The Role of the School Social Worker in Promoting the Psychosocial Well-being of Vulnerable Children within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit Primary Schools in KwaZulu-Natal

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis, **"The role of the school social worker in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children within the Esikhaleni Senkosi circuit primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal,"** was composed by myself in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in Social Work at the University of Zululand. I declare that this thesis has not been previously submitted for any degree or professional qualification in any Higher Education Institution and all consulted sources have been acknowledged through citation and referencing.

Dedication

This piece of work is dedicated to my late mother, Zanele Ndlovu, the sweetest and most selfless person who would do anything for her children, and to my loving family who has supported me all my life. I also dedicate this work to the Department of Education (DoE) and the Department of Social Development for granting me the permission to reach the study's participants (social workers).

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- I would firstly like to give a word of thanks to the Almighty God. For He has good plans for me, plans not to harm me but to make me prosper and give me hope (Jeremiah 29 vs 11). This is the verse that kept me going, even in difficult times and made me persevere and shine.

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Abstract

The number of vulnerable children has been growing globally, with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest number. Mostly, vulnerable children are orphaned and neglected, and it is therefore important that they are provided with psychosocial well-being. However, this may not always be the case as some families are not equipped with relevant skills to provide the psychosocial support required by vulnerable children. If the psychosocial needs of vulnerable children are unmet, they are at risk of experiencing emotional, physical, and psychological issues, which negatively affect their academic performance. In this sense, the role played by school social workers can never be underestimated as they are responsible for the promotion of the psychosocial well-being of school children. The study was triggered by the minimal psychosocial support offered to vulnerable school children, due to a lack of professionals in schools such as social workers, psychologists, and counsellors. On the other hand, neglect is the daunting problem facing most school pupils, dominantly orphaned children. The study was aimed at investigating the role of school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools, particularly those who are orphaned and neglected. The interpretive paradigm was employed, using exploratory and descriptive research designs in a qualitative manner. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 school social workers and were purposefully selected from all 26 primary schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit. Data was analysed qualitatively through the thematic analysis method. The results established several psychosocial problems facing vulnerable children in schools, dominantly, a lack of a birth certificate, bullying, low self-esteem, financial constraints, neglect and emotional and physical abuse. Various interventions

are used to tackle psychosocial problems of vulnerable children from case work to group work and community work. However, it has been noticed that these programmes are not effectively implemented due to less manpower and the high number of schools.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

DOE	Department of Education
DSD	Department of Social Development
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LSA	Learner Support Agent
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-Profit Organisation
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
SA	South Africa
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Service Professions
SAPS	South African Police Service
SIAS	Screening Identification Assessment and Support

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This is an introductory chapter on the role of the school social worker in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. This chapter firstly discusses the background and context of the study. It then moves to the discussion of the problem under investigation, and then highlights the study aim, objectives, and research questions respectively. Moreover, the significance of the study, scope and delimitations, and knowledge dissemination is provided. Lastly, the chapter provides the structure of the thesis and the conclusion of the chapter.

1.1. Background of the study

School social workers have an immense role to play in supporting the psychosocial well-being of school children, usually presented in a range of challenges in their everyday lives such as bullying, neglect, abuse, to mention but a few. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (section 150) emphasises that a child needs care and protection if in a state of physical and mental neglect and even orphaned or abandoned. The problem of neglect to most school children was observed by the East African Community (2020) to be one of the challenges of psychosocial well-being, referring to both short-term and long-term mental health impacts in most children. Morantz, Cole, Vreeman, Ayaya, Ayuku and Braitstein (2013: 8) too observed material and educational neglect as forms of maltreatment experienced by orphaned children and youth living with extended families. Wilkinson and Bowyer (2017) also noted neglect as a form of maltreatment experienced by most children. A study by Herruzo, Raya Trenas, Pino and Herruzo (2020) on the comparison between poverty and neglect found that externalising and internalising problems, school problems, and lack of adaptive skills were associated with children facing neglect rather than those who faced poverty. It is therefore for this reason the present study was triggered by neglect as the daunting problem facing most school pupils, dominantly orphaned children. It is evident that neglect can impact negatively on school children in terms of their academic performance; as Dahake,

Kale, Dadpe, Kendre, Shep, and Dhore (2018: 43) indicated child abuse and neglect have physical, psychological, behavioural and social consequences on children.

This study focused on the role played by school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children, which is a major concern to most South African children. Often vulnerable children are neglected and orphaned. It is thus significant that when orphaned children lose their parents due to any cause of death, they should be provided with psychosocial support. This could be from their extended families or significant others. However, this may not always be the case as some families are not equipped with the relevant skills to provide the psychosocial support required by these vulnerable children. This is supported by Ntuli, Mokgatle and Madiba (2020: 11) as having observed that if the emotional, psychological and physical needs of vulnerable children are neglected and not met, they are more likely to experience feelings of loneliness, pain, persistent grief, sadness, depression and anxiety, which result in poor psychosocial well-being.

There are different understandings and explanations of what an orphan is. An orphan is a child who has lost both biological parents due to death and has no one to care for them (Children's Act 38 of 2005: 15). Meintjes and Hall (2013: 88) noted orphans as coming in three categories, which include maternal orphan, paternal orphan and doubled orphan. Meintjies and Hall (2013) further explained that a maternal orphan is the orphan who has lost a mother; a paternal orphan is an orphan who has lost a father, whereas a doubled orphan is an orphan who has lost both parents. The number of orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa has been growing at an alarming rate. Statistics South Africa (2019: 20) reported, 2.2 million orphans in South Africa in the year 2016, then more recently, Hall (2019: 218) reported 2.5 million orphans in South Africa in 2018, whereby the KwaZulu-Natal Province had the highest number of orphans (111 000 double orphans were reported in 2018).

Several studies have revealed that many orphaned and vulnerable children are faced with psychological, emotional and physical issues, compared to non-orphans, as the death of the parents and the care they receive after their parent's death impacts on their psychosocial wellbeing (Caserta, 2017: 12). Kibachio and Mutie (2018: 20) revealed that orphans who are normally moved to extended families after the death of their parents become the victims of neglect and abuse as it is of great difficulty for

those family members to take care of both their own children as well as the orphans due to socio-economic issues. The study by Mwoma and Pillay (2015: 4) confirmed that there was minimal provision of psychosocial support to orphans in primary schools due to a lack of professionals such as social workers, psychologists and counsellors. Therefore, the role played by school social workers can never be underestimated as they are responsible for the promotion of the psychosocial well-being of children. Therefore, the present study sought to lay the strong foundation regarding the role played by school social workers to vulnerable children.

1.2. Contextualisation

The present study focused on all 26 primary schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi circuit in the Umhlathuze Municipality, under King Cetshwayo District, to address the issue of the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children, particularly those in primary schools. Notably, there are many contributory factors to child vulnerability in most South African schools which affect the psychosocial well-being of children and lead to their negative academic performance. Therefore, psychosocial well-being is essential for all human beings as it promotes positive human development (Hlalele, 2012). Linley, et al., (2009), as cited by Negovan (2010), defined psychosocial wellbeing as "a wide range of issues including, but not limited to, mental, emotional, social, physical, economic, cultural, and spiritual health and, consequently, it has been defined in numerous ways". According to Tadesse, Dereje and Belay (2014: 294), children's psychosocial well-being affects every aspect of their lives from their ability to learn, to be healthy, to play, to be productive and relate to other people as they grow. It is in this regard that Senefeld, Strasser, Campbell, and Perrin (2011); Thurman, Jarobi and Rice (2012); Tsang, Wong and Lo (2012) and; Phillips, (2015) proposed some themes to be used to measure the psychosocial well-being of school children, which include: school progress or improvement; HIV medication adherence; the child engages in cooperative and kind behaviours, e.g. being considerate of other's feelings; emotional symptoms, e.g. being happy; the child interacts with family and peers; peer relationships, e.g. interaction with other children as opposed to preference for being alone and; self-acceptance. Furthermore, the study by Ntuli, Mokgatle and Madiba (2020: 11) revealed that maternal death of the orphan's parent had

psychological problems that were expressed through anxiety, pain, prolonged grief and hopelessness, which in turn had a negative impact on their psychosocial well-being. Zhou (2012: 29) also found maternal orphans and double orphans to be at risk of developing psychosocial issues. Therefore, the provision of psychosocial well-being to orphans by school social workers is of paramount importance. This is in line with Ntuli Mokgatle and Madiba (2020:13) who stated that orphans who are not provided with psychosocial support drop out of schools after the loss of their parents as they are hindered from developing coping strategies and mechanisms, which in turn impact on their poor psychosocial well-being. One can deduct from what these authors are saying that orphans without psychosocial support tend to experience psychosocial problems.

It is under this background that the role of school social workers is of outmost important. A social worker plays various roles which may differ, depending on the setting in which they are practising. In a school setting, which is the context of this study, the role of a social worker is to address social and psychological issues of school children which may hinder their academic progress. NASW (2010) defined a school social worker as a social worker working within a school setting to provide emotional well-being to school leaners to support their academic performance. Moreover, Jaycox, Kataoka, Stein, Langley and Wong (2012), as cited by Shokane, Masoga and Blitz (2020:4) observed the role of school social workers as working with leaners individually, in groups and to provide support for families to address emotional and social issues that affect the child's well-being. According to Kemp (2014: 23), "the school social worker serves a crucial role and functions as mediator, negotiator, consultant and advocates for what is in the best interest of the client system". School social workers advocate for the rights of children to education, ensure that learners are emotionally, physical and psychological present in the classroom, enhance respect and dignity for all learners through working with the school, families and communities to promote good teaching and learning for school children (NASW, 2012: 1). School social workers work within a multi-disciplinary team working with diverse groups of other professionals, including educators, therapists, doctors, nurses, psychologists and counsellors (Kemp, 2014; Van Sittert, 2016 &; Shokane, Masoga & Blitz, 2020). School social workers should ensure collaboration between themselves and school

teachers, which significantly helps teachers to report cases of neglect, physical and sexual abuse so that school social workers can facilitate the case report that will help in determining if the child is in need of care and protection (Van Sittert, 2016: 25).

There are various vulnerabilities experienced by children such as poverty, violence, abandoned, learning or mental disabilities, malnourishment, HIV/AIDS, neglect and orphaned (Phillips, 2015:11). The present study focuses on neglected and orphaned children. Neglect is the failure to care for someone who is unable to care for themselves, cannot provide sufficient supervision as well as failure to provide needs for which the victim cannot provide for themselves. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 refer to neglect as a failure to meet the child's basic emotional, physical, social, and intellectual needs. Neglect may manifest in different forms, such as supervisory neglect, physical neglect, medical neglect, educational neglect, and emotional neglect (Parkinson, Bromfield, Mcdougall, and Salveron, 2017: 4). Neglect has long-term consequences that could include behaviour problems and attention disorders. Any child may be a victim of neglect; however, neglect is prominent in orphaned children as they no longer stay with biological parents. This concurs with Kibachio and Mutie (2018) who revealed that orphans who are being taken care of by extended families in poor households are at risk of being abused and neglected. The study conducted by Hermenau, Eggert, Landolt, and Hecker (2015) found that orphans in Tanzania are at risk of experiencing neglect. Neglected children are often associated with behaviours related to aggression, depression and anxiety. On the other hand, they could also experience some delays both cognitively and emotionally in terms of their development. Biçakçi, Er, and Aral (2016) stated that neglect can be physical whereby a parent or guardian intentionally fails to provide food, clothing, education, accommodation and medical attention to children, or emotionally whereby there is lack of provision of emotional support, love and attention. The authors further articulated that both these types of abuse may impact negatively on the development of a child. There are several effects that are associated with children who are victims of emotional and physical abuse which include feelings of worthlessness, being aggressive, feeling both hate and love for their parents, being afraid of being hurt or injured, avoiding topics that relate to domestic violence and developing insecure ambivalent attachment (Biçakçi, Er, & Aral, 2016). The study by Morantz et al (2013) found out that orphaned

children were faced with school and material neglect as the child lacked food or a school uniform which prevented them from attending school. The study conducted by Chuong and Operario (2012) revealed that "children face psychosocial challenges following the separation or death of a linear caregiver, which might then lead to educational problems".

1.3. Problem statement

The role played by school social workers can never be underestimated as they are responsible for the promotion of the psychosocial well-being of school children. Conversely, vulnerable children, particularly those orphaned and neglected, seem to be presented with several challenges in a school context. A study conducted by Mshengu (2014) to understand how orphaned children experience psychosocial support in Umhlathuze High Schools, found that a lack of emotional support, financial constraints, relocation and a change in living arrangements, and poor academic performance, to be stumbling blocks in orphans (Mshengu, 2014: 81). This concurred with Kibachio and Mutie (2018: 20) who revealed that orphans who are normally moved to extended families after the death of their parents become the victims of neglect and abuse as it is a great difficulty for those parents to take care of both their own children as well as the orphans, due to socio-economic issues.

On the other hand, orphaned children are faced with psychological, emotional and physical issues compared to non-orphans as the death of the parents and the care they receive after their parent's death impact on their psychosocial well-being (Caserta, 2017: 12). The study by Mwoma and Pillay (2015: 4) found out that there was minimal provision of psychosocial support to orphans in primary schools due to a lack of professionals such as social workers, psychologists, and counsellors. According to Biçakçi, Er and Aral (2016: 222), neglect affects the psychosocial well-being of the child and is viewed as one of the contributory factors towards vulnerability.

Several studies have focused on the role of school-teachers in supporting vulnerable children in schools in the South African context (Wood & Goba, 2011; Hoosen, 2015; Mwoma & Pillay, 2015; Sibeko, 2018, and Ringani, 2018); but none on the role of

school social worker in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children, which the study sought to address.

1.4. Aim and objectives

The study was aimed at investigating the role of the school social worker in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

The following objectives were formulated, to achieve the aim:
- To identify psychosocial problems impacting on the academic progress of vulnerable children in schools.
- To explore which interventions are used by school social workers to address the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children in schools.
- To assess related legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.
- To establish the challenges faced by school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.
- To solicit suggestions on improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

1.5. Research questions

- How do school social workers identify psychosocial problems that impact on the academic performance of vulnerable children in schools?
- How are the interventions used by school social workers making an impact on addressing the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools?
- How relevant are related legislations used by school social workers in addressing the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools?
- What are the challenges faced by school social workers in addressing the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools?

- What suggestions can be solicited in improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools?

