but it had reached 77% by 2019. When the occurrences among females were 17% and 22% in males, it was visibly higher among girls aged 12-17 than among boys of the same age group.

2.3.3. Substance Abuse in Sub-Saharan Africa

Substance abuse is prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, with alcohol and tobacco being the most commonly abused substances. While data on illicit substance abuse are limited, a study by Dada et al. (2018) suggests a need for urgent intervention on the problematic issue of substance abuse, including cannabis, cocaine, and opioids, in certain populations. Onaolapo et al. (2022) suggest that the increasing incidences of substance abuse and substance use disorder among young people have economic constraints, affecting the healthcare system as well as society at large. This study also suggests that continuous use of substances and illegal use of prescribed medications will, in the long run, negatively affect the health of these minors and increase the socioeconomic burden on the family and society. Gureje et al. (2019) believe the lack of comprehensive drug prevention and treatment programs worsens the problem. Many African countries struggle to allocate sufficient resources to address substance abuse effectively. The stigma associated with addiction often prevents adolescents from seeking help, further perpetuating the cycle of abusing substances.

2.3.4 Substance Abuse in South Africa

In South Africa, substance abuse usage is regarded as highly problematic compared to the global norm, and reports indicate that 15% of the population has a substance usage problem, impacting over 60% of crime-related activities (Tshitangano & Tosin, 2016). A study conducted by Mokwena (2021) suggests that learners abusing substances are suspected of being involved in various criminal conduct that involves bullying and violent behaviour. Mental illness issues have been detected, as well as engaging in risky sexual behaviours influenced by different substances taken. These aggravate achievements of intended education outcomes and result in poor academic performance, including the potential of dropping out of school (Mokwena et al., 2021). In the school environment and academic setting, substance abuse influences ill-discipline and aggressiveness in learners, which affects educators as they are faced with the challenges of adequately managing classrooms. Shuro and Waggie (2021) revealed that substance use amongst adolescents in South Africa (SA) who are attending schools has raised issues of concern within the public as learners between the ages of 10 and 12 are already experimenting with substances. Different substances, such as crystal meth (also known as tick or meth, marijuana, and nyaope, are readily available and affect individuals, their families and the community at large.

2.4 Forces that drive substance abuse in South African adolescents

Substance is rapidly becoming an issue that affects the adolescents of South Africa. Previously, it was an issue only in high school, but it is also eminent in primary schools.

2.4.1 Social Environment

The social environment where adolescents are growing up significantly affects their choices of early exposure to substance abuse. A study conducted by Hawthorne (1996) suggests that the influences of siblings, as well as associating with friends who are abusing substances, is likely to influence the choices of a male learner to spend pocket money on various substances if the child had more cash. In trying to determine prevention measures, Peltzer (2009) also identified the role of risk factors for alcohol use. Peltzer (2009) pointed out the following possible risk factors for substance abuse: social environment, issues of low socioeconomic status, lifestyle and personality, risky behaviour, and aggressiveness were viewed as possible risk factors. According to Peltzer (2009), these risk factors have also been associated with smoking tobacco and illicit substance abuse (Peltzer, 2009). Visser (2003) explains risky behaviour as conduct that can be physically or emotionally dangerous, this will negatively contribute to developmental challenges for young people involved. When exploring substance use and risky sexual behaviour also jeopardises the physical and psychological development of development of young people.

2.4.2 Adolescence: A period of turmoil

Adolescence is a very crucial stage of discovering the direction an individual needs to embark on while growing up. This is also a time when our learners are introduced to different substances. A study conducted by Somani and Megani (2016) confirms that underage substance abuse is dominant globally and impacts negatively on the development and growth of young people. The median age for the commencement of young people abusing substances in the United States is 14 years (Somani & Megani, 2016). In one study they conducted in the United States, Somani and Megani (2016) reported that 43% of adolescents aged between 13 and 14 had used alcohol, this increased to 78% among 17- and 18-year-olds. Among 13- and 14-year-olds, 10% are reported as regular alcohol users; evidently the numbers increased to 47% among 17 and 18 years old in the United States. The study suggested that more male students are

abusing alcohol regularly than female students, which makes substance abuse dominant to males when learners compared females with males. Kenyan recording stats revealed that 43% of males versus 37% of females are experimenting with cigarettes (Somani & Megani, 2016). In this study, it was determined that poverty is another risk factor for adolescents to engage in substance abuse. The poor parts of the world are also suffering and displaying more significant socioeconomic factors that accelerate occurrences of substance abuse (Somani & Megani, 2016).

Furthermore, the impact of poverty on the welfare of an individual must be taken into account as it can affect their psychological and physical aspects. In trying to cope with daily stressors and multiple issues, people living in poverty abuse substances as a means of managing their stress. This study revealed that 24% of the Pakistani population resides in poverty-encompassed areas, which exposes 70% of their children and young adults to substance addiction. Various substances such as cocaine, hashish, heroin, opiates and cannabis are abused more by poor people than wealthy people, particularly those who are jobless and have low income (Somani & Megani, 2016).

2.4.3. Peer Pressure - Cliques and Crowds

Peers have a crucial role in influencing other adolescents as they are basically associating with them as a form of freedom of association and belonging. Selvam (2017) defines peers as children or adolescents who are about the same age or maturity level. A peer group is referred to children with the same equal status and are usually of the same age group. This is when a child is exposed to an opportunity to relate to others and associate on an equal basis with their peers. This is when a child discovers peers as more attractive when compared to other groups and believes they have an equal environment that is better as well as exciting and unregulated. (Selvam, 2017). Selvam (2017) indicated that peer groups play a critical role in developing a person and self-discovering.

To a great extent, it can influence a person's discovery of values, self-aspiration, lifestyle towards his peers, as well as his attitude. Same-age interaction is essential as peers are sources of information about the world other than life with family. It contributes to whether the person will achieve and use acquired information for self-development as well as receive feedback about their abilities (Selvam, 2017). Furthermore, Selvam (2017) affirms that adolescents rely on being adored and accepted by their peers, which can result in admiration and confirmation of peer relationships rather than being stressed and suffering from anxiety because of peer

exclusion. Somani and Megani (2016) suggest that peer pressure can expose adolescents to initiations of substances as well as market activities, which are dangerous. A study conducted by Pfeifer and Berkman (2018) suggests that a critical developmental task of childhood is building a foundation of self-knowledge in the form of concepts; domain-specific self-adolescents begin to explore their emerging identities in ways that foster autonomy and connectedness (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018).

Furthermore, they also state that adolescents are physically, cognitively, and socioemotionally more advanced than children but prone to behave in ways that are inconsistent with adult values and norms. Adolescents are frequently caricatured as excessive risk-takers, overly self-focused, and highly susceptible to social pressure (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018). Pfeifer and Berkman (2018) regard adolescence as a critical state in terms of self-identity development, psychosocial welfare, attaining personal goals, self-motivation and commitment to social aspects. During adolescence, youth seek independence, mainly from parents and seek association with peers as a form of maturity. Relatedly, self-evaluations become complex as more interest in self-consciousness increases (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018).

2.4.4. Socio-Economic Factors - Poverty and Inequality

Socioeconomic factors contribute to how learners get exposed to substance abuse, and some are used for selling drugs in order to earn money. Manhica et al. (2020) suggest that poverty exposure in childhood/ adolescence increases the risk of later substance abuse disorder and drug crime convictions. Furthermore, poor living conditions, limited access to education and employment, poor neighbourhoods and housing characteristics may influence drug-related behaviours. Substance abuse may be influenced by origin, e.g. through the effect of acculturation in shaping patterns in the utilisation of psychiatric care in migrants. Having a migrant background, psychiatric disorders or having a parent with psychiatric disorders might exacerbate the effect of childhood poverty on later substance abuse behaviours (Manhica et al., 2020). Another study by Manhica et al. (2020) suggests that young people who had experienced poverty and had a psychiatric diagnosis in adolescence were at greater risk of developing later substance abuse disorders. A conclusion on this study concluded that poverty in adolescence was associated with substance abuse disorders in young adulthood.

2.4.5. Poor Mental Health and a Lack of Mental Health Services

Mental Health is associated with various causes, which also include failure to cope with stress, depression and abusing substances. Our learners are not fully matured both physically and psychologically, which leads to poor mental health. Karim (2016) suggests that the risks of adolescents experiencing mental health and substance use disorders have increased. It is estimated that about 20.0% of children and adolescents experience a mental health disorder, while 5.6% of adults and adolescents have alcohol and substance use disorders. Research conducted by Winter and Arria (2011) suggests that the human brain is still maturing during the adolescent years and that the developing brain may help explain why adolescents sometimes make decisions that are risky and can lead to unsafe behaviour or health concerns, including unique vulnerabilities to substance.

Similarly, Bava and Tapert (2010) also suggest that this is due to the dynamic brain changes that occur in the context of significant psychological and social transitions. In trying to comprehend necessary emotional development, a study conducted by Selvam (2017) suggests that the life cycle of every person, in the teenage stage, is followed by a period of profound biological and psychological changes. Karim (2016) believes that mental health illnesses and substance use disorders often converge, and many adolescents with mental health illnesses also experience poorer academic performance, higher rates of suicide, violence, substance abuse, pregnancy and psychopathology with ageing. Olawole-Isaac et al. (2018) suggest that harmful effects occur with any psychoactive substance use, and early initiation has been found to be associated with an increased risk of developing addiction and adulthood dependence. Hamidullah (2020) believes depression in adolescents is associated with smoking.

Furthermore, Hamidullah (2020) suggests that depression and depressive symptoms are consistently observed in smoking adolescents compared to their non-smoking peers. Nath (2022) suggests that childhood abuse is linked to suicidal thoughts and attempts. Furthermore, Nath (2022) states that teens experiencing suicidal thoughts, psychiatric illness symptoms like anxiety, mood, and conduct disorders, and various types of child maltreatment like sexual abuse, corporal punishment, and emotional neglect will display an inclining towards intoxicants. Sorsdahl et al. (2023) revealed that despite this high prevalence and substantial burden, most people living with a mental health condition do not access or receive the treatment they need and that an estimated 75% of South Africans living with a common mental health condition, such as depression, anxiety or problem substance use do not receive treatment. Those who do receive treatment are not always retained in care. A study conducted by Meyer

et al. (2019) estimated that 1.1 billion people were living with mental health and substance abuse disorders and that the prevalence of mental health disorders was the highest in low- and middle-income countries such as South Africa, which was attributed to conflict and trauma, hunger and poverty, poor access to health and social care, and social inequality. Sorsdahl et al. (2023) suggest that the availability of allied health professionals was also found to be limited, with an estimated number of 1.53 public sector occupational therapists, 1.07 public sector speech therapists and audiologists, and 1.83 social workers per 100,000.

2.4.6. Accessibility and Availability of Abused Substances

Different substances are readily available in the community where adolescents are growing up. Shuro and Waggie (2024) believe there is a huge battle to overcome substance use among learners as more substances become readily available, with the mean age of substance experimentation reported to be 12 years old. Broman (2016) indicated that the availability of substances in the home affects young adult substance use and substance use in later young adulthood, as well as establishing that parents and the home environment are critical in understanding patterns of substance use among adolescents and young adults. A study conducted by Hawthorne (1996) showed that social substance abuse among 6th-grade learners is of some great concern as it suggests that approximately 30% have smoked, 11% have drunk a whole glass or more of an alcoholic beverage, and 87% used analgesics (8-10). The problem of substance use (the use of illegal substances such as marijuana, cocaine, and alcohol) has increased in schools in Eisleben village, Botlokooa Ga-Ramokgopa (Mothibi, 2014). A study conducted by Broman (2016) showed that adolescents who reported that alcohol and illegal drugs were readily available to them in the household were likely more vulnerable to experiment on substance use in two periods of young adulthood, which is both early and later young adulthood. Surprisingly, the odds of marijuana, other illegal drugs and prescription drug misuse are greater when illegal drugs were available in the home during adolescence than when alcohol was readily available. Shuro and Waggie (2024) suggested that the most abused substances by learners were alcohol (49%), cigarettes (20.8%) and marijuana (dagga/cannabis) (16.8%). Broman (2016) believes substance availability may mean that parents have more substances in the home when children are older, but it could also mean that older children are better at finding the substances in the home. Shuro and Waggie (2024) believe the increased availability and variety of substances available to South African teenagers is a cause for preventive measures, for example, marijuana (known as dagga/cannabis), cocaine, glue, methamphetamine known as TIK and whoonga, known as “nyaope”, street name for a mixture

of mainly dagga and low-grade heroin. Most research has studied substance use among teenage learners in the school environment and communities. There is, however, some research that suggests occurrences of substance abuse that occur among primary school learners. For example, the prevalence of substance use among 460 primary school learners from four schools in a historically disadvantaged urban area was investigated (Visser, 2003). It was found that 14% of the primary school learners in this study currently used alcohol, 4% smoked marijuana, 3% sniffed solvents, 9% used over-the-counter medicines, and 2% used illegal drugs (Visser, 2003). Broman (2016) suggests that the availability of illegal drugs in the home during adolescence is considered more strongly predictive of initiation towards substance use, besides alcohol, in later young adulthood, according to a study conducted by Shuro and Waggie (2024) learners in a district in Limpopo alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, petrol, glue and jeyes fluid mixed with some spirit was identified as the most commonly used substances. It was also revealed that those learners were experimenting on heroin and cannabis as they had friends with access to the drugs in town.

2.4.7. Media, Peer Influence and Poor Performance

Social media is influencing the choices our learners make. Uncontrolled and unmonitored social platforms can impact the learner's choice of taking different substances. Another factor suggested by Khoza and Shilubane (2021) stated that advertising and ownership of promotional items are other ways to expose learners to alcohol. Khoza and Shilubane (2021) argue that media as a promotional platform and making alcohol popular increases the possibility of children engaging in substance use. Furthermore, Khoza et al. (2021) denote that when media in the form of televisions, electronic media and online platforms glorifies substance use. Drug dealers utilise it as an opportunity to determine the new sources of the drugs. Research further illustrates that peer influence and failure to acquire marks and impressive results also negatively impact academic performance, which leads to substance use (Khoza & Shilubane, 2021). Nzama et al. (2021) also specify peer pressure as a serious challenge and conclude that peer pressure is a significant driving force towards learners using substances. This study also highlighted that the embedded problems not only physically affect learners but also destructively affect their education, as they cannot concentrate on what transpires in the classroom. Similarity also emerged as Floyd et al. (2010) and Nzama et al (2021) maintains that substance abuse is extremely subjective to pressures learners receive from their peers as an approach to improve their egos.

2.5. Support and Intervention Strategies in Schools

Proper support and intervention are needed in school to address the growing issue of substance abuse. Effective strategies must be implemented as a form of creating awareness and prevention measures.

2.5.1 Education, Awareness and Prevention Programmes

One of the primary support and intervention strategies for substance abuse needs to involve prevention and awareness programmes, which are necessary in fighting the issue of substance abuse. Visser (2003) argues that when exploring the risky behaviour of primary school learners, standard prevention measures utilised in schools must include educating learners about the dangers of substance abuse as well as constructive information on avoiding inappropriate behaviour. This information dissemination and teaching learners must be factual information concerning risky behaviour like substance use and the dangers thereof. Furthermore, Research by Visser (2003) indicated that the learners are well informed from previous knowledge acquired about the inappropriate age of consuming alcohol and taking substances; however, their negative attitude contributes to the wrong decisions of ignoring facts about negative complications of substance use. Another study conducted by Ross et al. (1992) based on primary school substance abuse has explored other programs that have attempted to enrich the personal and social development of learners through what has been referred to as “affective” education. Visser (2003) emphasised that prevention programmes should include strategies for empowering the learners on a personal level, helping them deal with personal problems, developing their sense of well-being and enhancing their self-esteem. In general, affective education approaches appear to have placed too little emphasis on the acquisition of the kind of skills learners will acquire that will likely increase general personal competence and assist students in coping with various interpersonal and intrapersonal pressures to begin using, tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs (Ross et al., 1992). Another type of program identified is the “alternative approach”, which is an approach that includes individualised activities such as one-on-one reading, basic life skills, job preparation, and or/ physical adventure, which are designed to produce personal competence and give a learner a sense of control over his or her environment (Visser, 2003).

2.5.2 Early Intervention and Screening

Another important support and intervention strategy for substance abuse is early intervention and screening. Shuro and Waggie (2021) believe that “Educators are found at the frontline of dealing with learners abusing substances and are often not properly trained to respond effectively to the challenges such as early detection of substance use”. Stakeholders like SANCA and South African Police Services (SAPS) are some of the critical factors that should be engaged more in the prevention of substance abuse initiatives (Shuro & Waggie, 2021). Neger and Prinz (2015) believe that enrolling parents concurrently in SA treatment makes sense and parenting intervention, as opposed to delaying the parenting intervention for months. However, Neger and Prinz (2015) stated that parents tend to benefit more from these parenting interventions as they start with the fundamental psychological procedures, such as developing emotional regulation mechanisms, before teaching specific parenting techniques, such as practical discipline approaches.

