THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND MORAL
DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract

South Africa currently has one of the highest levels of crime in the world. The high prevalence of violence in South African culture has led to the increased exposure to violence of individuals of all ages. The South African Police Service annual report for 2008/2009 reported 48 732 crimes ranging from murder, attempted murder to sexual offences and common assault against children under the age of 18 years. In addition, young people between the ages from 12 to 22 are generally victimized at twice the adult rate and even higher for violent crimes. It is the belief of various theorists that exposure to violence can alter one’s cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes- the three core components that are essential to moral development. The role that exposure to violence has on the development of aggressive behavior has been thoroughly researched; however the implications that this exposure has on the moral development of adolescents remains vague. This study explored and described the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. A quantitative exploratory descriptive research design was employed and the participants were selected by means of non-probability, convenience sampling. The sample consisted of 53 participants at a coeducational high school in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. The demographic data of the participants was gathered through the administration of a biographical questionnaire. The participants’ exposure to violence was explored by using the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire- South African Adaptation (HTQ-SAA), while their moral development was assessed by means of the Moral Judgment Test (MJT). The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and both the Pearson’s correlation coefficient and Chi square test was computed to draw inferences regarding the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development.
The results of the study revealed that all of the participants were exposed to violence directly or indirectly on one or more occasion; however the frequency with which the participants were exposed to violence was lower than expected. The results of the MJT further indicated very low to low moral judgement competence scores for the majority of the sample. No significant correlation or association was found between the two constructs.

Key words: South Africa, exposure to violence, adolescents, moral development, Harvard Trauma Questionnaire-South African Adaptation (HTQ-SAA), Moral Judgment Test (MJT).
CHAPTER 1
Introduction and Problem Statement

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the present study. The motivation for this study is highlighted and an overview of literature which serves to contextualize the study is presented. The broad aims of the study are presented which is followed by an outline and overview of the study’s chapters.

1.2 General Overview of the Study

International and national research concerning the exposure to violence of children and adolescents has been vast with most of the findings highlighting the amount of violence youth are regularly exposed to in various settings such as the home, school, media and community. The existing research has provided valuable information regarding the adverse physical, social, emotional and psychological impact that exposure to violence has on the general well-being of children and adolescents.

Research has identified various cognitive, emotional and social sequelae for youth who have been exposed to violence. Studies have shown that exposure to violence results in brain abnormalities and interferes with the attainment of certain cognitive skills such as role-taking, perspective-taking, and decision-making (Gabarino, Kosteleny, & Dubrow,
1998; Goldsmith & Davidson, 2004; Hoaken, 2007; Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Exposure to violence is furthermore responsible for emotions such as fear, anger, depression, anxiety, reduced empathy and emotional numbing (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004; Giaconia et al., 1995; Richters & Martinez, 1993). The link between exposure to violence and perpetrating violence has also been established by both international and national studies (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2005; Flannery, Singer, & Wester, 2001; Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolsky, & Eron, 2003; Lansford, Miller-Johnson, Berlin, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2003; Weist & Cooley-Quille, 2001).

Children and adolescents are bombarded with exposure to violence on multiple levels as they witness or are the direct victims through family, school, community, television, internet, and video game violence. The increased amount of violence children and adolescents are exposed to in these multiple contexts on a daily basis results in the desensitization, internalization and normalization of violence (Farrel & Bruce, 1997; Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004). Furthermore, the unintended messages sent to developing youth through exposure to violent role models in their home, community and the media is that immoral and violent actions are acceptable and can be used to solve problems. The biological, psychological and social implications for development of children who have been exposed to violence have been addressed separately; however limited research has investigated the combined impact on specific developmental areas such as moral development.

Morality or moral development has been researched extensively for centuries and has produced numerous theories broadening understanding of this topic. Although there has
not always been consensus regarding the definition of morality, most theorists can agree that it involves the ability to judge certain actions as right and others as wrong and to behave accordingly. There are three broad components that can be identified and which have formed the foundation for various theories regarding moral development, these are the affective, cognitive and behavioural components (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Some theories propose moral affect and the ability to feel empathy for others as instrumental in moral behaviour (Hoffman, 2000). Other theories regard cognitive development as essential for moral growth and moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1971; Piaget, 1965). The underlying principles of moral behaviour are considered as important in theories such as the social learning theory which ascribe moral behaviour to observational learning, reinforcement and the internalization of moral standards (Bandura, 1977; 1991). In highlighting the various components underlying moral development and the theories that support these components it becomes evident that an integrated and comprehensive perspective is necessary when discussing moral development.

South African surveys and studies concerning the impact of exposure to violence have focused predominantly on specific consequences of exposure to violence such as the development of subsequent Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and its related symptoms (Peltzer, 1998; Ward, Flisher, Zissis, Muller, & Lombard, 2001), the development of intimate partner violence (Abrahams, 2005; 2006; Jewkes, 2002) and the effects of exposure to direct and vicarious political, family, and community violence on the adjustment of adolescents (Barbarin, Richter & De Wet, 2001). The impact of exposure to violence on the morality or moral development of developing youth has received limited attention within the South African context.
1.3 Rationale for this Study/ Problem Statement

Young people aged between 12 and 22 are generally victimized at twice the adult rate and even higher for violent crimes in South Africa (Pelser, 2008). They furthermore experience assault at eight times the adult rate; theft at five times and robbery at four times the adult rate. In considering the amount of violence South African youth are exposed to regularly and the negative consequences of exposure to violence previously highlighted, the question arises as to how these exposures has influenced their well-being and development.

As discussed in an aforementioned section, exposure to violence in multiple contexts and the contact with violent and immoral role models possibly serve to convey the message that violence and immoral actions are acceptable. The National Youth Victimisation Study conducted in 2005 reported that criminality within South African families include family members using illegal drugs (15.2 % of sample), parents/caregivers ever been in jail (9.2%) and siblings ever been in jail (18.1%) (Leoschut & Burton, 2005). In addition, almost half of the participants were personally acquainted with criminals in the community and more than a quarter were familiar with community members earning a living through crime (Leoschut & Burton, 2005). The statistics indicate that approximately 15% of all criminal offences in South Africa are committed by children under the age of 18 years but that the contribution of children to overall levels of crime is more than likely a much higher figure (Pereira, 2002). The South African Police Services murder dockets for 2001 showed that the largest group of offenders fell within the 20-29 year age group (43%) and 17% were between the ages of 10 to 19 (CSVR, 2007). In South Africa, 38% of all sentenced and unsentenced prisoners in correctional institutions are 25 years or younger (Department of Correctional Services, 2007). In addition to
the statistics of youth victimization mentioned previously, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2008) found that 76.2% of young offenders had previously been victims of crimes.

