

Learner Indiscipline in Public Secondary Schools

Gawie Schlebusch^a, Solomon Makola^b, Mkhumbulo Ndlovu^c, ^aDepartment of Post Graduate Studies Education, Central University of Technology, South Africa, ^bCampus Director, Welkom Campus, Central University of Technology, South Africa, ^cD.Ed Candidate, Central University of Technology, South Africa. Email: ^agschlebu@cut.ac.za

This paper sought to establish factors leading to learner indiscipline in public secondary schools in the Mpumalanga province of South Africa. Data was collected qualitatively. Purposeful sampling was used to identify the participants of the study. Data was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Six schools in two districts of the Mpumalanga province were selected for data collection purposes. The principal, a class teacher, a Life Orientation Skills teacher, and the chairperson of the School Governing Body of each school formed the study sample. In total 24 participants were interviewed. Document analysis of incidence record books, school codes of conduct, minutes for school disciplinary committees and school safety committees was undertaken. Analysis and presentation of data was done through thematic content analysis. The findings and literature revealed that family settings, community settings, human rights, peer pressure, the educator, and the learner are all factors influencing learner indiscipline.

Key words: *Learner indiscipline, Learner behaviour, Peer pressure*

INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the implementation of positive discipline shortly after independence, South African schools continue to have worrisome levels of indiscipline. Discipline issues are rampant in South African schools and other countries, according to Du Plessis (2015), and the situation is growing worse and even out of hand. Ngwokabuenui (2015) laments the reality that learners have gotten out of control and disrespectful to themselves, teachers, school administrators, parents, and society at large. He goes on to say that learners exhibit various forms of indiscipline, including boycotting classes, lying, violence, dishonesty, disobedience to teachers and those in authority, alcohol consumption, confronting and stabbing teachers, lateness to

school, drug and substance abuse, insulting, assaulting, theft, and rioting, to name a few. One of the primary issues with a lack of discipline in schools is that a significant amount of time that could have been spent on academic advancement is diverted to dealing with behavioural issues, and this time is never reclaimed. In an environment rife with violence, threats, and instability, teachers and other learners struggle to function effectively. According to Kourkoutas and Wolhuter (2013), the largest obstacle in dealing with learner indiscipline concerns in South African schools is figuring out how to address them.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conditions and factors that create susceptibility to behaviour problems are wide and diverse. In view of the complexities associated with this phenomenon, a holistic approach to exploring these factors is necessary. This broad-based view is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (2006) Bioecological Systems theory. This theory opines that behaviour is a result complex processes involving a system of interactions within the individual and between the individual and environmental forces surrounding him or her. According to the theory, there are four interconnected types of environmental systems that operate within four levels, namely: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). The microsystem is closest to the individual and the one in which they have regular direct contact. A microsystem characteristically comprises the person him or herself, family, peers, teachers or caregivers. The mesosystem consists of the dynamic interactions between the different elements of a person's microsystem. The exosystem consists of the factors beyond the person that have an impact on the person such as the parent's employment status and the environment. The macrosystem is the wider system of society which embodies a set of ideological beliefs, values, and norms, as reflected in the cultural, religious, and socioeconomic organization of society (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017). Magwa and Ngara (2014) state that there is need to get at the root causes of indiscipline amongst learners with a view to finding a solution. For purposes of this paper, the factors are grouped as environmental, school, teacher, home, peer group and learner based.

FACTORS LEADING TO LEARNER INDISCIPLINE

Environment-based factors

Environment-based factors stem from happenings and conditions learners face in the community and society at large. Kiwale (2017) stresses that, what a child sees, how it is done, and when it is done, does not go out of the child's mind. This implies that environmental imprinting of habits has a strong influence on the child's manner of conduct. The widespread unrests and indiscipline among the learners reflect the prevailing lawlessness and frustration in the society. Societal habits, injustices, crimes, prejudices, and stereotypes reflect in learners' behaviour in schools in various forms. Kiwale (2017) asserts that the school is in many ways a mirror of the society. Upindi (2013) contends that some of the causes of indiscipline in schools

are drug abuse, neglect and community and media violence. Social issues relating to changes in society, the increase in family breakdown and general moral decay exert influence on learners' behaviour in schools.

Teacher-based factors

There are a range of teacher-related variables that impact directly on learners' conduct at school. Teachers' personal conduct, attitudes towards work, relationship with learners, and their approach to discipline have a direct bearing on the quality of learner discipline in a school. Banja (2013) supports of this claim and argues that a research study conducted in Zambia revealed that teacher behaviour impacted on learner behaviour in a significant way. Jinot (2018) posits that educators disregard the fact that their conduct and attitudes in the classroom may influence the learners' sense of belonging to the school and hence the ways they behave. In her research, Jinot (2018) found that secondary school educators did not lead by example and that they also do not model socially acceptable behaviours to their learners. Magwa and Ngara (2014) state that teachers sometimes perpetuate indiscipline by coming to class unprepared. When a teacher is unprepared, learners have idle time to make noise and engage in other disruptive behaviours that tarnish the image of the school in so far as discipline is concerned. An ill-prepared lesson has a tendency of and causing misbehaviour since the learners will be bored. If teachers fail to use a variety of teaching methods to reach every learner, the learners become bored, disinterested, and reckless. Magwa and Ngara (2014) also allude to the fact that ineffective teachers treat all learners the same. They are not sensitive to the diverse needs of learners, and this leads to misbehaviour in class.