1.6. Significance of the study

The study reveals a pressing need for school social workers in schools to push for government interventions and provide several ways to overcome the neglect of orphaned children and societies as whole. The presence of school social workers in schools will enhance a collaborative working relationship between school social workers and school-teachers, which will in turn enhance a good teaching and learning environment for school pupils. The findings of the study will in turn help school children, vulnerable children, who find the school environment to be a completely dreaded place due to their home and family-related problems. Additionally, the findings of this study will complement other related studies on similar matters. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the body of already existing knowledge in the social work discipline. Seemingly, there are very few in-depth studies, such as (Dahake et al, 2020; Morantz et al, 2013; Ntuli, Mokgatle, & Madiba, 2020), on neglected orphans conducted in the South African context.

1.7. Scope and delimitations of the study

The present study investigated the role of school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in primary schools. The study only targeted primary schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit in the Umhlathuze Local Municipality under the King Cetshwayo District, in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, due to financial constraints. The present study only targeted school social workers as the study's participants as they have experience and knowledge on the psychosocial problems school children are faced with and are responsible for the promotion of their psychosocial well-being. A total number of 12 social workers from the Department of Education, Department of Social Development and one Non-

Governmental Organisation (NGO) who were working within these primary schools were selected using purposive sampling.

1.8. Knowledge dissemination

The dissertation will be deposited in the institutional repository of the University of Zululand for public and global access. The research study also published a research paper on the findings through an accredited journal in the field of social work. The other findings of the study were also disseminated to the Department of Education in the KwaZulu-Natal Province as the target audience by participating in local conferences. Moreover, the researcher also participated in local awareness campaigns to disseminate information on vulnerable children in schools and the role of school social workers regarding their role of promoting the psychosocial well-being of these children.

1.9. Preliminary chapter division

Chapter One: Introduction and general orientation of the study

This introductory chapter provided a background and context of vulnerable children and the role of school social workers in schools. The problem underpinning the study is articulated together with the research objective and questions presented to address the problem of the study. The chapter also provided definitions of terms that were used in the study.

Chapter Two: Literature review and theoretical framework

Chapter Two reviews literature based on studies conducted in relation to vulnerable children's schools; interventions used by school social workers including policies and legislations and the relevant theoretical framework suitable for the study.

Chapter Three: Research methodology

Chapter Three describes the proposed research methodology to address the aim and objectives of the study, and provides justification for the chosen data collection tools, and analysis plan.

Chapter Four: Presentation of data, Interpretation and analysis

This chapter presents collected data from school social workers in terms of themes and sub-themes.

Chapter Five: Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations

This chapter critically discusses key findings of gathered data from school social workers. The chapter also provides conclusions and the proposed recommendations of the study.

1.10. Conclusion

This chapter provided an introduction and background to lay the foundations of the psychosocial well-being, vulnerability and the role of school social workers in the context of the study. It stated the problem underpinning the study, aim, research objectives, significance, scope and delimitations, and knowledge dissemination. The study was underpinned by neglect and the minimal provision of the psychosocial wellbeing of most school children as the most cited challenges in literature. The following chapter (2) reviews related literature in relation to vulnerable children and the role of the school social worker.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter (introductory chapter) presented the introduction to, and background of the study. This chapter reviews literature on the role of the school social worker in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. The review of related literature in this chapter is relevant as most SA studies have put focus on the role of teachers in providing support to vulnerable children in schools, and none on the role played by the school social workers. School social workers are always equipped with necessary competencies to address barriers to learning and provide psychosocial support to school children. The following four set objectives of the study guided the review of related literature in this chapter:

a)   To identify how school social workers, address psychosocial problems impacting the academic progress of vulnerable children in schools.

b)   To explore which interventions are used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

c)   To assess related legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

d)   To establish the challenges faced by school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. This chapter also discusses the ecological systems theory as a theoretical framework employed in supporting the current research. The first section of the reviewed literature covers the definition of the concept of the study.

2.2. Describing vulnerable children

The high number of vulnerable children has been a global phenomenal issue affecting all the countries of the world, including South Africa. According to Mwoma and Pillay (2015), Sub-Saharan Africa has had the biggest percentage of vulnerable children globally. Vulnerability has negative effects on the person's life which may be physical, psychological, social, spiritual or developmental in nature (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2016: 42). Several studies (Hlalele, 2012; Hoosen, 2015, and Nduna & Jewkes, 2012) have defined vulnerable children incorporating similar elements in the definition. Hoosen (2015: 11) viewed vulnerable children as children who encounter emotional, physical, psychological and social challenges resulting from a countless number of factors. Hoosen (2015) further noted vulnerable children as requiring support in their development. Hlalele (2012: 66), as cited by Munyati (2006), defined a vulnerable child as a child that lives in hard conditions, for example a child living in a poor household with a sick parent, children in child-headed households, those depending on old, frail or disability guardians, and those children in households that undertake additional dependency through taking in orphaned children. For Nduna and Jewkes (2012), vulnerable children are those children who are in poverty; children who have experienced abuse and are placed in institutions or child-headed households and those living with a disability. The present study focuses on vulnerable children who are orphaned and neglected.

2.3. Psychosocial problems impacting on academic progress of vulnerable children in schools

2.3.1. Causes of child vulnerability

Numerous causes and factors contributing to child vulnerability have been noted in literature by several authors (Skinner & Davids, 2006; Simbay, 2006; Mwoma & Pillay, 2015; Hlalele, 2012). Skinner and Davids (2006), as cited by Mwoma and Pillay (2015:2), identified sexual and emotional abuse and neglect, disability, limited access to services, HIV/AIDS, child-headed households, and poverty as problems that contribute to vulnerability in children. Simbay (2006: 1) noted a lack of access to food,

education, shelter, healthcare, and clothing as indicators of measuring vulnerability in children. Mwoma and Pillay (2015) were of the view that vulnerable children who live with elderly grandparents, who also need to be taken care of, or poor relatives, are at risk of not having a decent living, less schooling opportunities, and unmet psychosocial needs. Learners are vulnerable because of orphanhood, neglect, a lack of access to a basic set of school uniforms and children who are heading households (Hlalele, 2012: 63). Moreover, emotional problems, disabilities, direct experiences of physical or sexual violence, substance abuse, or severe chronic illness, are factors that result in vulnerability among children (Olowokere & Okanlawon, 2016: 42).

2.3.2. Psychosocial problems of vulnerable children

In 2016, Statistic South Africa (2019: 20) reported that 2 245 000 million orphans live in South Africa. KwaZulu-Natal, which is the second most populated province in South Africa and the focus of the present study, has been marked to have the highest number of orphans at 679 000, followed by the Eastern Cape with 417 000. Seemingly, orphans experience several psychosocial problems. Recently, Alem (2020) conducted a study on "Investigating psychosocial problems of orphaned children in primary schools" which revealed that orphans in primary schools in Injibara were faced with psychosocial problems that include financial problems, poor nutrition, showed problematic behaviours both in the classroom and outside the classroom, loneliness, constant worries about their life, highly marginalised and unnoticed by the school community and other community members, poor health, lower participation in school activities and plenty of anxieties. This concurred with Saraswat and Unisa (2017) who also highlighted loneliness and helplessness, behavioural disorders, low self-esteem, depression and stress as psychosocial problems experienced by orphans and vulnerable children. Similar psychosocial problems were also noted in the study by Simbayi (2006: 12) which highlighted depression, feelings of loneliness and externalised behaviours, such as aggression, to be psychosocial problems facing orphans. On the other hand, Ngwu, Nnama-Okechukwu and Obasi-Igwe, (2017: 201) noted "abused, stigmatised, discriminated against, their inheritances denied after the death of their parents, and post trauma after the death of their parents" as problems

associated with vulnerability. Although there are several highlighted psychosocial problems facing vulnerable children, loneliness is dominant.

Child neglect remains an on-going concern that affects all the countries of the world and may be caused by various risk factors. Parkinson et al (2017: 38) identified various risk factors that lead to child neglect such as domestic violence, parent-child relationship, family structure, family/household size and socio-economic status. Other causes of neglect by parents or caregivers to their children include stress in the family, a low level of education, immature personality, having a personality disorder, aggressive personality, underdeveloped sense of responsibility, being a victim of neglect and addiction to alcohol, medication or drugs (Biçakçi, Er, and & Aral, 2016: 224). Morantz et al (2013: 10) identified stigma, alcohol abuse, living with non-biological parents and poverty as the contributory factors that lead to child neglect in orphaned children. The study by Pillay (2016: 3) found that orphans and vulnerable children who search for alternative living arrangements, particularly community-based homes, were faced with abuse and neglect from caregivers.

As far as aforementioned psychosocial problems are presented, school social workers have a significant role to play in addressing them to promote vulnerable children's academic success at school and their psychosocial well-being thereof. This correlated with Olowokere and Okanlawon (2016: 42) who articulated that it is optimal to support vulnerable children in school to promote their well-being, lifelong achievements and academic success as the school environment is the second home of children. Pretorius (2020: 150) emphasised the significant role that is played by school social workers in the school context as a way of encouraging good academic performance and the overall well-being of children.

2.4. Interventions used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being

Psychosocial support is an essential component for every vulnerable child as it addresses not only the physical needs of vulnerable children, but also the emotional, spiritual and mental needs of vulnerable children that are important for positive human development (Ngwu, Nnama-Okechukwu, & Obasi-Igwe, 2017: 204). School social

workers can perform a variety of interventions, depending on the need or psychosocial problem presented to meet the social and emotional needs of school children, including those who are vulnerable. Kemp (2013), as cited by Van Sittert (2016: 24), highlighted crisis intervention, grief counselling, violence prevention and case management as interventions used by social workers in schools. Kemp (2014: 33-34) noted "consultation with school staff, parents and other professionals; collaboration and co-ordination of services/programmes relating to social work within the education department which ensure a holistic service to the learner; community work; crisis intervention and case work and group work" as methods used by school social workers to eliminate barriers to learning.

2.4.1. Programmes for promoting the psychosocial well-being of school children

The Western Cape Education Department (2020) introduced psychosocial support services that are rendered by social workers, psychologists, counsellors, social auxiliary workers and care and support assistants whereby they provide individual and group counselling and HIV and TB Life Skills Programmes. The Western Cape Education Department (2020: 2) also highlighted other classroom programmes such as dance, art, breathing exercises and drama to help learners build resilience practices for emotional and sensory regulation/self-management. The Department of Basic Education has developed the Psychosocial Support Strategy for learners in the Educational System of South Africa 2015-2020 (Vergottini & Weyers, 2020). It has been revealed that the strategy was aimed at defining the scope of psychosocial support in the education sector to help identify learners' psychosocial needs as well as to indicate how existing resources and structures may be used to effectively assist learners in accessing the support they may need (Vergottini, & Weyers, 2020: 133).

Social workers have been noted as being involved in various levels of rendering psychosocial services to learners in a school context. Those psychosocial services include representing the learner, empowering, encouraging and advocating among others (Pretorius, 2020:150). It was however noted by Mwoma and Pillay (2015: 4) that there was the minimal provision of psychosocial support to orphans in primary

schools due to a lack of professionals such as a social worker, psychologist and or counsellor. Pretorius (2020: 150) observed school social workers working far way better when in collaboration with school-teachers and other professionals involved in easily identifying problems encountered by school children and providing interventions by linking learners to relevant resources and systems available.

2.4.2. Deficiencies in programmes for vulnerable children in schools

There has seemed to be a lack of sufficient and relevant available programmes for addressing issues facing vulnerable children in many schools as the emotional and social needs of leaners are usually attended by Life Orientation teachers (Wood & Goba, 2011; Thabethe, Mbatha & Mtapuri, 2016, and Mwoma & Pillay, 2015. On the other hand, school-teachers may not possess requisite competencies to promote the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children.

The study conducted by Wood and Goba (2011: 284) reported that programmes offered by teachers for orphans and vulnerable children are not effective as they are presented with some challenges, based on this matter, some teachers may not possess the necessary skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes to act on the emotional and material needs of vulnerable children. This corresponds with the study by Hoosen (2015: 66) which found out that teachers are inadequately trained to cope with child vulnerability in schools and some teachers are not familiar with the policies and procedures that are put in place to meet the needs of vulnerable children in schools.

A similar problem was also identified in the study by Naidoo (2018: 153) who articulated that there were insufficiencies in training and development programmes which impacted on the delivery of psychosocial and educational support for orphans and vulnerable children in schools. The study by Ringani (2018) also revealed that educators were not adequately trained to attend to the needs of orphaned learners as they lacked the required skills and knowledge. Although the school plays an immense role in supporting vulnerable children, in isolation it can never be guaranteed to provide full support if there are no good relationships between the school and families/communities. Thabethe, Mbatha and Mtapuri (2016: 366) found that there is less engagement between the family, school and community as the school provides

more support for orphans and vulnerable children while family support structures are in disorder. With this say in mind, the significant role played by school social workers can never be underrated as they are trained and equipped with requisite skills, knowledge, attitudes and values to respond to every learner's needs, vulnerable children included.

2.5. Guiding principles, policies and legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial wellbeing of children

Legislation and laws play an important role in governing human behaviour and resolving conflict amongst people in our societies. Social workers apply various legislation in practice, depending on the setting in which they are working, whether a school, hospital, correctional facility or a military setting, among others.

2.5.1. Children's Act 38 of 2005

In the context of the present study, the most predominant legislation that is used by social workers concerning psychosocial problems of children in schools is the Children's Act 38 of 2005, in collaboration with other legislation. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 advocates the rights of children, promotes the care and protection of children and ensures that the best interest of the child is of paramount importance. Section 150 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 states that a child who has been mentally and physically neglected, who has been abused or deliberately neglected, maltreated, or degraded by their caregiver should be offered counselling prevention and early intervention service, mediation, problem solving or be referred to the appropriate personal for further interventions. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 further stipulates that a child in need of care and protection must be removed and placed in a place of safe care, considering the best interest of the child.

2.5.2. Constitution of South Africa 108 of 1996

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 is a supreme law that all professions must adhere to, social workers included. This constitution, under the Bill of Rights in Section 28, which addresses children's rights, highlights numerous rights that are applicable to children. Included among the numerous children's rights, is a right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation; to basic nutrition, shelter, basic healthcare services and social services; and not to be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that place at risk the child's wellbeing, education, physical or mental health, or spiritual, moral or social development, all of which apply in the context of the present study. For school social workers dealing with the psychosocial well-being of school children as one of their roles in a school setting, it is imperative that they always take these rights into account.

2.5.3. The National Policy and White Paper on Social Welfare

The National Policy and Strategy on the Prevention and Management of child abuse, neglect and exploitation (2004) was developed to prevent the incidents of child abuse, neglect and exploitation, and to ensure that cases of children faced with maltreatment were attended to effectively. This policy was also designed to provide counselling for children and family to enhance healing and ensure that such maltreatment does not take place anymore (Vergottini &Weyers, 2020: 133). On the other hand, the White Paper on Social Welfare (Republic of South Africa, 1997) comes to play.