Despite the socialization of youth through the internalization and normalization of violence as acceptable behaviour in one’s culture, the implications for the moral development and moral behaviour of adolescents in cultures which tolerate immoral actions are immense. Moral development theories describe various avenues through which morality and moral behaviour develops. Socialization is one of these avenues and one that can not be ignored in the South African context; however there are other cognitive and emotional developmental theories that are just as important in moral development and which also have to be considered. In an aforementioned section of this chapter a few of the consequences of exposure to violence have been briefly discussed as well as how it potentially could interfere with the functioning and development of children and adolescents (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2005; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Flannery et al., 2001; Funk et al., 2004; Gabarino et al., 1998; Giaconia et al., 1995; Goldsmith & Davidson, 2004; Hoaken, 2007; Huesmann et al., 2003; Lansford et al., 2003; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Richters & Martinez, 1993; Weist & Cooley-Quille, 2001).

In South Africa, the high amount of crime adolescents fall victim to or witness and the high amount of adolescents who are perpetrators of violence and crime are cause for concern. South Africa has become increasingly more westernized resulting in a loss of cultural values and beliefs which emphasized caring and respect for others above the needs of the self. The impact of exposure to violence on the biological, psychological and social systems of the youth coupled with a lack of moral values and beliefs passed down by parents, significant others and the community has created a cycle of immorality and violence amongst the youth of our country (Leoschut & Burton, 2005; Pereira, 2002). The need for research in this field is vital in
order to broaden understanding of the impact of exposure to violence as well as identifying
potential interventions which would prevent the cycle of violence and immorality to continue
amongst the youth of South Africa. It is in light of the above mentioned that the researcher
sought to understand the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development by
identifying the impact of exposure to violence on the adolescent and describing the potential
influence on moral development.

1.4 Aims of the Study

Despite a few studies being conducted with regards to the effect that exposure to violence has on
the youth of South Africa, there has been limited research investigating the specific impact of
exposure to violence on the moral development of the youth of South Africa. The dearth of research
motivated the present study to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence
and moral development amongst adolescent learners. In light of the above the aims for this study can
be described as follows:

1. To explore and describe adolescents’ exposure to violence as measured by the Harvard Trauma
   Questionnaire (HTQ-SAA).
2. To explore and describe the moral development of adolescents as measured by the Moral
   Judgment Test (MJT).
3. To explore and describe the relationship between the exposure to violence and moral
   development of adolescents.
1.5 Outline of the Study

In this chapter the context and overview of the study was provided, additionally the rationale and aims of the study were presented. In Chapter Two the reader is introduced to the various theoretical viewpoints which have informed current understanding of moral development. The theoretical viewpoints of moral development provide information regarding the range of factors responsible for moral growth and development. Chapter Three provides an overview of the impact of exposure to violence on the functioning and development of children and adolescents. The chapter gives an overview of the statistics of the incidence and prevalence of violence in South Africa followed by literature which suggests a link between exposure to violence and violent behaviour. In addition, Chapter Three explores and describes the link between exposure to violence and moral development. Finally, a biopsychosocial perspective of the connection between exposure to violence and moral development is presented.

Chapter Four describes the research design and methodology utilized in this study. In Chapter Five the results of the study are provided and the findings are discussed according to the aims of the study. Chapter Six presents the concluding remarks in relation to the study’s results and findings. In addition, a critical evaluation of the study is provided by considering its value and limitations. Finally, recommendations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter a brief overview of the incidence and prevalence with which adolescents are exposed to violence was given. The reader was introduced to the concept of moral development and
the basic components which have informed moral developmental theories. This chapter further outlined some of the potential harmful effects of exposure to violence for the general functioning and moral development of the youth in South Africa, highlighting the rationale for this study. The specific aims of the study were provided. In the following chapter the various theoretical viewpoints of moral development are discussed.
CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Viewpoints on Moral Development

2.1 Introduction

Many philosophers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle have grappled with morality since the beginning of the fourth century. These philosophers believed that objective knowledge of the good or moral is possible and that reason, justice and right conduct are key aspects essential to living a good life. The age of modern science however moved away from the view of knowledge as absolute and objective to a more relativistic, naturalistic and empirical view of knowledge and morality. Moral philosophers and theorists perspectives of morality are still being influenced by the notion of either an objective or relativistic morality. There are diverse views regarding why humans act the way they do in morally challenging situations and judge certain actions as right and others as wrong.

In this chapter the reader will be introduced to the theoretical viewpoints that inform understanding of moral development and have contributed to the literature in this field. In discussing theoretical viewpoints on moral development, the meaning of morality or moral development will firstly be explored within this chapter.

2.2 The Meaning of Morality and Moral Development

There are three components of morality that inform theoretical perspectives on moral development; these are ‘moral reasoning’ (cognition), ‘moral emotions’ (affect), and ‘moral conduct’ (behavioural) (Askan, & Dunbar, 2005; Kochanska & Askan, 2006; Kohanska, Forman,
Perry & Busey, 1984). The affective component comprises of the feelings which facilitate the development of moral thoughts and surrounds right or wrong actions. It is said that the affective component of morality includes children’s feelings as well as their experiences (Hoffman, 2000; Kochanska & Askan, 2006; Perry & Bussey, 1984). Researchers have also defined moral affect to include feelings like ‘guilt, discomfort, concern, and empathy following a transgression’ (Kochanska, Gross, Lin & Nichols, 2002). The cognitive component focuses on the process of conceptualizing right and wrong as well as decisions regarding appropriate behaviour and the justifications thereof.

According to Sigelman and Rider (2006) the behavioural component consists of how one behaves when faced with moral situations. The behavioural component has also been identified as consisting of two parts, the first being the engagement in prosocial behaviours and the second being resistance or inhibition to engage in antisocial behaviours (Koenig, Cicchetti, & Rogosch, 2004; Perry & Bussey). According to Kurtinez and Gewirtz (1984) moral behaviour can be seen as the manifestation of four inner cognitive affective processes. The first of these processes is the ability to interpret a situation as a moral problem and evaluating the courses of action along with its consequences for all individuals involved. In the second process a plan of action is formulated that applies the relevant moral norms. The third process involves making a selection among competing values which then determines one’s actions. The fourth process entails putting the moral plan into action. Kurtinez and Gewirtz (1984) further state that deficiencies in any of the components can impact on the ability to behave morally. As highlighted previously the interplay between the three components of moral development are essential and facilitate moral reasoning, moral emotions and moral behaviour. In the following section the importance of the cognitive component in moral development is discussed.
2.3 Cognitive Developmental Theories

Cognitive developmental theorists predominantly focus on the reasoning underlying morality as well as the qualitative form of an individual’s reasoning and the developmental changes that occur in the reasoning (Colby, Kohlberg, & Kauffman, 1987). Two theorists who emphasized the importance of the cognitive component to moral development and have contributed significantly to the field of moral development are Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg. These theorists believed that cognitive development is necessary although not sufficient for moral development to occur. Piaget (1965) and Kohlberg (1971) believed that the two elements that are critical in moral development are cognitive growth and social experience. This means that certain cognitive structures facilitate the acquisition of skills like role-taking and perspective – taking which are achieved through social experience and which plays an instrumental part in moral development (Reimer et al., 1983; Sigelman & Rider, 2006).