Teachers are expected to be role models behave in loco parentis all times. According to Upindi (2013), teachers who come to school drunk and improperly dressed, create opportunities for learners to imitate them and the discipline of the school suffers. Rhalmi (2016) argues that the relationship between the teacher and learners is essential for any learning process. Conversely, Banja (2013) notes that indiscipline is easily bred in a school where no healthy relationship exists between teachers and learners. A strain in the relationship between teachers and learners is predominantly a result of preferential treatment of some learners by teachers, ill-treatment of learners by teachers and improper associations with learners by the former. One of the major roles of a teacher is to cultivate and maintain discipline in a class. The teacher's knowledge about discipline techniques and manner of instilling discipline has a direct effect on learner discipline and general conduct of learners under his or her care. According to Magwa and Ngara (2014), adolescents are very sensitive and trying to demean them or force them into doing something they do not like could result in direct confrontation. Thus, teachers cause indiscipline by using their position to humiliate and intimidate the learners.

Home-based factors

The behaviour of learners at school tends on a significant proportion to reflect the lifestyle of the home and family the learner comes from. Jinot (2018) argue that the root causes of learner misbehaviour at school emanate from their homes. Home-based factors specifically resonate on the parenting styles, working parents, ineffective parental discipline and dysfunctional family systems which give rise to a lack of learner discipline that originate from the family. Kiwale (2017) asserts that the home environment plays a very big role in influencing their behaviour at school. Similarly, Kagoiya and Kagemu (2018) assert that a range of family circumstances and conditions may exert more powerful influences over the learners' behaviour than anything that happens in school. Kiwale (2017) further argues that some learners come to school already displaying existing disposition to be disruptive in behaviour. Poverty is a state where parents are unable to provide adequate necessities like proper housing, clothing and food to their children. It is mainly determined by the family's socio-economic status. Poverty becomes real when parents fail to meet learners' basic needs as stipulated by Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs. Biological needs are necessary for survival, and they entail clothing, food, health and shelter (Magwa & Ngara, 2014). Unless these basic needs are satisfactorily gratified other higher order needs do not motivate children to learn and as a result the child resorts to abusive behaviour. Learners may be involved in theft and prostitution to meet daily needs.

Parental permissiveness and neglect have been identified as a home-based factor of learner indiscipline (Kagoiya & Kagemu, 2018). It has also been noted that if parents spend little time at home, children may seek inapt social experiences elsewhere that have shattering effects on their lives. Jinot (2018) posits that the children of a dysfunctional family lack character education at home. In such families, parents attempt to discipline children by constantly threatening them with violence. Children from such homes tend to be abused, experience and regularly witness domestic violence. Such experiences predispose them to the development of ant-social and criminal behaviour. They are usually intolerant and believe that physical violence is the only means of resolving one's problems (Kagoiya & Kagemu, 2018).

The peer groups

Secondary school learners are at a stage in life where friendships matter the most in life. Friendships translate to the formation of peer groups that serve to reinforce beliefs, activities and behaviours that define the specific subculture of that group. Ibrahim (2015) confirms this by stating that adolescents (learners) spend a great deal of time with their own age group and the attitude of their own set of friends within the peer group become a central influence on their behaviour. Upindi (2012) asserts that it is obvious that peer pressure plays a role in learners' misbehaviour in class.

Gutuza and Mapolisa (2015) posit that there are some learners who influence others to cause chaos, and this happens when learners meet with other learners with different behaviours that

negatively influence them. They further noted that as children grow older the importance of parents decreases as a reference group and as a model for conformity and they begin to relate more with their age mates for the same. The power of the peer group becomes more influential and felt when the family relationships are not close or supportive. Ibrahim (2015) argues that the peer-group provides a sense of oneness, security and solidarity which the average learner desires, hence this association has its own problem linked to the reality that when the norms of a group are deviant, individual members must follow such norms. Inevitably, such disruptive and indiscipline behaviour have a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

Data was gathered in a qualitative manner. Six principals, class teachers, Life Orientation topic teachers, and Chairpersons of School Governing Bodies (representing the parents) participated in semi-structured interviews. The study's sample size was 24 people in total. Document analysis of each school's disciplinary policy, learner code of conduct, discipline record book, and minutes of disciplinary committee sessions were also observed. Content analysis was used to assess qualitative data acquired through interviews and document analysis. Content analysis, according to Choongwa (2018), is the process of categorizing verbal or behavioral data to classify, summarize, and tabulate findings. Content analysis, according to Musingafi and Hlatjwayo (2013), focuses on documents, texts, or speech to see which themes emerge. The data was thus reported in the form of themes.