The White Paper on Social Welfare is applicable in various situations and contexts, although in the present study it was applied to vulnerable children in the school setting. The White Paper on Social Welfare stipulated South Africa's commitment to a developmental approach in providing child protection services, putting more emphasis on prevention, rather than treatment. These policies (National Policy and Strategy on the Prevention and Management of child abuse, neglect and exploitation and the White Paper on Social Welfare) have been put in place to significantly assist school social workers to tackle intrinsic barriers, extrinsic barriers, pedagogical barriers and social

barriers that negatively affect learning by school children (Kemp, 2014; Department of Basic Education, 2014; Van Sittert, 2016, and Vergottini & Weyers, 2020).

2.5.4. Global standards for school social workers

There are several standards that serve as guiding principles on the daily operation of school social workers. Generally, those standards vary from one country to another. The Department of Public Instruction (2008) for North Carolina Professional School Social Work Standards developed five standards as a guide for school social workers, which include that:

(i) school social workers demonstrate leadership in the school;

(ii) school social workers promote a respectful environment for diverse populations;

(iii) school social workers apply the skills and knowledge of their profession within educational settings;

(iv) school social workers support student learning; and

(v) school social workers actively reflect on their practice.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) developed three guiding principles and eleven standards for school social workers, namely the Education/School Reform, Social Justice, and the Multitier Interventions (NASW, 2012: 3-5). The standards include ethics and values; qualification; assessment; intervention; decision-making and practice evaluation; record keeping; workload management; professional development; cultural competence; interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration; and advocacy. The Michigan Department of Education (2019) adopted six standards from the 11 of NASW's which include ethics and values; assessment; intervention; decision-making and practice evaluation; leadership and collaboration; and advocacy, and these standards help guide the performance of school social workers in service delivery. The Michigan Department of Education (2019) added the seventh standard which is human rights and social and economic justice. In the context of this study, ethics and values; assessment; intervention; decision-making and practice evaluation; leadership and collaboration; and advocacy were applied. In terms of ethics and values, school social workers should be guided

by South African Council for Social Services Professional (SACSSP) ethics and values and the National Association of Social Workers NASW code of ethics.

Assessment standard is then applicable in this study because social workers use it to assess the child's needs which help them to identify if the child is in need of care and protection. Regarding interventions, they differ according to a child's needs. Once the assessment has been conducted by the school social worker, it is important that the interventions implemented best suit the needs of the child. In terms of interdisciplinary leadership and collaboration, it is crucial for school social workers to work together with significant others such as teachers and parents and/or caregivers to promote a good psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children. It is however unfortunate that Balli (2016: 176) observed that there is lack of knowledge on the perceptions of school social workers as professionals who can assist in diverse activities which results in a lack of cooperation with other school stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and other specialists.

2.5.5. Standards for school social workers in South Africa

In the South African context, school social workers are guided by the South African Council for Social Services Professionals (SACSSP) and the South African Council for Educators (SACE) as ethical obligations (Reyneke, 2020: 163-164). School social workers are expected to follow the ethical obligations of the SACE as they are not only expected to register with SACSSP but also SACE as they are treated as educators within the school setting (Reyneke, 2020: 160). According to Reyneke (2020: 163) the SACE put an emphasis on the "need to respect the dignity, beliefs and constitutional rights of learners, to avoid humiliation and, importantly, to refrain from any form of abuse".

Social justice; respect for people's worth, human rights and dignity; show care and concern of other's well-being; competence; integrity; professional responsibility; and service delivery are ethical guiding principles designed by SACSSP that help social workers to practise in any setting, including a school setting (Reyneke, 2020, and Van Sitter, 2016). Van Sittert (2016: 27) noted that school social workers are guided by

the social work values and principles and should apply them in the following ways: "each pupil is valued as an individual, regardless of any unique characteristics, each learner should be allowed to share in the learning process, individual differences in learning should be recognised by supporting the learner in their educational goals so that every child, regardless of race and socio-economic circumstances, has the right to equal treatment in schools". In this instance, school social workers should apply social work values and principles in line with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and also respect the values and beliefs of their clients, school children in this context.

2.6. Challenges facing school social workers and vulnerable children in schools

Any functional organisation, as well as its individuals, faces numerous challenges. As is the case in the present study, school social workers along with school children, particularly vulnerable children, encounter some challenges within the school context.

2.6.1. Challenges facing school social workers

Social workers in schools come across a vast of challenges in their work. Sibanda & Lombard (2015: 335) observed a range of social service practitioners as being poorly developed and unrecognised, leading to considerable human resource challenges which eventually have an impact on the implementation of the Children's Act 38 of 2005. In addition, the Children's Act (2005) plays an immense role in guiding social workers to help children who in need of care and protection, orphans included. Sibanda and Lombard (2015: 335) went on to mention infrastructural challenges, which include a lack of funding as well as the human resource which involves a shortage of social workers, the inadequate training of social workers and high caseloads. Muchanyerei (2015: 84) agreed that school social workers are presented with the challenge of a lack of financial support to implement the Children's Act No. 38 of 2005 effectively.

The Western Cape School Social Work Forum, as cited by Kemp (2014: 49), found that reporting to multiple line managers as the main challenge facing school social workers. On the other hand, Kemp (2014: 122) observed that despite the articulation

of roles in the job description, the challenges remain in the location of the school social workers in a circuit team and the circuit team responsible for the management of school social workers, which result in the senior school social worker to only have little insight into the effort of the social work. Again, Kemp (2014: 122) observed the filling of the school social work posts as problematic, which is associated with the challenges of the implementation of the guidelines. This concurred with Van Sittert (2016: 26) who indicated that there are no national policy guidelines or guidance in the appointment of school social workers at a national or provincial level.

Furthermore, Balli (2016: 176) viewed a legal gap as the key challenge encountered by school social workers regarding the legal framework. Balli (2016: 176) further stated that there is a lack of clarity on the exact character of the school social worker profile or a school psychologist and that results into some confusion. On the other half, a lack of cooperation with other school stakeholders such as parents, teachers, and other specialists is also quite challenging due to their insufficient knowledge on the perception of the social worker as a professional who can assist in diverse activities related to education, training as well as the socialisation of pupils in the extracurricular environment (Balli, 2016: 176). Furthermore, Van Sittert (2016: 26) observed that there are no employed school social workers in some of the provinces in South Africa.

2.6.2. Challenges facing vulnerable children in schools

According to Ntuli, Mokgatle and Madiba (2020:2), vulnerable children face psychological distress due to the loss of their parent/s, hunger and food insecurity. Again, Ntuli, Mokgatle and Madiba (2020) noticed that vulnerable children also experience exploitation by their relatives and are at a higher risk of dropping out of school as they do not receive any psychosocial support from family members, while those heading households adjust to taking care of their siblings. Tadesse, Dereje and Belay (2014: 297) noted psychological problems such as loneliness, stress and depression, a lack of sleep and lack of love as challenges facing orphans and vulnerable children, which impact their psychosocial well-being. Mwoma and Pillay (2016: 88-90) identified several challenges that orphans and vulnerable children face in schools that hinder their academic progress, such as a lack of concentration in class, reading and writing challenges, submitting school work late or not doing their

homework, absenteeism, lateness and low self-esteem, as well as a lack of cleanliness.

Similar challenges were also noted by Magampa (2014: 44), which included a lack of concentration, inability to do school work, behavioural and emotional problems, and feelings of unhappiness, rejection, shame and isolation. Motsa and Morojele (2016: 35) observed that household chores that are given to vulnerable children tend to hinder them from fully participating in school work as they have to focus more on the chores compared to school work, which eventually negatively impacts their academic progress. Moreover, the study by Motsa and Morojele (2016: 47) also found that because of neglect and abuse, vulnerable children were not obeying some of the school rules such as arriving at school on time, completing assignments and wearing proper school uniforms, which leads to corporal punishment by teachers. On the other hand, Hoosen (2015: 45) also noted some challenges that vulnerable children come across in schools, which include a lack of interest in schoolwork, children present discipline problems, children display a lack of respect for self and others, and children are affected by bullying in school. Ringani (2018: 101) highlighted poor academic performance, lateness and unruly behaviour as challenges of vulnerable children in school. Additionally, Makhonza (2018: 151) noted a couple of challenges that orphans, and vulnerable children, encounter in schools, with a lack of support from teachers and neighbours/ communities one of the dominant challenge, among others.

2.7. Theoretical Framework

When conducting research, theory plays a crucial role in acting as a blueprint for a research study. This was supported by Grant and Osanloo (2014) who stated that the theoretical framework acts as the structure and support for the rationale for the study, the problem statement, the purpose, the significance and the research questions. According to Neuman (2011:57), "a theory is an entire worldview of understanding, seeing and interpreting the events in the world." Leedy and Ormrod (2013: 20) defined theory as a structured form of words and principles intended to explain a phenomenon.

The nature of the problem investigated in this study called for the application of the ecological systems theory/perspective. The ecological systems perspective is the theory by Bronfenbrenner that focuses on environmental issues and how different systems affect/influence the development of the child. This theory views external forces and surroundings as big determinants towards human development (Friedman & Allen, 2011: 9). The theory includes four levels of society (micro, meso, exo and macrosystem) which affect the development of the child (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). Peterson and Govender (2012) pointed out that the microsystem consists of activities and interaction patterns in the person's immediate environment. According to Senefeld and Perrin (2014: 133), "a child's microsystem might include parents, teachers and the educational system, childcare staff, religious institutions, the healthcare system, peers, extended relatives, and siblings".

The mesosystem is concerned with how different structures of the child's microsystem work together (Paquette & Ryan, 2001:1). Christensen (2016:23) viewed the exosystem as including relations between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context. The macro level encompasses laws, cultural values and customs (Paquette & Ryan, 2001: 2). Van Sittert (2016:33) viewed this theory to help in assessing and identifying a problem that affects an individual by looking at different systems that influence his/her functioning and is useful in service-rendering. This theory is applicable to the present study as Pretorius (2020: 149) viewed "services rendered by the school social worker to address social, emotional and behavioural barriers to learning experienced by learners at an educational institution from an ecological, systems theory and strengths-based perspective as these services are aimed at supporting learners, parents, educators and school as a community". In this case, the study sought to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools, including the social, emotional and behavioural issues.

2.7.1 Critiques of the Ecological systems theory

Although the theory was applicable and relevant in the current research, it can never be spared from its shortcomings. Christensen (2016) noted the Bronfenbrenner's theory to not have included resilience. As Christensen (2016), citing Engler (2007), remarked, resiliency assists in better understanding one's capacity, hence, it is

associated with a sense of purpose; belief in a bright future such as goal direction, educational aspirations, achievement motivation, persistence, hopefulness, optimism and spiritual charisma. On the other hand, this theory only reflects the negative impact that may be brought by the external environment, which can impact human development. The theory also displays the systems in a nested diagram as this may not be the exact way to conceptualise the connection of the various systems and therefore making the network approach to be more precise in a multifaceted connection among individuals' ecological environments (Ettekal & Mahoney, 2017: 6). In addition, Houston (2017: 5) was of the view that the theory touches on power partially and that does not reflect how people can use it to infuse social life in various systems when faced with oppositional forces derived from class, religion, race, norms, routines and roles.

2.7.2 Application and relevance of the ecological systems theory

The most related study by Thabethe, Mbatha and Mtapuri (2016) adopted the ecological systems theory to examine whether the school-based programme fills this gap in the lives of orphans and vulnerable children who have non-existent or limited parental care in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. This theory was successful in ascertaining that a school-based programme has taken centre stage to fulfil roles and functions, which were met within families. The study by Mwoma and Pillay (2015) on "Educational support for orphans and vulnerable children in primary schools: Challenges and interventions" also used this theory, which was successful in exploring that although the South African Government has put mechanisms in place to support Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) attain a basic education, several challenges were found to be hampering some OVC from attaining a quality education. The study conducted by Maphalala and Ganga (2014) on the "Developmental Experiences of OVC in Child-Headed Households and the Impact on Cognition and Learning" also used this theory. The theory helped to reveal that many orphans and vulnerable children are suffering from stress, low self-esteem, loneliness, feelings of inferiority, anxiety, a lack of concentration in class and heightened negativity that militates against effective assimilation and accommodation of learning materials within their ecological environment. In the context of this study, the theory has addressed the following three set objectives of the five:

- To identify how school social workers, address the psychosocial problems impacting on the academic progress of vulnerable children in schools.
- To explore which interventions are used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.
- To assess related legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

2.7.3 Microsystem

In the microsystem, the study has looked at how school social workers intervene with school learners individually in providing psychosocial well-being and how they ensure a good, positive relationship between a child and his/her family or peers since they have an influence on the child's development. Positive interaction between parents and children is of paramount importance as Senefeld and Perrin (2014: 133) stated that, "Parenting styles and a parent's characteristics are considered an integral component of child development". A positive relationship/interaction between a child and family may be viewed in terms of parental supervision. Mwoma and Pillay (2016: 90) were of the view that supervision may involve making sure that the children always follow hygienic routines, do their homework and parents/caregivers have a positive relationship with teachers to enhance a good academic record and help children learn to be responsible and not be seen as vulnerable by law.

2.7.4 Mesosystem

In the mesosystem, the study assessed whether there were any group work activities and home visits done by school social workers to promote good behaviour of school pupils as the surrounding environment has an influence on the child's development. For successful promotion of the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children, there should be an interaction between school social workers and parents/caregivers. Senefeld and Perrin (2014: 134) believed "the developmental impact of two-way communication and participation in decision-making by parents and teachers (school social worker in this regard) is correlated with receiving higher grades". Senefeld and Perrin (2014: 134), citing Glasgow et al. (1997), also noted that children who are neglected at home regularly have difficulties in school and this reflection of experiences in one microsystem (the family) are inherently connected with another

(the school). Therefore, interactions between school social workers and parents/caregivers are crucial as the school social workers can equip parents/caregivers with skills to provide the psychosocial support required by vulnerable children.

2.7.5 Macrosystem

Regarding the macro level, the study established how policies and legislations are incorporated by school social workers in providing psychosocial support to vulnerable children and their impact on the services' provision. As this system contains cultural beliefs which may differ from one person to another, it is important for school social workers when incorporating legislation and policies to take into consideration multiculturalism; as Shokane, Masoga and Blitz (2020: 15) recommended, "consideration and application of African indigenous knowledge through the embodiment of local cultural practices, norms, morals, and values that support human rights can enhance engagement with families and schools".