2.5.3 Peer Support and Mentoring Programs

Pairing learners with peers as a form of support is needed to address the issue of substance use, and I believe it is effective if adequately monitored. A study conducted by Tracy and Wallace (2016) explains peer support as the process of providing and receiving nonprofessional, nonclinical assistance from individuals battling with similar conditions or circumstances of substance abuse to accomplish feasible long-term recovery from psychological, alcohol, and other substance abuse-related problems. According to Scannell (2021), peer-to-peer support is a phenomenon that can be seen in the behavioural health field and is necessary for increasing formal roles of monitoring designed to address prevention, health, health promotion, and intervention support. Musyoka et al. (2020) propose the use of a peer-led approach that is useful in influencing behaviour change, as it involves peers in programs related to youth health promotion. The use of peer mentors is a common practice in behaviour change and substance use prevention programs. Peer support has been shown to be a key component of many existing addiction treatment and recovery approaches, such as the community reinforcement approach and therapeutic communities. The community reinforcement approach has demonstrated the importance of valued social roles in maintaining abstinence, which is the foundation of a peer support relationship (Tracy & Wallace, 2016). Social pressure, particularly peer pressure, appears to be an important factor favouring the onset of early adolescent smoking and is probably also involved in the onset of alcohol and drug abuse. Training students to resist specific social pressures toward tobacco, alcohol, and substance abuse may reduce the

frequency of those behaviours (Balamurugan, 2018). Sober living houses are alcohol- and drug-free living environments for a group of peers to embark on a journey of recovery. Utilising a peer-oriented social model modality, sober living houses rely on mutual sobriety support, self-efficacy, and resident participation (Tracy & Wallace, 2016). The cornerstone of peer relationships is based on shared lived experiences of addiction and recovery. This shared narrative enhances hope that long-term recovery can be sustainable. It increased motivation for engagement in recovery-based activities such as mentoring, coaching, being a role model, connecting to natural community-based supports and resources, facilitating community reintegration, advocacy, coping skill development, and the encouragement of treatment adherence and completion (Scannell, 2021).

2.5.4 Parental Involvement and Education

Encouraging parental involvement and educating parents are effective intervention strategies for substance abuse. Ladis et al. (2018) believe that preventing and reducing youth substance use and problem behaviours must focus on parents as the primary prevention agent. Allen (2016) suggests a prevention approach in adolescent substance use which will be achieved through the recognition of parents playing a crucial role in promoting healthy adolescent behaviours and focusing on strengthening parenting skills. Dittus et al. (2021) consider parents to have a crucial role in promoting healthy adolescent behaviours that can influence positive developmental trajectories and health outcomes. Parental monitoring is a central component of the parent-child relationship, and it has the potential to reduce adolescent risk behaviours. The influence parents have on their adolescent children has been substantiated by numerous studies linking a well-defined set of parenting practices (i.e., monitoring, discipline, communication) and qualities of parent-youth relationships (i.e., warmth, support, acceptance, attachment) to adolescent behavioural outcomes including substance use (Allen, 2016). Dittus et al. (2021) suggest that parental involvement will enhance monitoring in supporting adolescent health behaviours, reducing risk, and encouraging positive and healthy decision-making. Parenting interventions for parents of adolescents abusing substances must broadly focus on building parent self-efficacy in implementing skills and engaging with their children in a manner that encourages health-protective and preventing risk behaviours (Allen, 2016). Parental monitoring has also been associated with results of reducing intention to engage in risky behaviours such as drinking alcohol, using marijuana, and misusing prescription drugs by the youth (Dittus et al. 2021).

2.5.5 Policy Development and Enforcement

Effective policies on the issue of substance abuse must be available in schools to try and assist educators in fighting and addressing the issue. It is also crucial that school governing bodies are made aware of such policies to eliminate contradiction and implementation. Mokwena et al. (2020) believe the increasing incidents of substance abuse among learners in schools call for the consistent use of available policies that guide interventions to combat the scourge, and so enable policy reviews and amendments to improve interventions. Suggestions made by El-Khatib et al. (2021) propose the creation of social institutions for young people as well as reflecting on their safety, which will yield benefits of preventing risky conduct, developing resilience and promoting healthy development in adolescents. Mokwena et al. (2020) stated that schools should be equipped with the resources and support needed to combat substance abuse in the school environment, and stakeholders need to acknowledge that the problem of substance abuse exists among in-school youth. There is a need for implementation of the South African National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools, which was published in 2002. The collaboration between law enforcement agencies and school-based substance use prevention programs continues to be the focus of research, policy as well as deriving the best practices for effective law enforcement in schools where different substances are abused, and this will also assist with crime prevention (El-Khatib et al.2021). The effectiveness of school-based prevention programs has been acknowledged as one of the most effective approaches capable of reducing substance use among young people. Promotion of prevention programs that equip young people with skills necessary for promoting social and emotional abilities helps them to be critical thinkers and problem-solvers and benefits them in making constructive decisions and perceptions towards various substances (Alarcó-Rosales et al., 2021). In SA, many public health interventions are developed to address health issues among adolescents. Policies within the school environment provide a course of action to address many of the educational, health and social challenges. Considering there are many policies relating to children and adolescents in SA, it is worrying to note a gradual decrease In the incidence rates of substance use amongst learners. As researchers, we are questioning the possible gaps (Shuro & Waggie, 2021).

2.5.6. Staff Training and Support

As educators, we are in great need of support from all stakeholders in fighting the issue of substance abuse. This support must also include workshops and training on how to properly

address the issue without violating Children's Rights and our Employment Act. An essential part of assisting adolescents who are abusing substances is becoming familiar with available community options, such as education and prevention services for those identified early in their substance use, or treatment modalities, such as treatment-locator mechanisms and patient-treatment matching criteria (Brown et al., 2011). Machete et al. (2022) confirm that the training of staff on effective school programmes and after-school childcare teaches young people to resist drugs by developing their personal and social skills, such as decision-making, stress management, communication, social interaction, conflict resolution and assertiveness. These programmes can enhance youth awareness and help them to resist the lure of drugs. Brown et al. (2011) suggest that telling adolescents who are invested in their substance use to stop using substances can trigger resistance, whereas asking about their plans might present an opportunity for positive feedback. Patients who are not willing to try complete abstinence might agree to risk reduction. When an adolescent professes interest in making a behaviour change, consider asking for a signed commitment not to use alcohol or other drugs for a defined time.

2.5.7 Community Partnerships

It is essential for us educators to form partnerships with the community stakeholders in addressing the issue of substance abuse as this improved our trust and relationship in achieving the same goal of eliminating drugs in the community. Drug abuse and addiction have detrimental consequences for both the user and those around them. It negatively impacts individuals, families, and communities as its effects are cumulative (Budambula & Budambula, 2018). A study conducted by Machete et al. (2022) considers substance abuse as one of the most pervasive problems facing our nation, especially in the townships. Curbing this problem requires an integrated approach in which community stakeholders and society work together to improve safety by tackling the fundamental causes of criminality through mobilising state and non-state capacities and resources at all levels. This study investigated the strategies and successes of community initiatives and circumstances that bestow the path towards helping to fulfil the community's aim to prevent and combat drug abuse. Budambula and Budambula (2018) discovered that rehabilitated substance abusers are often stigmatised and discriminated against in the community. Community participation facilitates easier re-integration of rehabilitated persons. They are also less likely to be employed and lack psychosocial support when they are discharged from rehabilitation facilities. Machete et al. (2022) suggest that the law enforcement community has recognised this principle in embracing community policing

and seeking to address and solve local problems through partnerships with residents. The police play a significant role in many community crime prevention activities and organisations. In fact, the police may be the initiators and leaders of neighbourhood watches and other programmes. Machete et al. (2022, p.215) also confirm that there are community-based organisations which “reach out to the community to inform the residents of the services that their organisations provide to help fight drug abuse. A community outreach programme involves home visits to identify problems and to look after clients, as well as workshops and drug awareness campaigns conducted in public places such as shopping centres to enhance public awareness about the dangers of drugs”.

2.5.8 Peer Leaders

Peer pressure is one of the reasons adolescents take substances; pairing them with peers who are leading, whether as mentors, school monitors, or captains of the team, makes it proper as they can associate with a group capable of leading. This also creates a sense of admiration and self-respect. Zyl (2013) suggests that we should consider peer leaders as the most important measure to combat substance abuse amongst youths. In this regard, school managers should promote the election of model learners to the Representative Council of Learners. Once elected, they should be trained and utilised to optimise their positive influence on peers (Zyl, 2013). Another suggestion made by Zyl (2013) includes school governing bodies that need to accentuate parent involvement in combating substance abuse so that parents and peers, the two most essential influences on youths, convey the same anti-drug message. Zyl (2013) proposes appropriate parent involvement initiatives, including parent training programmes in terms of substance abuse, could be developed by selected parents, learners, educators and relevant organisations and key figures in the community so that a network which counteracts substance abuse in the micro- and exosphere is established.

2.5.9. Inclusion in the School Curriculum

Including the effects of using substances in the school curriculum might assist in preventing learners from taking substances as well as raise awareness on the issue. Ross et al. (1992) stated that “historically, most substance abuse prevention programs were primarily informational” (Ross et al., 1992). Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug prevention programmes have been primarily based on the assumption that increased knowledge about these substances and the consequences of their use would be an effective deterrent. Evaluations of these programs

clearly indicate that increased knowledge has virtually no impact on substance abuse or intentions to use drugs (Ross et al., 1992). Individuals who perceive substance use as desirable for whatever reason will not be prevented from using it by merely teaching them pressure resistance skills because some individuals may actually want to engage in these behaviours (Botvin, 1983, cited in Ross et al., 1992).

2.6. Theoretical Framework

2.6.1. What is theory?

A theory explains why or how something works, unpacks why things occur and explores what contributed to behaviour as an underlying cause. McMillan and Schumacher, 2014 explain the theory as “a prediction and explanation of phenomena”. Theories arrange a set of concepts to define and explain a phenomenon. Theories consist thus of reasonable relationships produced among concepts and sets of concepts, providing both a framework for critically understanding phenomena and a basis for considering how what is unknown can be organised (De Benetti, 2009). Focusing your research using a theory, choices are guided by why we behave and if our behaviour has consequences and bearing in the application of reality.

2.6.2. Ecological Systems theory

The Ecological Systems theory represents a connection of biological, psychological, and social sciences. Crawford (2020) stated that through the study of the ecology of human development, social scientists seek to explain and understand the ways in which an individual interacts with the interrelated systems within that individual’s environment.

2.6.2.1 Origin of the theory

This study used the Ecological Systems theory that Urie Bronfenbrenner developed. This theory offers a framework through which one can examine an individual’s relationships within their homes, with their communities, and with the broader society. As stated by Crawford (2020), ecological Systems theory describes human development through the prism of environmental interconnections and their impact on the force directly affecting psychological growth. The theory is also commonly referred to as the ecological/ systems framework. It identifies five environmental systems with which an individual interacts, namely the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Microsystem and Chronosystem (Paquette et al., 2001). Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological systems theory explores a child’s development within the context of the system of relationships that form his or her environment. It also identifies

complex “layers” of the environment, each affecting a child’s development (Paquette et al., 2001). This theory emphasises that a child’s biology is a primary environment fuelling her development. However, it is the interaction between factors in the child’s maturing biology, her immediate family/ community environment, and the societal landscape that fuels and steers the development of the child (Paquette et al., 2001). Through this theory, I am able to comprehend gaps in the psychological development of a child that contribute to learners abusing substances as a form of coping because of bullying or lack of compassion, as well as influence from peers.

2.6.2.2. Ecological Theory Five sub-systems

The ecological systems model is a model concerned with understanding the development of humans and the interactions between a developing person and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This environment forms the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 1994) consisting of five sub-systems that include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises multiple levels of influence, from the individual's direct environment (microsystem) to broader societal and cultural factors. In the context of substance abuse, this means considering how factors such as family structures, peer influences, school or work environment, community resources, cultural norms, and societal attitudes toward substance use all play a critical role. This theory helps to understand how humans develop and grow, and the environment in which they live must be considered.

2.6.2.2.1. Microsystem

The microsystem is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. Microsystem comprises cultural values, customs, and laws (Paquette et al., 2001). This is the immediate environment in which an individual resides, including family, school, peers, and any other direct social interactions. The microsystem has the most direct influence on the individual's development and conduct. The effects of more significant principles defined by the microsystem have a cascading influence throughout the interactions of all other layers. For example, if it is the belief of the culture that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents (Paquette et al., 2001). This, in turn, affects the structures in which the parents function.

The parents' ability or inability to carry out that responsibility toward their child within the context of the child's microsystem is likewise affected (Paquette et al., 2001). Most of the influences in decision-making, whether they are constructive or negatively affect the child, come from the basic foundation laid in the microsystem.

2.6.2.2.2. Mesosystem

The mesosystem promotes channels of open communication between a child's parents and educators for the benefit of the child as well as maintaining consistency in the child's development and conduct, which provides consistency both in a home and school setting. A mesosystem is a layer that provides the connection between the structures of the child's microsystem. Examples: the connection between the child's teacher and his parents and between his church and his neighbourhood (Paquette et al., 2001). It can also encourage a monitored relationship between peers and a family as a strategy to try and resolve issues of introducing substance use between peers.

2.6.2.2.3. Exosystem

The exosystem refers to formal and informal social structures that includes environments in which an individual does not directly participate but is greatly affected by what transpires in that surrounding. Children are not directly involved but are affected and influenced by what happens, such as parents losing a job and their lifestyle having to change. That is how they are affected. The structures in this layer impact the child's development by interacting with some structures in her microsystem. Parent workplace schedules and community-based family resources are examples (Paquette et al., 2001). Another scenario is parents' involvement in substance abuse, and children perceive this behaviour as acceptable and influence the individual's development. Community and media where they see all the substance abuse happening without proper restrictions affect the child's decisions.

2.6.2.2.4 Microsystem

The microsystem, which incorporates the broader cultural context, including societal values, laws, customs, and cultural norms, can include the fundamentals of Ubuntu in terms of raising

a child, which shapes the identity and meaning-making of one's self-conduct. Relationships have an impact in two directions - both away from the child and toward the child. For example, a child's parents may affect his beliefs and behaviour; however, the child also affects the behaviour and beliefs of the parent (Paquette et al., 2001). There are cultural contexts that prevent young people from involving themselves in mischievous behaviour prevent young people from involving themselves in mischievous behaviour, as this can negatively impact or tarnish their family names. As Africans, we are guided by customs and societal values.

2.6.2.2.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem represents the dimension of time in the learners' lives and in the environmental contexts in which they develop, whether in the form of divorce or rules set at home, and they might develop a sense of disobedience. Changes over time, such as historical events, family transitions, or personal developments, can have significant impacts on development. Chronosystem: this system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environment. Elements within this system can be either external, such as the timing of a parent's death, or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the ageing of a child (Paquette et al., 2001). As children get older, they may react differently to environmental changes and may be able to determine more how that change will influence them (Paquette et al., 2001). New policies in the school might bring an overwhelming change and influence to bridge the rules, like policy on drug testing and exclusion. Learners might violate or feel stigmatised when they are in trouble.

2.6.2.3. Relationships between Reasons for Substance Abuse in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory

My study focuses on primary school learners and provides insight into the driving forces of substance abuse. Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, I was able to merge behaviour with other social issues that affect learners. One of the forces that might influence substance abuse is poverty, which directly and indirectly has a negative effect on the mental well-being of youth, thereby making them more vulnerable to seeking relief from the use of drugs (Zyl, 2013). Zyl (2013) stated that the mesosystem refers to the interaction between components in the microsystem. Two components in the microsystem may be critical reasons for substance abuse amongst South African youths, namely peer pressure and inadequate role

modelling by parents and significant others. Zyl (2013) further elaborates that another reason for substance abuse in the exosystem, namely the under-actualisation of metaphysical values, would complement easy access to drugs and communities' tolerance thereof. Tong and An (2024) suggests that Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems assists in understanding the educational setting of learners that depend on the characteristics of a learner that are highlighting the complicated and hindering connections among these environments they exists in. This is regarded as focusing on the significance of real life real-life settings and the dynamic interactions between learners and their environments. It was pointed out that the use of drugs by parents and significant others in the microsystem could encourage substance abuse by youths and their peers as a consequence of poverty and unemployment in the exosphere, which, in turn, can be related to the government's difficulty in the macrosphere to effectively address this reason for substance abuse amongst youths (Zyl, 2013). In essence, it could be said that the reasons for substance abuse amongst youths constitute a web that comprises the micro-, exo-, and microsystem of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Zyl, 2013). Crawford (2020) proposes that the person's immediate environment comprises a system of influence called the microsystem where patterns of activities, roles and interpersonal relations are experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics. Children spend most of their time in the likelihood of their peers in a school, meaning a school can also be viewed as an interrelated component in the microsystem, which can promote the use of drugs since it serves as an obligatory meeting place for members of peer groups (Zyl, 2013). Department of Basic Education (2013) suggests that families, schools and community can influence and place youth at increased risk for alcohol and drug use as this includes parents who use substances, easy to access drugs and witnessing public drunkenness and smoking as well as schools that tolerate alcohol and drug abuse by their learners. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory affords us an opportunity to explore an individual's development and how it is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the family structure and upbringing to broad societal structures that can also include schools, businesses, and cultural aspects that are representing different levels of environmental influences on an individual's growth and behaviour.

2.7. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed literature on substance abuse and outlined my theoretical framework. I briefly explained substance abuse and the nature of substance abuse globally, in sub-Saharan

Africa, as well as in South Africa. In my literature review, I also highlighted the driving forces of substance abuse as well as discovering a need for support and intervention. Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises multiple levels of influence on substance use in adolescents. In the next chapter, I introduce the research methodology used.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The study aims to address substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences. By addressing the research questions, the study generates knowledge on understanding substance abuse, the driving forces behind it, the challenges experienced and possible intervention strategies that can be employed by teachers. The previous chapter reviewed literature focusing on substance abuse and outlined the ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework for the study. This chapter explains the research methodology comprising of the various considerations for researchers to generate, analyse and interpret their data. The chapter begins with an outline of the research paradigm that guided the study, the research approach, the research design, the selection of research participants and the research location. The chapter discusses the principles of a self-study research design and its significance to this study. Thereafter, the data generation methods, namely memory work and dialogue sharing of experiences and collages, are described. This chapter concludes with an outline of the ethical considerations, issues of trustworthiness and the limitations of the research design.