Qualitative studies meet requirements for trustworthiness if results are proven to be honest and truthful; and hold resonance for similar population segments in other contexts (Creswell et al, 2016). According to Rehman and Alharti (2016), if a study possesses credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability, it is regarded to be of high quality. Qualitative studies are thus evaluated for trustworthiness using a systematic approach that determines how well credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are satisfied during the preparation, data collection, organization, analysis, presentation, and interpretation of findings, as was the case in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To adhere to the ethical standards of anonymity and confidentiality, schools and participants were identified during the presentation using alphabetic codes. School A, B, C, D, E, and F were the names of the schools. PA, PB, PC, PD, PE, and PF were designated as principals, with PA assigned to School A and PB to School B, and so on. Class teachers, Chairpersons of the School Governing Bodies, Life Orientation Skills Teachers, and documents were all coded in the same way. School A and B are rural, School C and D are semi-urban, and School E and F are entirely urban in this multiple case study design. With this socio-geographic component in mind, the study's findings were triangulated during the presentation. The table below lists the detailed codes used to identify participants and documents:

Table 1

Category	Code name
Schools	SA, SB, SC, SD, SE, SF
Principals	PA, PB, PC, PD, PE, PF
School Governing Board Chairpersons	CA, CB, CC, CD, CE, CF
Class teachers	CTA, CTB, CTC, CTD, CTE, CTF
Life Skills Orientation teachers	LSTA, LSTB, LSTC, LSTD, LSTE, LSTD
School Code of Conduct	CCA, CCB, CCC, CCD, CCE, CCF
Disciplinary Committee Minutes	DCA, DCB, DCC, DCD, DCE, DCF
Incidents Record Book	IRA, IRB, IRC, IRD, IRE, IRF
School Safety Committee Minutes	SCC

Participants identified a wide range of factors that contribute to learner indiscipline in public secondary schools. The factors were coded and themed. The themes include family setting, community setting, peer group pressure, the learner, the educator, human rights and biological factors.

Theme 1: Family setting

Most participants alluded to the fact that the source of most learner behaviour problems is the home environment. The school was viewed as an institution that inherits learners with personalities that have taken shape from home and thus struggles with fixing that which the family could not deal with. Specific views implicating the family were aired by the following three participants in this manner:

In the majority of cases, we struggle with learners with an improper home background involving the family. [PC]

We inherit behaviour problems that are developed at home and allowed to settle by the family in most cases. [PE]

They say charity begins at home...so, it all begins from there. Learners learn misbehaviour from home. [CTD]

The narratives presented above point to the fact that the family is the primary socialisation agent of the learner where manners, norms and values of society are inculcated through reward and punishment mechanisms at its disposal. The school receives the learner at a later stage and must deal with the product of the family system. Arguably, learners reflect the homes they come from, since the learner is just a component of the whole family unit to which he or she belongs. The sub-themes that arose from this theme were parenting styles, absent parents, and family relations.

Parenting styles

Different parental styles were identified as contributory factor to learner indiscipline in this study. Parents adopt a variety of parenting styles that correspondingly produce varying results in terms of learner behaviour. Overly strict, negligent, and permissive parents shape the behaviour of their children in negative ways. Participants in this study had this to say:

Learners are out of hand because of weak parenting styles. Some learners have become aggressive to a point where the parent is afraid of them. [LSTC]

Poor parenting is another cause of learner indiscipline. Solutions to such learners should also involve the parents. [PF]

They misbehave because of lack of parental care. In most cases, misbehaving learners are alone at home. Its either both parents are out on a drinking spree or they just do not care. [CTE]

Parental styles that rely on excessive use of force and punishment without discussing the matter with the child to understand issues hardens the learner. Such learners are not afraid of any punitive measures you can take as a school because they are used to the worst beatings at home. [PE]

Given the views expressed above, one could state that in this study permissive, negligent, and authoritarian parental styles contribute to learner ill-discipline at school. Permissive parents allow their children to behave as they please while negligent parents are seldom present to attend to the needs of their children. Authoritarian parents are bad communicators and rely on harsh punitive measures meant to enforce strict rules in a quest for attainment of unquestionable obedience. Efforts to handle disciplinary problems presented by such learners at school are likely not to yield expected results if conditions at home remain the same. This, therefore, calls upon the school to involve parents in implementing the positive learner discipline approach to ensure that parenting styles are consistent with positive discipline principles adopted at home.