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed related literature to understand the nature of vulnerable children and the role of school social workers in the promotion of their psychosocial well-being in schools. The study has been guided by the ecological systems theory in terms of the theoretical bases. The current state of literature reveals that most related studies conducted in relation to vulnerable children in schools has focused on the role of teachers in providing psychosocial support and not school social workers. There have been gaps identified, which include an insufficient provision of psychosocial support for vulnerable children in schools due to a lack of professionals in the system, including psychologists, social workers and counsellors. It has also been noted that in most schools, psychosocial support is usually rendered by Life Orientation teachers. However, some of them are not aware of the policies and procedures that are put in place to cater for the needs of vulnerable children, and some do not possess the required skills, knowledge, and attitudes. This brings into realisation the immense role that can be played by school social workers in the provision of the psychosocial

wellbeing of vulnerable children in schools, as they are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes. Vulnerable children in schools experience several challenges such as a lack of concentration, absenteeism, not doing schoolwork on time or not doing it at all, and behavioural problems which negatively affect their academic success. Considering the highlighted gaps in literature, it is recommended that future research could focus on extending the scope to cover both high schools and primary schools and also include more than one province in the country (SA) as the present study only covered the KZN Province.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research procedures and instruments that helped the researcher conduct the research study by looking at many elements that comprise a research methodology, including the research design, population and sampling, data collection approach, data management and analysis, data verification, ethical consideration and potential limitations of the study. Generally, research methodology refers to how the study will be carried out, including the methods, techniques and procedures used to collect and analyse data. Igwenagu (2016:4) defined research methodology as, "the systematic, theoretical analysis of the methods applied to a field of study". According to Kothari (2004:8), "research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem". Research methodology could also be considered a roadmap that shows philosophical worldviews/research paradigms, research approaches/designs, methods, population, data collection tools and analysis methods as well as other methods and techniques applied for data collection and analysis in research.

3.2. Research paradigm

Generally, a research paradigm refers to how one scientifically views the world. According to Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) worldviews are philosophical orientations about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to the study. Research paradigms help researchers to determine research methods, procedures and principles that will be used to carry out the study and how the data will be analysed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017: 26). Positivism, post-positivism, interpretive/constructivism, transformative and pragmatism are commonly used paradigms in social research. In the context of the present study, the interpretive research paradigm was employed.

3.2.1. Interpretive paradigm

Cresswell and Cresswell (2018:8) viewed the interpretive paradigm as "a worldview whereby individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work". This paradigm believes that reality is socially constructed, multi-layered, complex and subjective (Dammak, 2015; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Rehman, & Alharthi, 2016, and Dean, 2018). Thomas (2010: 296) believed interpretivism uses oriented methodologies, such as interviews or participant observation, to understand the experiences of individuals to describe the subjective reasons behind social action. This study employed this paradigm because it is in line with the qualitative research approach which would be used as a research design by conducting interviews with school social workers in all 21 primary schools situated within the Esikhaleni Senkosi circuit under King Cetshwayo in the uMhlathuze Local Municipality. This paradigm was also used in a previous study by Makhonza (2018) on "Resilience among orphans and vulnerable children in KwaZulu-Natal schools: towards a psychosocial model of intervention". Hoosen (2015) also employed the interpretive paradigm on "the role of teachers in managing vulnerable children in schools: evidence of one school".

3.3. Qualitative research approach

The study applied qualitative research methods to investigate the role of the school social worker in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. The qualitative research approach was selected for the study because it is generally used to answer questions about experience, meaning and perspective, most often from the standpoint of the participant (Hammarberg, Kirkman and De Lacey, 2016: 499). The use of the qualitative approach in this research was underpinned by its use in the previous related study by Ntuli, Mokgatle and Madiba (2020) on their "psychosocial well-being of orphans: the case of early school leavers in social depressed environment in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa". The qualitative approach was also used by Muchanyarei (2015) in investigating challenges experienced by social workers in placing children living with HIV in foster care in Johannesburg.

This approach is often used with the constructivism/ interpretivism paradigm which was the case with the present study. According to Thomas (2010: 302), qualitative research includes an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter as it tries to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena relating to the meaning people bring to them. Qualitative research uses inductive reasoning, which Sekaran and Boigie (2010) believed is aimed at acquiring an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons for the occurrence of a particular behaviour.

Strengths and limitations of qualitative research approach

In research, each approach has its strengths and weaknesses that act as deciding factors for the researcher on tackling the problem under investigation. Goundar (2012: 22) stated that in qualitative research, the researcher is more involved which help in gaining more insight about the subjects that are usually left out by scientific positivistic enquiries. According to Flick (2015: 12), qualitative research has the strength of an indepth and exact analysis of limited cases that can be produced, which Flick believed could be achieved when participants have the freedom to determine what is relevant to them and to present it in each environment. This was the case with this study, whereby school social workers were interviewed with such freedom. Goundar (2012: 22) highlighted that time for data collection, interpretation and analysis should be long, which is one of the shortcomings of this approach.

3.4. Research design

Kumar (2011:) defined a research design as a strategy, structure and plan, and of investigation used to obtain answers to research questions or problems. This study employed a qualitative case study design. A case study can be in the form of exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Therefore, the current study used exploratory and descriptive research design in a qualitative manner.

3.4.1. Exploratory research design

Burns and Groove (2001:374) referred exploratory research as the research undertaken to discover new ideas, gain new insights, and to expand on the knowledge about the studied phenomenon. Exploratory research design is most appropriate and suitable to be used by researchers if there has been little research conducted on the subject matter (Van Wyk, 2012: 8). Therefore, this research design was applicable in the present study since there had been little research conducted on vulnerable children and no evidence of the studies on the role played by school social workers to promote the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in the South African context. A qualitative research design is an approach to investigate and understand the significance of humans to a particular problem (Cresswell, 2014). This design was hence used to deal with a few numbers of employed school social workers around the UMhlathuze Local Municipality which allowed in-depth information by conducting interviews with them. A few cases of employed school social workers meant no need for quantifiable data.

3.4.2. Descriptive research design

The purpose of this research design is to describe a phenomenon together with its characteristics and focus on the "what" questions (Nassaji, 2015). Nassaji (2015) further noted that in this design, data may be collected qualitatively to have a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives, attitudes and opinions. Therefore, it was applicable for the study as the researcher wanted to gain a profound meaning on the role of school social workers in providing the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

3.5. Population

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) define population as a set of cases from which the sample is drawn. The population of interest for the current study consisted of school social workers from UMhlathuze local schools, particularly all 21 primary schools based within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

School social workers were chosen for their active and pivotal role in enhancing the social well-being, social justice and social security of school children. Teachers are normally trained for teaching and learning, whereas school social workers are well trained personnel for identifying children in need of care and protection, as stipulated by the Children's Act 38 of 2005.

3.6. Sampling

There are customarily two types of sampling methods, viz: the probability and nonprobability sampling methods. This study used the non-probability sampling method. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the school social workers to participate in the study. The participants represented all 21 schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit**.**

3.6.1. Purposive sampling

For Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005: 52), the purposive sampling technique is a technique whereby "a researcher selects what he/she thinks is a typical sample based on specialist knowledge". In this study, the purposive sampling technique was applied as the researcher was dealing with one group of the population (school social workers) who share a common role of addressing social and psychological issues that may hinder the learners' academic progress. The purposive sampling technique was also applied in a related study by Ntuli, Mokgatle and Madiba (2020) on "the psychosocial well-being of orphans: The case of early school leavers in socially depressed environment". The use of purposive sampling was also used by Mwoma and Pillay (2015) on "Psychosocial support for orphans and vulnerable children in public primary schools: Challenges and intervention strategies".

3.6.2. Sampling frame

The sampling frame of this study was drawn from all 21 schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit. A total number of 12 social workers from the Department of Education,

Department of Social Development and one Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) who were working within these primary schools were selected using purposive sampling.

3.7. Data collection methods and procedure

There are different types of data collection methods that can also be used in qualitative research, such as focus groups, observations, content analysis and individual interviews and in quantitative research, methods include surveys, content analysis and observations. Data was collected using interviews as a technique to solicit information from social workers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

3.7.1. Interviews

The study conducted telephonic interviews with all school social workers in all 21 selected primary schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit around the UMhlathuze Municipality. Permission to conduct interviews with the school social workers was obtained from the Department of Education situated in EMpangeni to ensure the safety of the participants and from the Department of Social Development (appendix D). Consent forms were emailed to the school social workers by the researcher prior to the interviews. This was done to ensure the safety of the participants as COVID-19 is very contagious. Generally, an interview is a face-to-face encounter between two or more people. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 187) defined the interview as a formal discussion between two or more people, typically in person, in which information is exchanged with the sole purpose of establishing the understanding of the studied phenomenon. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005: 165166) highlighted structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews as types of interviews in research. This study therefore used semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1.1. Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school social workers as they do not limit the researcher to a specific format, instead allowing for probing for new questions

and providing in-depth information (Appendix C). The duration of the interview was about 20 minutes with each participant of the study. The use of semi-structured interviews was underpinned by a related study by Hoosen (2015) on "the role of teachers in managing vulnerable children in school". The study by Hermenau et al (2015) on "how neglect and perceived stigmatisation impact psychological distress of orphans in Tanzania" also used interviews as the data collection instrument. The identified problem of neglect was tackled by collecting qualitative data in a form of interviews with school social workers in all 21 primary schools situated within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit under King Cetshwayo in the uMhlathuze Local Municipality.

3.8. Data analysis and interpretation

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from interviews. Original audio from interviews was translated and coded into writings or texts. Direct quotes and paraphrasing were applied. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018: 193-195) identified five steps that are involve in data analysis in qualitative research. These steps include organise and prepare data for analysis; read or look at all data; start coding all of the data; generate a description and themes; and present the description and themes. All five steps as described by Creswell (2018: 195) were applied in the present study as follows:

Step 1: Organise and prepare data for analysis
This step involved transcribing data (Appendix E) that was collected from school social workers through conducting interviews.
Step 2: Read or look at all data
In this step, the researcher made sense of the overall collected data from the study's participants. Thorough reading of the interview notes was done by listening to the audio that was recorded to make sense of the collected data.
Step 3: Start coding all the data
This step involved the categorising of data that was aligned with the research objectives of the study.

Step 4: Generate a description and themes

Generating of themes and subheads was derived from the set research objectives of the study and themes that emerged during interviews.

Step 5: Presenting the description and themes

In this step the researcher gave a detailed description of the data collected from the school social workers.

3.9. Ethical considerations

In the present study, the researcher received approval from the University of Zululand Ethical Committee and ethical clearance (appendix A) was provided to collect data. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the Department of Education in UMhlathuze as the employers of the school social workers in the province.

3.9.1. Informed consent and voluntary participation

Fleming and Zegwaard (2018: 210) were of the view that informed consent is a contractual agreement between the researcher and the participant that fully informs participants of what will be asked of them, how the collected data will be used and what consequences there may be. Consent forms were developed for the participants to be interviewed and the forms were emailed and signed by the participants prior to the interviews. The participants were informed that the study was conducted for research purpose only. Participation was voluntary for school social workers in this study without intimidation or force.

3.9.2. Do no harm

Fleming and Zegwaard (2018: 211) asserted that harm may be manifested physically, reputationally, emotionally and with resource loss (including time). Participants were assured that they would not be harmed in any of the above-mentioned ways, by ensuring that participants were at ease and by first building a rapport with them in order for them to fully express themselves on the subject matter. Rubin and Babbie (2017: 86) emphasised that "research should never injure the people being studied,

regardless of whether they volunteer for the study". Debriefing mechanisms would have been applied if the participants were accidentally harmed in the present study.

3.9.3. Anonymity and confidentiality

It is crucial to keep the identity of participants anonymous and confidential to avoid causing any harm (Fleming and Zegwaard, 2018: 211). Anonymity was ensured in the study by informing participants of their rights, by informing participants that results would be published as a thesis and in a research paper, and not collecting any names and personal particulars of the participants. In the data analysis, the researcher coded collected data by using pseudonyms.

3.10. Trustworthiness of the data

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is assured by looking at transferability, credibility, conformability and dependability, as they are qualitative paradigm terms (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, in the context of the current study the following was considered:

3.10.1. Transferability

Bitsch (2005: 85) stated that the research utilises thick description and purposive sampling to facilitate transferability judgement. The application of purposive sampling in a research study is to choose participants or cases that have vast knowledge which significantly helps to answering the research question (Bitsch, 2005). To ensure transferability in the current research, school social workers were purposively selected as the study's participants. The participants were selected based on their in-depth understanding of the psychosocial problems that vulnerable children in schools may encounter and should play a role in promoting their psychosocial well-being.

3.10.2. Credibility

Credibility strategies include "prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity (field journal), triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview technique, establishing the authority of the researcher and structural coherence" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Bitsch, 2005 and Anney, 2014). Regarding the use of peer briefing to ensure credibility in the study, the researcher sought support and scholarly guidance from significant others such as academic staff, the department and postgraduate research committee to enhance the quality of the research findings (Anney, 2014: 276). In this study, support and guidance was received from the research supervisor to ensure that the interpretations and findings of the study were properly articulated.

3.10.3. Dependability

According to Guba and Lincoln (1982), as cited by Anney (2014: 278), one of the ways to achieve dependability is the use of an audit trail whereby interview and observation notes, raw data, documents and records collected from the field, test scores and others are kept for cross-checking the inquiry process. An interview guide (Appendix C) was prepared and utilised. To ensure that the participants' information was properly interpreted in the present study, the researcher obtained permission from the participants to record their interview and drafted notes to establish dependability.

3.10.4. Confirmability

According to Anney (2014: 15) confirmability "refers to the degree to which the results of the enquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers". Confirmability can be achieved when transferability, credibility and dependability have been accomplished (Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules, 2017: 3). Confirmability was achieved in this study through noting down personal feelings in a journal, seeking clarity from participants whenever necessary, and the researcher refraining from imposing her beliefs or values to participants during interviews.

3.11. Chapter summary

In this chapter, the researcher employed qualitative descriptive and exploratory research designs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the school social workers in primary schools. Issues pertaining to ethical considerations were discussed in detail within this chapter. The trustworthiness of the data was evaluated by looking at transferability, credibility and dependability. Permission to carry out the study was obtained from the Department of Education (KZN) and participants were provided with written consent. The next chapter (Chapter Four) presents, interprets, and analyses the collected data.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Data, Interpretation and Analysis

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analyses and interpretation of the data from the semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 social workers working within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit primary schools. The study investigated the role of the school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in primary schools. The interview questions were guided by the research objectives of the study. Permission to record the data collection sessions was granted by the participants of the study. Participants of the study were social workers from the Department of Education, the Department of Social Development and one Non-Profit Organisation (NGO). The findings of this research study are presented in themes and subthemes.