3.2 Research Paradigm

Before embarking on this, I needed to examine the beliefs that would shape my research ideas and inform my research methodology. Paradigms shape the methodological procedures in a study and represent the belief system or worldview of the researcher (Paragoo, 2021). Saliya (2023) explains that selecting a paradigm is crucial since it enables you to formulate your initial research focus. Thus, paradigms offer guidelines for researchers in a given field as they determine what has to be examined, how it should be studied, and how the study's findings should be interpreted. Ganon et al. (2022) highlighted paradigms as a researcher's comprehensive understanding of the central philosophical beliefs necessary for conducting sound research. Paradigms are moulded by the researcher's ideas on best practices for conducting research, both generally and in relation to the study's objectives. It serves to inform the procedures followed, the research methodologies used, and the type and applicability of the results that are eventually reached (Saliya, 2023). My selected paradigm shapes my

philosophical understanding of truth and knowledge in this study. Philosophical aspects of ontology and epistemology provide a basis for the research methodology. Ontology refers to the nature of reality, and epistemology relates to how knowledge is acquired. The researcher's values about what can be known as real and what someone believes to be accurate (Gemma, 2018) shape the researcher's ontological beliefs. A researcher's perspective is also shaped by their epistemological beliefs - a unique standpoint regarding the nature of knowledge and procedures of knowledge acquisition (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In this study, my research decisions were shaped by my personal beliefs about the nature of knowledge acquisition. Knowledge needs to be acquired through collaboration with my critical friends. Mcclunie-Trust (2022) suggests that collaborative research teams are an effective strategy to combine the knowledge and skills of like-minded researchers across tertiary education settings and international borders. Research collaborations have the potential to increase research capacity for both individuals and the team alike. My personal beliefs about reality are socially constructed and also guided my selection of research procedures.

3.2.1 The Interpretivist Paradigm

In this study, I adopted an interpretivist paradigm. The paradigm emphasises that reality is socially constructed and knowledge is gained through understanding individuals' subjective experiences. Gemma (2018) suggests that interpretivism has a relativist ontological perspective. Relativists suggest that reality is only understandable through socially constructed meanings and that there is no solitary shared reality. Irshaidat (2022) proposes interpretivism as dependent on a constructivist ontology and explains that constructionists believe the social world is not given but rather constructed and imposed by humans through social interaction (Irshaidat, 2022). In the case of epistemology, in interpretivism, knowledge is acquired through understanding or 'verstehen' (Chowdury, 2014). The latter-mentioned author states that the subject is the knower and the inquirer, aiming to gain knowledge about the issues of the contemporary social world. Knowledge is, therefore, socially constructed with multiple realities (Rehman & Khalid, 2016). In interpretivism, researchers do not study people but get involved with the subjects and try to understand phenomena in their contexts.

Interpretivism is used widely as it provides rich descriptions of people's experiences. However, it is sometimes rejected as it does not involve the seeking of universal truth. Al-Ababneh (2020) suggests that the interpretive approach allows researchers to explore culturally derived and

historically situated interpretations of the social world. Interpretivism also considers the situation in each context as unique and different from other situations or settings. This interpretivist philosophy develops knowledge differently by focusing on subjective and descriptive methods to deal with complicated situations rather than objective and statistical methods (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

In my study on substance abuse, I intend to discover complex issues and comprehend human behaviour. Applying the interpretive paradigm in my study assisted in comprehending the world from the subjective experiences of individuals, in this case, myself and my critical friends. Data relied on our observation concerning learners' substance abuse and be "able to see what has happened and how it has happened" (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022, p.422) and knowledge is constructed socially and collaboratively with my critical friends. Interpretivism enabled my critical friends and me to address the issue and constitute a change in our lives and the lives of our learners. Applying the knowledge gained, I was able to explore in-depth social issues and apply my empathetic comprehension of why our learners are in this current situation of substance abuse. Pervin and Mokhtar (2022) suggest that researchers should have a meta-eye, allowing scholars to look beyond what they can perceive as well as cross past empirical data to view their subjective notions, opinions, emotions, values and the matters that cannot be at once discovered and counted. Since the interpretivist paradigm is based on the idea that understanding people's perceptions, ideas, and significant meanings can be achieved through studying their cultures, it allowed me to comprehend the acts of humans and their environment in relation to substance abuse.

3.3 Research Approach

In this study, I adopted a qualitative research approach that focusses on comprehending how people perceive social life and their conduct within natural settings. Punch and Oancea (2014) suggest that qualitative research may be considered a vital and essential investigative tool in the human and social sciences. The qualitative approach assists in gaining a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena in their natural environments (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Qualitative methods are informative when exploring people's emotions or requiring reflective experiences of critical friends. In the social disciplines, qualitative research is considered descriptive research that focuses on interpretation by groups and individuals, their perceptions, and their comprehension of the world so that they construct significance from their experiences (Islam, 2019). Qualitative researchers use data in the form of words instead of numbers as a

tool to better understand ideas, opinions, or experiences (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Cropley (2022) believes the qualitative approach is based on the fundamental idea that reality is subjective. Every human being constructs an individual, personal view of the way the world works on the basis of his or her specific interactions with it (including the people who are part of it), resulting in much of what people, including researchers, regard as reality actually consists of a set of impressions, inferences and opinions in each person's mind. Ugwu and Eze (2023) believe that in contrast to the quantitative research approach, which involves gathering and analysing numerical data for statistical analysis, the qualitative approach involves gathering and analysing non-numerical data (such as text, video, or audio) and can be utilised to uncover complex details about a situation or to spark fresh research concepts. In this study, I aim to understand the unique experiences of my learners' conduct and influences of substance abuse; therefore, I used a qualitative research inquiry as a process of comprehending substance abuse, a social and human problem faced by our learners and teachers in their natural settings.

3.4 Self-Study Research Design

While the research methodology is a broad plan to conduct the research, the research design is specific to the research focus and guides the selection of methods and procedures used in the research. I am conducting a self-study as part of my research design. According to Tidwell et al. (2009), self-study as an established genre of educational research has grown over the last 15 years. It was acknowledged as research that could potentially have the most significant influence on teacher education and the transformation of practice. Self-study is a methodology that embraces multiple methods of research. (Tidwell et al., 2009). While drawing heavily on traditional qualitative methods of data collection, self-study generally transforms those methods by taking them into a new context and using them in ways that often depart from the traditional. These transformations highlight the fact that the role of the researcher in self-study and the role of the teacher are closely intertwined and generally inseparable. (Tidwell et al., 2009). Thus, self-study is centrally concerned with seeking to understand the relationship between the knower and the known as well as seeking to understand what the form and nature of reality is (Tidwell et al., 2009). Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) suggest that we are always becoming practitioners and self-study researchers at the exact moment that we are acting as one or the other – we are being researchers of our professional practice.

3.4.1 Principles of -Self-Study Research Design

The first characteristic of a self-study, according to Samaras (2011), is a personal situated inquiry, which can help a teacher identify their research question from observations of their classroom. Similarly, Pithouse-Morgan (2014) discusses self-study as an increased self-awareness through which teachers evaluate their experiences and what is most important to them professionally. According to Samaras (2011), self-study is the opportunity to examine your lived practice and whether or not there is a living contradiction or contradiction between what you actually do in practice. Similarly, Pithouse-Morgan (2014) argues that self-study can focus on challenges and difficulties a teacher might be having. However, she argues that it does not have to be viewed as a challenge but can also be something that requires in-depth exploration. Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2014) argue that self-study is a reflexive approach focusing on the teachers' personal direct experience. This characteristic emphasises that self-study occurs in the teacher's context.

The second characteristic of self-study, according to Samaras (2011), involves critical inquiry that includes personal and interpersonal learning, thinking, and knowing arising through collaboration and the appropriation of feedback from others. She also explains it as a community that helps extend an individual's understanding. This also involves critical friends (Samaras, 2011) who encourage and ask supportive questions and provide different views that contribute to validating the quality and legitimacy of each other's claims.

The third characteristic, according to Samaras (2011), is that self-study aims for improved learning. This is when teachers embark on a journey to study their teachings with the intention of improving them. Pithouse-Morgan (2014) argues that self-study helps discover new paths and reinvent one's practice in the service of others. This provides teachers with the skills to reassess their work environment. Pithouse-Morgan (2014) argues that teachers consider the ramifications of their efforts in specific and broader contexts. Self-study requires self-improvement and self-development with the intention of impacting your learners. Samaras (2011) refers to this as progress research. Hauge (2021) suggests that self-studies must be made available for public criticism, critical review and evaluations from other teacher educators so that others can use, build on, develop, adapt and adjust the work in meaningful ways that suit their teaching context and own level of knowledge.

The fourth characteristic, according to Samaras (2011), is self-study, which requires the deposition of openness to outside views, questions, and critique. Hauge (2021) suggests self-study research as an approach to understanding one's practice and one's self-concept, which means that teacher educators look critically at their professional values, work towards a better self-understanding and have a moral purpose. Samaras (2011) argues that self-study requires teachers to be prepared to experience discomfort and vulnerability when seeking self-observation and critique from others because this requires them to evaluate themselves and their practice. This teaches them open-mindedness and self-resilience to the views of those outside (Samaras, 2011). Samaras (2011) argues that you are accountable for your students' learning. This does not only come with responsibility; it also entails a self-reflective attitude which can be guided by change that is self-initiated and self-motivated.

The fifth characteristic, according to Samaras (2011), is that self-study is based on knowledge generation and presentation. Hauge (2021) argues that self-study is mainly about becoming better informed, gaining expanded understanding, and making an effort to improve oneself as a professional educator and one's practice, considering an essential aspect of self-study is to search for the gap and contradictions between personal theory, own beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and how own teaching is actually conducted. Samaras (2011) states that self-study also contributes broadly to the knowledge base of personal and professional programs and development as well as making the study public this consent review and critique, which is also essential in the contribution of gathering pedagogical, content, and issue-based knowledge and serves to build validation across related work. Pithouse-Morgan (2014) argues that the availability and accessibility of knowledge will result in its utilisation in other situations and as knowledge available to academics, policymakers, practitioners, researchers and others. Furthermore, the availability of self-study facilitation and teaching public and studying it is a learning curve and beneficiary to other self-study scholars" as it comes with noticeable lessons. Pithouse-Morgan (2014) argues that these tangible lessons could be used as tools for practitioners to educate and facilitate other types of practitioners' inquiries by educators, as well as contribute to practicality and conceptual knowledge of self-discovery.

3.5 Research Location

My study is based in a Primary School in the Snathing area in the uMgungundlovu district in Edendale, approximately 16 kilometres from the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Cheteni et al. (2018) suggest that youth are considered major offenders

and are coincidentally faced with the issue of unemployment, which makes them prone to drug-related offences. The social profile of Snathing is made up of many unemployed youths, with a quarter of the unemployed youth engaging in substance abuse. Substance abuse has given birth to illicit drug dealers, and as a consequence, there is a handful of the youth who have been dubbed “amaphara”, a slang name used to describe drug-infested people who terrorise the community by stealing to satisfy their habits. Mafa (2021) suggests traders that who sell to minors are fuelling the availability and accessibility of alcohol. Taverns, illegal shebeens and illicit drug dealers are typical businesses in this area, and they take advantage of operating illegally without following regulations and sell alcohol to the adolescents in the area. In trying to fight the issue of poverty, there are small and medium-sized Enterprises (SMMEs) that engage in more legitimate trades like brick making, tent hiring, catering, sewing, baking and transport businesses, including the “omalume” who ferry children to and from school in order to feed their families however illegal businesses like shebeens are also operating. Makwara (2019) views SMME as having a critical role in addressing the challenges of inequality and enduring the social ills of unemployment and poverty as a form of social exclusion in the country. In certain parts of the Snathing area, there is evidence of mud houses that represent socio-economic issues, e.g. poverty and unemployment in the area, as well as Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing built by the government for low-income families. Mashwama et al.(2019) stated that only RDP application eligibility is for South Africans with the sole provider not working or when families have a combined household income of R3,500. Challenges faced by this community are the high unemployment rate, substance abuse, crime, teenage pregnancy and disorientated family structures. Mashwama et al. (2019) also claim that on some occasions, people who have already received their houses would lease their properties and move back into their shacks as a strategy for earning income. Limited resources are available since the Snathing location is served by three schools, a community hall and a clinic. A sports ground facility is shared between the three schools and the community. This facility helps to keep the youth off the streets, and the Snathing Youth Development Committee organises soccer and netball tournaments to keep the youth occupied and out of the streets. Masilo et al. (2021) believe the South African environment has resources that can enable immigrants to migrate to their country of origin in pursuit of quality of life. For instance, the availability of schools for children to attend and access healthcare facilities such as clinics and hospitals. In order to access the healthcare services. Snathing location is solely a Black South African location with a handful of foreigners who are operating both legal and illegal businesses.

3.6 Selection of Critical Friends

In this self-study, the selection of research participants is quite different from that of conventional qualitative research. The researcher is the leading participant in this research design, and the aim is to improve my practice through self-reflection (Campbell, 2017). However, interpersonal collaboration offers the researcher unique insights; therefore, I adopted a collaborative self-study design. According to Pithouse-Morgan (2014), collaborative self-study designs ensure that educators learn from feedback received from other educators in the research context. Kortjass (2020) states that these research participants are critical friends who are able to offer truthful and valuable opinions about improving the practice of educators. I, therefore, purposefully selected three friends who possessed the necessary expertise and experience in the teaching profession. The three critical friends who I selected for the study were knowledgeable enough to challenge my thinking and opened opportunities for deeper learning. They consisted of a teacher who is also a self-study researcher, my current school principal and the former principal of my school. The table below indicates the biographical details of the research participants in the study:

Table 3.6.1: Bio-details for participants

	PARTICIPANT 1 SELF STUDY RESEARCHER	PARTICIPANT 2 CRITICAL FRIEND 1	PARTICIPANT 3 CRITICAL FRIEND 2	PARTICIPANT 4 CRITICAL FRIEND 3
GENDER	Female	Male	Female	Male
SUBJECT(S) TAUGHT	Natural Sciences EMS	English	Isizulu English	English
AGE (in years)	44	33	31	60
TEACHING EXPERIENCE	08	10	10	38
HIGHEST QUALIFICATIONS	B. Ed Honours Degree (Inclusive Education)	Bachelor of Education (Intermediate and Senior Phase)	B. Ed Honours Degree (Educational Psychology)	B. Ed Honours Degree (School Management and Leadership)

3.7 Data Generation methods

In this section, the generation of data meant gathering information and being able to produce data that can be utilised in addressing research questions as well as attaining the objectives of my research. I only used three methods, memory work, dialogue, and collages, to generate reliable data.

3.7.1 Memory Work

I used memory work as a means to examine my past experiences and the impact they have on my current practice. Pillay et al. (2019) describe memory work as a method used when exploring the power of writing self-narratives using discovered photographs that evoke, make, and reconstruct memory. Guided by Mkhize-Mthembu et al. (2022).), where memory work was used to recollect incidences of the past in order to transform the researcher's respective educational practices as well as produce a compassionate, protected, and conducive learning environment for the learners. I was able to capture photographs of my first encounter with substance use in primary school. I was even able to form follow-up questions and take photographs using my phone. This assisted me in reflecting and recording the memories that emerged from these photographs, retracing the cases of substance use that transpired in my school. This also afforded me an opportunity as an educator to take into consideration the obligation I have towards my practice. Self-study research is considered a tool for educators to work collaboratively and initiate self-development, as well as encourage a working environment with critical friends. To encourage educators to be agents of their reform initiatives while working collaboratively with critical friends (Samaras, 2011). Memory work is an advantage as it allows a researcher to reminisce and relive childhood days (Mkhize-Mthembu et al. 2022). One of the challenging moments was recalling events, and I discussed this with my supervisor, who recommended a reflective journal where I wrote all my recalled memories. Writing memories in a sequence and format was going to be challenging, so jotting down memories according to sub-questions was the key to having order in my work as well as memories. Memories do not fade but are part of our daily lives. Patience was key in attaining my memories instead of forcing myself to remember.

3.7.2 Dialogue

I engaged in a dialogue with my critical friend as to when we first encountered substance abuse in a primary school environment. This afforded us an opportunity to share our challenges.

Tidwell et al. (2009) suggested utilising dialogues as a method for researchers to examine their practice in their self-study work to improve our teaching. Dialogue is a method that assists in carrying out collaborative self-study with attention to content and process; that is, we get to analyse our self-study process itself critically, and we do so through dialogue (Tidwell et al. 2009). Dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it (MacInnis & Portelli, 2002).

Similarly, Tidwell et al. (2009) view dialogue as a method for presenting data that is necessary for improving collaborative processes. Madni (2022) proposes that researchers consider the advantages of using dialogue because dialogue as a method of data collection is logical and practical in the sharing of thoughts and ideas between two or more groups of people. The dialogue cannot exist without the assessment of mutual interests and points. Hence, I chose a dialogue because my critical friend and I share the same sentiments with regard to the issue of substance abuse. A disadvantage or limitation is the failure to listen to each other. Madni (2022) believes respecting each other before and after the dialogue is critical to keeping the essence of the dialogue alive because if it does not, it would result in a waste of time, and there occurs the chance of not abiding by the agreement after the dialogue. In my case, I derived follow-up questions to control and guide during our dialogue session so as not to lose focus on the issue at hand.