Absent parents

Participants noted that absent parents contribute to the emergence of permanent or temporary child-headed families. When parents are absent, the learner becomes the head of the household who makes the rules according to his or her own liking. In the process, they decide when to attend school and when to be absent. Participants also noted that parents who work from afar delegate all responsibilities of disciplining the learner to the educator, not considering that their responsibility in this regard cannot be completely ignored. Participants observed that:

Learners from child-headed families misbehave a lot. Some are orphans who lost both parents. [CTC]

Parents are sometimes too far, and they leave everything in the hands of the teacher to decide what to do. [CTB]

In this area, a good number of learners are staying on their own. They have freedom that spills over to the school, for an example, late coming, absenteeism etc. [PB]

Most parents around here work in Johannesburg or elsewhere, so the learners remain alone, doing what they want. They decide when to come to school and when not to. [PA]

Minutes of a disciplinary hearing at school B reported of learner B who appeared before the disciplinary committee without a parent. When the principal asked about the whereabouts of the parent, the learner indicated that both parents were working in Johannesburg and could not manage to attend. The matter was postponed to a later date when the parent could be available.

Views gathered from participants through semi-structured interviews and findings arrived at through document analysis agree that learners with absent parents exhibit problematic behaviours. The current study gathered that learners who live alone in the absence of parents exercise too much freedom which affects the way they behave at school. Learners become heads of households because of parents working from afar, while others are orphaned. Freedom in young minds that are not yet mature to exercise restraint can lead to indulgence in irresponsible behaviours.

Family relations

The study established that negative attitudes of learners arising from unhealthy family relations between learners and adults at home tend to be transferred to similar adults who serve as educators at school. Some participants stated that gender violence occurs in certain households, with the result that some learners from such households tend to transfer hatred towards their fathers to male educators at school. In addition, learners living with their grandparents disrespect them and bring an attitude of disrespect to school. Participants noted that:

Home lifestyle where the father abuses the mother in front of the child, so the child hates the father and transfers this hatred to other male teachers at school. [LSTB]

Some children stay with their grandparents who are very old. They disrespect them at home and the same behaviour is displayed at school. They know even if you engage the granny, there is nothing they are going to do. [CTC]

Some parents are even afraid of the children, they say they even threaten them at home. So, what can you expect from such a child at school? [PB]

The study gathered that nature of relationships between learners and adults at home tend to spill over to the school. Learners who bully their parents at home, are not moved when the school informs them that it will report them to the parents. Bad relations at home result in ill-discipline and lack of cooperation between the learners and the educators. If the learner has sour relations with his or her father, they then generalise the dislike to male educators at school. Handling such matters from the school end of the chain might not produce the desired effect. Efforts to engage families are envisaged if proper implementation of positive disciplinary measures is to be achieved.

The family is the primary socialisation agent of the learner where norms and values that regulate behaviour are inculcated. Dynamics taking place in the family are bound to produce a learner whose behaviours in the outside world may create challenges for the learner and those whom he or she relates to. By and large, the learner's behaviour reflects the kind of home they come from. This view resonates with Jinot (2018) who argues that the root causes of learner misbehaviour at school emanate from the homes. Similarly, Kiwale (2017) asserts that the home environment plays a very big role in influencing the learner's behaviour at school. Tauatswala (2018) asserts that the type of a family in which a child is raised will in future influence the way the child behaves at school. A learner is part of a complete family unit and what the learner portrays in his or her behaviour is to a large extent a reflection of the behaviour of the other members of the family to which he or she belongs.

Theme 2: Community setting

The community at which the learner resides was cited as a strong factor for the development of behaviour problems experienced in schools. The school is a miniature community. It reflects the characteristics of the wider community to which it belongs. Criminal activities occurring in the community tend to manifest themselves in learner behaviour at school. Learners' manner of conduct depends on the type of community they come from. Learners from high density suburbs tend to misbehave more than those who come from low density suburbs and rural areas. Participants had this to say:

There are many factors, but to me, the community comes first. Whatever happens in the community, happens here at school as well. We have observed that learners from the rural areas and suburbs are well behaved, but those coming from the location...hey! They misbehave a lot. [PE]

Crime in communities where learners come from also causes learner indiscipline as learners tend to import criminal activities from their communities into the school. [PF]

This implies that the state of crime in the wider community and society is mirrored at school level. Learners who come from crime prone areas tend to misbehave at school as well. The school can seldom be different from the feeder community from which it enrolls its learners. Drugs and gangsterism emerged as the two main sub-themes.

Drugs

The study learnt that the community serves as the source of drugs that learners traffic and consume. The school environment resembles in part, the state of the drug abuse situation in the community. Drugs that are trafficked and consumed in the school premises are the same drugs that are readily available in the surrounding community. Rural communities rich in dagga production supply rural school with dagga while urban communities infested with nyaope (cocktail drug with heroin), cocaine, alcohol and other drugs infiltrate urban schools with the same. Learners behave in ways that disrupt teaching and learning activities while under influence of drugs. Participants stated that:

In this community, there is no motivation for the value of education. Most rich people here earned their riches through production and trafficking of dagga. This area produces a lot of dagga and our learners get involved as well. [LSTA]

About 40 percent of the learners are involved in dagga. It is so because the area surrounding the school is a dagga growing community. [CTB]