The cognitive theorists further believe that justice is a key concept when considering moral development (Crain, 1985; Kohlberg, 1981). According to Piaget (1965) children’s development of justice progresses from a narrow perspective informed by adult authority to a broader perspective in which children weigh all relationships and circumstances before decisions are made regarding questions of justice. Kohlberg (1981) viewed justice as the most ‘structural’ or ‘operational’ domain of moral or evaluative thought. The justice ‘operations’ of reciprocity and equality are essential to the idea of fairness which is necessary for the adequate weighing of conflicting claims and moral judgment (Colby et al., 1983). Each stage of moral development therefore consists of its own principles of justice which are used to resolve conflicts posed by moral dilemmas. It is evident that
both Piaget and Kohlberg viewed the acquisition of knowledge and application of justice principles as instrumental in moral growth.

The cognitive-developmental approach and the theorists that ascribe to this approach will be discussed in the next section as this approach has been the focus for many within the field of moral development.

2.3.1 Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget was one of the first theorists postulating the importance of cognitive development and its role in moral development. Piaget believed that “all morality consists in a system of rules, and the essence of all morality is to be sought for in the respect which the individual acquires for those rules” (Piaget, 1965, p. 13). In other words, Piaget believed that moral development is dependent on children’s consciousness, respect, understanding, knowledge, and finally independent practice of moral rules. In reviewing his theory of moral development it becomes evident that rules are seen as instrumental to morality. Piaget (1932) examined the moral judgment of children and their notions of justice by interviewing them regarding game rules as well as questioning them about stories of clumsiness, stealing and lying. In discussing Piaget’s stages of moral development examples from these stories, especially the stealing story will be used to illustrate the moral judgement of children at each stage.

Piaget’s (1965) theory of moral development consists of a premoral period and two distinct moral stages. The premoral period begins during the preschool years when children are still unaware and uncertain about rules. During this period children’s thinking and social interaction with others are predominantly egocentric.
The Heteronomous morality stage develops between the ages of 6 and 10 years, and in this stage children begin to understand the importance of rules. They believe that these rules have been passed down by authority figures which include their parents and are therefore sacred and unchanging. During this stage children rigidly adhere to the rules and expect everyone else to do the same (Reimer, Paolitto & Hersh, 1983). The child in this developmental stage feels a sense of obligation to the rules which guide their actions, but do not yet possess the cognitive structures to apply these rules (Duska & Whelan, 1977). Although children are unable to apply the rules during this stage, it is however the first sign of moral conscience development. Furthermore, in this stage children do not consider the intentions of an offender when evaluating whether an act was good or bad (Piaget, 1965). The magnitude of the material consequences and adherence to the rules are the primary criterion for judging an act for children in this stage of moral realism. Objective responsibility is used as the basis for judging actions (Duska & Whelan, 1977). The thinking of children during the Heteronomous morality stage is illustrated by extracts from Piaget’s (1965) research on the moral judgement of a child. Marilene a six year old participant states that the boy in the first of three stealing stories presented to her was the naughtiest as the item he stole cost the most, neglecting to consider that the boy was starving and therefore stole bread. The above example emphasizes that a child during this stage of moral development focus primarily on material result whilst intention or motive are not considered in judgement (Duska & Whelan, 1977).

The final stage of moral development according to Piaget is autonomous morality which begins at the age of 10 to 11 years. Children start to realize that rules constitute agreements between individuals and can only be altered when both individuals agree upon the change. They are able to cooperatively modify and adapt the rules when necessary. During this stage the individual’s
intentions behind an act is considered when judging whether actions are good or bad (Piaget, 1965). In addition, once a child has reached this stage they are able to judge actions by subjective responsibility which entails seeing actions from perspectives other than their own (Duska & Whelan, 1977). Children older than seven were exposed to the same stealing stories mentioned previously, but in this instance they compared the intentions of the actors in the stories and judged the well-intentioned actors as less naughty (Duska & Whelan, 1977).

Piaget’s contribution to the understanding of the development of justice will now be discussed as ideas of what is fair and just are essential to moral judgement. There are three stages that can be identified in the development of justice. The first stage occurs in children aged five to seven years old who view justice as what is commanded by adults. The second stage begins at the age of 8 to 12 years; during this stage equality becomes the basis for judgments on fairness. The third stage begins at the age of 12 to 14 years old and children in this stage consider relationships as well as circumstances when making judgments of fairness. They have become autonomous in moral judgement (Buska & Whelan, 1977). Piaget (1932) ascribes stage movement to appropriate cognitive development, meaning the ability to view moral issues from multiple perspectives and social experience where peer interactions facilitate the child’s ability to learn regard for others, and the importance of rules and role-taking. Piaget believed that children’s earliest structures develop through their interactions with their environment and subsequent structures develop through the interaction of the existing structures and their current behavioural experiences (Kurtinez & Gewirtz, 1984). Piaget (1997) furthermore believed that moral action preceded moral thought through social interactions as children learn about abstract concepts from their social interactions which lead them to new moral understandings. Peer interaction which involves cooperation is regarded as an important way by which children develop sympathy, mutuality, recognition of reciprocal rights and
duties, and a sense of justice. In addition, Piaget not only considered peer interactions as important in moral development but acknowledged the influence of society. He believed that Heteronomy lessens as children experience societies of mutual respect, and that the ability to consider intentions behind actions should be fostered by the societies one lives in (Duska & Whelan, 1977).

In the review of Jean Piaget’s theory of moral development various strengths and weaknesses become evident. The work of Piaget has provided a solid foundation for developmental theories and shaped the field of cognitive psychology as it is currently understood. Flavell (1996) highlights some of the most important contributions of Piaget to the field of developmental psychology. One such a contribution is the development of the assimilation-accommodation model of cognitive growth illustrating that cognitive development occurs through constant cognitive structural acquisition and change. Furthermore, Piaget’s concepts of egocentrism, centration and decentration have expanded understanding of social and nonsocial thinking (Flavell, 1996). In addition, Piaget has expanded the understanding of children’s thinking at different ages, from the quantitative, to logical and finally abstract metacognitive thinking of adolescence (Flavell, 1996). Piaget further proposed the importance of social interactions in the development of cognitive, affective and moral development as well as the impact of moral content on moral reasoning. Piaget believed that the moral content of a situation will impact on moral reasoning and that an individual can employ more than one level of moral reasoning at any point in time. The concepts and ideas identified by Piaget as instrumental to moral development are today still influencing the field of moral development and as such he has in many ways laid the groundwork for future moral development theories.

The weaknesses of Piaget’s theory have been identified by numerous theorists and will be discussed in the following section. In a critical analysis of Piaget’s concept of morality Weinreich-Haste (1982) highlights some of the criticisms launched against Piaget’s theory of moral
development. One of these criticisms is directed toward Piaget’s lack of consideration of the impact of affect-based relations such as friendship and love on the development of moral judgement. A further criticism is that Piaget’s moral perspective is predominantly based upon justice and rules excluding the influence of empathy and motivation. Piaget’s concentration on the rules of marbles as instrumental in understanding and practicing moral rules has furthermore been criticized by Turiel (1983).