This was a moment for us to formally engage in a conversation about what has transpired regarding the issue of substance abuse, as well as an opportunity to realise the everyday things that have occurred in our school. Our dialogues are instant promoters for altering classroom practice as well as modifying conduct in an educational field. We have found our dialogues to be actual, whether the dialogue is stimulated by text or classroom incidents (Tidwell et al. 2009). Dialogue afforded us an opportunity to reflect on how severely we are affected by the issue of drugs in our school and converse on experiences we have encountered. Our dialogue can be referred to as a brief description of the self, serial and simultaneous writing, and a research method that evolves from personal experiences. These methods have been drawn from various sources, including self-study of teacher education, anthropology, literacy theory, autobiography, narrative inquiry, and qualitative research (Tidwell et al., 2009). Personal history is a self-study method that allows participants to reflect on their learning, which may have connections to the interests of the research and the main questions. It is particularly useful to examine who you are as a teacher, your teacher identity, the motivations behind your teacher

goals, and the constraints and supports you have experienced in reaching those goals Samaras (2011). Our experiences are our history and journeys as educators, not only as professionals but as human beings who are rooted in our fundamentals and teachings. Being comfortable in sharing personal experiences and being vulnerable is an essential characteristic of a self-study community (Bullock & Russell 2012). Reflection involves participants rethinking something problematic to make meaning of the experiences to help researchers, participants, and readers cope with similar situations in the future (Bullock & Russell., 2012). This was also a supportive moment for us as we have a common understanding of how negatively substance abuse affects our profession.

3.7.3 Collage Work

My critical friends and I utilised collages as a data collection method. This afforded an opportunity to create our collage that acted as a prompt to discuss what support we require in addressing concerns to the issue of substance abuse. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) suggest ways in which researchers can construct their collage as part of their visual enactment of dialogue and provide an explicit visual image of dialogue as a process for coming to know. This method of collecting data created an understanding of the world. Guided by the ideas of Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), my critical friends and I used collage to broaden our knowledge of tackling issues. A collage can be defined as a collection of found images that represent an idea, experience or concept (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). Creating a collage assisted us in comprehending the assistance options that are available when addressing the issue of substance use in a primary school. It created an opportunity to discuss the necessary support we require as educators, not for learners only but for our social wellbeing. Relevant channels that guided us properly. When using collage, the artist/scholar attempts to interrogate cultural notions as they come up against situations seen and observed. To engage in collage work, the creator must be open-minded and use instincts (Pinnagar & Hamilton, 2009). This was a constructive way of developing interventions. We had an open discussion regarding the collages we created as part of discovering solutions to the problem at hand. Tackle issues of concern, such as adequate roles describing what can be played by all the stakeholders and our learners' vulnerability to substance abuse. Most often, collages involve a reflexive internal dialogue. This method is a coping mechanism for us, as we were able to address substance abuse in primary school.

3.8 Data Analysis

For my data to mean anything at all, I had to keep going back and reflect on themes guided by my data collection methods, which are memory, dialogue and collages. I used themes to identify lessons and standard information. Thematic data analysis procedures are related to qualitative methods such as grounded theory, framework analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, critical ethnography and template analysis. Thematic analysis is considered to be the foundational approach to qualitative data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I also used voice typing as a form of doing a transcript. Harding and Whitehead (2013) suggested that this is a step in utilising the themes to explain relationships between different parts of the data and building theory.

3.8.1. Process of understanding my data.

After collecting data, I embarked on a journey to better understand collected data, had to re-read as well as listen to audio collected as part of my data generation method. My focus was also on comprehending the essentiality of the memories I had shared as well as the experiences my colleagues and I shared. Had to scrutinise the voice transcripts and establish significance and contributions to the study. Ngulube (2015) suggests this process as necessary as it provides naturally occurring information and assists in answering why and how questions, while documenting the interventions of the researcher during the whole research process. I was able to code them in order of their significance and themes. I read my transcripts and audio to make meaning, establish content and categorise data according to connection. Belotto (2018) views this as a process of revisiting technique for bias as well as establishing whether opportunities to probe more deeply for responses were missed.

3.8.2 Categorising the data and focusing on analysis

According to Belotto (2018) the categorising process allows researchers to interpret large segments of text and portions of information in new ways, as well as assessing how these units were linked led to the identification of themes. Identifying themes and patterns afforded me an opportunity to base my data according to the research questions and experiences. I identified themes related to the data recurring occurrences and experiences. I decided to use a method of structural coding (Belotto, 2018) which is flexible enough to make adjustments during data collection, as supplementary questions may be formulated during data collection to gather additional data (Ngulube, 2015).

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

In research, it is essential to establish trustworthiness that can be attained, as suggested by Cloutier and Ravasi (2021), through using multiple sources of evidence, gathering and providing rich contextual information, as well as keeping well-organised and easily accessible data. Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) suggests that interpretive research may be critiqued as it rejects knowledge as a universal law and thus questions its validity. Padgett (1998) explains that trustworthiness is not something that naturally occurs but instead is the result of ‘rigorous scholarship’ that includes the use of defined procedures. Criteria that require postmodern researchers to evaluate the validity of their research do not fit the underpinnings of this paradigm. Defining ‘rigour’ in research as that which is ‘valid’ contradicts philosophical positions regarding social construction and the acknowledgement of multiple realities. Considering these differences, one could argue that the very construct of rigour and postmodern qualitative traditions are not aligned (Lietz & Furman 2007). In determining the trustworthiness of my research, I applied reliability and validity. This is a vital method in determining its quality that is utilised as an instrument to assess my research. These two aspects are referred to as the psychometric characteristics of an instrument.

3.9.1 Credibility

Utilising credibility ensured I discovered confidence in the truth of the data and its interpretations. My study required a recorded dialogue session to ensure that the data collected entails believability and credibility to the external reader. Credibility is similar to internal validity. I had data review and interpretation sessions with my critical friends and my supervisor, which was also necessary to validate and improve the credibility of my self-study. Credibility relates to how researchers reconstruct views and opinions expressed during the process of inquiry from critical friends and make their views a reality (Shaw & Gould, 2001). Credibility is equivalent to internal validity in qualitative research and is concerned with the aspect of significance in the truth. The issue of substance use, especially involving minors, required memories of the previous encounters as well as dialogue with my participant as a method of verifying occurrences. Credibility is a fundamental principle in qualitative research that has been proposed in numerous quality frameworks. Gagani (2019) suggests that data must be based on a natural world setting, and before starting the research project, it is vital to identify the phenomenon in the natural world. In pursuing the investigation, it is also crucial to

determine the type of evidence gathered, which is necessary for the occurrences that can be regarded as credible data. I applied credibility in my research to determine the truth and correct interpretation of data.

3.9.2 Confirmability

Self-exclusion was applied throughout the study as a method of allowing my participants to contribute information that is relevant to my study. During data collection sessions. Advised by my supervisor, especially with the structuring of questions and data presentation, to ensure data accuracy during interpretation to avoid data being invented by myself as a researcher. Shenton (2004) believes the concept of confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity and ensuring as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. Similarly, Morse et al. (2002) and Subedi (2023) explain dependability as another criterion for trusting qualitative research findings. As a researcher, despite being grounded by my values and beliefs, this was not going to hinder my research as I guaranteed non-interference and did not use it to structure questions during the interview. I was able to maintain professionalism, I also maintained a level of self-awareness throughout the research process to ensure my pre-existing assumptions were not applicable to this research. As a result, all transcribed texts were properly captured using voice-over typing as well as transcripts to prevent my level of personal preference from influencing findings. Shenton (2004) further proposes that in order to reduce investigators'/researchers' biases, confirmability must again be applied and maintained throughout the study. In my research, confirmability assisted in establishing that acquired data signifies the information provided by the participants and determines my interpretation as a researcher based on the particular data, not false interpretations. I cautiously ensured that the data I obtained from a participant was accurate and relevant, which constitutes confirmability.

3.9.3 Transferability/ Validity

Transferability ensured the extent to which data could be conveyed in text with the respondents, and this was achievable through purposive sampling. My critical friends were selected based on their knowledge and the contribution they made in acknowledging substance abuse as an issue at a primary school level. It validates what the instrument measures and it gives us a sense of assurance that the information is obtained. Shenton (2004) proposes that through

transferability, the responsibility of the investigator/ researcher is to ensure that sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites is provided. This enables the reader to a conclusion and, for most, affords readers an opportunity to determine how confident they can be in transferring the results and conclusions presented to other situations. Transferability assisted me in describing the phenomenon under investigation, which provided readers with an opportunity to understand the extent of substance abuse and enable them to compare the presented data with what they have witnessed in their situations. As a researcher, numerous approaches to establishing validity can be utilised, with the essential ones being the validation of content, the criteria necessary for validation, and the way we construct validation. (Punch & Oancea, 2014). I applied validation of content as a necessity to confirm the validity of my research. Data collected is correctly transmitted to ensure the feasibility of transferability so that it tallies the findings that educators and researchers can utilise in relation to their own experiences with substance abuse in a school context.

3.9.4 Dependability

Dependability is essential in maintaining stability in acquired data and can be achievable over some time under strict circumstances. Stahl and King (2020) refer to dependability as the trust in trustworthiness. Credibility is never be feasible without dependability; they co-exist to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Dependability is the qualitative researcher's equivalent of the conventional term "reliability", which is equal to replicability. In quantitative research, reliability means that the same tests should produce the same results. Even though my study is qualitative, I was able to prove replicability based on the number of previous studies conducted by researchers on substance use, and the influences are also similar, like peer pressure and socio-economic issues. Stahl and King (2020) similarly suggest that in qualitative research, researchers, both as producers and consumers, must actively build their trust in the unfolding events, maintain a concrete research practice and establish trustworthiness. It is also important to have peer debriefing sessions and enhance communication habits, as this maintains a positive relationship. This assisted me in my research and helped me maintain trust between my peers and myself as a researcher. The journals recommended by my supervisor also proved that my current research is constantly dependent on previous researchers' data for it to be trusted. The same must be maintained with validity and reliability in research. It was of paramount importance that the layout of my study was clearly documented, consistent and traceable.

3.9.5 Ethical Issues consideration

Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout this study. Written permission to conduct this study was granted by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Department of Education. The school principal approved permission to research on the school premises, and all participants provided written consent to participate in the research and for them to be recorded. Cacciattolo (2015) emphasises the importance of seeking informed consent as a fundamental component of conducting ethical research and suggests that informed consent can be given either verbally or through signing a consent form. I maintained adherence to the ethics by ensuring discretion and maintained the anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms since the issue of drugs is a dangerous and critical issue. My goal was to ensure readers were not able to identify participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) also suggest that the researcher must maintain the anonymity of the participants as well as discretion. As researchers, we have a responsibility to protect the participants from other persons in the setting and to protect the informants from the readers. Maintaining privacy and accomplishing empowerment in research is also vital. Participants were also informed of their power and understood their role in the research. Mirza et al. (2023) propose that in research, individuals should be treated fairly, and researchers must apply sensitivity and maintain dignity. Recognising the individual's rights is the application of freedom, and it is essential to acknowledge their nationality, race, cultural identity, and disability. I applied fairness and care to prevent any harm that might pose a danger to participants. Samaras (2011) suggests that self-study permits educators to plan and assess their pedagogical conduct, as well as an opportunity to be constructively critical in their profession and towards their colleagues while exploring the positive impact they have on their learners. Accomplishing my research and adhering to the ethics was vital in my self-study, mainly because I was both a scholar and an educator with an obligation to as the enquire not to offend, humiliate or make participants feel inferior during my research. I eliminated dishonesty and maintained trust as a form of maintaining informed consent and privacy; despite being the enquirer in this research, I certainly did not fail in my role as an educator.

3.9.6 Anticipated problems of the study

Limitations / Problems

One of the limitations of my study was finance as well as using minors, which was going to require parental concerns. Substance abuse is a sensitive issue, especially in Primary school, and parents are not readily accepting that learners have a substance abuse problem. Strict observations of COVID-19 regulations were also problematic at the time as they required

compliance. The availability of critical friends as their contribution to the study also requires their involvement, which is also time-consuming. There were clashes due to commitments and tasks we have in our line of duty as educators, as well as fear of talking about the issue due to implications.

Solutions

I did properly plan for the finances required despite having financial issues because I was determined to ensure that the study is feasible. I was able to derive a suitable plan for data collection with my critical friends. I ended up collecting data with three critical friends as some colleagues feared from being targets of drug lords despite assurance of discretion and anonymity.

3.10. Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the research methods, approaches, and paradigms that were employed. The strategies that were utilised for data collection, as well as the details for selecting such strategies, were explained. The research methodology and design that were selected for this study were significant in the sense that the data that were generated were able to address the research questions of the study. In the next chapter, themes representing analysed data are presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

In this study, I focus on substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences. By addressing the research questions, the study generates knowledge on understanding substance abuse, the driving forces behind it, the challenges experienced, and possible intervention strategies that educators can employ. The previous chapter presented the research methodology, which entails the research paradigm, research approach, self-study research design, research location, data analysis, as well as trustworthiness of the study and ethical issues and solutions. This chapter presents data generated from the memory work, dialogue, and collages between my critical friend and me.

The findings of the study is informed by the following research questions:

- What parts of my personal history have contributed towards me becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance abuse in this primary school?
- What experiences and challenges have we encountered with substance abuse in the primary school context?
- Why are substances abused in the primary school context?
- How do we address substance abuse in the primary school context?

Table 4.1 presents the four themes in alignment with the above research questions. My personal history and substance abuse in a primary school context.

Table 4.1. Research questions and findings			
Research question	Data generation	Theme	Sub-themes
What parts of my personal history have contributed towards me becoming an educator who is	Memory Work	4.2. My personal history and substance abuse	4.2.1 My first exposure to alcohol 4.2.2. Becoming an Educator 4.2.3. Motherhood and Pastoral Care

concerned with addressing SA in primary school?			
What experiences and challenges have we encountered with SA in the primary school context?	Dialogue	4.3. Challenges and experiences	4.3.3. Violent behaviour 4.3.4. Lack of concentration 4.3.5. Lack of consistency
Why are substances abused in the primary school context?	Dialogue	4.4. Driving Forces	4.4.2. Social Media and Individual choice/ experience 4.4.3. Family as a driving force 4.4.4. Community 4.4.5. Poverty and Unemployment
How do we address substance abuse in the primary school context?	Collage	4.5. Support and intervention –	4.5.2. Psychological Support 4.5.3. Community Intervention 4.5.4. Departmental Support 4.5.5. Sister Departments 4.5.6. NGOs

4.2. Theme 1 - Parts of my personal history have contributed towards becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance abuse in primary school

I attended a workshop held by my supervisor to explore and deliberate on my research topic. We agreed upon the discussion to find an item in my household that was going to be my prompt for the topic. According to Rhodes et al. (2010), prompts are follow-up ideas that assisted in generating further elaboration. I struggled at first, but she kept assuring me to dig deep into my thoughts and why this topic was essential to me. It assisted me as Khatun and Siddiqui (2018)

stated that personal history is the choice that includes taking time to “reflect” deeply about self and life in order to be grounded on an issue. Reflecting on my past provided an opportunity for me to acknowledge every aspect of my life and how I overcame challenging situations encountered; this was a time of appreciating opportunities that made me the person I am today.

Our memory work allowed us to comprehend the nature of cooperative relations. Our memory work allowed us to comprehend the nature of cooperative relations. Memory work, as discussed by Mkhize-Mthembu et al. (2022), helps educators reflect on their early learning, which can help teachers speed up and enhance their practice. This was an exercise of my reflective memory of when I first noticed substance use in a school context Mortari (2015) states that learning the practice of reflection is essential as it affords people an opportunity to engage with their thoughtful relationship; this gives a wake for the experiences. Seeking advice from my supervisor assisted me in discovering visual prompts and also reflecting on my concerns with substance abuse at school. Rhodes et al. (2010) emphasise using observational and visual data, as well as documents and diaries.

This theme focused on memory work, where I embark on a journey of reflecting on my past, my exposure to alcohol, my becoming an educator, motherhood, and parental care in education.

4.2.1. My exposure to alcohol

My first exposure to alcohol occurred in my late teens. I was around seventeen, turning eighteen, when I first tasted alcohol. If I lived in an environment where alcohol was not available in my teens, I would have never tasted vodka or ciders. Crawford (2020) believes that when looking at Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, there is a conjunction between biological and psychological issues as well as social sciences; they all work together for the formation and development of a human and environment at These are visible because human development is the product of the interaction between the growing human organism and its environment. My childhood was pre-1994 before 1994, and when there were many strict laws in a rural area as well as political riots, which prevented us from living and enjoying life. We were faced with the struggle of always running away in fear, dropping in and out of school and not experiencing childhood as we should have. Dumitrache et al. (2018) suggest memories as screens behind our forgotten elements and hidden experiences and considered as memories about our childhood.

Inspired by my hidden experiences, I was able to revisit memories of my childhood as part of the data generation method. It was a revisit of the previous life I once lived.