Learners here abuse a lot of 'nyaope', alcohol and cocaine. This is a town environment and these substances are readily available. Some even sell them here at school. [CTC]

Some of the learners drink where we as their teachers drink. It is us who try to hide from them, but as for them they actually want to come closer so they can share with us. In this community, alcohol is too much in supply. [CTD]

The greatest problem we have as parents is the issue of drugs that are easy to get in this area. [CC]

Some learners come to school under the influence of substances and disrupt the entire teaching and learning process. [PF]

Both parents and educators expressed similar views regarding the wider community having a hand in the proliferation of drugs to learners. Rural based schools bemoaned easy access to dagga while urban based ones complained of alcohol and synthetic drug abuse. The communities serve as source of drugs that lie at the core of the behaviour challenges schools face involving learners.

Document analysis findings concurred with participants' views expressed above. At one rural based school, incidents of dagga trafficking in the school were recorded. [IRB]. This confirmed what was indicated by educators [LSTA; CTB] above that the schools were located in dagga growing communities. On the other hand, records at semi-urban and urban schools reflected more cases of cigarette and alcohol abuse by the learners. The findings in school records are consistent with what educators from different schools alluded to. It can be noted that easy access to a particular substance in the community facilitates manifestation of related abuse behaviours in learners.

Gangsterism

Findings under this category revealed that urban based schools were confronted with a huge challenge of gangsterism. Gangsterism was identified as the cause of most of the violent behaviours that learners display at school. The fight for control by rival gangster groups to which some learners belong spills over to the school and causes chaos. Educators fear for their lives as they are faced with the risk of being targets of gangs who may decide to attack them for instilling discipline at school in cases that involve learners who belong to them. Participants were quoted saying:

Gangsterism started in the community, and it is now manifesting here at this school. This thing is so serious that even us as educators we have to trade carefully because the gangsters can target you outside of work. [PE]

This community is full of gangster groups that fight for control both in the community and here at school. Some of our learners belong to these gangster groups. So the fights and contestations that exist in the community are extended to school. The fights between members of rival groups fighting for dominance in the school become so violent. Sometimes members of the gangster groups outside come and reinforce their members here. So, we have a very big problem with gangsterism. [CTC]

Learners belonging to rival gangster groups fight all the time. And we sometimes call the police to intervene. [LSTF]

This implies that the school adopts the behaviour patterns and dynamics of the broader community within which it is located. Minutes recorded during School Safety Committee meetings are testimony to the existence of gangsterism in the community and in schools. Incidents of violence were noted as:

Issue of dangerous weapons (like pangas, knives, swords, throwing stones at each other, etc). Carrying of dangerous weapons and resource areas where they hide weapons. [SCC]

Issue of gangsterism. Some members of gangs were proving to be unruly in class and this was creating problems for educators. Some members of the community were also working with the gangs. Violence by gangs bullying other learners. Principal elaborated that gangsterism affects all schools in the ward. Fights in schools reflect community dynamics and hence it is difficult or even impossible to discipline outsiders. [SCC]

Further, documents at school D, indicate reported incidents of bullying connected to gangsterism [IRD]. These were reported three times in 2020 and four times in 2021. School C recorded three and five incidents of gangster related violence in 2020 and 2021 respectively. Due to COVID 19 lockdowns, incidents in 2020 appear to be lower than those in 2021. What is worrying however, is the fact that the incidents appear to be on the rise.

Information extracted from records echo the same message participants put across to the effect that gangsterism is alive and causes havoc in urbanised schools. Records also revealed that gangsterism is at the centre of all acts of violence involving dangerous weapons in schools. Lives of educators and other learners are at risk under such conditions. Educators find it extremely difficult to deal with cases of indiscipline that involve outsiders resident in surrounding communities. One would therefore argue that efforts to handle indiscipline matters resulting from these dynamics should be designed from a community-oriented perspective.

The lifestyle in the community learners come from tends to spill over into the school. The school is a miniature community. It reflects the characteristics of the wider community to which it belongs. Criminal activities and problematic habits practised in the community are most likely to emerge in the behaviour of learners at school. Learners from high density suburbs tend to misbehave more than those who come from low density suburbs and rural areas. Netshitangani (2014) affirms that the school is a unit of the broader environment hence the notion that school violence is a mirror image of violence in the wider social context. This implies that school violence is imported from the neighbouring community and wider society. Obadire and Sinthumule (2021) posit that the learners' surrounding community has unimaginable influence on learners' conduct. Masakhane and Chikoko (2016) share a similar view by arguing that violence prevalent in the community may spill over into nearby schools. This implies that in most cases the behaviour problems educators struggle with at school have their roots in the community where learners reside.