4.2. Demographic information

In the study, the demographic information of the study participants included their age, gender, population group and work experience.

4.2.1. Age

Table 1: Age

Age in years	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24 years	1	8%
25-34 years	5	42%
35-44 years	4	33%
45 years and above	2	17%
Total	**12**	**100%**

The majority of the participants (42%) fell between the ages of 25-34 years followed by those who fall under the ages of 35-44 years.

4.2.2. Gender

Table 2: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	2	17%
Female	10	83%
Total	**12**	**100%**

Table 2 shows that the majority of participants (83%) were females and only 17% were males. This is because the social work profession is labelled as a female-dominated profession, where women are far greater in number than males in this profession (Hicks, 2015).

4.2.3. Population group

All the participants (100%) were Africans as the study targeted schools located in rural and township areas. This positively contributed to the data collection as there was no language barrier between the interviewer (researcher) and interviewees (participants). This positively contributed towards the yielding of the in-depth and rich information from the study participants.

4.2.4. Work experience

Most participants (50%) had more than five years of work experience, followed by those who had less than a year at 25%. The narration from the study's participants also revealed the majority (92%) of participants had never worked in other organisations.

4.3. Psychosocial problems impacting on the academic progress of vulnerable children in schools

This question sought to identify the psychosocial problems faced by vulnerable school children. Participants highlighted several psychosocial problems facing vulnerable children which disturbed their academic performance at schools. Those problems included sexual abuse; loneliness; poverty related problems; poor family background; behavioural problems and persistent grief and emotional and physical abuse; neglect; financial constraints; malnutrition; a lack of birth certificates; bullying and low self-esteem, among others.

4.3.1. Neglect

Neglect was the most dominant problem experienced by vulnerable children in primary schools. Most participants also indicated that neglect does not only occur to orphans, but also to children who are raised by single parents, grandmothers and teenage mothers. Participants of the study provided numerous causes of neglect and their responses articulated verbatim as follows:

Participant 5 - *Children are usually neglected because they are born into single parents or teenage mothers, children are raised by an elderly person who is old enough and incapable to take care of a child. Some children have teenage mothers who can barely take care of themselves. We also get cases of children who are neglected not necessarily because they are orphans.*

Participant 4 - *Neglect in school children is caused by a lack of parenting skills, dispute between partners/parents which eventually leads to the needs of a child being neglected and no support in raising a child. Most of the referred cases I get are related to child neglect because in most cases children who are neglected by being raised by teenage mothers and dispute between partners tend to fight with children.*

Participant 6 - *Some of orphaned children stay with their paternal or maternal aunts who do not properly take care of them like their own children and neglect their needs.*

Some children are raised by single mothers who leave their children to go and cohabitate, leaving their children to be taken care by their grandmothers.

Participant 7 - *Child neglect, as a child being raised by a grandmother as there is no strong relationship between a child and the grandmother because of the age gap and the mother is nowhere to be found. Sometimes the mother is present in the child's life but is not that supportive in meeting the child's needs. Another cause of neglect is because children in primary schools are being raised by teenage mothers who are still in high schools and do not have time to take care of their children as they need to focus on their studies.*

Participant 2 - *Child neglect is most prevalent in families where there is alcohol abuse by parents and where orphaned children are being raised by their grandmothers.*

From the above quotes, it shows that child neglect was caused by numerous factors such as alcohol abuse in families, grandparents raising children, school going teenage mothers, lack of parenting skills and important others.

4.3.2. Emotional and physical abuse

Participants noted emotional, physical, sexual abuse and neglect as the forms of abuse experienced by vulnerable children. Their responses are presented verbatim in selected responses below.

Participant 3 - *Usually school children experience physical and emotional abuse because caregivers are not well educated about abuse and how it affects children, which leads to poor academic performance in school. In some cases, you will find that parents are working but they fail to meet the needs of their children.*

4.3.3. Malnutrition

Participants also highlighted malnutrition to be one of the psychosocial problems experienced by vulnerable children, however they stated that the schools played a big

role in providing nutritional meals. The provision of the nutrition programmes in schools assists learners to be present and focused during teaching and learning in class. This was supported by Sandersa, Hendricksb, Krollc, Puoaned, Ramokoloe, Swartf, and Tsolekileg (2019); and Mwoma and Pillay (2016), who stipulated that school nutrition promotes learning achievement, endurance and good health. Selected responses from the study's participants are presented below.

Participant 9 - *Malnutrition in vulnerable children is a problem but we are grateful that the schools do provide a nutrition programme.*

Participant 1- *Malnutrition is usually present in vulnerable children as the legal guardian or foster care parent only pays attention to their own children and the orphan must take care of herself or himself. There is also that weakness as they usually come from child-headed households.*

From the above responses, it can note that schools play an immense role in providing nutrition to vulnerable children who come from disadvantaged background.

4.3.4. Financial constraints

One participant noted that caregivers face financial problems as most of them are not from this country (South Africa) and lack documentation to apply for stable jobs and child support grants. Other causes of financial hardships that were noted by the participant were linked to orphans being raised by grandmother who rely on social grants. The participant stated the following:

Participant 8 - *Most caregivers do not originate from this country (South Africa) and therefore do not have the required documents to apply for child support grant, usually work in nearby farms and cannot find stable jobs. Some children are orphans who are being raised by grandmothers and rely on social grants.*

Similar findings were revealed in the study by Mshengu (2014) who stated that orphans experienced financial constraints.

4.3.5. Low self-esteem

Low self-esteem was also mentioned by participants as being one of the psychosocial problems experienced by vulnerable school children. The findings by Thapa (2020) also revealed that orphans had low self-esteem and experienced depression compared to children who lived with their parents.

Participant 1 - *Vulnerable children usually have a low self-esteem which prevents them to perform to the best of their abilities as they are constantly thinking about their mother who passed away and how life would be if their mothers were still alive.*

Participant 7 - *Low self-esteem caused by poverty in the family, self-esteem of vulnerable children is affected by other children who come from better or middle-class families teasing them on how their school uniforms look like.*

Participant 10 - *Vulnerable children are faced with low self-esteem and they end up succumbing to peer pressure and doing things they do not want to which could put their lives in danger.*

The above responses from participants reveal that low self-esteem experienced by vulnerable children in schools' impact on their academic performance and exposes them to engage in risky behaviours.

4.3.6. A lack of birth certificates

Some participants identified a problem of school children not having birth certificates as the most dominant issue. The issue of a lack of documentation affects the child in every aspect of their lives and may lead to a child being unable to receive social and health services (Mouravieff-Apostol, 2001). According to the Admission Policy for ordinary public schools (2021: 8) it is mandatory for parents to produce a birth certificate of a learner when admitting them to a public school. The responses from study participants are articulated in the next section.

Participant 11- *In this area, we have people who are from outside South Africa such as those from Mozambique who are renting rooms and do not want to go back to their*

countries of origin. Some mothers of these children passed away and they are left with their landlords. It is very hard for us to assist children in such cases as we do not even know where to begin in trying to track their families or relatives as the landlord do not either have the family details of the tenant. This makes it impossible for us to compile a report and assist children with the process of getting their birth certificates.

Participant 1- *The issue of documentation for many vulnerable children is a stumbling block where a child does not have a birth certificate. Some mothers pass away before applying for their children's birth certificates and the father does not qualify to apply for the child's birth certificate without the mother's consent and the child ends up using a wrong surname. It is even worse when the mother passes away without having an ID or birth certificate.*

The issue of documentation is because of parents/ caregivers neglecting their children, leaving them to be taken care of by the landlord and sometimes a child is an orphan being raised by an elderly person. In some instances, the mother dies and leave her children with the landlord.

4.3.7. Bullying

Some participants noted that bullying is experienced by both children who come from middle-class and disadvantaged backgrounds. However, a study by Juan, Zuze, Hannan, Govender, and Reddy (2018: 3) revealed that socio-economic status is a risk factor that is associated with bullying and learners from a low socio-economic status were more likely to be victims of bullying than learners who came from a high socio-economic status. Selected responses from this study's participants are presented in the next section.

Participant 12 - *Most of the bullying happens in primary schools. Bullying can happen either way; the neglected children who come from disadvantaged/poor/poverty-related background children get together to bully children who come from advantaged backgrounds by stealing their lunch boxes/money and sometimes children who come from better/middle-class background bully those from the disadvantaged backgrounds through name calling.*

Another participant noted stigma as a psychosocial problem encountered by vulnerable children and articulated the following:

Participant 7- S*chool children are faced with stigmatisation. Teachers tend to classify children, whereby you will find that some are treated better than others. When teachers address school children, they address them according to their social class and status.*

From the above responses, it can be deduced that vulnerable children do not only face bullying by other learners but also stigmatization by school-teachers because of their social class and status.

4.4. Intervention programmes for addressing neglect

4.4.1. Employment of learner support agents (LSA)

There are intervention programmes to address neglect. One participant stated that the Department of Education has taken an initiative by employing learner support agents in schools. The learner support agent is responsible for prevention campaigns and is trained by different departments or professionals, including the Department of Health, Psychologists, Social Workers, and NGOs on how to implement these prevention programmes in schools. Learner support agents are also trained in the early identification of problems encountered by school children and implement a referral as they cannot conduct case work by themselves since most of them are not qualified professionals. The participant articulated the following regarding the role played by learner support agents in schools:

Participant 1- *Learner support agents are the care centre information, they go around and track the progress of children in schools and if there are any problems experienced by school children like problems of absenteeism and dropouts, they are able to identify them and report to social workers. Also with an assistance of NGOs, we do prevention programmes, but it is not up to standard as they not cover all the schools due to less man power. Another intervention programme the DOE does is empowering school-teachers to be able to do early identification of leaner's problems through workshops.*

Learner support agents play an immense role in schools in identifying problems that school children encounter, as expressed by one of the participants on the above quote.

4.4.2. Child protection awareness campaign

Other intervention programmes to address neglect include child protection awareness campaigns which are implemented in the month of May each year. The aim of this programme is to empower children on their basic human rights that they are entitled to and raise awareness of child abuse. Regarding child abuse, it involves all forms of abuse, including emotional, psychological, physical, sexual, and economic and neglect Therefore this awareness campaign does not only address neglect but also the psychosocial well-being of children. Although there is a month allocated when this programme should be conducted, the Department of Social Development implements this programme throughout the year. This programme assists children to better understand that bullying does not only occur in a physical form but also emotional and psychologically, as most children do not have such knowledge. Responses from the participants of the study are presented below:

Participant 7 - *We do this awareness programme in a large capacity (assembly), and it covers child abuse, children's right bringing awareness to their rights and how to identify if their rights are being violated. While one of us is presenting, my other colleagues walk around to identify children affected during the presentation as a follow up procedure for individual interventions. However, I feel like we are not doing enough. Sometimes it is difficult to do the programmes as their level of concentration is not that much.*

Participant 3 - *When implementing the child protection awareness, we involve the whole school and do it in an assembly. The aim of this awareness is to bring awareness to school children on child abuse whereby we invite different stakeholders such as the SAPS, Lifeline, Department of Social Development and the Department of Community Safety and Liaison to do their presentations on the services they offer to cases of child abuse.*

School social workers also implement child protection awareness campaigns to educate school children about their rights. These campaigns are of paramount important as they empower children through providing them with information so that they become aware when their rights are being violated.

4.4.3. Early intervention programmes

One participant stated that early intervention programmes are also rendered to vulnerable children in school as a response to neglect. The participant noted the following:

Participant 4 - *We offer early intervention programmes whereby we firstly conduct an assessment, assessing the physical appearance (bruises and scars), emotional and social well-being of the child. We then provide psychosocial support through counselling aimed at individuals as a first response to child abuse before referring the child to the Department of Social Development for further interventions.*

4.4.4. Substance abuse programmes

Participants reported that substance abuse awareness programmes are implemented in Grades 6 and 7 as many cases are reported in these grades, especially amongst the boys. If there are any cases of substance abuse, the school principal calls and informs the social workers. One-on-one interventions in the form of counselling are also conducted. Some responses are presented in the next section.

Participant 5 - *It is very difficult to work in schools as you need to squeeze yourself in. It becomes a challenge as you cannot even do the programme after school which would be exposing school children to danger. We try to work with whatever we are given. Group work requires time of which the school teachers do not have, what I normally do are awareness campaigns and one-on-one interventions.*

Participant 7- *We are aware that in their homes they are being sent to go and buy alcohol and therefore the danger that they are exposed to. We try in our presentations to bring awareness and bring down the content into simplest terms in order for them to fully understand the effects of substance abuse as their level of understanding is not that widen up compared to children in high schools.*

As substance abuse is also an issue in the upper grades (grades 6 and 7), prevention and intervention programmes for substance abuse are also implemented in schools. However, participants stipulated that due to less time they are given in schools, they normally do awareness campaigns.

4.4.5. Parenting programme

The Department of Social Development partners with NPOs to implement this programme in communities. Group sessions are conducted to provide support to caregivers as most of the group members from this programme are foster parents. The participants responded by articulating the following:

Participant 12 - *This programme assists in building a health relationship where parents/ foster parents can talk about anything with their children with caregivers being too strict on their children.*

Participant 4 - *The parenting programme helps parents/ caregivers build friendly relationships with their children and provide them with parenting skills.*

4.5. Psychosocial programmes for school children

4.5.1. Primary peer education programme

Participants stated that in the Department of Education there is a primary peer education programme which aims to equip school children with knowledge and skills on how to handle issues they face. There are also competitions for schools where they debate on different topics which assist in exposing children to psychosocial issues and

could be used to identify if a child is being abused in their schools and how they are attended. The responses from the study participants are presented experienced by vulnerable school children as follows:

Participant 1 - *In the Department of Education, school social worker is all about psychosocial programmes in schools. We work with the Department of Social Development and NGOs in implementing these programmes. These programmes are aimed at empowering school children with skills to tell if there is something that is bothering them and report as soon as possible within 72 hours.*

Participant 3 - *We use children for the primary peer education programme to be soul buddies so that they get an opportunity to learn from each other as children tend to learn better if they see information coming from their peers.*

The primary peer education programme helps in exposing children to psychosocial issues. However, participants further articulated that the implementation of these programmes is not to the best level as there are many schools and the manpower is not enough.

4.5.2. Advocacy programme

Regarding the advocacy programme, the participants responded that they provide information to school children on what constitutes child neglect. In delivering these programmes in schools, social workers from the Department of Education work with NGOs and local municipality leadership and provide available resources to communities where children can channel their problems and get help. Selected responses are presented in the next section.

Participant 2 - *These programmes are of vital importance as they equip children with information who are exposed to different forms of abuse. They provide information to children on the available resources they can use to get help in any threat they can get and empowers them to fight psychologically.*

Children are also provided with resource lists which are developed per circuit office whereby they are given information on different organisations from which they can get help.