Piaget’s claim of intentionality as a criterion for making moral judgements at age 7 to 9 years has also been criticized as it has been shown that five year old children are able to use intentionality in their moral decisions (Langford, 1995). Finally, Piaget has received criticism for the limited nature of his work on moral development as he neglected the period of development from 13 years to adulthood which was later highlighted in Kohlberg’s theory.

As is evident from Piaget’s theory of moral development and the criticisms thereof, some flaws are present in his theory explaining the development of moral judgement. However, Piaget’s theory of cognitive and moral developmental has been influential in the field of development and some of his key ideas remain relevant to the current understanding of moral development.

2.3.2 Lawrence Kohlberg

Kohlberg’s theory will be discussed next as he expanded Piaget’s theory of moral development and introduced new concepts and ideas into the field of moral development by delineating six stages through which moral judgement progresses. According to Kohlberg moral judgement is a cognitive process that allows one to reflect on one’s values and order them in a logical hierarchy (Reimer et al., 1983). Kohlberg also provides a description of moral development as progressing through an
invariant sequence of stages as one develops the ability to understand and integrate multiple points of view on moral-conflict situations as well as being able to take increasing amounts of situational variables into account. Kohlberg’s view of upward progression to the next stage of moral development was based upon Piaget’s (1977) process of “equilibration”. In order to understand Kohlberg’s theory of progression one has to review Piaget’s theory of constructivism and equilibration. Constructivism comprises the view that children construct reality or knowledge of the world from their experiences and this knowledge of the world or their reality is then kept in schemes. Schemes are cognitive structures- organized patterns of action or thought that people construct to interpret their experiences (Piaget, 1952; 1977; Siegler & Ellis, 1996). Piaget further stated that organization and adaptation are important to the development of schemes or understanding. Organization consists of combining existing schemes into new or more complex ones and adaptation entails adapting to the demands of the environment through assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation allows for the interpretation of new experiences in terms of existing schemes and Accommodation is the process by which existing schemes are modified to better fit new experiences (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Piaget believed that when new experiences challenge old schemes, old ways of thinking or existing ways of understanding are challenged and cognitive conflict or cognitive disequilibrium occurs. It is through cognitive disequilibrium that cognitive growth and more advanced understanding develops (Piaget, 1985).

According to Kohlberg moral reasoning is structured in the mind in the form of schemes or schemata which are used to perceive and ascribe meaning to everyday experiences. Moral development entails change in mental structures through assimilation, accommodation and cognitive disequilibrium. Disequilibrium occurs when an individual is faced with a conflicting situation to which there is no clear solution, and as a result attempts to find a more adequate cognitive solution.
In finding this more adequate solution an individual has progressed to a higher stage of reasoning and moral development. Kohlberg further emphasized decentration as important in the process of moral development. He postulated that once individuals are able to understand the perspective of others in a particular situation their moral reasoning moves beyond self-centeredness and decentration is achieved (Gibbs, Arnold, Ahlborn, & Cheesman, 1984; Gibbs, Basinger, & Fuller, 1992; Kohlberg, 1969; 1984). Decentration therefore entails the ability to consider the perspectives of others in moral reasoning (Piaget, 1932; 1965). Kohlberg’s stages of moral development are discussed in depth in the next section in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of his view of moral development.

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development has three levels each consisting of two stages, and therefore there are six distinct stages of moral development an individual progresses through in an invariant sequence (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1963; 1981; 1984). Level 1 is called Preconventional morality and is observable among pre-adolescent children. At this level rules are externalized as children attribute no value to rules themselves but merely consider them to be indicators of behaviour that would either bring pleasure or pain (Duska & Whelan, 1977). Conforming to rules occurs merely to avoid punishment or to gain personal reward. In this level of moral development the concrete interests of the individual is paramount. Stage 1 of this level is called the Punishment and Obedience Orientation stage, and occurs between the ages of five to eight years old (Reimer et al., 1983). An act during this stage is judged as good or bad depending on its consequences. Children consider physical punishment to be the primary consequence to an act during this stage and therefore their own values are generated due to a fear of punishment. Stage 2 is called the Instrumental Hedonism stage and develops among seven to eight year olds and continues throughout the primary school years. During this stage children learn to coordinate perspectives
thus realizing that others perspectives or views are not static and are subject to change when new information is introduced. A form of fairness develops where an act is judged to be acceptable if there is a good reason for doing it and when it satisfies one’s own needs. This stage is therefore characterized by conformation to rules for the purpose of personal satisfaction and reward (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1963; 1981; 1984).

Level 2 which is called Conventional morality entails an individual internalizing moral values and being able to take on the perspective of others. Rules are now obeyed in order to maintain social order or to gain approval from others. In addition, adhering to the moral norms society prescribes is important in this level. In the Conventional level there develops a cognitive recognition of the value of a group as well as their practices and rules (Duska & Whelan, 1977). The individual becomes aware that esteem and approval from others is more important than rewards, but that in order to receive the esteem and approval of others you have to do your share (Duska & Whelan, 1977). Stage 3 in this level is labeled the ‘Good boy’ or ‘Good girl’ morality stage where an action is considered to be good when it is approved of by others. This stage begins to develop during pre-adolescence and continues throughout adolescence. In this stage behaviour is often judged by intention and good intentions are approved off (Duska & Wheelan, 1977). The ability to take a third-person perspective develops which allows one to consider how the group might react to a particular action. The third-person perspective is important as moral action is guided by what significant others expect of you as a member of the group or society (Reimer et al., 1983). Self-sacrifice is considered when deciding whether an act was good or bad. Furthermore, psychological pleasure in the form of approval has taken the place of concrete forms of pleasure at this stage.

Stage 4 is called the Authority and Social Order Maintaining Morality stage. This stage develops from mid-adolescence and usually becomes dominant only after 18 years old (Reimer et al., 1983).
In stage 4 the shared point of view or perspective of the social system one belongs to motivates moral action. Furthermore, an action is viewed as right when it conforms to the rules of the legitimate authorities, respecting the law is valued during this stage (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987; Kohlberg, 1963; 1981; 1984). According to Kohlberg (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971, p. 415) there is an “orientation towards authority, fixed rules and the maintenance of social order. Right behaviour consists in doing one’s duty, showing respect for authority and maintaining the given social order for its own sake”. In other words, individuals in this stage attribute great importance to authority, rules and the social order of society and these aspects influence their moral judgement and subsequent actions.

Level 3 is labeled Post Conventional morality, at this level an individual deems an action as good based upon the broad principles of justice that comprise of the perspectives of all individuals. In this level an individual is able to gain distance from the norms and laws of society in order to create their own set of principles that guide their actions in moral dilemmas. Individuals in this level have the ability to take an outsiders perspective of society along with its traditions and standards. They are able to decide independently about what is right or wrong which results in autonomy in judgement.