Theme 3: Peer group pressure

Participants revealed that learners belong to peer groups within the school system. The peer group sets standards and expectations for behaviour for its members. The peer group thrives on the learner's inherent need to want to belong. In this quest for belongingness, learners conform to the subculture and values of the peer group which might be in conflict to family expectations and the school code of conduct. Behaviours such as smoking are learnt from peers. Participants expressed the following sentiments about the peer group:

Our children misbehave because of influence from bad friends. Their friends teach them to do things we do not allow them to do at home. Which parent in his or her right mind can each a child how to smoke? [CE]

One of the most contributing factors to learner indiscipline is peer pressure. These young people do many wrong things in trying to please their friends. [CTC]

Peer pressure is one of the causes of the discipline problems we encounter in the school. [PE]

You can't separate some of these kids of ours from bad friends. The more you tell them to move away from them, the more they commit to the friendship. [CF]

There is a saying which says, 'birds of the same further flock together'. So, it's simple. Peer influence has a huge hand in the development of learner misconduct. [LSTD]

Educators and parents had converging views on the influence of peers on learner misconduct. Adolescent learners tend to seek identity among friends who approve of their actions. The quest for identity may result in acts of indiscipline especially when the peer group approves of such behaviours. The peer group sets standards and expectations for behaviour for its members. The peer group thrives on the learner's inherent need to want to belong. In this quest for belongingness, the learner conforms to the subculture and values of the peer group which might be in conflict to family expectations and the school code of conduct. Adolescent learners tend to seek identity among friends who approve of their actions. Behaviours such as smoking are learnt from peers. Their friends teach them to do things we do not allow them to do at home. Jinot (2018) agrees and states that many learners misbehave because of pressure from their peers at schools. In the same vein, Nene (2013) contends that on most occasions, learners misbehave to conform to the expectations of the peer group and avoid rejection. Gutuza and Mapolisa (2015) posit that there are some learners who influence others to cause chaos, and this happens when learners meet with other learners with different behaviours that negatively influence them. They further noted that as children grow older the importance of parents decreases as a reference group and as a model for conformity and they begin to relate more with their age mates for the same.

Theme 4: The learner

Participants cited aspects about the individual learner that have a bearing on learner indiscipline. This stems from the notion that each learner is a unique individual with own cognitions, feelings and endowments that influence him or her to make specific decisions about the way they conduct. Personality and developmental changes at puberty stood out as the main sub-themes of this factor.

Personality

Participants shared sentiments that pointed to the fact that learner indiscipline is part and parcel of the learner's character. Participants argued that some learners had an inborn predisposition to misbehave. Personality denotes the overall characteristics that define the individual's behaviour consistently over a long period of time. The following excerpts are presented:

Learners misbehave because they are naughty by nature. [CA]

People are created differently, some were born to be naughty. [CD]

Parents concurred that ill-disciplined learners were born with a character that predisposes them to misbehave all the time. Indiscipline is seen as part of who they are. Educators however observed an attention seeking trait in misbehaving learners and articulated the following:

Some learners misbehave for attention seeking reasons. You find out that such kids do not get enough attention at home so they strive to get it at school. Others, it's the opposite, they get too much attention at home, maybe they are the only child at home, so they come to school with that habit. [CTB]

Attention seekers are a problem. When they misbehave and you punish or rebuke them, they get excited because that is what they wanted in the first place. They are even seen as heroes by their friends because they can stand up and challenge the teacher. [LSTF]

Given the foregoing, it can be argued that personality dimensions with attention seeking tendencies are instrumental in the development of problematic behaviours in learners. Learners with attention seeking personalities commit offences so that they can receive attention in the process. Committing offences and being held to account for them fulfils their obsession for attention and feeling of heroism.

Puberty

Participants noted that most secondary school going learners are in their adolescent stage. During this stage individuals experience physiological and hormonal changes that affect their mood, thoughts and behaviour. The following was articulated:

Most of our kids are in their adolescence. So, the hormones are making them to behave hey wire. [CTF]

As they mature, they discover themselves and want to show us what they assume are their true colours. [LSTC]

Educators noted that some learners had an attention seeking trait in in their personalities. Such a personality is responsible for behaviours that disrupt learning and teaching. These findings are similar to what Nene (2013) identified in a study conducted in KwaZulu Natal where she sought to establish the challenges of managing learner discipline. The study concluded that learners' behaviour problems were largely a result of emotional problems. It was further argued that some learners behave weirdly in class because they require special attention, desire to be in leadership, do not want to be interfered with, or are inclined to hurt others because they were also hurt previously (Nene, 2013). Given the foregoing, it can be argued that personality dimensions with attention seeking tendencies are instrumental in the development of problematic behaviours in learners.