4.2.1.1. Preteen - Finding alcohol bottles



Figure 1– Old Alcohol bottles in my backyard

My first taste of alcohol was when I was eighteen after acquiring my matric and embarking on a journey to study skills. According to Fauziah et al. (2012), an investment in the human capital of the young generation is crucial to prepare this group in order to withstand the current challenges of globalization. Acquiring skills was my opportunity to structure my future. My friends would bring them, and we would drink; that was the first taste of alcohol I experienced before working while I was in college doing my one-year course as an Executive Administration Clerk. This was when I was in my adolescence stage and had not been exposed to independence and social behaviour. Kakkad et al. (2014) believe that Antisocial behaviour in early childhood is associated with the formation of delinquent peer groups and later impacts conduct disorder in adolescence. Given the critical responsibilities that adolescents should deal with, accomplishing these responsibilities requires self-control. According to Khormaei et al. (2017), adolescence reconstruct and reshape their relationship with their parents and other relatives and are involved in recognising themselves as independent persons and establishing

their self-identity. The influence of peers to experiment was the reason behind my drinking. I remember how adult relatives would drink, and I also saw that as the coolest behaviour that I needed to join as a form of displaying maturity. Proper guidance and disregarding this conduct would have prevented my misbehaviour as Fauziah et al. (2012) view the young generation as the future leaders having a crucial role in determining the direction of the country in achieving excellence. I therefore regard the importance issue of self-control in adolescents and guiding as stated in Khormaei et al. (2017), emphasises on

investigation of this issue of developing one's self, which is a necessity as it enhances skills and prevents adolescents from self-harm.

My prompt is a brown bottle and the famous transparent Smirnoff, which is always available in my community, even today. I consider this as a hazard for the young people whom we are trying to inspire. I wish we could take into consideration the importance of role modelling in human life and the vital role of maintain healthy mental issues and mental health, as investigated by Khormaei et al. (2017) as a very important issue in promoting self-control and attaining issues of religion and spirituality. My key learning is that my previous antisocial behaviour and availability of alcohol meant letting loose due to freedom not previously experienced. Currently, this necessitated the issue of adequately guiding my learners in learning that unguided freedom can lead to regrets of consuming alcohol and assisting my learners in mastering self-control.

4.2.1.2. Early Adulthood – Vodka and Ciders



Figure 2 – Early adulthood - Vodka and Ciders

The above picture is a representation of my typical early adulthood and the alcohol I would consume. Even though my drinking was not excessive, I firmly believed it also delayed much progress in my life. Mbandlwa and Dorasamy (2020) investigated the excessive and abnormal use of alcohol by young people, as well as abusing substances, and this is a major global challenge for many young people. In the information collected, evidently, Mbandlwa and Dorasamy (2020) suggest that South Africa is a country that displays a high level of experience with alcohol. If only I made a choice when I was fully mature and capable of making conducive and structured decisions without the influences of others, which Mbandlwa and Dorasamy (2020) view as a lack of effective mentorship. Reflecting on **Figure 2** allowed me an opportunity to remember and relive my substance use days, and I wished I had a mentor or someone who was going to instil self-control.

As time progressed, I reflected and introspected on how alcohol consumption contributed to my life and made a vital decision to stop drinking. Balconi et al. (2023) point out that making strategic adjustments and changes in a situation is required as it influences decision-making as well as development towards self-awareness. I am glad because my experience only involved alcohol, not dagga, not benzene, not even cigarettes. Balconi et al. (2023) encourage individuals to make daily decisions in every moment of daily life, both in private life as well as professional contexts. My key learning included understanding that no matter how I measured and viewed my alcohol consumption as not excessive, there were tangible delays in my life progress due to alcohol. Making such a conclusion has taught me the importance of equipping my learners to be knowledgeable about the choices of drinking and how alcohol negatively impact their lives.

4.2.1.3. Celebrations and Gathering

Celebrations and gatherings also accelerated substance abuse as these were freely available. Going to these events means you are not going to spend your money but will be offered free alcohol. My peers and I would go to the celebration and assist.. After the ceremony, we would be offered alcohol as a form of appreciation. These types of gatherings sometimes result in fights that stem from as little as accidentally stepping on someone. Sudhinaraset et al. (2016) suggest that the harmful effects of misusing alcohol, whether as a family or with friends, are dangerous and can affect health, leading to issues of illness and even death and misuse as a consequence. Most of my peers are no more due to the violent behaviour they portrayed when intoxicated. I should share my experience with my learners to prevent stress and peers from influencing them into consuming alcohol. These kinds of gatherings were held in the early

1980s – early 2000s and only adults were permitted to attend. Lately, we are transitioning to a dimension where teens attend celebrations and gatherings as a form of rendering an entertainment service of indlamu and Ingoma, and they are offered a case of beer and a bottle of vodka. Mafa (2021) investigated social settings where readily available substances and permissive attitudes towards smoking and drinking put young people at risk. Social gatherings present an opportunity for young people to drink alcohol, where youth drink alcohol with their family members, usually during social events. Our youngsters utilise this opportunity to experiment with substance use.

Exploring celebrations and gatherings helped me to understand that substance abuse can start early in life because of the free alcohol available at these events. It has also revived my practices into always providing advice to my learners not to engage in social gatherings at an early age as this can be their first-time experiencing substances and can lead to bad decisions in the future.

4.2.2. Becoming an Educator – Community Leader



Figure 3: Memory – Born in a Family of Leaders – Community Leader

I come from a family of leaders; my father was a traditional leader, and so was my grandfather. We were raised with values of respect, proper self-conduct, leadership, and mentorship. My dad was a highly respected leader who believed in instilling self-discipline. According to Khatun and Siddiqui (2018), this conduct is a practice of promoting honesty and strict adherence to legislation and proper guidelines, and this is a strategy for instilling self-morals and self-values and encourages a person's ability to be constructive in overcoming life obstacles. Sadly, my father passed in 1990, leaving my mother with the massive burden of raising minors on her own. Due to family disputes and politics, we were forced to depart from our home, which our father had built, so we could go and reside on my mother's paternal side.

My mother was not as educated as my father was, but as a strong and resilient woman, I am proud of how she instilled the culture of learning and the importance of a good education that assists us in fighting the drastic change that awaited us ahead.

Financially, we were no longer stable and depended only on my father's pension fund, and both our grandparents' social grants also assisted us. I always knew the situation at home was no longer okay financially because my mother also embarked on a journey of becoming an entrepreneur by commuting between Pietermaritzburg and Durban to buy clothes and resell them at a profit. Losing the stability of my finances and forced me into adulthood.

When I obtained my Matric in 1997, with exemption, I was eligible to pursue a career, but looking at the status of my family, I opted for a one-year course in one of the private colleges. After obtaining this certificate, which was my achievement, I managed to secure a job in one of the printing offices. This was my first break, and I was now earning R150 a week. This also helped me buy coupons for my sisters to commute to school. My other sister also followed suit in 1999, and she did the same. She was also fortunate to receive a bursary to study at a university.

When the Department of Education introduced the Schools Administration Clerks in schools, I was fortunate to get appointed in 2002 May 06th, in one of the primary schools. You can also imagine the availability of money and the responsibilities I endured stress and pressure also kept my drinking a habit. Baingana et al. (2015) explain that individuals self-medicate with

various substances as a form of overcoming and coping with stress, which negatively affect them. The challenges and obstacles I faced in this journey also formed part of my inspiration to become an educator. Besides financial constraints one of the challenges was proper management of time Balacuit and Lopio (2022) affirm that one of the challenges students may encounter is time management, meaning allocating time for work and study is a tough task to fulfil. After always coming home with mixed feelings and talking to my younger sister, she is the one who assisted me in making my applications through the University of South Africa (UNISA) as part of my journey to becoming an educator.

4.2.2.1. Becoming an Educator – Financial Constraints

Finances were also a battle as modules were not cheap. According to Baingana et al. (2015), increased economic hardship and homelessness can create complexity and substance use. Whenever there were Administration Clerks Meetings organised in our circuit, we always shared our experiences. I also discovered that I am not the only Admin Clerk doing a Bachelor's Degree in Education. We started networking. Some of my colleagues at work also provided support, and they gave me leverage and inspiration for dedication and self-realisation in becoming an educator. This is an essential component of my life as Aryadiningrat et al. (2023) stated that one way of overcoming challenges in life is making sound adjustments that can positively impact the character of a student by promoting discipline, responsibility as well as character that will see them through tertiary education which is an era every student requires for self-development and strengthening of character. My younger sister also contributed to me mastering the study plan necessary for a varsity level, contributed financially towards books, and she was my pillar throughout the journey. Sebullen et al. (2023, p5) believe that working students need to establish “solid time management and self-reflection” and be “optimistic and have good time management abilities.” Which automatically yield positive results in overcoming the difficulties of working while pursuing a degree Sebullen et al. (2023). Family, colleagues and critical friends played a crucial role in reaching my goal as an educator.

4.2.2.2. Becoming an Educator - Overcoming Financial Implication

Through God's mercy, I also acquired and secured a bursary from KZN DoE, which elevated the financial strains, stress and depression I was experiencing. Balacuit and Lopio (2022) acknowledge that university students work while studying to support their underprivileged

families and sustain their scholastic expenses for their dreams of having a better life. In my first year, I think I only managed to pay for five modules myself and the following year, DoE paid for eight, and I also added four and paid for them. This elevated some of the financial burdens I was experiencing, which Balacuit and Lopio (2022) view as the primary academic challenge of working scholars in their daily lives, which is financial problems that are attributed to school-related expenses (requirements), needs, and wants. Even though my career came late in life, my inspiration is to be the best educator these kids need to make a change for themselves. One of the skills that assisted me in achieving this goal is determination. Aryadiningrat et al. (2023) believe that by having a disciplined character in education, students are capable of awakening their self-awareness, which encourages students to be successful in their learning. If someone can draw their strength and maintain discipline in their character from what I overcame, I know I have attained my goals. Started in 2011 and graduated in 2015. Have also obtained an Honours Degree in Inclusive Education. I studied Inclusive education with the aim of providing children with disabilities and special needs a right to education, just as typical children do in my classroom. I saw challenges with acquiring knowledge and learning patterns with other learners and decided to acquire skills to assist my learners. Walton et al. (2022) believe that in the implementation process, educators interpret and adjust policy imperatives and guidelines to align with their own beliefs about human rights, as well as meet the challenges they face within their contexts to support the multiple learning needs of the children in their classrooms. I believed in acquiring information and policy as part of my implementation.

4.2.3. Motherhood and Pastoral Care

I love my kids, and indeed, I am a mother of two beautiful daughters born on the 28th of July 2004 and the 06th of July 2005, and their sole provider. I am blessed as they form part of my journey to becoming an educator. My daughters are my life in the sense that most of the good choices and changes I am required to make stem from my becoming a mother.

I wanted to instil core values, self-conduct and respect as early as possible. Yes, I previously indulged in adult beverages from time to time (smile), but due to my kids becoming older and me having the background first-hand experience in the school of learners being experimenters of sipping parents' drinks, I decided to quit in January 2013. Having a secure and stable life

and being able to provide for my kids was my priority. Career change came from an inspiration of being a mother and being able to cater for my kid's needs. As mothers, one of our obligated duties is to do everything possible to love, care, look after, and provide for our babies. Attaining my goals, as Aryadiningrat et al. (2023) stated, came with "Self-awareness creates a positive impact in terms of doing lecture assignments on time, being able to manage time properly, students being focused and consistent in the goals to be achieved" (Aryadiningrat et al., 2023, p. 83). Our kids must feel complete when they have us as we would do the impossible and possible despite challenges and obstacles, assuring being valued and appreciated.

When they started school, I also noticed their style of acquiring information, and they struggled with certain subjects and learning styles. My duty was to be the best mother by creating a schedule that was conducive for them to have play and study time. My affordability meant they would start in a rural area school where I worked even though the school was under-resourced, the educators were highly flexible in using diverse materials as part of subject enrichment. Some of the materials were self-designed and compliant for their appropriate learning. They always managed to attain the best results and provide support despite the number of learners in a classroom. This also motivated me to be an educator, provide intervention if required and derive a proper study plan for my kids.

My studies in 2012 also increased pressure and anxiety when it came to work, varsity and motherhood. I remember coming back from work and discovering that my daughters had cleaned and washed their school uniform, and rice was already boiling in the pot. I was so emotional and proud at the same time, scared because they were in grades 4 and 5. What if they had burnt themselves? I just hugged them, and tears of emotions came, we all embraced the moment, and they kept rubbing my back as a sign of assurance. I am mentioning this because it is also part of my moments when I self-reflect and smile as I realise I have accomplished so much with these two. Tretiak et al. (2021) believe in instilling moral values that yield positive changes as well as a sense of responsibility, behaviour and taking action. Discipline has always been my main goal in maintaining a stable home so that they can value and cherish themselves. Aryadiningrat et al. (2023) support the idea of "guidance carried out by adults whose goal is to help children learn to live as social beings to achieve their desired growth and development according to goals" (Aryadiningrat et al., 2023). My daughters coexist as sisters and provide

support for one another. They are all I have, and if they can live harmoniously, it will be one of my most outstanding achievements in instilling the values of appreciating family.

Motherhood also meant that even the kids I did not give birth to were my kids, they could not suffer or feel neglected in my presence. Schmidt et al. (2023) suggest that mothering requires a norm to have comprehensive knowledge of her child's needs and desires, which are assumed to be best met when she is physically present and highly attentive. It created a space where I am also loyal to my learners as well as those who are in my school. Communication as a form of discovering and addressing issues has improved, studying Psychology also assisted in being strategic and applying patience and positivity at home and in the workspace, as stated by Aryadiningrat et al. (2023) that character education is the primary responsibility and discipline in human consciousness as well as improving components of emotional intelligence. Studying psychology was inspired by the fact that my kids are teens but are disciplined and refrain from taking any narcotics or substances. This brought up a question of how I can utilise that in the school and community to bring change to young teens by nurturing and loving them. I had to prove my trustworthiness and make crucial positive choices in life. I motivate my learners with my experiences and those of my daughters. Aryadiningrat et al. (2023) believe education strengthens the character of discipline and responsibilities to produce future national leaders who are not only capable in the academic field but also have good character values. They are now in tertiary school, and it proves that everything is possible if we put our faith and determination into creating goal-oriented teens; it also influences them to have the vision to prosper.

I started working as an educator in 2016, and my former students often ask me about my girls. Some also say, "Mam how are they doing? What are they studying"? I always stop and realise how much of an impact I had on them by sharing my story. Acknowledge the positivity and protection one has with the choices of life. Some of the mistakes my learners make are also a result of peer pressure; I always tell them to choose positive peers who will pressure them to do well. Believes "Patience is a moral virtue and refers to persistence, consent, transcendence, tolerance, and hesitation in unpleasant and difficult situations. Based on this definition, patience is an active process that makes the individual not complain, endure, and be stable when confronting situations that are difficult and sometimes impossible to change" (Khormaeire et al., 2017, p. 12). I also learnt the importance of pastoral care in my daily

conduct. My obligation as an educator has improved as I am able to provide proper guidance to my learners and be a mother for all. My key learning in becoming an educator and a mother meant I needed to restructure my life in a way that would positively impact the choices my daughters and my learners will make in the future. Motherhood influenced my practice by being more than an educator to my learners but a role model that promotes self-discipline as I apply pastoral care.

4.2.4. THEME SUMMARY

My memory serves as an inspiration for appreciation and dedication to my work as an educator. I draw all of my strength to succeed from how I was raised, my two daughters, and the critical friends who supported me. Shaheen and Awan (2020, p18) motivate females to be educated and believe “girls should be educated because the future of coming generations depends upon them.” I am on a journey to be knowledgeable about the circumstances, trials and tributes we face in the line of duty, but services have to be rendered. I also learnt that life adjustments also played a crucial role in accumulating achievements as an educator. Shaheen and Awan (2020) believe that a child's education also depends upon the mother's education. If mothers are not educated, it is be hard for an ideal and educated family or society. This theme also instilled the essentiality of self-development and application of efficient information processing skills in my everyday conduct, as well as realising that substance abuse is a problem that affects us all. Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019) suggest substance abuse is a chronic, unbearable disease with chronic draining consequences that affect individuals and their families and support those affected. My practice has improved as I am able to be more patient, apply pastoral care and provide support to my learners, not only those with substance abuse issues but all my learners who are battling social ills. In the following theme, my critical friends and I shared our experiences of substance use in a school context. This has many implications for our work and for ensuring a safe environment for our learners.

4.3. Theme 2 – Experiences and Challenges we encountered with substance abuse in the primary school context

Introduction

My experience in the previous theme displays the struggle and the concerns I have with substance use at the Primary school level. In this chapter, my critical friends and I are deliberating the issue of substance abuse in the school as well as when we first discovered substance use, finally touching on our experiences and challenges we face in our line of duty due to substance abuse.

4.3.1. Challenges and experiences

In our experience, my critical friend and I both agreed on the year when we discovered drugs in our school, which was the year 2019. According to Hunter (2021), the rise in the illicit use of Xanax, an anti-anxiety- medication, among South African school learners, occurred roughly from the mid-2010s. Specifically, he considers the dramatic rise in the illicit use of Xanax pills among South African high school learners in Durban, South Africa, from around 2015. This is a drug that is very famous amongst our youth. Gunjan et al. (2020) describe drug abuse as the deliberate use of chemical substances for reasons other than intended medical purposes and which results in physical, mental, emotional or social impairment of the user. In our discussion, when I was specific about 2019 as being the year we had issues with drugs, my critical friend responded, *“It was there before but it was not excessive”*. They used to discover drugs, but it was “very rare” meaning this issue of drugs was at a primary state. Zanax is a drug that the learners used to mix with water and was always eminent. Hunter (2021) describes Xanax, or alprazolam, as a widely prescribed benzodiazepine used to treat anxiety. My experience was when I noticed a learner who was up for a scholarship in one of the prestigious schools. This incident would transpire after a break, and she would sleep out the period. Gunjan et al. (2020) describe the immediate effects drugs have as an initial stimulation, which fades into relaxation accompanied by euphoria, increased ability to communicate, drowsiness, blood-shot eyes, occasional nausea and vomiting, clumsiness, decreased muscular coordination and dizziness. These are the same signs our learners would portray. Hunter's (2021) study revealed that Xanax is perceived as a more substantial, easier-to-consume substance compared to cannabis (locally called weed, zoll, dagga, or insangu), the most widely used drug in schools. Both drugs are regarded as distracting learners from their everyday stresses, although Xanax is easy to hide as well as cheap to buy, and popping a pill is less stigmatising for women compared to smoking

a substance. Dagga is also one of the drugs that challenge our teaching, and there have been instances where it was confiscated.