Stage 5 is the Morality of Contract of Individual Rights, and Democratically Accepted Law stage. In this stage the individual becomes aware of the importance of developing rules and laws that have been agreed upon by the majority and which enhances social welfare. The principle of the social contract is utilized during this stage where individual rights are considered as well as the limits of social obligations (Reimer et al., 1983). According to Kohlberg, right action during this stage is defined in terms of general individual rights and critically examined standards with which the whole of society agrees. Furthermore, the legal point of view is emphasized whilst simultaneously emphasizing the possibility that the law can be altered.
Stage 6 is called the Morality of Individual Principles of Conscience and is deemed the highest stage of moral reasoning. In this stage the individual uses their own self generated principles which are broad and universal to decide whether an action is right or wrong (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). In other words, one’s conscience along with self-chosen universal principles of justice which includes the reciprocity and equality of human rights as well as respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals guide moral action (Duska & Whelan, 1977).

In addition to Kohlberg’s stages of moral development delineated above he also identified two moral types called type A ‘heteronomous’ and type B ‘autonomous’. He believed that individuals’ moral judgements can be classified into either type A or B and that criterion like ‘freedom’, ‘mutual’ ‘respect’, ‘reversibility’, ‘constructivism’, and ‘choice’ are the basis for this distinction. Type B moral judgments would include the above mentioned criteria where rules and regulations are considered along with the needs, rights, and obligations of the individuals involved in the particular situation before making a moral judgement. In addition, Type B moral judgements would reflect responsibility, mutual respect for all involved, and the understanding that in certain situations laws and rules could be adapted. Type A however constitutes lower stage reasoning based solely upon rules, regulations of the law and authority. Type A moral judgments are further characterized by self-interests and the lack of perspective taking (Levine, Pakvis, Higgins-D’ Alessandro, 2000). Kohlberg viewed these types as developmental in nature, age dependent, influenced by socio-cultural environments and believed that a relationship exists between moral type and moral action (Colby et al., 1987 b).

Kohlberg (1969; 1971; 1981) further believed that the reasoning surrounding moral dilemmas develop in a similar fashion in both Western and Non-Western countries and that the development of moral reasoning follows the same invariant stages in all cultures but that the Post-Conventional
and Principled level of stages 5 and 6 are not universal across all cultural groups. Kohlberg ascribed to the notion of universal stages of moral development which are defined by their structure or form and not the content of reasoning (Smith, 1992). The structure of moral reasoning referred to above are the patterns of thought which underlie moral reasoning and not the unique moral beliefs held by an individual.

Similarly to Piaget, Kohlberg believed that there were two factors responsible for the moral development of an individual, the development of certain cognitive capacities which enable adequate moral judgement and subsequent moral behaviour, and the perspective taking process which develops through social interaction (Matarazzo, Abbamonte, & Nigro, 2008). According to Kohlberg (1981, p.134) “forms of moral judgment clearly reflects forms of cognitive logical capacity”. This means that moral development and cognitive development influence one another in a reciprocal way. As mentioned previously, Kohlberg believed that not only cognitive growth but also social experiences are important as they could result in advances or decline in the moral judgement of an individual. According to Kohlberg (as cited in Turiel, 1998, p. 867):

Children form ways of thinking through their social experiences which include substantive understandings of moral concepts like justice, rights, equality, and welfare. An implicit but important assumption in this formulation is that morality is not solely, or even mainly, imposed on children nor solely based on avoiding negative emotions like anxiety and guilt. As part of their orientation to social relationships, and especially through taking the perspectives of others children generate judgments, built on emotions like sympathy, empathy, respect, love, and attachment, to which they have an commitment and which are not in conflict with their natural or biological dispositions.

Kohlberg (1969; 1976) believed that children have to be exposed to moral reasoning at a stage higher than their current reasoning for disequilibrium to occur and to enable them to progress to the next stage of moral judgement. Children who lack the necessary cognitive growth or social experiences exposing them to a higher stage of reasoning will inevitably remain at their current
stage of moral development. In addition, Kohlberg believed that moral reasoning will remain the same irrespective of the specific content of the moral situation. He proposed that an individual’s moral judgement is not situation dependent and that if an individual has only reached stage 2 of moral development this will characterize their moral reasoning despite the specific situation they are faced with. Kohlberg acknowledged that situational factors do have an impact on an individual’s moral action but that the higher one’s level of moral reasoning the less impact these variables would have on one’s moral actions. In other words, the higher moral reasoning the more likely moral conduct is and the greater the consistency between moral judgement and conduct (Kohlberg & Candee, 1984).

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development has contributed to the field of moral development in substantial ways. According to Kurtines and Gewirtz (1995) Kohlberg’s theory has shaped the field of moral development as it has evolved. One of Kohlberg’s main contributions was the application of the concept of stage to moral judgement and delineating six stages of moral judgement individuals’ progress through (Reimer, Paolitto, & Hersh, 1983). Furthermore, Kohlberg’s explanation of moral development and upward progression has been a major contributor to moral education.

Although Kohlberg’s theory made a substantial contribution to the field of moral development it has endured many criticisms. One such a criticism is from Turiel (as cited in Rest, 1997) who disagrees with Kohlberg’s single system view of morality and recognizes morality and social conventions as being separate, different and parallel domains of cognitive development. He believed that children are able from a young age to distinguish the behaviour that falls within the moral domain from the behaviour which can be ascribed to social convention. Furthermore, Turiel (1983, 1998) explains that children construct moral concepts on the basis of their social interactions and
young children are capable of judging an act like stealing or hurting others as wrong not because they fear punishment as a consequence but rather because they are concerned with the welfare of others.

An additional criticism is that of Gilligan (1982) who believed that Kohlberg’s theories were inadequate, male-based, and incomplete as it did not adequately reflect the morality of girls and women. Kohlberg’s theory only focused on measuring the justice reasoning and excluded the characteristically feminine care reasoning (Walker, 1994). Furthermore, Colby et al. (1983) lists two additional criticisms, as the moral dilemmas are considered to be hypothetical and far removed from the life experiences of children, adolescents and adults. Secondly, the sample Kohlberg used were mainly male and as such the findings may only hold for males. Rest (1979) disagrees with Kohlberg’s claim that development progresses through a stepwise sequence of stages, but rather that individuals’ simultaneously use reasoning of many types and therefore a description of an individual’s moral judgement should reflect the proportion of each type of reasoning rather than one stage.