Experiences associated with puberty, largely affecting individuals in their adolescent stage also contribute to learner indiscipline. It was established that most secondary school going learners are in their adolescent stage hence most behaviour problems exhibited by these learners emanate from developmental issues. Jinot (2018) argues that adolescent learners who are 13 to 15 years of age manifest a lack of discipline substantially because they are in the adolescent crisis stage. During this stage individuals experience physiological and hormonal changes that affect their mood, thoughts and behaviour. Across all these changes, the task of adolescence is primarily rooted on the formation of an identity, which is triggered by environmental, social, pubertal, and neurobiological changes. Barbot and Hunter (2012) asserts that most adolescent changes also result in behavioural manifestations such as risk taking, impulsivity, and emotional disturbance. Indiscipline in adolescent learners has been attributed to identity diffusion as expressed in Erickson's theory of psychosocial development. Identity-diffusion status is an identity structure resulting from a lack of exploration associated with a lack of commitment in significant domains. In other words, diffuse adolescents do not attempt to commit, which reflects a low level of psychosocial development, low motivation and often a less mature identity. Identity-diffusion is associated with negative outcomes such as negative self-concept, lack of self confidence, higher conformism, and more risk for alcohol and drug abuse (Crocetti et al, 2014)). Adolescents also experience the Moratorium status. It is known as a period largely characterised by wide exploration, and a quest for identity with intense questioning about possible commitments (Barbot & Hunter, 2012).

Theme 5: The educator

Educators have a hand in the development and manifestation of learner indiscipline. The learner spends most of their time with the educator under normal circumstances. School and classroom conditions created by the educators influence the standard of learner discipline. Participants argued that:

Learner indiscipline can be caused by a situation whereby there are varying levels of expectations from teachers. Some tolerate indiscipline while others do not. Learners take advantage when there is such an imbalance. [PA]

Some teachers fail to attend classes regularly. When learners are left alone, they end up misbehaving. [CF]

Educators sometimes come ill-prepared for the lesson. When learners discover that the educator has not prepared enough teaching material to occupy them for the whole lesson, they start making noise. [PD]

Educators were said to be tolerant of indiscipline while others were accused of inadequate lesson preparation and absenteeism. Educators who do not attend class regularly, who come to class ill-prepared and those who leave the classroom before time contribute to learner indiscipline. When learners become idle, there are more chances of them falling into the temptation of misbehaving. When learners discover that the educator has not prepared enough teaching material to occupy them for the whole lesson, they start making noise. These views are consistent with Magwa and Ngara (2014), who argued that teachers who are often absent from school for no good reasons and who do not respond promptly to the bell after break, for example, contribute to indiscipline. Further, Tauatswala (2018) posits that educators who do not adequately prepare their classwork contribute to learner indiscipline in the sense that learners lose focus when faced with an educator who does not seem to know what he or she is doing.

Theme 6: Human rights

Participants lamented the over-emphasis on human rights by the government. Learners were said to have been given too many rights ahead of educators. The government was blamed for attempting to score political goals through overloading learners with rights without emphasising on responsibilities that accompany them. As a result, learners have developed a superiority complex which makes it difficult for them to show respect to adults at home and at school. Such learner attitudes have escalated the levels of indiscipline in schools to unprecedented levels. Participants are quoted as follows:

Too much rights and freedoms were given to learners by the government. These rights have rendered educators and parents powerless to the extent that they can't control the behaviour of learners. [PE]

Government's appetite for political gains gave too much rights to learners without emphasis on responsibility. Learners were overloaded with rights without teaching them what they entail. [PF]

Children now think they are equal or even superior to adults because of human rights. Because of this, they do what they want. They know they can get you arrested if you decide to beat them. [CF]

Principals and parents of learners in urban schools highlighted that learners' awareness of their rights and an attitude of wanting to exercise them to the full has led to the high levels of indiscipline in schools. Educators and parents fail to exercise their power where learners' rights are over-emphasised. Human rights have given learners the habit of being disrespectful.

Surprisingly, document analysis of the school code of conduct for learners revealed that learner rights are articulated in the context of responsibility. The section on, 'Responsibility of learners,' partially reads:

- Attend school regularly, no absence without reporting
- Show respect
- Do not disrupt teaching and learning
- Do not damage school property
- Do not take other people's possessions without permission
- Do not abuse others (verbally, emotionally, physically or sexually) etc. [CCA; CCC]

It would appear from the above cited precepts that responsibilities are attached to learners' rights articulated in school regulations handbooks. In exercising their constitutional rights, learners are required to attend school regularly, complete schoolwork, respect others and avoid indulging in any behaviours considered to be in violation of school regulations. However, participants claimed that learner rights were given without an emphasis on responsibility. Such disparity could be indicative of the fact that not all sections catered for in official school documents are implemented to the latter. The same might also reveal a gap in terms of the lack of clarity on whose responsibility it is to train learners on responsibilities attached to human rights. While government might have expected educators to carry out that responsibility, educators could have also waited upon the government to take up the responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Contributing factors to learner indiscipline are family setting, community setting, peer pressure, the learner, the educator, human rights and biological factors. Within the family setting, sub-factors such as parental style, quality of relationship between learner and parents, and the socio-economic status of the family influence the direction of learner conduct in a dynamic manner. Permissive, negligent and authoritarian parental styles produce learners who exhibit behaviour problems at school. Substances and criminal activities taking place in the wider community that surrounds the school exert a direct influence on learner indiscipline. Gangsterism and drug abuse filter to the school situation and destabilise teaching and learning.