Figure 4 – Dagga Confiscated in our school.

I am so glad I conducted a study because I am not learning that we have called this drug the wrong name. After all, it is the name our learners informed us; they even call it “Zane” pronounced as “Zdane”. Drugs, I believe, have a negative psychological effect on our learners. One of the key learnings is discovering that there are new substances that are abused other than dagga in the lives of our learners. It has influenced my teaching to conduct research and educate my learners on the dangers of substance abuse.

4.3.2. Violent behaviour

There are a number of challenges we are faced with in a school context, but one that is gruesome is “*Violent behaviour especially in the classroom*”. *Violent behaviour when you confront a learner about dug issues they become very rebellious, these drugs have stimulated some sort of power*”. Critical friend. Mkhize and Shembe (2022) revealed the traumatic experiences educators succumbed to experiences of substance independence in their classrooms; this transpired in a Township school in KwaZulu-Natal province. Mthembu and Shembe (2022) stated that educators are emotionally and psychologically drained as they face issues of physical harm, verbal and physical abuse, and threats from the learners, which leave traumatic experiences. What I have noticed is that their behaviour portrays “Masculine”, and they have no respect for adults or any other authority in the school. Their lack of respect is accompanied by violence and approaching gestures into an immediate “fight me mode”, which clearly occurs due to the eminent drug stimulation. Mkhize and Shembe (2022) view substance

abuse as a globally gradually increasing scourge that has found its way into the classroom. My critical friend, also in our discussion, experienced and witnessed how *“these violent behaviours you know they range from violent behaviour towards kids towards educators towards any authoritative figure within the school and they do feel untouchable”*.

The learners always challenge educators in front of the other learners and educators as well as in front of the parents, which is called part of the disciplining or intervention process. Moss (1993) views the relationship between substance abuse and alcohol abuse as well as aggressiveness and violent behaviour. This has developed focus attention for all stakeholders to take responsibility in developing policy and its implementation in addressing the issue. There was an incident last year where a learner suspected that one of his classmates was a whistleblower after a crushed Xanax was discovered in “go-slow” (chips that are wrapped at home and usually sold at local spazas or school gates). This particular learner asked the boy if he was responsible for losing his profits. This escalated into him spiking his food I remember it was “Amasi” Fortunately, I was in class and asked, “Why are you touching someone else’s food?” my intuition was correct because he dropped Xanax in the food just to teach this learner a lesson. We have rules in our classrooms not to touch stuff belonging to someone else. Kids keep violating these rules and school policy not to bring substances into the school premises.

We, as educators, have also lost authority in the classroom. A study by Moss (1993) discovered that “Direct pharmacologic actions of drugs, such as alcohol, on the central nervous system have for many years been advanced as the primary cause for the expression of aggressive behaviour among substance-abusing individuals. For example, behavioural disinhibition produced by alcohol ingestion has been attributed to the facilitation of aggression” (Moss, 1993). My critical friend mentioned rebellious behaviour as a challenge, *“facing probably the learner has not done work or the letter is not done homework or the letter has been involved in some sort of misbehaviour or mischief within the schools where you find they become very rebellious they don’t want to take instructions”*. Moss (1993) explains aggression as a complex behaviour that is highly specific to situational difficulties and cannot be reduced to one predictable construct. Aggressiveness and retaliation can be witnessed in the form of commotion and disruption when you check whether learners have done work; as an educator, you are not permitted to check their exercises, and it also raises concern as the other learners mumbled words because some are even shocked at how this particular learner is behaving

towards the educator. “Several psychological characteristics have been found to be linked to the risk for substance abuse. These behavioural characteristics include aggressiveness, hyperactivity, impulsivity, antisocial behaviour, a disinhibitory motivational state, and deviant temperament, all of which may involve poor regulation of aggressive impulses” (Moss, 1993). This proves that they are incredibly confrontational and can be very aggressive unless reprimanded calmly and collectively. An incident that also transpired last year, 2023, was when a grade 7 learner wanted to attack one of the educators, and a parent was called. While they were in the waiting area, he rose and attacked his mom. Fortunately, my critical friend, the one I was conducting research with, was going to the computer room and intervened. On probing his behaviour, he said he was angry because his mom came to the school. She was supposed to ignore the calls. On arrival home, his mom told me that he had burnt all of their bedding.

In our discussion, my critical friend mentioned a very crucial issue of violence towards their peers. *“You also find that whenever there’s a learner who pinpoints these learners that are using drugs, they immediately become targets to such an extent that they are bullied the list is endless”*. This is saddening as we have rules that prohibit bullying, which are not always followed because learners taking drugs provide themselves with the pleasure of not abiding by the school rules. Crawford (2020) suggests Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory that proposes systems of influence in an individual's current existence, which have various effects on the individual, and the whole-person approach, which aids in assessing the individual within the environmental systems of influence. My key learning for this theme includes the importance of eliminating violent behaviour in schools as it disrupts the school and substance abuse as a contributing factor. My practice improved as I believed behaviour can be viewed as an outcome of inputs of what is happening globally, which affects what is happening in society, community and culturally; this also affects family structures, schools and religion. In my teaching, as well as my critical friend’s teaching, it is evident that behaviour does not happen in isolation, and for us to handle substance abuse, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory is our source of consultation.

4.3.3. Lack of concentration

There is a new trend now where they arrive early and go to smoke in one of the shops before coming to school. They come to school already intoxicated. When we discovered drugs, it was because most of the learners were sleeping after breaks due to consumption of Xanax or smoking Dagga behind the school. The desire to experience intoxication motivates adolescents

to abuse substances, according to Sedibe and Hendricks (2020). This intoxication can create a euphoric feeling, likened to walking on clouds. However, it also disrupts sleep, potentially leading to sleep deprivation lasting for days. I believe this is true because I have witnessed these learners' concentration in class deteriorate as they sometimes display signs of failure to walk or being sick depending on the type of drug in their system. Critical friend also stated that *"violent behaviour leads to lack of concentration"* which is true as they now have to maintain the status of being rude and arrogant. He further explains that *"sleeping in class and not even able to remember their name"* is due to intoxication. How can that learner participate in the class and school work? In a study by Sedibe and Hendricks (2020), their findings indicated that drugs influence the personalities of their abusers, which can also hinder understanding their surroundings and things that transpire around them, as well as failure to reason. Consuming drugs makes users have no conscience because drug addicts do anything to get their hands on drugs, even if it means stealing from their own families. In the case of stealing, it also happens when they steal even pencil cases and calculators. This does not only affect the concentration of the one affected by drugs, *"It affects concentration of more than 40+ learners, also the concentration of the educator"*. This also disrupts lessons because an educator has to attend to this learner either by removing him/her from the class or call a parent. *"This is the only solution as if you leave the learner in the class it becomes chaotic"*. I also shared an experience where the learner even called one of the male educators an "uncle". He had been to their morning spot and came late, so the educator wanted to know why is he late to join the class, he responded, "I am sorry "ankela" slang for uncle, unable to stand. The whole class started laughing.

One of the issues is that this can be habitual, and other learners perceive this as an in thing. My critical friend said, *"this kind of behaviour can lead to peer pressure because of the attention you give this learner"*. *"It might be misinterpreted as attention good, and some even copy this behaviour and it creates problem in the class"*. We lost one good educator who had been with our school due to violent behaviour, *"the learner hit another educator with a paper and when the educator called the other one next door"*. The learner came charging and pushed the educator on the concrete of our school veranda. My critical friend also tried to intervene as he saw this transpire, the *"name calling"* as he reflected. He recalled that the educator *"had done a good thing of trying to talk to him outside the classroom"*.

I remember the learner saying he was going to “*stab educators*” pinpointing two of the male educators and the security guard. The utterances of such vulgar language, I was shocked and humiliated; even the taxi association tried to intervene, but the learner was in another state. He also recalled an incident where “*I tried to reprimand one of the learners for being mischievous in the class for whatever reason, he positioned himself in a fight challenging me into a fight*”. The key learning is that drugs affect concentration in class as well as their performance, which automatically becomes habitual since they have mastered the promotional guidelines of being retained in a phase for a certain number of years. My practice has improved by developing a strategy of involving parents to support learner results and motivate our learners to consider education as an essential tool for the future.

4.3.4. Lack of Consistency – Disciplining Substance Users

While trying to cope with learner behaviour, I decided to share my concerns with my critical friends as part of our intervention as an inspiration to make a difference in the lives of our learners. We are responsible for shaping and grooming their behaviour. Our focus as educators must not only be about our role in the classroom. We are responsible for these learners. This picture was meant to revive and get rid of our lack of consistency in trying to attend to these cases as they become draining and also affect us psychologically while we have to assist other learners. This is one of the factors that prevent the elimination of substance use entirely in the school context. We try by all means to attain discipline on the school premises. Khatun and Siddiqui (2018) explain discipline as a practice of frank and strict adherence to legislation and guidelines, cultural standards and values, and the ability to control oneself or other people, even in challenging circumstances.

Furthermore, discipline impacts the learning process by creating a stress-free environment for assigning time to various activities, improves planning through observing and maintaining a set daily routine, moulds learner character and enhances their motivation, enables the setting of good examples and positively contributes to better grades (Khatun et al., 2018). We are short-staffed, and some educators are also scared because the issue of substance use has “drug lords” who are not afraid to apply any form of intimidation and violence towards the school. Their lack of discipline has escalated to ill behaviour where these learners throw things at you while writing on the board and wait for the one that identifies them. Sometimes, these are the incidents that I ignore so that my learners are not be bullied. A study conducted by Furlong et

al. (2015) suggests that involvement with substances in youth is very persistent and that learners are reported to be both victims of school violence as well as perpetrators, signifying their subculture that is involved in participation in secondary activities and all the entailed criminal behaviours. One of our experiences is lack of intervention, *“even though there are some strong female educators, they would rather call you”* he further stated that *“I do not believe in running away from the matter”* and *“addressing drug issue automatically restores respect”*. I also agree with him. Even learners know which educators to approach if they see wrongdoing in the school, and ignoring a problem does not make it go away, and it enables it to escalate into rudeness, ill-discipline and lack of respect. We as educators need to maintain the same standard of consistency when it comes to not condoning misbehaviour in our learners as a form of instilling values in them. A key learning includes understanding that ignoring substance abuse in our learners does not eliminate the problem as a matter of fact, it perpetrates and escalates it further. It has influenced my practice to ensure consistency in my duty to support learners, educate them properly about the dangers of substance abuse and look for NGOs that can assist us with the issue.

4.3.5. Theme Conclusion

In this theme, it is saddening to reveal the suffering we endure in our daily lives as educators in the hands of the learners, fear of learners’ violent behaviour and attacks as educators are confronted with violent behaviour in schools when reprimanding learners on the issue of substance abuse. Dittus et al. (2021) study revealed that adolescent behaviours and experiences include problems with sexual behaviours, substance use, violence, and indicators of poor mental health. Similarly, Mothibi (2014) suggests that aggressiveness towards educators and elders, which sometimes leads to conflict and scuffles between educators and learners, also appears to be associated with substance use in schools. Improvements have been made in discovering ways of maintaining discipline and being consistent in applying school policies when learners abuse substances in school, as well as fighting learner dropouts. Discovering Xanax as a substance in our school was a breakthrough in realising that even Primary school learners are capable of abusing substances. Hunter (2021) suggests Xanax is typically seen as a more robust version of cannabis/weed but not as powerful as drugs such as heroin, which drive students away from school.

Furthermore, Xanax pills are also easy to conceal, which is viewed as acceptable by young females as they do not want to be associated with the stigma of smoking. In the past year, there were instances where they would come to school already intoxicated, and consistency in involving parents yielded tangible results in a decline in substance abuse. Bhadani and Balamurgan (2018) suggest preventing the onset of cigarette smoking and regard it as a primary public health goal because substance abuse, even if it is tobacco, is difficult for individuals to control. The usual pattern of life-long, dependent smoking is associated with severe health consequences. My practice has also improved in monitoring learner behaviour, patterns of absenteeism and requesting parents to intervene at an early stage of substance abuse, which I regard as an introductory phase. In the next theme, as educators, we deliberate on issues that assisted us comprehend the causes of these behaviours by applying ecological theory as a form of enquiry.

4.4. Theme 3 - What is driving substance abuse in the primary school context.

In the previous theme, my critical friend and I discussed our experience with learners who are experimenting with substance use. Violence and ill-behaviour are the core problems that we are faced with, whether coming from the parents in denial or the learners themselves. In this theme, we are using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to investigate contributing factors to the issue of substance abuse in primary schools.

4.4.1. Social Media and Individual choice/ experience

Social Media and trends or challenges our learners discover, and experiment on are part of the driving force in substance abuse in a school context. Vannuccia et al. (2020) suggest that social media represents a compelling and integral component of adolescents' daily lives, both online and offline. My critical friend also agrees with me and believes the driving force is imminent, *"It is social media and self-inflicted as the driving force in our learners."* He further narrates that *"learners need to take responsibility in how they are using social media"* I strongly agree and our learners' maturity at primary school requires proper guidance and monitoring. Vannuccia et al. (2020) discovered that social media had become an essential developmental platform for adolescents since its introduction and widespread in the early-to-mid 200s due to societal adoption. The prominence and relevance of social media to adolescence are also

associated with identity exploration, self-expression, friendships, and peer acceptance that occurs during this developmental period. Bhadani & Balamurgan (2018) view the role of media as increasingly enormous in promoting the use of illicit drugs, tobacco and alcohol among people, especially adolescents who get manipulated by these advertisements easily and are invoked to give them a try. Having social media that is not supervised or monitored is not acceptable, as social media can negatively impact and create the assumption of being cool enough to smoke dagga. His concern is that *“when learners access social media it is not age restricted and what type of content are they accessing”*. Romer and Moreno (2017) revealed adolescent exposure to favourable presentations of addictive substances, such as alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana, as well as behaviour due to online media. I know that even when content says 18 years and above, it is a matter of writing the age required, and you have access to it despite the age stipulations. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2018) suggests that unless it is on explicitly featuring branded products, there are no restrictions for alcohol product placement in entertainment media such as television, movies, music this is also eminent with smoking, alcohol marketing and media portray favourable images, associating alcohol use with social and financial success, with little interpretation of the hazards of drinking or discouragement of drinking at an early age. Vannuccia et al. (2020) believe social media engagement in adolescents promotes risky behaviours that expose youth to harm or even death, such as substance use, unsafe sexual acts, and violence-related behaviours. The choices our learners as young individuals are readily available to them for access and without control. Dagga and Hubbly are always available on social media platforms. I remember when we had a one-on-one with our learners that are using drugs. They have even saved pocket money to buy Hubbly and mix it with Dagga. Their narrative was that there are also different types of dagga available, some are even mixed with alcoholic spirits to make it stronger. Romer and Moreno (2017) discovered that the marketing of alcohol products is common on social media. Many alcohol brands have a presence on social media, giving them the opportunity to connect with young people and develop brand loyalty. Learners' social media is readily available to them; my critical friend even says, *“not every parent have any restriction especial on their child’s phone usage or checks their internets history and access”*. I also feel the rights and privileges our learners have do not properly allow us to invade their privacy. Fear of finding out is also the reason parents would rather not access their children’s phones, but give talks and believe advice will be received and utilised by our learners. I feel it is the responsibility of the parent to check if our learners are utilising these devices for the intended use.

My critical friend also shared an experience when we first had computers in our school. He narrates this incident: “A learner, instead of using computers for the educational purposes but was on a search engine trying to access something not permitted”. He was even shocked and recalled the explanation that even though there was monitoring and supervision, *“the learner was trying to access a site with narcotics to share a story with peers. When the teacher approached she tried to hide the screen.”* He further states that to even think that *“this was a sign of desperation to fill in as this was teaching time and computers are meant to develop them”*. It is a sad reality that the issue has escalated in such a way that learners are prepared to compromise even learning because of substance use. Romer and Moreno (2017) explained that even though marijuana advertising on social media is currently not permitted, nothing really prevents marijuana businesses from creating business pages to promote content and engage with users, and these business pages are easily accessible to social media users of any age. Our learners idolise the people they see on television; when they see their idol in an alcohol advert, they are surely tempted to taste it. Similarly, Jackson et al. (2018) discovered that young persons’ exposure to alcohol content in marketing and the media is high and teens are reported as the one greatly exposed to alcohol engagement and its marketing than any than other age groups. Learners get fascinated by the trends of someone smoking vapour and even know the flavours as these are not even restricted in social media. Life learning includes my understanding of how influential social media is to the lives of our learners. I have taken it upon myself to educate my learners on the dangers of believing and copying what appears on social media as a new trend, quoting the conduct of the circulating photos of grade 12 learners class of 2023 who were publicly drinking alcohol.