Kohlberg’s claim of universal stages of moral development has also received criticism by many theorists. Some cultural theorists postulate that morality is a concept relative to one’s culture and that moral values and behaviours differ from one society to another (Gielen & Markoulis, 1994). Kohlberg recognized that moral diversity among cultures exists but believed that “cultural factors might speed up, slow down, or stop development, but they do not change its sequence” (Colby, Kohlberg, & Kauffman, 1987, p.6)

In light of the above the present author believes it is important to consider cultural diversity when discussing moral development as one can assume that countries ascribing to duty-based interpersonal morality will inevitably only reach stage 4 of Kohlberg’s moral development as this
stage is characterized by doing one’s duty and meeting the social expectations of one’s society, although this would be deemed the highest level of moral reasoning in that particular culture. In contrast, countries ascribing to the individually oriented interpersonal morality would have the potential to reach Kohlberg’s stage 5 or 6 of moral development as these individuals would strive toward developing self-chosen principles of justice.

Kohlberg has been criticized for his definition of justice as the central principle of morality, neglecting to consider the diverse moral systems other countries are based upon, for instance, kin-group affiliation or honour (Chazan, 1980; Simpson, 1974). In a study by Nissan and Kohlberg (1982) factors like the environment as well as culture of the participants were seen as partially responsible for the lower stages of moral reasoning found amongst these participants. Despite the fact that findings from Kohlberg’s cross-cultural studies have shown that the first four stages of moral development appear to be universal (Gielen & Markoulis, 1994; Snarey, 1985) one has to be cautious when measuring individuals from a non-western society against the norms and values held by western societies.

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development has made a large contribution to the field of moral development through expanding on Piaget’s original theory and delineating six stages of moral judgement individuals progress through. In addition, Kohlberg’s stage model has influenced the literature and theories of moral development for a significant period of time as well as informing educational practices of moral development. Although Kohlberg has widened understanding of moral development, numerous flaws have been identified within his theory. Kohlberg’s theory of moral judgement has been based upon hypothetical dilemmas, which lack consideration of real-life applicability as well as the situational and cultural variables likely to influence moral-decision making.
Criticisms against the cognitive-developmental approach in general has been the lack of consideration of the affective impact on moral judgement (Haidt, 2001), the influence of situational variables on moral cognition (Krebs, Vermeulen, Carpendale, & Denton, 1991), and that moral development produces multiform moral thinking rather than following a single developmental track (Bandura, 1991).

Although the focus in the past has predominantly been on the cognitive-developmental approach there are many theories explaining the development of morality and as such need to be discussed in order to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of all theoretical viewpoints on this topic. The social-learning approach will be discussed in greater detail in the next section along with the factors identified as instrumental to moral and immoral behaviour.

### 2.4 The Social Learning Theory

According to social learning theorist Bandura (1996) moral development produces ‘multiform’ moral thought and moral reasoning is driven by personal and subjective preferences rather than the level of cognitive competence. Bandura (1991) viewed morality as being dependent on the internalization of a set of standards in order to achieve self-directedness and a sense of self continuity or purpose in existence. The social learning theory thus suggests that children learn moral behaviour from an early age through physical sanctions which discourages problem behaviour, and as children mature they experience social sanctions which provide information regarding appropriate behaviour in different situations. Children learn how to discriminate approved from disapproved forms of conduct and regulation of actions based on the expected social consequences of their behaviour (Bandura & Walters, 1959; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; Walters & Grusec, 1977).
This theory further postulates that socialization is responsible for developing moral behaviour and emphasize the importance of internalization of moral standards as well as the evaluative reactions of parents and significant others with regards to appropriate conduct. In the event that unpleasant experiences occur as result of unacceptable behaviour it influences the moral behaviour of children. Children learn to self-regulate their behaviour in self-approving and self-critical ways based upon these evaluative reactions of others and are consequently able to apply self-sanctions when confronted with moral predicaments (Bandura, 1991). Moral reasoning is viewed as the interpretation of available information in moral predicaments against one’s personal standards and situational variables in evaluating the rightness or wrongness of action. Cognitive skills and competencies are also deemed important in moral reasoning as it facilitates the ability to comprehend and internalize the modeling of different moral opinions by parents, peers and significant others.

These theorists further believe that moral judgement of a moral dilemma entails the consideration of multidimensional rules such as the nature of the act, context and intention, consequences of the action and characteristics of the perpetrator and victim (Bandura, 1991). This theory states that the relationship between moral thought and action is dependent upon the exercise of moral agency (Bandura, 1986; Rottschaefer, 1986). The moral agency of an individual can be explained as self-regulatory mechanisms and its subfunctions that individuals apply when confronted with a morally complex situation. These three subfunctions are: self-monitoring of conduct through monitoring one’s behaviour in certain situations; judgement of conduct in relation to personal standards and environmental circumstances through extracting, weighing, and integrating the morally relevant information from the situation. Lastly, affective self-reaction facilitates the self-regulatory mechanisms through applying personal moral standards in a moral predicament as behaving in a
contradictory manner to one’s moral standards results in feelings of self-condemnation (Bandura, 1991).

According to Bandura (1991) variation in social influences further contributes to developmental changes in what is deemed to be morally relevant and the importance ascribed to it, the influence of peers and other adult role models who display different standards of conduct influence moral perspectives to a great degree. Social interaction and role-taking opportunities have been deemed as instrumental in the development of moral reasoning by many other theorists whom also believed individuals need opportunities to observe a more mature stage of moral reasoning in order for them to progress to a higher stage (Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001; Gibbs et al., 1984; Kohlberg, 1984; Piaget, 1965; Walker, 1983).

Bandura (1990) further proposed the concept of moral disengagement which provides an explanation for having moral principles which are at times disregarded in behaviour. Moral disengagement suggests that an individual would under certain circumstances justify their actions which are in conflict with their moral principles for the purpose of self-regulation. The disengagement of the self-regulatory mechanism occurs through moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement or diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame (Bandura, 1991). Moral justification focuses on behaviour and entails detrimental conduct being made personally and socially acceptable by ascribing a moral purpose to the behaviour. Euphemistic language is used as another moral disengagement practice where sanitized or acceptable labels are given for aggressive or immoral acts. Advantageous comparison occurs when detrimental conduct becomes less repugnant when compared to more horrendous inhumane actions. The displacement or diffusion of responsibility focuses on an individual’s sense of personal responsibility and occurs when personal
responsibility for immoral actions are displaced or ascribed to authority or the situation and the degree of responsibility for certain actions are minimized.

Another type of moral disengagement entails the outcomes of behaviour which includes disregarding or distorting the consequences of actions so that one might avoid the harmful consequences of one’s actions (Bandura, 1991). The dehumanization of individuals is a disengagement practice which focuses on the recipients or victims of immoral behaviour and occurs through stripping them of their human qualities such as feelings, hopes and concerns so that they become subhuman objects (Bandura, 1991). Finally, attribution of blame is another form of moral disengagement where individuals view themselves as victims as their immoral actions are attributed to necessary defensive behaviour in the face of provocation.