4.5.3. ChommY

One of the group work programmes implemented by participants was ChommY which is a Social and Behaviour Change Programme from the Department of Social Development for children between the ages of 10 and 14. Selected responses are presented below:

Participant 12 - *This programme assists children to build self-esteem, self-love and to be aware of who they are and how they differ from one another.*

Participant 9 - *ChommY is a programme for children aged 10 to 14 years that deals with behaviour change and mainly focuses on decreasing HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy.*

Participant 7 - *This is a social development programme for pre-teens to help them understand the changes in their bodies, to be safe and not to allow other kids to bully them.*

The above quotes revealed that the ChommY programme played a significant role in addressing the psychosocial problems encountered by vulnerable school children.

4.5.4. Holiday programme

The holiday programme ensures that children are kept safe during school holidays by encouraging them to engage in sports which will keep them busy. This programme is in the form of group work and mostly includes orphaned children for them to return to school safely and soundly. Selected responses are presented in the next section.

Participant 8 - *During school holidays, children have a lot of time to gallivant as they have a lot of pleasure time which could expose them to risky behaviours. We assist*

them to direct their time in things that promote their psychosocial well-being like engaging in sports and reading books.

The participants are playing a dominant role in engaging children in reading and sport activities to avoid risky behaviours.

4.6. Policies and legislations

Participants were asked to state legislation and policies they use in addressing the psychosocial problems of vulnerable children. They highlighted three policies, which included the Integrated School Health Policy, Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS), and the Service Commitment Charter guidelines.

4.6.1. Integrated School Health Policy

This is the main foundation policy that guides social workers in terms of the programmes with regard to age relevancy. One participant noted the following:

Participant 1 - *As we cannot assume which programme is suitable for children, this policy tells us which programme is age-appropriate for school children. For an example, this policy stipulates that you cannot implement a programme on STIs within the foundation phase (Grades R to 3) as you cannot educate these children on such topics because they are beyond them.*

4.6.2. Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS)

In the research responses, some participants advised that they were using the Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) which is a policy from the Department of Education, mainly focusing on supporting and managing processes of teaching and learning for learners who encountered learning barriers (Department of Basic Education, 2014). This policy encompasses the well-being and educational attainment of the learner as it advocates access to public services such as psychosocial support, health and poverty alleviation (Vergottini and Weyers, 2020: 133). One participant articulated the following:

Participant 6 - *Whenever I get cases from the school, I use this policy to guide my daily operation.*

4.6.3. Service Commitment Charter Guidelines

This policy entails the commitment that relates to the rendering of services that are fair and equal to all, regardless of age, gender and social status. The service commitment charter encompasses all the departments, and each department has its own service standards. The participant shared the following regarding the service standards for the Department of Social Development.

Participant 7- *Service standards for the DSD guides us on how to deal with a child that is orphaned or abused in any form. It must be attended within 24 hours. It also guides us in the implementation of child protection awareness campaigns and Social and Behaviour Change Programmes.*

4.7. Legislation

4.7.1. Children's Act 38 of 2005

This legislation has been revealed to be used by all the participants as a guiding tool in rendering psychosocial services to children. Following are the responses verbatim by the participants of the study.

Participant 12 - *Children's Act is the custodian of DSD since it is the legislation that we mostly use, and we normally refer to section 150 which is about children in need of care and protection.*

Participant 4 - *We mostly use the amended Children's Act 38 of 2005 where we find the Bill of Rights for Children which include children's rights to be cared for, education and to life.*

Participant 6 - *This Act plays a major role in providing guidance, especially in cases of neglect as it stresses the rights of children to have a home and taken care of. If a*

child is neglected in any way, then their rights have been violated, so this Act provides a clear guideline in assisting children who have been neglected.

Participant 5 - *As we work with children, we mostly use Children's Act 38 of 2005.*

Children's Act 38 of 2005 advocates the best interest of the child and is of paramount importance as its acts as an essence for school social workers in their daily activities.

4.7.2. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996

One participant articulated that she also incorporates the Children's Act in line with the provision of the Constitution of South Africa. Reyneke (2020) noted that Section 28 of the Constitution, which talks about children receiving social services, is of paramount importance as children and youth are viewed as vulnerable groups, more so than adults, and therefore are entitled to social services. The participant articulated the following:

Participant 7 - *We use the Constitution of the country which is the supreme law and the backbone.*

4.7.3. South African Schools Act 84 of 1996

School social workers are also guided by this act as it regulates and governs their daily activities.

Participant 3 - *As we are working with children in school, we need to follow the regulations taken from this act.*

4.7.4. Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998

According to the Domestic Violence Act Section 1, domestic violence involves sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional, verbal and psychological abuse. One participant of the current study highlighted the following:

Participant 4 - *Most cases that I get are of domestic violence, as child abuse and child neglect fall under domestic violence as it happens at homes.*

This implies a need for the employment of Domestic Violence Act by school social workers in addressing the issues of domestic violence facing vulnerable children.

4.8. Guiding principles

Participants articulated that they are mainly guided by the principles of social work emanating from the SACSSP. Some participants referred to the Batho Pele Principles and stated that they put people first by providing information on where they can get relevant help from other departments as sometimes they get clients who they are unable to assist and cannot solve their cases.

4.8.1. SACSSP guiding principles

Most participants noted that they were guided by the SACSSP principles. In terms of these, confidentiality was the prominent guiding principle for participants. The participants of the current study stated the following:

Participant 6 - *One of the main principles I use on daily bases include confidentiality, respect and accountability.*

Participant 3 - *The first principle that I use is confidentiality - when a child comes to see me, I always make them feel comfortable by explaining to them that whatever they will share with me will stay between us. I also use respect and acceptance.*

Participant 5 - *The main principle in the social work field is confidentiality, we try by all means to maintain it because in schools, if the teacher refers the child to you, they would want to know what is wrong with the child then I always try to tell them that I really appreciate that you have shared the case with me but whatever I discuss with the child must remain confidential unless the child is in danger, even so you cannot direct the problem to the teacher.* This relates to Reyneke's (2020) observation in that many teachers do not understand the importance of confidentiality which becomes problematic for social workers; therefore, it is very important for social workers to maintain confidentiality and social workers must obtain permission from the child to share certain information with the teacher, and only share information that the child has consented to being shared.

Participant 11- *We incorporate both the social work values and principles when working with children in schools which include confidentiality, maintaining a non-judgmental attitude and self-determination.*

Most participants operated within the parameter of social work/SACSSP principles.

4.9. Challenges encountered by school social workers and vulnerable children in schools

4.9.1. Challenges faced by school social workers

Participants noted several challenges faced when providing psychosocial support to vulnerable children in schools, which included a lack of cooperation from parents/ caregivers, limited time to provide psychosocial services in schools, no consultation rooms in schools, no consultation rooms to render counselling services in schools, fear for one's life in abuse cases, a lack of collaboration from other stakeholders involved and a lack of training in developmental programmes. The participants of the study articulated the following with regards to these challenges:

4.9.1.1. Lack of cooperation from parents/caregivers

This was the most noted challenge faced by social workers.

Participant 9 - *Children do not want to share their problems with you because of the intimidation they receive in their families. You would get children who want to share their problems with you, but they would rather not because they are afraid of what their families would do to them if they heard that they have spoken to a social worker. For some children, you can see that whatever they are going through is really weighing on them, but the family members are stopping the child from sharing.*

Participant 3 - *Lack of participation from parents. It is not easy for school children to share their problems with the social worker, they withdraw information, especially those from foundation phase (Grades 1 to 3). You cannot ask them questions and expect the correct answer, it is better for those who are grown up, they are not afraid to speak up and share with me.*

Participant 5 - *Sometimes the parents/caregivers are preventing children from sharing their problems with the social workers, they are so afraid and intimidated by the caregivers/parents. One caregiver said why is the child talking to the social worker, they are too forward. Some children can share their stories, but they do not want me to talk with their parents/caregiver and would just say they are feeling better as they have talked to me, so there is no need to involve their parents. Some children would prefer that you call their uncles instead of their mothers of which in most cases the reason is the mother being the perpetrator. Even with teachers, it is like we are stealing or doing something illegal, it is not smooth working with children. They need their parent's or caregiver's support in solving the child's case. Even if you refer the child, it is very difficult for us to see that the child does have a problem, but the parent or caregiver who is supposed to give consent is not available or refuses to do so. It is like parents expect their children not to have problems. They would sometimes ask why the child is talking to the social worker, they are just being forward. Mental health is underrated in us as black communities because they are underage.*

Participant 6 - *Parents/caregivers do not want to come to school to discuss challenges facing vulnerable children, especially those who are taken care by their foster parents.*

You would politely ask for their paternal or maternal aunts to come to see you, but they do not pitch up. When you request for a child's birth certificate, they would think you want to do something like applying for foster care grant and giving it to someone else. Parents/caregivers do not want to cooperate at all.

Participant 4 - *When you want to meet the caregiver they do not want to come because they know they are perpetrators of child abuse and neglect and even force children to hide this issue.*

The verbatim from responses reveal a lack of co-operation from parents/ caregivers to school social workers which eventually negatively impact the promotion of the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children.

4.9.1.2. Limited time for providing psychosocial services in schools

Participant 10 - *We do not have enough time in implementing programmes, you end up not doing the programme thoroughly and not going into details. Usually, we have limited time to do the programme as teachers also need time for teaching and learning.*

Participant 8 - *Time is the stumbling block. As we are not based at school, it is impossible for us to be in the school the whole week. It is much easier to identify behavioural problems of a child that you normally interact with, and children are afraid to share their problems with people they do not normally have conversations with.*

Participant 7 - *I am not doing justice to them because of time, especially now since we have COVID-19. It very hard for a child to open up and share his/her feelings to you if you come once in a while at school. We also do group works with children who have a common problem.*

From the above quotations, it can be deduced that participants experience work overload of which affect the rendering of psychosocial services to vulnerable children in schools. This is due to several caseloads to be attended in a short space of time.

4.9.1.3. No consultation rooms to render counselling services in schools

Participants of the study also faced a challenge of a lack of consultation rooms for rending counselling services in schools. One participant articulated the following:

Participant 7 - *Most of the schools do not have proper rooms to accommodate us to do cases. It even ends up us having to sit in cars with children. The car is not child friendly and even the sitting arrangement in the car is not conducive. It disrupts the attention of a child, and it brings that stigma to the child that could mean the child has problems as they are sitting with the social worker. Sometimes it is difficult to attend to a case immediately as we have limited resources in terms of transportation as we are too many in our office and have few cars.*

The study by Chinyama, Rembe and Sibanda (2020: 155) also noted a lack of resources, including counselling rooms and transport to provide psychosocial support for leaners in schools. Yuca, Ahmad and Ardi (2017: 223) were of the view that proper infrastructure plays an immense role in providing effective counselling services in schools.

4.9.1.4. Fear for one's life in abuse cases

Abuse cases seem to be more sensitive as some cases may be life-threatening to school social workers. Selected responses are presented below:

Participant 11- *In the abuse cases, you just wish you can run away as your life is at risk and you always pray for your safety. The family always covers each other. When you receive a case of abuse from the school you must go to a child's family as part of the comprehensive assessment. Sometimes a family is not willing to share any information as the perpetrator is the breadwinner. In that manner, you depend on police for protection. Sometimes because the SAPS has limited transport and there is no car to accompany you together with a police officer resulting to knocking off very late at work.*

4.9.1.5. Lack of collaboration from other stakeholders involved

Participants also articulated that those stakeholders involved do not always co-operate with cases and fail to attend to cases on time. Selected responses are presented below:

Participant 4 - *You would refer the case and when you call to check the progress you would find out that they have not done much to attend the case. When you want to go to school and ask to do a certain awareness with school children, they would say they do not have time and the teachers would complain about stealing their teaching and learning time, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. They would complain about how COVID-19 has affected their teaching and learning and therefore busy trying to cover the syllabus. You would be given just that one slot in the assembly in the morning to address children and less time in one-on-one sessions with children. When they are in the assembly in a large number, only few will concentrate.*

Participants 1 and 2 - *We have a problem with a lack of cooperation from parties involved, they take long to respond to cases.*

The challenge of a lack of collaboration from other stakeholders involved is also experienced within the school premises, where they are not given enough time to conduct counselling sessions with children.

4.9.2. Challenges faced by vulnerable children in schools

The participants were asked to solicit the challenges experienced by vulnerable children in schools. The challenges were articulated as follows:

4.9.2.1. Reading and writing challenges

Participant 4 - *Learning problem, they have challenges in terms of writing. These are the most referred cases from teachers. You would find that the child can tell/give the answer but when it comes to writing it becomes a challenge so the child ends up failing although they know the answer, but the fact remains that they cannot write.*

Participant 5 – *In most cases you would find out that some children need a special school, but the teachers and the parents are turning a blind eye and keep on pushing the child even though they see that the child is having barriers of reading and writing. They do not understand that a child attending a special school has a mental disability.*

The balance in reading, writing, and participating in class seem to be a stumbling block for some vulnerable children which affect their academic performance. In this manner, parents/caregivers and teachers should take an initiative to address this.

4.9.2.2. Absenteeism

This research study also found absenteeism to be problematic to most vulnerable children, which concurs with Vergottini and Weyers (2020) who noted that one of the challenges schools faces is a high rate of absenteeism. Some selected responses are presented in the next section.

Participant 2 - *There is high rate of absenteeism and drop out among vulnerable children because of a lack of parental supervision.*

Participant 3 - *I have had cases associated with absenteeism, late coming which results in poor academic progress.*

Participant 9 - *Some of them stay absent for a very long time. They become very reserved and less engaging in classroom activities.*

Responses reveal a need for parental supervision which could significantly contribute to minimising absenteeism amongst vulnerable children.

4.9.2.3. Children do not want to share their challenges/problems with social workers

Some challenges faced by vulnerable children are identified during the implementation of programmes (ChommY) in schools as they would spend most of the time with them. This behaviour has been noted not to be only displayed during the group sessions, but even during teaching and learning.

Participant 8 - *One of the challenges faced by vulnerable children that I have observed during my sessions with them is that they are normally reserved and less engaging in our discussions.*

Participant 11 - *Children do not want to verbalise and share their challenges or problems with a social worker.*

4.9.2.4. Poor hygiene

Participants also reported that because of a lack of supervision from parents/ caregivers, vulnerable children went to school with unclean school uniforms. This was one of the challenges most cited by participants, who articulated the following:

Participant 5 - *They come to school with dirty uniforms and even their masks would be so dirty that you can see it has been a long time since it was washed. You can see by the uniform that the child is neglected and not being taken care of.*

Participant 6 - *On a Monday, you would find the child with a dirty uniform. Some do not wear a full school uniform.*

Participant 10 - *It is not necessarily to orphaned children, sometimes children are neglected because the mother is working far and comes once after three months and the child stays with the grandmother who does not have time to look after the child and wake up to go and plough in the garden, as a result children go to school with unclean uniform because no one is supervising them or teaching them how to take good care of themselves.*

Participant 2 - *What I have observed as challenges vulnerable children face is wearing a torn and unclean uniform.*

The above quotations show that some children were not properly supervised as they would attend school wearing dirty clothes.