4.4.2. Family as a driving force

In the previous paragraph, it is evident that parents are not failing to raise their children but require assistance in fulfilling their duties. Crawford (2020) gives a brief description of research conducted by Bronfenbrenner on the socialization effects of different systems within a child’s life, which includes examining multiple factors such as the socioeconomic status of the family, cultural differences within family units, and parental education levels. When considering social factors, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which is the most salient to the development of human ecology, considers the family to be the most influential microsystem in

the social development of a child. Families are also part of the driving force as they send their kids to buy alcohol for them despite alcohol restrictions not being for sale to people under the age of 18 years. Moganki et al. (2022) discovered that social pressure, peer pressure, a dysfunctional family, genetic factors, emotional problems, mental health problems, loss of respect, trauma experience, loss of livelihood, and prior substance exposure have all been identified as contributing factors for children as young as 8 years to be experimenting on nyaope and refers to this major health and social issue as a substance use disorder (SUD). On weekends, I always see my learners with bottles of alcohol, whether covered with paper or in a plastic bag and their families send them. My critical friend also agrees and states *“Witnessing someone small to the shop to buy alcohol or cigarettes”* and views this as *“stimulating substance abuse”*. Je[^]drzejczak (2015) proved that direct interdependence between the family condition and the extent of narcomania are contributing factors to drug addicts, which came mostly from incomplete and pathological families. I also feel this is condoning behaviour because minors are not at liberty to differentiate between correct conduct and bad conduct. Indeed, sending them to the shops even creates egocentric stories to share with peers that I am the one who buys alcohol in my home. *“Home socialisation begins from minor things when you are being sent by your mother or father to purchase alcohol this is influencing or fuelling substance abuse”*, states my critical friend. Je[^]drzejczak's (2015) analysis of the family environment of young people in danger of drug addiction indicates young people prefer to stay in the company of persons whose behaviour and social norms are unacceptable that permits accessibility to various kinds of drugs, which is practically unrestricted. Adolescents are also prone to be reached by dealers' reach and become younger dealers themselves. I agree, as this becomes the norm, and once these parents are intoxicated, learners have access to the remaining alcohol.

I have witnessed videos of kids drinking alcohol in a home, and the uncles or aunties are laughing and joking about it as if it is acceptable. Ndou and Khosa (2023) revealed that dysfunctional family life, unemployment, and reduced productivity are the top worldwide rank contributors to substance abuse. My critical friend also emphasises that *“families now drink alcohol very freely in front of kids as well as smoke and this is unacceptable and damages the minds of these kids as they tend to mimic behaviour”* he further stated that *“kids idolise their parents”*. He believes that the driving force mindset of saying, “I want to be like my mother, I want to be like my father, so therefore if Daddy smokes and Mommy smokes, then that

behaviour is right” I also approve of this because if parents have frequent visitors’ kids believe their family is the coolest in the block. Varshney et al. (2022) discovered that addiction leads to individuals stealing from friends and family to pay for the drugs. Department of Education (2013) also recognises family factors as concerning because they place adolescents at increased risk for alcohol and drug use because they include parental drug use and frequent family conflict. I narrated a scenario where “every weekend people are visiting our families, and there is drinking as well as smoking that is happening” My critical friend also stated that “*we have also to take into account that we are not saying that families can’t enjoy themselves or can’t enjoy family life but I’ve seen in some families where kids are playing and parents are drinking*” he explains that “*not all families are fortunate to have big yards or big homes so children witnesses drinking*”. I have also witnessed such conduct, and children being allowed to play in front of the family is their only technique of supervising them, as sometimes there is no one sober to look after them or keep them occupied. Alhammad et al. (2022) discovered that individuals who join their peers in using illegal substances do not do so by accident and reveal peers and facility issues and attitudes as contributing factors. Adolescents are easily influenced to use illicit substances as well as smoking and drinking alcohol when socialising, which could, in turn, lead to the use of illegal drugs. Jogsan (2012) revealed that people with an addiction believe that their parents hardly have any time for them. Even though this can be easily ignored and not be directly linked with addiction, it certainly could be a factor of family alienation and, hence, indirectly could be responsible for addiction. The drug habits of elders and particularly of parents are an important factor for the status imitation of the child. We both agreed that times are changing because while we were growing up, we were not allowed to sit where adults were sitting or watch them.

Just last year, one of my students witnessed my grade 7 learner driving and drinking with his mother on the weekend, and his behaviour influenced arrogance on Monday when we were in class. His expectation, I presume was for me to address it in class, which I didn’t until I came up with a proper strategy to educate him. Moradi et al. (2019) believe families and neglect cause the relatively high prevalence rate of substance abuse in adolescence as a result of mental health structures in the family. Furthermore, adolescents raised by single mothers are highly prone to engaging in high-risk behaviours due to the lack of presence of fathers and economic problems, which prevents families from having sufficient time to supervise teens, which leads

to increased vulnerability to children's involvement in high-risk behaviours. Losing respect not only for me as an educator but also for other adults, and if the mother condones it, who am I to question this kind of conduct outside the school. I had to let the situation calm down and only approached him to instil the values of respecting any adults as parents. Fortunately, he was very remorseful and apologised. I also raised an issue of family making a choice and shared that I stopped drinking to instil values in my kids as part of adequately guiding them to their adulthood. Moradi et al. (2019) revealed that the probability of adolescent substance abuse increases in stressful family environments (such as corrective parenting or frequent residence changes) and the failure of the family to provide peace and solutions for stress reduction. My critical friend trusts, "we have to be honest about these things" which is an issue of smoking and drinking. He shared an experience with his dad and explained, "*My dad was not a heavy drinker nor a heavy smoker but he would smoke inside the house and saw nothing wrong with it, until we confronted him*" he also explained "*he apologised and never smoked inside the house again and became considerate of other people*". Alhammad et al. (2022) explain that a family history of substance abuse was among the risk factors that made individuals prone to misuse any subtype of substance and that families face significant life challenges which demand maintaining a balance between job and family life which tends to increase the risk of substance abuse. My drinking was greatly influenced by my uncle, who would say "Taste" but it is a choice also not to let this be a trial for my kids if the family condones this, then no one can tell kids otherwise.

4.4.3. Community

As stated in the previous paragraphs, our learners are sent to purchase alcohol in the community. The owners of shebeens (clubs or illicit bars operating without a license) have a right not to sell. Bibave (2007) conducted a study to sensitise the people of the community in general and the youth in particular about the menace of drugs. Stritzel (2022) believes community contexts also shape opportunities for substance use and the extent to which peer groups can facilitate substance use. My critical friend believes that "*Even though the family is socialising the drug abuse the community has a right not to sell, as they are also perpetuating the use of drugs and alcohol*". Areas that sell alcohol are regulated by the law not to sell to children under the age of 18. Even bottle stores that are regulated and operating under strict regulations are also selling to the kids because it is now a norm to sell. My critical friend views

this as the owners' way of only considering the "profit margin". Rules do not really apply in this case. Our learners feel free to smoke and drink in the community as if this is an acceptable thing. Our learners know very well that there is no one in the community to reprimand their behaviour. This issue has even escalated to learners smoking behind stores in the community. Some do not even make it to school after that, and some are brave enough to come to school, reeling off the dagga. Stritzel (2022) demonstrated that community contexts for adolescents' substance use demonstrated peers from the larger community context as shaping the opportunities and perceived risks and rewards of substance use neighbourhood norms and the strength of community ties when it comes to tolerance of substance use. My critical friend even says drinking and smoking are interdependent, "*You start to drink automatically you start to smoke, if the drug is no longer doing the job in your system than you look for something stronger*". I think our issue of substance use instead of it going away but it is escalating to Primary School learners being sent by some of the members in the community to sell drugs to other kids. According to Fawcett et al. (1994), broad-based groups involving different sectors of the community have been formed to prevent substance use among adolescents. This is also very dangerous. Even the Community Policing Forum, a structure meant to deal with crimes and conduct in our community, is scared to intervene because of how dangerous the issue is. Budambula and Budambula (2018) suggested that when drugs are easily accessible and available in the community, residents are more likely to purchase them, especially if they are relatively cheap. Dagga is very common in our communities and is even planted in the gardens of our learners' homes. The temptation to bring it to peers is very high as they use that as an opportunity to fit in. Fawcett et al. (1994) suggest easy accessibility of alcohol and tobacco as one of the environmental factors to underage youth as well as community norms which are favourable to substance use.

My critical friend also emphasised that these drug operators are usually not only males in the community "*It is not ka bra bani but ka mama ubani*" meaning it is not a male residence but a female residence where these drugs are accessible. Our learners are seen frequenting these areas, wearing the school uniform of our primary school, but they are not chased away. Stritzel (2022) discovered plenty of alcohol retail outlets and underage drinking, which was more prevalent in neighbourhoods because in these environments, alcohol is more accessible and less "expensive" to obtain, and youth are less concerned about neighbours who are observing and report them. In 2022, there was a time when absenteeism was pretty dominant, and by investigating the matter, I discovered there was a room rented by high school boys where they

smoked and engaged in sexual conduct with girls. Budambula & Budambula (2018) suggest traditional cultural practices in the community serve as productive grounds for initiation into drugs, meaning the presence of public entertainment places, open dumpsites, open mines, abandoned buildings and corridors in a community; their availability serves as drug initiation venues. This room is in the community, and I firmly believe we are a very tolerant community that allows so much because of fear. My key learning is that learners' behaviour is also influenced by what their parents condone as well as the family structure. This has improved my teaching into being more empathetic when addressing substance use as well as investigating the family structure.

4.4.4. Poverty and Unemployment

We also need to take into consideration that the level of poverty and unemployment in our community is very high. Poor people have become addicted to the drug based on being socio-economically deprived, with high unemployment rates and pockets of poverty; this has increased a robust addictive nature as social environments are unfavourable (Mokwena, 2016; Ghosh, 2013). Mokwena and Madinga (2022) discovered that most of the users are unemployed, and unemployment plays a role in the abuse of substances. Parents are also battling with addiction, and some are selling drugs and alcohol to generate income. My critical friend also stated that *“drugs are not cheap, meaning you are struggling financially and you choose to numb yourself with drugs or alcohol”* he further says *“a problem with addiction is that you start with something easy and if it no longer satisfy you, you escalate to something stronger and more expensive. Instead of solving the issue you are now faced with the issue of addiction.”* I also feel like people or families seem to be battling so much with socio-economic issues, like providing for their families. Mokwena and Madinga (2022) revealed that the employment of parents is one of the contributing factors that lead to substance use, as most adolescents are left at home alone and unsupervised. On the contrary, this study discovered that most parents were unemployed and at home full-time, available to supervise their children; however, their children are addicted to substance use. Sometimes, there is one breadwinner in a family, or they are all unemployed and depend on the social grants of their kids. Time on their hands and stress levels of providing for their kids contribute so much when both parents are unemployed and both drinking alcohol. Their priority shifts from their kids to their alcohol. Some are using this opportunity to sell drugs or open unauthorised shebeens to generate money.

The majority of substance users, were single and unemployed, which easily aligns their lack of life plan and purpose to addiction. Unemployed people show a constant decrease in overall life satisfaction as well as ambition, which exposes them to substance use, which results in difficulty in securing a job (Mokwena and Madinga, 2022). I remember when one of our learners was caught selling chips mixed with Xanax; she stated that no one was working at home, so the person who gave them these also gave them food. It becomes complicated because you cannot call the authorities. After all, they are not willing to give the name of the drug lord due to fear of being killed. My critical friend is also disappointed by the fact that *“you are drowning in poverty and addiction and even resort to selling your belongings just to feed addiction”* and says, *“how deep of a whole are you getting yourself into, and how hard it will be to pull yourself up”*. This is a true reflection that drugs can affect people even psychologically. Nzaumvila et al. (2023) suggest drugs are highly addictive substances with potentially devastating effects on individual, families and communities. To service their addiction, the often economically disadvantaged young people using drugs struggle financially to fund their substance use requirement. People are incapable of reasoning and making constructive decisions. Instead of looking for employment, selling their stuff is the only solution. Drugs are indeed hard to fight and even compromise the learners. Nzaumvila et al. (2023) discovered a wide-ranging effect, such as theft at home or from the neighbourhood, dropping out of school or higher education, and getting involved in criminal activities. These potentially productive adolescents and young adults become non-functional and live only for their next fix. A learner might even become a dropout due to the situation of drugs at home because there is no one to look after them and send them to school. Our stakeholders are also not doing everything possible to intervene in the substance abuse issue. My key learning is that some of the substance abuse issues are not going to be appropriately addressed as the community is dealing with issues of unemployment. My learning is improved by educating parents of our learners who are part of the community that ignoring substance use might also affect their children and their dream of having kids who will be employable in the future.

4.4.5. Theme Conclusion

In this theme, it is evident that substance use does not only affect our learners but is a plague facing everyone without any proper plan of dying out. Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019) regard

substance abuse as a serious public health problem affecting usually adolescents and young adults and affects both males and females as a source of crimes in youth and health-related problems in many communities. Discovering social media as an influential trendsetter for adolescents to get involved in risky behaviours of abusing substances. Poverty and unemployment of their parents also affect our learners as there are limitations to their basic needs due to a lack of finances. Budambula and Budambula (2018) viewed societal factors like advertising, marketing and social media as the ones influencing individual beliefs about drug use, especially alcohol among adolescents, as well as creating and expanding environments where the use of drugs like alcohol is socially acceptable and encouraged. Some households are dependent on government grants because there are no jobs available for them. To numb the situation, some parents drink because of depression and anxiety, which also affects our learners psychologically. In fighting substance abuse, Machete et al. (2022) state that social, political, and economic structures in a community are critical factors in the development and elimination of criminal activities in a community. Community is also viewed as a factor of why our learners abuse substances, as they are not comprehensively tackling the issue of substance abuse due to fear of being targeted by drug lords. My conduct and practice have improved in creating awareness of social media influences and probing family structure and conditions as a matter of intervention. Forming part of the community structures that supports our learners and address the issue of substance abuse. In the next theme, I will be looking at suggestions for trying to fight the issue of drug abuse in a school context.

4.5. Theme 4 - How do we address substance abuse in the primary school context.

4.5.1. Collage



Figure 5 – My Collage



Figure 6 – My Critical Friend's Collage

4.5.2. Psychological Support

Psychological support is required for learners battling with issues of peer pressure, drug abuse and social existence in the community and home environment. This type of support will allow

learners to cope with substance abuse addiction and cope without it. Drug abuse as a problem exists, and the denial will always cloud and hinder the assistance required. *“We need to understand that drug abuse is a psychological issue that needs to be addressed and if learners are in denial there is no way of moving forward as assistance might seem imposed and will not be received well, meaning it will mean we are pouring water in the back of a duck”*. This will also assist families of learner abusing substance cope with denial and disappointment which is usually dominant when parents discover their kids are abusing substances. *“Acceptance is needed because whatever you do nothing will help you unless the child accepts”*. Provide support to these learners, as not everyone goes into drugs willingly”. I strongly agree, as psychological support will also permit learners to open up about the types of drugs they are taking so that it will be quickly addressed.

4.5.3. Community Intervention

Community intervention will be required as substance abuse conduct transpires in the community. If a community intervenes in addressing and probing the issue of substance use in minors, a difference will be feasible instead of turning and shying away, which is tolerating substance abuse. *“Type of support I need as teacher, the community needs to be involved in identifying these problems and then also finding solutions to these problems and all of us to change the behaviour of learners. We need to be a community that shows zero tolerance towards drugs”*. Community intervention will also mean drugs are curbed in the core foundation of their existence, and there will be no operation in the community as well. *“The issue of drug abuse is everybody issue, and if someone is also selling and reaping the consequences of drug addiction, then it is a problem”*. Community Policing Forum (CPF) needs to be established and functional as it will be able to address learners, especially during school hours, if they see them in a school uniform. We were also raised by the whole community, and the Zulu proverb that says *“Umntu nguMuntu ngabantu”* must still exist, and people must not enjoy that your child is failing or is on drugs.

4.5.4. Departmental Support

Department of Education needs to pay more attention to the issue and acknowledge the existence of drugs in the schools. There used to be psychologists in the department, but I am

not sure if they are still there, their intervention must be visible as we in a school and have a policy *“Departments needs to intensify their departments because when you deal with drug problem there is not much support, usually when you seek intervention from the department they will refer schools to anonymous organisations”*. More training is also needed in capacitating educators with issues of substance use as this hinders with the vision and mission of the department together with the school code of conduct. *“Learners use suspension to further indulge on drugs”*. The department must be able to support us, especially when we implement correctional measures like sanction/ suspension, but it is not tangible as they come back in a worse state as there was plenty of time to continue using drugs while at home. We need training on policy so that we do not violate procedures with learners and drug testing. *“We are also not trained in dealing with drug issues and sanctioning of learners”*. I only came across the Drug Testing Policy because I am studying; what about the educators who are faced with the same problem and have never heard of drug testing.

4.5.5. Sister Departments

Department of Social Services, law enforcement departments, and the Department of Health must also play critical roles in assisting schools in fighting substance use. Department of Police, military and intelligence will be able to utilise their resources, especially search and seizure in schools. It is even declared in the South African School’s Act (SASA) as part of reinforcement, but when you approach police stations for intervention, this is only good on paper as it does not materialise. *“Law makers need to reinforce they law making, we need stricter laws in dealing with substance abuse”* that will protect us from violent behaviour. Police departments are trained to investigate crimes, and I firmly believe, that bringing illicit drugs into the schools and threatening educators and learners is a crime. Department of Social Services can even probe the home environment of the learners and provide them with a safe rehabilitation facility to clean drugs in their systems. *“Department of health also must play a key role in roadshows and drug testing our learners that are suspected of abusing drugs”*

4.5.6. NGOs

NGOs have also played a key role in assisting our schools with support groups for the learners. *“Schools have been sent with Social Workers but they are not well trained on issues of drugs,*

they tend to deal more with social issues involving households.”. Our school even has a social worker who is assigned by the NGOs. Drug abuse in our school is not the only problem. Some learners are sexually assaulted, abused, and victims of bullying, which is overwhelming as she also facilitates placements for learners with special needs. Most cases she deals with are not drug-related.