The social leaning theory has highlighted that family, peers and significant others reactions towards behaviour influences moral development to a great degree and therefore reinforcement for certain behaviours should also be discussed as a motivating factor for specific actions. Reinforcement occurs rapidly when immoral actions are chosen in a moral dilemma as an individual gains some form of reward, for instance, stealing would lead to the acquisition of a desired object. Alternatively, choosing the moral action in a dilemma would mostly lead to little if any acknowledgement or reward. Kurtinez and Gewirtz (1984) explain that the negative affect associated with immoral actions are reinforced when mass media and society emphasize moral infractions. The society and the community’s approach to immoral actions thus become important in the reinforcement of moral actions. The aforementioned illustrates how immoral individuals and an immoral culture could develop when immoral actions constantly lead to an immediate reward and a lack of punishment for these actions.
Behaviorists have endorsed a similar stance on the development of moral behaviour as the social learning approach and have identified a few additional aspects contributing to moral development. They believe that the ability to self-regulate is one of the first signs of moral development. Regulation is considered the first sign of control when parental figures are present in the environment and which naturally progresses into a child’s ability for self-control in the absence of parental figures. The final progression is the ability to adapt their own behaviour to the requirements of various environments (Eiden, Edwards & Leanord, 2007; Kochanska & Asken, 2006; Kochanska, Coy & Murray, 2001; Kopp, 1982).

Behavioral researchers further believe that internalization is very important in the development of morality. According to Kochanska (1994) internalization is essential to moral development as it enables the continuance of the values, culture and social order of families and society thus constantly informing the development of children’s sense of morality. The observation of regulated behaviours, imitation and reinforcement are some of the key factors identified by behaviorists as essential to moral development and as such the parent-child relationship is viewed as at the root of moral development. Researchers such as John Bowlby and other attachment researchers attributes moral thought, emotions and actions to an internal guidance system or conscience that is based upon childhood socialization within the family context (Kochanska, 2002).

Behavioral research has further proposed numerous mechanisms contributing to internalization and therefore moral development, these include a secure attachment, a mutually responsive orientation (MRO) between parent and child as well as parent-child conflict which leads to the development of emotional understanding and therefore conscience development. An effective discipline technique like inductive reasoning, a stable temperament and effortful control in delaying
actions and applying restraint has also been identified as important to internalization and moral development (Termini & Golden, 2007).

In addition, the development of a secure attachment relationship has been shown to be instrumental in cognitive, social and emotional development (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Children who have formed secure attachments are able to regulate their own emotions and understand the emotions of others (Bell & Calkins, 2000; Feinman, 1992; Kopp & Neufield, 2003). Kochanska (1997) explains mother-child mutually responsive orientation (MRO) as consisting of two components: the mother’s and child’s cooperation with, or responsiveness to each other, and their shared positive affect. MRO has been shown to increase children’s willingness and eagerness to internalize the rules and behaviour from their mothers (Kochanska, 1997). The early positive responsive relationship between mother and child has shown to be of great importance in social-moral development as children receiving MRO as toddlers showed more morally mature views when confronted with moral cognition tasks (Kochanska & Murray, 2000). Hoffman (1983) has also endorsed effective discipline techniques as fostering internalization. He suggested that parental discipline leads to children experiencing anxious arousal which allows them to pay attention to parental socialization interventions. The child then stores the content of the parental messages in memory and these rules of behaviour are considered in future decision making and behaviour.

In considering the role of temperament in fostering moral development, Kochanska (1995) has provided support for the view that children’s temperamental fearfulness/anxiety proneness contributes to the development of internalization. In his study of temperament, mothers’ discipline, and security of attachment, it was found that fearful and anxiety prone children appeared more internalized as gentle discipline resulted in optimal levels of anxious arousal therefore enabling internal attributions and effective internalization of parental socialization messages. In contrast,
children who have a fearless temperament are less likely to experience anxiety or distress in doing wrong and therefore lack the willingness to internalize the rules of behaviour inherent in parental messages (Kochanska, 1995).

In the above section the contributions of the social learning theory and behaviourist perspective to the understanding of moral development have been reviewed. These theories illustrate the role of social experiences, socialization, internalization and self-regulation in moral learning and moral development. Although the social learning approach has contributed to the field of moral development there have been criticisms lodged against this approach. These have been identified as a lack of explanation regarding the origins of moral rules and norms, why individuals adhere to them, why children conform to some but not all rules and norms, and why children engage in moral argumentation rather than submit to persuasion or incentives (Krebs & Janicki, 2004). In the following subsection the role of emotional development and more specifically empathy in moral development is discussed.

2.5 Emotional Development and Moral Development

There are various theories proposing the importance of emotional and motivational development as essential to moral development. One of the theories contributing to this field of literature is Martin Hoffman’s theory of prosocial moral behaviour and development (Hoffman, 2000). In this theory the emphasis is on the development of empathy which Hoffman (2000) defines as the ‘involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another’s situation than with his own situation’ (p. 30). The importance of empathic distress is also stressed as a prosocial motive for moral
action. Hoffman (1987) suggests five empathy-arousing modes and describes three to be automatic and involuntary and two that are subject to voluntary control. The three involuntary empathy-arousing modes are mimicry, classical conditioning and direct association of cues in the victim’s situation which are similar with one’s own past experience. The fourth and fifth modes are higher-order cognitive modes. The fourth mode is mediated association in which the victim’s distress is communicated through language, semantically processed and related to one’s own experiences. The final mode is role-taking which causes empathic arousal as one is able to put oneself in the other’s place and experience their feelings. These empathic-arousing modes are therefore deemed as necessary for feeling empathy towards others and results in prosocial moral behaviour.

Hoffman (2000) further suggests five stages in the development of empathic distress, each stage building upon the other. Children initially respond to other’s distress as if they themselves were in distress as they can not yet distinguish between the self and other. They then realize that the distress is the other’s but confuse the other’s inner states with their own and attempt to assist in ways that would normally be comforting to them. They gradually realize that the other’s inner states are independent of their own. Finally they comprehend that the lives of others could be sad or happy and they develop the ability to feel empathy for entire groups, for instance the homeless (Hoffman, 2000).

Hoffman (2000) also suggests that attributions regarding the cause of another’s distress influence an individual’s empathic distress. In the event that the distress is outside the victims control sympathetic distress is evoked. If an individual’s distress is caused by someone else empathic anger ensues. Inconsistency between the victim’s character and their fate results in an empathic feeling of injustice and the inability to help someone in distress for some unavoidable
reason can often lead to feelings of guilt over inaction. This theory further suggests that victims need not be present for empathy to be aroused in observers as cognitive development enables the representation of people and events as well as role-taking (Fiske, 1982; Hoffman, 1985). In light of the above statement it is therefore possible for empathy to influence one’s judgements in hypothetical dilemmas such as the Kohlbergian dilemmas.