4.9.2.5. Uncompleted school tasks

Vulnerable children are not given support with school-related activities. When they have been given homework that needs hands on assistance, they are not given support at home. This is in accordance with the findings by Mwoma and Pillay (2016) indicating that orphans and vulnerable children could not do their homework due to a lack of support and supervision in their homes.

Participant 1 - *Normally, children who are vulnerable due to orphanhood, have to do chores when they get home and end up not having much time to focus on their studies.*

Participant 6 - *They do not concentrate and do not do their homework and when you ask them, they would tell you my maternal aunt said I must look after her children, clean and wash and they end up repeating the grades.*

Vulnerable children are normally facing an imbalance between the household chores and school work as they have to do great amount of household chores compared to the amount of time they get to do their school related activities.

4.10. Suggestions by participants on improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children

Participants noted the employment of school-based social workers, a need to revive the passion in the social work profession, and supervised training and collaboration between parent/caregivers, social workers, teachers and school children as the ways for improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. Their responses were as follows:

Participant 1 - *Young or newly employed social workers do not have the same dedication as the social workers who have been long employed. If social workers could work with passion and dedication, if we could all be self-motivated and revive the passion of working with children. As social workers, we must end this thing of getting cases and not doing any follow ups and not do things just for the case of doing them. There should be a much difference between a child that has received psychosocial*

support from the social worker and that has not. As social workers, we must also do self-introspection on whether we do justice to cases we are getting. There are those social workers that are good and there are those who are struggling to do their work; hence they are not doing their jobs accordingly. Hence, there is need to revive our passion in our profession.

Participant 12 - *We are also accountable for not supervising accordingly. If cases are supervised thoroughly there should be an improvement. Therefore, there is a need for supervising training for encouraging supervision and case consultation. The supervision from government departments is lacking.*

Participant 3 - *Social workers should receive more support and participation from caregivers. Caregivers should be more involved in their children's social and academic life and the community at large. School children should also be encouraged to support one another.*

Participant 5 - *Collaboration between parents, teachers, social workers and children in order to address the psychosocial problems and challenges of vulnerable children in school. For us to be able to advocate for children, we must be given a platform as social workers are not given enough recognition to render social services to vulnerable children. There is not enough knowledge about social workers' role in providing psychosocial services to children. Schools need school social workers, not one at least two because of the number of children in school.*

Participant 2 - *The Department of Education and Department of Social Development should consider increasing in the employment of social workers to prevent uncompleted cases as social workers have work overload which could contribute to not successfully completing the cases.*

Participant 4 - *There is a need for employing more staff to prevent work overload and to work effectively.*

Participant 10 - *The Department of Education together with the Department of Social Development should work closely together in terms of strategising how the social worker can have a slot to come more often to render psychosocial services to school children not for a social worker to come more often to school and not only whenever there is a problem, but it should be mandatory for a social worker to have time and slot*

for rendering services within the school. There should also hire a school-based social worker who will be within reach of school children. If there is a school-based social worker, children can be assisted immediately.

Seemingly, school principals and teachers are only keen to support teaching and learning practices other than the services being provided by school social workers. However, the services provided by social workers are of paramount important to vulnerable children as talking to school social workers is their best way to ventilate other than sharing their problems with their significant others.

4.11. Chapter summary

This chapter presented and analysed the key findings of the current study from social workers working within primary schools within the Esikhaleni Senkosi circuit. The findings showed that various psychosocial problems are experienced by vulnerable children. The findings also revealed that social workers provide both prevention and intervention programmes to promote the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children. Challenges faced by school social workers and vulnerable children were also cited. The next chapter provides a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations emanating from the current study.

Chapter 5: Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter analysed and interpreted collected data. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the key findings on the role of school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in primary schools. The discussion of findings is aligned with the set objectives of the study. Also, covered in the present chapter are the proposed recommendations of the study.

5.2. Restatement of research objectives of the study

The formulated research objectives were as follows:

- To identify psychosocial problems impacting on academic progress of vulnerable children in schools.
- To explore which interventions are used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.
- To assess related legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.
- To establish the challenges faced by school social workers to promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.
- To solicit suggestions on improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

5.2.1. To identify psychosocial problems impacting on academic progress of vulnerable children in schools

The findings of the current study show that there are several psychosocial problems experienced by vulnerable school children in their everyday lives, including emotional and physical abuse, neglect, financial constraints, malnutrition, a lack of birth

certificates, bullying and low self-esteem, among others. These concur with the findings by Alem (2020) who revealed that orphans in primary schools in Injibara were faced with psychosocial problems that included financial problems, poor nutrition, problematic behaviours both in classroom and outside the classroom, loneliness, constant worries about their life, being highly marginalised and unnoticed by the school community and other community members, poor health, a lower participation in school activities and plenty of anxieties. Similarly, the findings by Saraswat and Unisa (2017) also revealed psychosocial problems experienced by orphans and vulnerable children to be loneliness and helplessness, behavioural disorders, low self-esteem, depression and stress. Though there are several noted challenges facing vulnerable school children, neglect was the most dominant challenge among other challenges noted in the current research. The study also ascertained that the problem of neglect is not only experienced by children who are vulnerable in terms of orphanhood, but even children who are being raised by teenage mothers, single parents and grandmothers. Moreover, this study also revealed that experienced psychosocial challenges pose a big threat towards the academic performance of these vulnerable children.

5.2.2. To find out which intervention programmes are used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools

The current study revealed different intervention programmes that are implemented for promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. Most of these programmes are offered collaboratively by different stakeholders and departments, which include the Department of Education, the Department of Social Development, and NGOs/NPOs. These programmes are provided for individuals, groups and larger capacities such as a school assembly, in the context of the current study. For example, individual counselling is provided to vulnerable children who have been identified by school-teachers, school principals, those identified during awareness campaign presentations, and those emanating from group work programmes. This study also noted *ChommY* to be one of the group work programmes for promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. This programme is part of DSD's compendium of Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) programmes for children between the ages of 10 to 14 years and implemented by social workers from DSD in

primary schools. Furthermore, the Department of Education renders a programme on Primary Peer Education which exposes and highlights the psychosocial issues faced to the children and provides them with knowledge and skills on how to handle such issues. It is also worth noting that the offered programmes not only focus on vulnerable children but also involve parents/caregivers to provide them with relevant parenting skills, as parents/caregivers also have a role to play to vulnerable children in terms of the required psychosocial support. The Department of Education has expanded psychosocial support by taking an initiative to employ learner support agents (LSAs) who are equipped with the necessary skills to enable them to identify problems normally faced by school children and thereby implement prevention programmes in schools. Conversely, some programmes are not thoroughly implemented as participants of the current study felt that there is not enough manpower because of the high number of schools in most communities. On the other hand, it has been noticed that the psychosocial programmes mainly focus on school children, other than the parents themselves. It is however deemed necessary to focus to both parents/caregivers and children to easily tackle the psychosocial problems that may be faced by vulnerable children.

5.2.3. To assess related legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 and the Children's Act 38 of 2005 form the backbone used by school social workers in their daily operation in promoting the psychosocial well-being of children. It was also noted that with the Children's Act, Section 150 is the most-used section, which helps and guide school social workers to identify children who need care and protection. Other legislation commonly used by social workers includes the South African Schools Act and Domestic Violence Act when dealing with the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children.

The current study also found that the Integrated School Health Policy is a cornerstone that guides school social workers in identifying programmes to be implemented within the respective age groups in primary schools. This implies that one may not implement

a programme that is not age appropriate. On the same note, the mental capacity and level of understanding is taken into consideration when implementing programmes to address psychosocial problems facing vulnerable children in schools. According to the Department of Basic Education (2012: 42), the objectives of this policy are to "provide preventive and promotive services that address the health needs of school-going children and youth with regard to both their immediate and future health; to support and facilitate learning through identifying and addressing health barriers to learning; to facilitate health and other services where required and; to support the school community in creating a safe and secure environment for teaching and learning".

The present study has also revealed that school social workers should incorporate legislation and policies with principles to promote the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children. The SACSSP guiding principles and Batho Pele principles are professional values that act as guidelines and a road map for ensuring that services are rendered with respect and dignity by school social workers to vulnerable children in schools. In terms of the SACSSP guiding principles, the study found that confidentiality is of paramount importance when working with children as they are usually afraid to share their problems and do not disclose them easily because of the intimidation they receive at home. In this sense, SACSSP social work principles assist school social workers to obtain more information and therefore able to identify the psychosocial problems encountered by vulnerable children in schools. This aligns with Reyneke (2020: 167) who noted that confidentiality is one of the SACSSP principles that enhance the learners' human rights, worth and dignity.

The study has also revealed that talking about sensitive topics with children can be very difficult for them. It is therefore important to explain confidentiality and its limitations as this helps improve the working relationship and a rapport between the school social workers and these vulnerable children. Moreover, trust is an important element in a client/worker relationship.

5.2.3. To establish the challenges faced by school social workers to promote the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools

There are several encountered challenges when it comes to considering the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools. Those challenges are faced by both school social workers and vulnerable children and thus discussed in the next two sections (5.6.1 and 5.6.2).

5.2.3.1. Challenges faced by school social workers

Among several identified challenges, a lack of cooperation from parents/caregivers was one of the most cited challenges, followed by a challenge of limited time for providing psychosocial support in schools. In terms of the lack of cooperation from parents/caregivers, it was noted that parents/caregivers do not want to collaborate with school social workers in meeting the vulnerable child's needs. In some cases, parents/caregivers do not show up if they have been summoned to meetings addressing psychosocial problems encountered by their children. On the other hand, rendering psychosocial services to vulnerable children is sometimes problematic as school social workers always deal with young children below the age of 18, who always require consent from their parents/caregivers. This can cause an ethical dilemma for the school social worker as counselling permission should be obtained from parents (Reyneke, 2020: 170). Moreover, parents/caregivers' non-cooperative behaviour is accompanied by threatening children to not share their problems with school social workers. This eventually leads to children withholding some information from the school social workers during counselling sessions, which negatively affects the proper provision of psychosocial support.

5.2.3.2. Challenges faced by vulnerable children

The current study discovered various challenges faced by vulnerable children in schools and the challenge of poor hygiene was mostly cited. Most vulnerable children

come to school with unclean and/or torn uniforms or not wearing a full school uniform on the first day of the week because of poor parental supervision. Similar observation was made by Mwoma and Pillay (2016: 90) who revealed that "cleanliness among orphans and vulnerable children was another challenge indicating that orphans and vulnerable children are not supervised at home to ensure personal hygiene". The present study also revealed the challenge of reading and writing for vulnerable children.

5.2.4. To solicit suggestions on improving the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children in schools

There are several ways of improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children. However, in the current study, participants felt that the employment of school based social workers as collaborators would be the most effective ways to overcome the challenges affecting vulnerable school children. Similarly in literature studies by Mwoma and Pillay (2016); Van Sittert (2016); Vergottini and Weyers, (2020); and Reyneke (2020) it was stated that the employment of school social workers to be the most effective manner in improving the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools.

5.3. Conclusions

Based on the above findings, it is evident that the current study was able to meet the set objectives of the study. The conclusions of this study are aligned with the objectives of the study.

5.3.1. To identify psychosocial problems impacting on academic progress of vulnerable children in schools

Vulnerable school children experience various psychosocial problems, whereby low self-esteem, malnutrition, neglect, lack of birth certificate, emotional and physical abuse, bullying and financial constraints were observed to be most dominant issues faced The psychosocial problems experienced by vulnerable children are as a result

of various factors, including children being raised by a single mother, grandmothers, alcohol abuse and peer pressure. These problems have been observed to lead to the poor psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children, which in turn affects their academic performance in school.

5.3.2. To find out which intervention programmes are used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools

Various interventions are used to tackle psychosocial problems of vulnerable children from case work to group work and community work. Social workers from different departments or institutions work collaboratively in promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children in schools by rendering both prevention and intervention programmes for psychosocial support. The Department of Education has employed learner support agents who work together with the social workers in implementing prevention programmes in schools, identifying learners in need of psychosocial support and conducting referrals for relevant support for vulnerable children. *ChommY,* a programme initiated by the Department of Social of Development aimed at children aged 10 to 14 years, and the Department of Education Peer Education programme play a big role in providing psychosocial support to school children. However, it has been noticed that these programmes are not effectively implemented due to less manpower and the high number of schools. Moreover, these programmes mainly focus on vulnerable children and give less attention to parents/caregivers, creating a significant gap that still needs attention.

5.3.3. To assess related legislations used by school social workers to address the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools

The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is the mainstay legislation within the social work profession and is used by social workers in different settings, including a school setting. This Act caters for the care and protection of children and guides school social workers in their daily operations of providing psychosocial support to vulnerable children. School social workers are also guided by the South African Schools Act, the

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Integrated School Health Policy, social work guiding principles from the SACSSP and the Batho Pele principles, in their daily work.

5.3.4. To establish the challenges faced by school social workers in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children in schools

School social workers face several challenges when it comes to the rendering of services to vulnerable children in schools, with a lack of cooperation from parents the stumbling block. Vulnerable children can never be spared from challenges. Poor hygiene seems to be most prominent, among other challenges from their side.

5.3.5. To solicit suggestions on improving the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children in schools

Employment of enough staff, namely social workers and teachers, is a vital requirement in dealing with the psychosocial well-being of the vulnerable school children. This concurs with the findings by Mwona and Pillay (2015) who noted minimal psychosocial support being provided in primary schools, due to a lack of responsible staff and support from parents and teachers. As a result, collaboration between the stakeholders involved, such as teachers, parents or caregivers and school social workers has been noted to be a significant requirement in assisting these vulnerable children to overcome the challenges they are faced with.

5.4. Recommendations

Reflecting on the conclusions made in this study, the following recommendations have been solicited:

- There should be an increase in the employment of school-based social workers due to the high caseload social workers usually have to deal with.
- The Department of Education should employ a school-based social worker who will work together with the learner support agents to elevate the effectiveness of psychosocial support to vulnerable school children, as social workers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to provide interventions

through the use of social work methods, including casework, group work and community work.