4.5.7. Theme Conclusion

This theme focused on collages and our desperation since we are not receiving sufficient support as much as we would love to address the drug issue. We seem to be embarking on a deteriorating state as the issue is escalating. Every one of us must play a key role in the lives of these learners and protect educators from being attacked and bullied in the workplace. Balamurugan (2018) recommends preventing and addressing occurrences of substance abuse, which includes public enlightenment activities to increase general awareness of society's problems, and mass media, seminars, or workshops are the solution for defeating substance abuse. Strict prevention measures must be implemented by all involved in educating the children. In order to yield feasible results, prevention education must target various people, including schools and school dropouts (Balamurugan, 2018). Parents must also accept assistance instead of fighting the schools and approaching the department for immediate reinstating of their suspended kids as a form of correctional measure and instilling discipline. Das et al. (2016) suggest school-based interventions for substance abuse, which will combat and protect against influences of substance abuse. School-based primary prevention programs and social influence approaches have shown effective influence against substance abuse. My practice has improved as I am now part of the schools' development team responsible for a code of conduct for our learners that incorporates the South African School Act drug testing Policy in our policy-making, which assists parents and learners to comply in protecting the school and creating a drug-free environment.

4.6. Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the raw data was presented, interpreted, and analysed using thematic analysis, which assisted me in reaching key learning of acknowledging the existence of substance abuse and improving my classroom teaching by equipping learners with knowledge of

refraining from abusing substances as well as discussion of with emerging themes. The themes were formed and discussed using principal questions that engage the topic of the research as well as follow-up questions. By so doing, the sensitivity of substance abuse was adequately investigated. Findings also revealed that this is an existing problem among the learners of South Africa, and the occurrences need immediate intervention. These findings are adequately tackled in Chapter Six, the final chapter of my thesis and recommendations for intervention and prevention measures to provide learners with the knowledge to fight substance abuse.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

The study aimed to explore and address substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences of substance abuse. In chapter four, I engaged with my memory, conducted dialogues, and collages with my critical friend on the issue of substance abuse in our school. I was also able to outline the findings. In chapter five, I will present the summary, the conclusions, and relevant recommendations for the study. Efforts were made to organise responses to individual questions so as to arrive at specific conclusions and recommendations that may expectantly assist in resolving the problems identified in the study.

5.2. Summary of the study

In summarising the relevant findings of this study, conclusions were reached by considering the following objectives of the study that I used as the guide throughout my study.

- To explore the parts of my personal history that have contributed towards me becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance abuse in the primary school context.
- To collaboratively explore the experiences and challenges that we have encountered with substance abuse in the primary school context.
- To collaboratively explore why substances are abused in the primary school context.
- To collaboratively explore how we address substance abuse in the primary school context?

Substance addiction in primary schools is a growing, sensitive, and critical issue that threatens South Africa as a whole because these children are our country's future.

In **Chapter One**, I was able to introduce the background of my study, research questions and the aim of conducting this study, which was to probe educators' experiences with substance use addiction among primary school students. As

educators, we encounter numerous obstacles, particularly in primary schools, where drugs have become the new normal for young students. The motivation for selecting the topic and the objectives for undertaking this study were outlined. Delivered an inclusive overview of this study by revealing the core of the thesis as articulated through the background.

Chapter 2 contextualised the multidimensional prevalence of substance abuse, noting the geographical dimensions of substance abuse as a growing problem globally, and tackled driving forces and strategies that can contribute to fighting substance abuse. I also incorporate the focus on the youth Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, which is an appropriate theoretical framework responsible for tackling issues of studies on human development within the context of vast environmental systems.

Chapter 3 discussed research methods and approaches that were employed when embarking on my journey to discover the dynamics of substance use in primary schools, as well as deriving strategies that may be useful in fighting substance abuse. Justification for choosing a self-study was also provided, as details of the interpretive paradigm. Chapter 4 also covered research approaches and methods employed. The basis behind the selection of these methods and approaches was specified. The strategies that were employed for data collection, as well as the reasons for using such strategies, were explained. The research methodology and design that were selected for this study played a significant purpose in my research as I was able to attain the information required to address my research questions.

In **Chapter 4**, collected data was presented, interpreted, analysed using thematic analysis and discussed with emerging themes. The themes were formed and discussed using principal questions that engage the topic of the research. Thorough investigation and consultation with my supervisor, where reflective journals were also suggested, assisted in adequately investigating substance abuse in my primary school. Findings did reveal the magnitude of the substances taken by our learners as well as the driving forces behind substance abuse. I can basically reveal that the perception of substance abuse was adequately investigated. Findings also revealed that there is a considerable need to attempt and fight substance abuse as well as implementation of policy in schools.

5.3. Research Conclusion

This section presents a summary of findings and conclusions based on study themes:

Theme 1 - Parts of my personal history have contributed towards my becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance use in primary school

By engaging in self-study research design, this particular study revealed that I was able to touch base on my previous encounter with alcohol reflected on my teen life as well as becoming a leader in my classroom. I discussed a decision to quit alcohol and focus on acquiring my Bachelor of Education Degree, raising my kids and positively impacting the lives of my learners. I also realised a need for critical friends that served as a support structure. I was able to conclude that I was not afraid to address wrong conduct in my learners. My conclusion for this theme is my obligation and duty to lead my learners and instil self-discipline. The application of Ubuntu is a form of developing humanity not only for my learners but also for the community at large.

Theme 2 – Experiences and Challenges we encountered with substance abuse in the primary school context

In theme 2, my colleagues and I reflected on our experiences of substances and what was eminent in this theme was the type of drugs consumed by these learners, the year 2019 when we first discovered Xanax as part of the drugs taken by our learners which is an antidepressant with the same effects as alcohol. Violent behaviour is part of the challenges we have encountered, as substances easily influence learners' behaviour. Findings revealed our lack of consistency in trying to discipline these learners. One of our fears as educators is being targets to drug lords who use these learners to sell drugs. I also discovered that substance abuse is also promoted by traumatic experiences our learners face, whether at home or in the community. Taking substances and abusing them also psychologically affects our learners. These discoveries also assisted me in probing the underlying issues of why our learners are aggressive and affording them an opportunity to tell their stories as a form of transformation. I have also transformed as an educator from being quick to apply policy and preferring to offer support and encouragement to my learners on crucial issues of concentrating on and diligently doing school work.

Theme 3 - Why are substances abused in the primary school context?

Theme 3 highlights the driving forces of substance abuse in the study as social media, dysfunctional family structure, and community were deliberated on as part of the driving forces since our learners do not exist in isolation from the mentioned factors. Poverty and unemployment in the area we reside in, where family life comes with struggles. Findings revealed that learners tend to mimic the conduct of their parents, and lack of proper supervision may be part of the driving force when parents are forced to work long hours and kids are left unsupervised. Social media, which also promotes substance as being excellent, easily influences learners' behaviour into trying drugs. I have transformed my practice by incorporating peer leaders in our school as part of inspiring and supporting learners.

Theme 4 - How do we address substance abuse in the primary school context.

The study emphasises in theme 4 that substance abuse can be addressed by workshops for educators and government laws that are stricter, especially in the outlets that sell to minors, and inform educators on the new legislation, especially the drug testing policy, which I only discovered through my study. Findings also revealed that psychological support, the intervention of sister departments, parental involvement and NGOs can assist educators in fighting substance abuse in schools, not just primary schools only. This theme has equipped me with the skills to seek assistance not only from within the Department of Education but also from all the stakeholders as well as non-government organisations that will help us transform the lives of our learners. I have also transformed my practice by bringing the Drug testing policy to the attention of the School management team and the school governing body as part of a tool to help us fight substance abuse in our school. Our school policy, as well as our learner's code of conduct, informs both the learner and the parents on issues of compliance.

5.4. Recommendations:

Based on the study results and conclusions reached, the following recommendations can be made.

Psychological Support – The study recommends that the Department of Education should hire school psychologists and social workers who are trained in counselling skills and who can identify and assess problems. Professionals will not judge learners, but they will be able to address the core problem and even put Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory into practice. This will help learners cope with peer pressure as well as social issues.

Parental Intervention and Community Support – Parents need to accept and seek proper intervention for their kids and take them for drug testing as part of identifying the extent of substance abuse as well as the type of drug in the system of their kids. Community support and intervention will include Community policing, which will probe smoking areas as well as community shops and liquor outlets that sell alcohol to minors. Therefore, the study recommends building community structures and establishing a parental intervention programme that will assist in fighting occurrences of substance abuse.

Department of Education needs to intensify its support to the schools and be available when learners are suspended. It should also rope in rehabilitation centres that can take in learners during their sanction as learners use suspension to administer drugs further. This is one of the reasons educators lack consistency: our learners come back even worse than before.

NGOs and Sister Departments Involvement – the mentioned stakeholders have the resources to investigate, do drug tests, probe the home environment, and provide immediate assistance. This is one of the reasons we rely on them. A proper working channel must be derived to assist schools. Therefore, the study recommends that NGOs and sister departments intervene and fight substance abuse in primary schools.

5.5. Chapter Summary

This study sought to address issues of substance abuse in a primary school in the uMgungundlovu district by conducting a collaborative self-study on educators' experiences of substance abuse. By addressing the research questions, the study generates knowledge and adds to scholarship on understanding substance abuse, the driving forces behind it, the challenges experienced, and possible intervention strategies that educators can employ. This has been an emotional journey, mainly due to the volume of work that has been put into this study. I started this study in 2021, and since then, tangible evidence of change, especially this year (2024), has been reached in fighting substance abuse on our school premises. Behaviour and discipline have been maintained thanks to the parents who are also monitoring their children outside of school premises. I may not conclusively declare that they are no longer smoking, but as an educator, I can conclude that our school has been a drug-free zone this year. Various NGOs have been there to bring moral regeneration to our learners. After being afforded an opportunity through this study to respond to my research questions and attain intended objections, I can conclude that my study is closed. I have grown as an educator and intend to maintain self-discipline and dedication in my life of duty. I am hoping the theory I discovered through this journey will be applied in my line of duty as an educator for change and in my daily conduct. Conducting this research made me realise that we are more than educators in the community promoting pastoral care; we have a responsibility to be proactive in addressing ill behaviour. I have managed to derive intervention strategies as part of reacting to and fighting the occurrence of substance abuse in my school.

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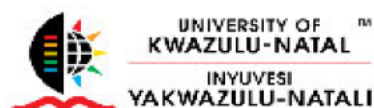
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Appendices

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



22 March 2023

Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi (221115503)
School Of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear NP Zondi,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00005124/2022

Project title: Substance use in a primary school context: a collaborative educator self-study of uMgungundlovu district.

Degree: MEd

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 December 2022 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

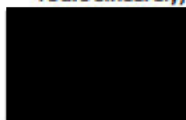
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid until 22 March 2024.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 250 8350/1557/3587 Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi
Pietermaritzburg

0722603839

nonhlanhlaprecious.snothando.z@gmail.com

Date: 17 August 2022

Dear Principal

My name is **Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi** and I am currently a student at UKZN where I am completing my master's degree. As part of my degree, I am required to do a research project. I humbly request your permission in conducting a study. My research topic is

Substance abuse in a primary school context: a collaborative educator self-study in the uMgungundlovu District

This study will explore what we believe is driving this behavior and afford us the opportunity to collaboratively comprehend the challenges we are facing and explore what might be required in terms of intervention needed. It is hoped that I will be able to use the findings to try and advocate for support from the Department of Basic Education, as part of equipping us as a school, with what is needed to address substance use in our school.

I have also been allocated a supervisor that will properly guide me as this is a very crucial issue.

Thanking you in advance hoping my request will reach your favorable consideration.

Yours in Education

Miss N.P. Zondi

APPENDIX C: APPROVAL LETTER FROM SCHOOL

Permission to conduct Research: Miss N.P. Zondi



Permission was sought and granted to Ms N.P. Zondi to conduct an educational research towards her Masters Degree in Educational Psychology with UKZN.

She has undertaken to observe and adhere to all the principles regulating research methodologies.

Hope you will find this in order.

Regards


Principal



13 SEP 2022

KZN DEPT OF EDUCATION & CULTURE

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANTS INFORMED CONSENT

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi
 Pietermaritzburg
 0722603839
nonhlanhlaprecious.snothando.z@gmail.com

Date:

Greetings Colleague

My name is Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi and I am currently a student at UKZN where I am completing my master's degree. As part of my degree, I am required to do a research project. I have identified you as a possible participant to take part in my study. This document is referred to as a consent form and its purpose is to explain the aim of the research to you and your role in it if you agree to participate. The consent form ensures that you have freely given your permission to participate.

My study aims to better understand my (I am including myself in this study as a participant) and two of my colleagues' experiences and understandings of substance use of substance use in the primary school we work in, with the intention of addressing this issue as devoted educators. It will explore what we believe is driving this behavior and afford us the opportunity to collaboratively comprehend the challenges we are facing and explore what might be required in tackling this issue. It is hoped that I will be able to use the findings to try and advocate for support from the Department of Basic Education, who might equip us with what is needed to address substance use in our school.

The research study will involve us (myself, you and another two colleagues) meeting on three occasions to share our experiences of substance use at our school, explore what we think are the factors that are driving this behaviour, and explore what we believe we need to be able to address this behaviour. We will engage in dialogue and will also use collage making to assist us in exploring our ideas. Each meeting will be about two hours long and will happen in the first few months of 2023 at times that suit us all. We will use a venue that is private and quite at the school.

HSSREC-041-2008

1

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
 Research Office, Westville Campus
 Govan Mbeki Building
 Private Bag X 54001
 Durban
 4000
 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
 Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

DECLARATION

_____ (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.
 Yes/No (please circle the relevant response).

I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.
 Yes/No (please circle the relevant response).

I consent to have this interview recorded.
 Yes/No (please circle the relevant response).

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

HSSREC-041-2008

3

The study may elicit some discomfort as we explore our experiences and identify the factors that drive such young children to use substances. If we feel that we need some debriefing after our three meetings I will arrange for a social worker, psychologist, or appropriate counsellor to assist us. I, however, hope that the study will provide us with a supportive opportunity to share our experiences with each other and that we can use the findings to get the support we need to address this concern in our school.

Please be assured that participation in this research is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any point. In the event of withdrawing there will be no negative consequences for you.

There are no costs involved in participating in this study other than the time you will give to meet on the three occasions described above.

An important part of this research is that your participation will be kept confidential. Although I will describe some of the demographics of our school, I will not mention its name in the final report. In addition, I will give you the opportunity to choose a name you want me to use for you in the study so that you remain anonymous, meaning that no one will know that you participated. I will not include any details in the research that will identify you if you wish to remain anonymous.

When we meet, I will record our dialogue and discussion. These recordings will then be transcribed, and the transcripts will be the data that I use for the study. Once I have transcribed the recordings on a word document, I will save these with a password to ensure they are kept safe and send them to my supervisor. After a 5-year period they will be destroyed.

I wish to inform you that this study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number _____).

I can be contacted using the contact details provided at the top right-hand side of this document.

My supervisor is _____ who is located at the Edgewood Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Her contact details are: email _____ and cell phone number is _____.

HSSREC-041-2008

2

CONSENT

_____ have been informed about the study entitled SUBSTANCE USE IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL CONTEXT: A COLLABORATIVE EDUCATOR SELF-STUDY OF UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT by ZONDI NONHLANHLA PRECIOUS.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study

- To explore the parts of my personal history that have contributed towards me becoming an educator who is concerned with addressing substance use in the primary school context.
- To explore the experiences and challenges that I and my colleagues have encountered with substance use in the primary school context.
- To explore what I and my colleagues believe is driving the use of substances in the primary school context?
- To explore what types support I and my colleagues require in order to address this behaviour in the primary school context?

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed about any available compensation or medical treatment if injury occurs to me as a result of study-related procedures.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact the researcher at (provide details).

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
 Research Office, Westville Campus
 Govan Mbeki Building
 Private Bag X 54001
 Durban
 4000
 KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
 Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
 Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Video-record my interview / focus group discussion	YES / NO
Use of my photographs for research purposes	YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
 (Where applicable)

Date

HSSREC-041-2008

4

APPENDIX E: TURN IT IN REPORT

ZONDE 28TH JUNE

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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5	K. Sorsdahl, I. Petersen, B. Myers, Z. Zingela, C. Lund, C. van der Westhuizen. "A reflection of the current status of the mental healthcare system in South Africa", SSM - Mental Health, 2023 Publication	<1%
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APPENDIX F: LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



Centurion

Tshwane

precision4edits@gmail.com

OIPG: (2024/014327/07)

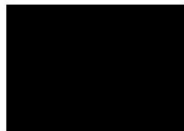
MANUSCRIPT REVIEW PROOF

4th July 2024

To Whom It May Concern

This letter is to confirm that the article titled, **SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL CONTEXT: A COLLABORATIVE EDUCATOR SELF-STUDY IN THE UMGUNGUNDLOVU DISTRICT**, by Nonhlanhla Precious Zondi (**221115503**), was edited by a professional language editor. As the language editor, the author was supplied with two versions: the first contained comments and edits [track changes], and the second was the accepted version with no track changes. As the language editor, I cannot be held responsible for the author or authors' decisions concerning the edits and comments supplied.

Sincerely,



Language Editor

PRECISION EDUCATION CONSULTANCY