Association with friends culminating into the creation of a peer group that develops a subculture of notoriety has a hand on the state of indiscipline in schools. Educators contribute to learner indiscipline by late coming, failing to attend to classes regularly and coming to class ill-prepared. Biological, social, and developmental factors exerting force on the learner make the learner to be susceptible to problematic behaviours. The introduction of learners' rights was made in such a manner that learners felt they were superior to adults and thus created in them an attitude of disrespect.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding was provided by Central University of Technology, Free State for a doctorate research study.



REFERENCES

- Banja, M.K. (2013) *Teachers as Agents of Pupil Indiscipline*. Lusaka: University of Zambia.
- Barbot, B. and Hunter, S.R. (2012) Developmental Changes in Adolescence and Risks for Delinquency. In Grigorenko, E.L (2014) (Ed) *Handbook for Juvenile Forensic Psychology and Psychiatry*. New York: Springer Science.
- Choongwa, G. H (2018) *Fundamental of Applied Research Methodology: A complete Guide for Scholars Researchers in Social Sciences*. Mbabane: Southern African Research Foundation for Economic Development.
- Creswell, J.W., Ebersohn, I., Eloff R., Ferreira, N. V., Ivankova, J. D., Jansen, J., Nieuwenhuis, J., Pieterse, V. L, and Plano, C (2016) *First Steps in Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Crocetti, E. Meeus, W.H.J., Ritchie, R.A., Meca, A. and Schwartz, S.J. (2014) Adolescent Identity: The Key to Unravelling Associations between Family Relationships and Problem Behaviours? In Sheier, L.M. and Hansen, W.B. (2014) *Parenting and Teen Drug Use*, Chapter 5. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Du Plessis, P (2015) Learner Discipline in Crisis: Can South African Schools Overcome the problem? *International Journal of Educational Sciences*, 9(3):383-384.
- Ettekal, A. and Mahoney, J.L. (2017) *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Out-of-School Learning: Ecological Systems Theory*. Online: <https://www.sagepub.com>. Retrieved: 4 May 2020.
- Gutuza, R.F. and Mapolisa, T. (2015) An Analysis of the Causes of Indiscipline Amongst Secondary School Pupils in Nyunga District. *Global Journal of Advanced Research*, 2(7):164-171.
- Ibrahim, M.M. (2015) *Teachers' Perception of the Causes of Indiscipline among Learners: A Case of Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State*. Online: <https://www.iprojectmaster.com> Retrieved 7 September 2020.
- Jinot, B.L. (2018) The Causes and Lack of Discipline Among Secondary School Learners in Mauritius. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 9(1):35-46.
- Kagoiya, P. and Kagema, N. (2018) Examining Factors Contributing to Indiscipline in Primary Schools in Nyeri Central Sub-County, Kenya. *Pedagogical Research Journal*, 3:1-8.
- Kiwale, J.A. (2017) *Factors Leading to Indiscipline in Secondary Schools in Siha District Council Tanzania*. Dar es Salaam: Open University of Tanzania.
- Kourkoutas, E.E and Wohuter, C.C (2013). Handling learner discipline problems: A psychosocial whole school approach. *Koers-Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 78(3):1-8.
- Magwa, S. and Ngara, R. (2014) Learner indiscipline in Schools. *Review of Arts and Humanities Journal*, 3(2):79-88.
- Masakhane, S.D. and Chikoko, V. (2016). Corporal Punishment Contestations, Paradoxes and Implications for School Leadership: A Case of two South African High Schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 36(4):1-8.



- Netshitangani, T. (2014) Causes of School-Based Violence in South African Public Schools: Application of Normalisation Theory to Understand the Phenomenon Through Educators' Perspectives. *Mediterranean Journal of School Sciences*, 5(20):1394-1402.
- Ngwokabuenui, P.Y (2015) Students' Indiscipline: Types, Causes and Possible Solutions: The Case of Secondary Schools in Cameroon. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(22):64-72.
- Obadire, O.T and Sinthumule, D.A. (2021) Learner discipline in the post-corporal punishment era: What an experience! *South African Journal of Education*, 41(2):1-8.
- Rehman, A. and Alharti, K (2016) An Introduction to Research Paradigms. *International Journal of Educational Investigations*, 3(8):51-59.
- Rhalmi, M. (2016) *Discipline and Causes of Indiscipline*. Online: <https://www.myenglishpages.com/blog/discipline-andcauses-of-indiscipline/> Retrieved 29 April 2020.
- Tauatswala, T.T. (2018) *Educator Perceptions of Power Relations and Discipline in Rural Schools*. (M.Ed Dissertation) Pretoria: University of Pretoria.
- Upindi, N.M. (2013) *Views of Teachers and Parents Regarding Factors that Contribute to Learners' Indiscipline in Secondary Schools: A Case of Selected Schools in the Khomas Education Region*. (M.Ed Dissertation) Windhoek: University of Namibia.