- Schools should provide consultation rooms for rendering counselling services to improve the quality in promoting the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children. This will also help in protecting the privacy of vulnerable children.
- Given that neglect is a dominant psychosocial problem experienced by vulnerable children, school social workers should conduct home visits regularly to monitor the well-being of these vulnerable children.
- More programmes should focus on parents/caregivers to encourage and empower them. Equal attention to both vulnerable children and parents/ caregivers to promote the psychosocial well-being of vulnerable children effectively is a requirement. There should be a collaboration between parents and school social workers to facilitate dealing with the psychosocial problems of these vulnerable children.
- The Department of Education and the Department of Social Development should work together, allocating regulated time slots, and make it mandatory to implement group work programmes run by social workers from the Department of Social Development. This will thereby assist in the early identification of psychosocial problems of vulnerable school children and in the provision of early interventions.
- Moreover, school social workers should familiarise themselves with the Policy on Screening Identification.
- Collaboration is vitally significant in allying school social workers, teachers and parents.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
(Reg No: UZREC 171110-030)

RESEARCH & INNOVATION
Website: http://www.unizulu.ac.za
Private Bag X1001
KwaDlangezwa 3886
Tel: 035 902 6273
Email: ViljoenD@unizulu.ac.za
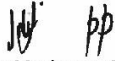
ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Certificate Number	UZREC 171110-030 PGM 2021/83						
Project Title	The Role of the school social worker in promoting psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children under eSikhaleni Senkosi Circuit Primary Schools in KwaZulu-Natal						
Principal Researcher/ Investigator	N Ndlovo						
Supervisor and Co-supervisor	Prof A.L Shokane			Ms S.S Myeni			
Department	Social Work						
Faculty	Arts						
Type of Risk	Medium Risk – Data collection from people						
Nature of Project	Honours/4th Year		Master's	x	Doctoral		Departmental	

The University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC) hereby gives ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project. The Researcher may therefore commence with data collection as from the date of this Certificate, using the certificate number indicated above.

Special conditions:
    (1) This certificate is valid for 1 year from the date of issue.
    (2) Principal researcher must provide an annual report to the UZREC in the prescribed format [due date-31 March 2022]
    (3) Principal researcher must submit a report at the end of project in respect of ethical compliance.
    (4) The UZREC must be informed immediately of any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the documents that were presented to the meeting.

The UZREC wishes the researcher well in conducting research.

Professor Mashupye R. Kgaphola
University Research Ethics Committee
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research & Innovation

31 March 2021

CHAIRPERSON
UNIVERSITY OF ZULULAND RESEARCH
ETHICS COMMITTEE (UZREC)
REG NO: UZREC 171110-30

3 1 -03- 202~

RESEARCH & INNOVATION OFFICE

Appendix B: Letter of request to the Department of Social Development

Name: Nomfundo Ndlovo
Email address: ndlovon985@gmail.com
Contact number: 0609159791

Mrs N.I Vilakazi
Head of Department
Private Bag x 9144
Pietermaritzburg
3201

RE: Request for permission to conduct research

Dear Mrs Vilakazi

I am Nomfundo Ndlovo, a Master's student from the Department of Social Work at the University of Zululand. I am conducting a study on "**The role of the school social worker in promoting psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children under Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal".** The researcher seeks to conduct semi-structured interviews with the School Social Workers as to push for government interventions and provide several ways to overcome neglect in orphaned children and societies as whole. It is noted that school children, vulnerable children in particular are more likely to find the school environment as a completely dreaded place due to their homes and family related problems. In this sense, the school social workers in schools will enhance a collaborative working relationship between school social workers and school teachers which will in return enhance a good teaching and learning environment for school pupils. The obtained data will only be used for research purpose. I therefore request permission to conduct the interviews with the School Social Workers working at the Department of Social Development (Ongoye Service Office) within all the primary schools under Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit as the area of interest.

Attached documents are my proof of registration from the University of Zululand, ethical clearance certificate from the University of Zululand research ethics committee, informed consent and research instrument.

Should you have an inquiry regarding my request, please do not hesitate to contact me or my research supervisor on the following details:
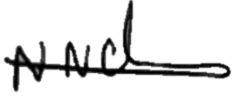
Researcher: Miss N Ndlovu

Email: ndlovon985@gmail.com
Contact number: 060 915 9791 **Researcher Supervisor:** Professor A.L Shokane
Email: ShokaneA@unizulu.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,
Nomfundo Ndlovo

Appendix C: Interview guide for school social workers

University of Zululand

Faculty of Arts

Department of Social Work

Dear participant,

I am Nomfundo Ndlovo, a Master's student from the Department of Social Work at the University of Zululand. I am conducting a study on "**The role of the school social worker in promoting psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children under Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal".** The School Social Workers are noted as having a crucial role in providing several ways to overcome neglect in orphaned children and societies as whole. It is also noted that school children, vulnerable children in particular are more likely to find the school environment as a completely dreaded place due to their homes and family related problems. In this sense, the school social workers in schools will enhance a collaborative working relationship between school social workers and school teachers which will in return enhance a good teaching and learning environment for school pupils. I therefore request permission to conduct online interviews through Microsoft teams or Zoom and or telephonically with the School Social Workers working at the Department of Social Development (Ongoye Service Office) within all the primary schools under Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit as the area of interest.

This study has been granted an ethical clearance certificate by the University of Zululand's Research Ethics Committee (UZREC) and **UZREC171110-030** as the certificate number. Participation in this study is voluntary and and you are free to withdraw your participation from this study at any time, however collected data before withdrawal will be included as collected data for this study. No names or personal particulars of participants will be included in the research and the researcher will use pseudonyms to code collected data. Collected data will only be used for research purpose.

Should you have an inquiry regarding my request, please do not hesitate to contact me or my research supervisor on the following details:

Researcher: Miss N Ndlovu
Email: ndlovon985@gmail.com
Contact number: 060 915 9791 **Researcher Supervisor:** Professor A.L Shokane
Email: ShokaneA@unizulu.ac.za

_____

CONSENT

I voluntarily agree to participate in the research project by (………………………) on the study entitled: **"The role of the school social worker in promoting psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children under Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal"**.

☐

☐

Yes

No

_____   _____ Signature
of Participant   Date

Section A: Demographic Information

1. What is your current age category?
   25-30 years ☐

   35-40 years ☐

   45 and above year☐s☐

2. What is your gender?

   Male ☐

   Female ☐

3. What is your population group?

   African ☐
   White ☐
   Coloured ☐
   Indian/Asian

4. How long have you been working on your position?

5. Have you been employed as a social worker in another organisation?

Section B: Psychosocial Problems Impacting on Academic Progress of Vulnerable Children in Schools

6. From your experience working with school children, which psychosocial problems that vulnerable children come across can you identify?

7. From the mentioned problems, which one(s) is/are more dominant in most children?

8. What do you think could be the possible reason for the dominant problems?

Section C: Interventions That Are Used by School Social Workers to Address Neglect to Vulnerable Children

9. Do you have any available intervention programmes that you use to address the problem of neglect in your everyday work?

10. Are the interventions aimed to individuals, groups or both?

11. What promotion programmes do you have to promote the psychosocial wellbeing of children?

12. Why do you think they are important?

13. If there are none available, do you consider having some in future?

Section D: Legislations Used by School Social Workers in Schools to Address Neglect to Vulnerable Children

14. What policies do you use to address psychosocial issues in vulnerable children?

15. What other related policies are you using jointly with highlighted policies?

16. How exactly do they work or applied?

17. What legislations guide your daily operation?

18. How are they applied in your work setting?

19. What are guiding principles are you applying in your daily work?

20. How are policies, legislations and principles related to each other as applied in addressing problems vulnerable children?

21. Do you also apply the same policies, legislations and guiding principles to other children with different matters?

Section E: Challenges Facing School Social Workers in Promoting the Psychosocial Well-being of Vulnerable Children in Schools

22. What challenges are you facing in addressing psychosocial problems of vulnerable children?

23. What challenges do vulnerable children normally encounter in schools?

24. What do you think could be done to address the highlighted short comings?

Appendix D: Permission Letter

KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DIRECTORATE:
HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT& UTILIZATION

FAXMAIL	: 086 762 2427	Room 112, 174 Mayor's Walk
Telephone/ Ucingo/ Telefoon	: 033 341 7935	Private Bag X9144
Enquiries/ Imibuso/ Navrae	: Ms N Makhoba	Pietermaritzburg
E-mail	: nozipho.makhoba@kznsocdev.gov.za	3200
Reference	: 56/9/2	

Ms N Ndlovo
Masters of Social Work Student
University of Zululand
Private Bag X 1001
KwaDlangezwa
3886

Contact No: 060 915 9791
Email: ndlovon985@gmail.com

Dear Ms Ndlovo
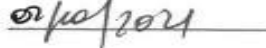
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH UNDER A TOPIC "*THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER IN PROMOTING PSYCHOSOCIAL WELLBEING OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN UNDER ESIKHALENI SENKOSI CIRCUIT P SCHOOLS*"

1. This matter has reference.

2. Kindly be informed that the permission has been granted by the Head of Department for you to conduct research in the department, for you to fulfill the requirement for degree of Masters in Social Work at the University of Zululand.

3. The permission authorizes you to: -

    (a) To conduct a study through semi-structured interviews with social workers in the department who are working at Ongoye Service Office within Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit, at their consent deemed relevant to your research project, and maintain high level of confidentiality; and

    (b) Share your findings with the Department.

Wishing you success during your research project.

Yours Faithfully

MRS NI VILAKAZI
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

DATE: 02/10/2024

GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER

Appendix E: Raw data transcript

1. From your experience working with children, what are the dominant psychosocial problems facing vulnerable children in schools?

Participant 1 – this depends on who is taking care of the child, whether the child is if the foster care parent/ guardian is not proper and unreliable the child experiences malnutrition. You know when children take care of themselves, there is that weakness.

Participant 3 – children are faced with emotional and physical abuse. Neglect is also a major problem and not only have those who are orphans experienced neglect. That is why we refer to these as orphans and vulnerable children because not only children that are orphans are neglected. Sometimes you may find that the child does have a mother and she is working but does not meet the child's basic needs.

2. Are there any programmes implemented in schools to address neglect?

Participant 1 – There are but manpower is not enough. Yes, we do address problems associated with neglect. Let me make an example, we have 600 schools if Mhlathuze has 100 something schools alone, it ends up manpower not being enough. The department has made interventions and employed learner support agents. We do implement programmes but it is not to the best have manpower is not enough. Also with assistance from NGOs, we also do prevention programmes but it is not up to the standard because you cannot go to all the schools…we try to reach as many schools as we can. And just to add, we also train school teachers to be able to do early identification of problems.

Participant 4 – Mmmmmh….it just that for us for child abuse cases and neglect falls under this, we usually refer. We do psychosocial of which we do counselling and early intervention response, check how is the child like then we fill in form 36 before we refer. We also check the physical appearances in the child maybe like physically she/he has bruises, where is he/she hurt? Does he/she have any scars? And emotional on how the child is feeling, you know things like that; socially on how the situation is like at home. Then we refer to DSD to take the case to the court.

Participant 5 – You see, I do not want to lie to you, and it is very difficult to work in schools because you squeeze yourself in number one. So whatever we do we squeeze ourselves, that time you get you request to address children about a certain issue. But teachers are complaining about time so we end up having a challenge and you cannot do a programme with a child because that would be exposing a child to danger. But I try to by all means to do programmes. I am also focusing on the substance abuse programme as there are cases of substance abuse in grade 7. There is a child I referred last week because the school principal requested that I put more emphasis on grades 5 and 7.

3. Do you have any programmes for promoting the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable school children?

Participant 3 – We have a primary peer education programme where we have soul buddies as peer educators, we make children be more involved. For instance, if I do a session on bullying, the soul buddies will demonstrate the type of bullying I explain to other learners. We understand that if the information is coming from them, they can learn a lot from each other.

Participant 9 – We have a programme called ChommY in the Department of Social Development for behaviour change to minimize HIV infections and teenage pregnancies.

4. What policies, legislation and principles do you use in your daily operation?

Participant 11- We integrate the social work values with the principles when working with children in schools such as confidentiality, maintaining a non-judgmental attitude and self-determination.

Participant 6 – children's Act is the leading act, especially in neglect cases as it stipulates that children need to be cared for and protected. If this does not happen then the child's rights have been violated.

5. What challenges do you come across when addressing the psychosocial problems of vulnerable children?

Participant 9 - The child does not want to talk because the child is afraid or maybe is intimidated where she/he is coming from you see what I mean. Then causes a

challenge to a child because sometimes you may find out that the child is smart at school but because of the problems she/he is experiencing, their marks drop at school. Some children really do want talk but the family is preventing the child from talking.

Participant 7 – The challenge that we face is that most of schools do not have rooms to accommodate us as social workers. You know it looks so unprofessional to provide counselling in a car as this also brings stigma to the child as other learners will think that the child has problems because they are seen with a social worker.

6. What do you think could be done to address the aforementioned challenges?

Participant 1- young or newly employed social workers do not have the same dedication as the social workers who have been long employed. If social workers could work with passion and dedication if we could all be self-motivated and *sivukelwe uthando lokusebenza nezingane. Umunt athole icase angiyilandeleli agcine icala. Ingane ethintwe I social worker Fanele ibe nomehluko. Igenge encane kumele ibuyelwe ugqozu lokusebenza. Asibuke senze iintrospection ukuth* are we doing justice to cases we are getting. *Umangabe sonke singaba nothando lokusiza izingane kungangcono.*

Participant 12 – We as social work supervisors are at fault for not supervising accordingly, there needs to be an improvement in cases supervision then things will be better.

Participant 10 – Long short, if our Departments could sit down and help each other. The department of Education should work together with the Department of Social Development so that the social worker can come to the school and assist on the provided slot. Social workers should not come to school only because there is a problem but it should be something that is mandated or the school must have a schoolbased social worker who will be within reach to school children so that the child can be assisted easily.

Appendix F: Proof of editing

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18 March 2022
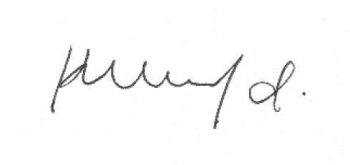
To whom it may concern

Editing of research dissertation

This serves to confirm that I was appointed by Nomfundo Ndlovo to edit the dissertation, *The Role of the School Social Worker in Promoting the Psychosocial Well-being of Vulnerable Children Within the Esikhaleni Senkosi Circuit Primary Schools in KwaZulu-Natal*

The dissertation was edited with respect to grammatical and spelling corrections and conciseness only; at no time was the content altered in any way.

Yours faithfully

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Appendix G: Turn-it-in Report

Ndlovu Nomfundo Masters thesis.docx