Guilt or more specifically empathic-based transgression guilt is viewed as another prosocial motive for prosocial action. Moral internalization is also emphasized and defined in terms of the individual’s prosocial moral structure. This structure comprises of a network of empathic affects, cognitive representations and motives and includes principles, behavioural norms, rules, a sense of right and wrong, images of acts that hurt or help and associated self-blame and guilt (Hoffman, 2000). Internalization of the structure occurs when the individual abides by the organizing principles despite external reward or punishment. Similar to other moral developmental theories, socialization is proposed as important as parents have the responsibility to socialize children through discipline encounters so that they may consider others needs and feelings in their actions. Inductions are suggested as the vehicle through which parents bring awareness of other’s distress and show the child how their actions caused the distress. These inductions then facilitate the development of transgression-induction-guilt scripts which function as prosocial moral scripts. In addition, socialization occurs through values communicated by parents, peers, teachers, religion and media, these values then form the foundation for empathy-based fairness concepts which are continuously expanded by inductions and personal experience (Hoffman, 2000).

Empathy-based moral education is furthermore suggested and occurs through parents and teachers’ use of induction in discipline encounters and educating children on how to always
consider the immediate and future consequences of their actions for others. The theory of Hoffman has produced a valuable contribution to the understanding of the role of emotions and specifically empathy for others in moral development. Despite the contribution of the affective, cognitive and behavioural components in moral development the cultural context of individuals also have to be considered and will be looked at in the following section.

2.6 Sociocultural Influences on Moral Development

In considering the impact of various factors on moral development one has to consider culture as a component which influences moral development and moral judgement. According to a study conducted by Nisan (1984) the moral content of a culture does indeed influence moral judgement and therefore moral action. Nisan (1984) suggested a two-factor model where both content and structure are considered to influence moral judgement. Moral content comprises of internalized behavioural instructions regarding right and wrong which can be labeled as norms that develop through socialization or social learning. The norms of one’s own culture are viewed as representing the objective right and wrong. However, moral content can be described as partially culture dependent as certain behaviours are universally prohibited (Nisan, 1984). According to Nisan moral norms comprise of different components, value judgments are one of these components and are based upon values such as justice and welfare. Another component of moral norms is the definition of the limits of required or prohibited behaviour and the domains within which these moral obligations apply as well as the beliefs held about the world. Moral content and its inherent norms are said to affect moral choice and judgement and are predominantly based upon cultural expectations.
Structure develops through cognitive structuralization and enables an individual to choose and interpret the relevant content (norms) presented in a specific situation. Moral structures represent the stages of moral judgement and as mentioned assists with the understanding a specific situation as well as determining how different norms are interpreted and which values to consider in a moral decision situation (Nisan, 1984). The aforementioned section identifies the importance of both content and structure in moral judgement and therefore the two-factor model of moral judgement is suggested as an integration of the cognitive-developmental and social-learning approaches in which the importance of cultural influences on moral development are also considered. The moral system suggested by the two-factor model thus comprises of a general principle (structure) or orientation of right and wrong based on a certain mode of understanding social relations; and specific standards (content) of prohibited and required behaviours (Nisan, 1984). Moral decision making is thus guided by this moral system in which structure and content is considered before a decision is made and action is taken.

Sociocultural influences also assist individuals in developing meaning systems which comprise of available theories or common knowledge, explanations, beliefs, norms and ideologies which they develop through cultural experience (Weinreich-Haste, 1984). Although sociocultural meaning systems influence an individual their own experiences will further allow them to attribute importance to some theories, beliefs, and norms and discard others.

**2.7 Moral Judgement and Moral Behaviour**

Another important aspect to consider in the discussion regarding moral development is how closely the moral judgement of an individual is influenced by behaviour or actions. Piaget’s (1932)
studies of behaviour and judgement led him to conclude that judgement and behaviour are indeed interrelated. Piaget (1932) described judgement as implicated in action and that a child’s actions play an important part in the development of their judgement. Some theorists believe that the connection between one’s moral judgment and actions are influenced by the degree of the moral sense of self as well as possessing an identity characterized by morality (Blasi, 1993; Colby & Damon, 1992). Alternatively, theorists like Piaget mentioned above and Turiel (2003) believe that actions are closely linked to moral judgement due to the reasoning that occurs during actions and making decisions regarding actions in different contexts involve the coordination of different types of judgement. Kohlberg and Piaget both believed that moral judgement was linked to actions. These theorists suggested that individuals are active in thinking about their social environments and that they possess the mental/emotional propensities to care about the welfare of others and fairness in their relationships. They further believed individuals reflect upon their own and others judgement and actions, and that they are not merely driven by emotional, unconscious biological or psychological forces to act without choice (Turiel, 2008).

2.8 Adolescent Moral Development

In the search for a comprehensive understanding of moral development from childhood to adulthood the morality of adolescence should be discussed as it also pertains to the current research topic. The research findings related to moral development during adolescence has shown that a number of factors distinguish adolescent development from that of childhood. One of these factors is the increased amount of time that adolescents spend with their peers along with certain age-related changes they experience (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Some of these age related changes adolescents
experience are physiological, physical maturation, and cognitive growth which influences moral behaviours as there is an increase in the maturation of certain brain structures enabling adolescents to reason about abstract concepts such as justice and adopt broad perspectives on problems (Segalowitz, Unsal, & Dywan, 1992; Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1998; Sigelman & Rider, 2006). As mentioned previously, the increased amount of peer interaction also influence the moral development of adolescents as they provide an increase in ‘role-taking opportunities’ and expose adolescents to novel moral behaviours (Hart, Atkins, Markey, & Youniss, 2004; Hart & Atkins, 2002).

Becoming apart of the community and adhering to socially regulated behaviours provide adolescents with additional opportunities for moral decision-making. Various scholars (Holland et al., 2000; Damon, 1990; Crain, 1992) have emphasized the importance of participation in moral dialogue in the development of moral reasoning. According to Holland et al. (2000) young people’s discourse “is laced through with relationships and sociability, with parents, with family, with friends” (pp. 288). A study by Bosisio (2008) which investigated the representations of justice in young people revealed that young people draw on a vast amount of rules and moral principles chosen in a selective and complementary manner according to each given situation when making justice and moral judgements. In light of the above section it becomes evident that in discussing moral development one has to consider the distinct stages of development each with their own challenges and opportunities which invariably either promote or inhibit moral development as well as the impact of the environment with its contextual cues on moral reasoning.
2.9 Conclusion

In this chapter the various theoretical viewpoints which have informed current understanding of moral development were discussed. These theories illustrates that a comprehensive view of the development of morality is necessary and should include the affective, cognitive, behavioural and social components of individuals as well as the impact of their culture and particular developmental stage. In the following chapter exposure to violence will be discussed as another aspect which impacts on the general functioning and moral development of children and adolescents.
CHAPTER 3
The Impact of Exposure to Violence

3.1 Introduction

The American Psychological Association (1993) defines violence as immediate or chronic situations that result in injury to the psychological, social or physical well-being of individuals or groups. According to Masuku (2001) interpersonal violence and crime have affected all South African citizens and violence has become an accepted form of conflict resolution. An injury mortality surveillance study found that homicide was the leading cause of death in South Africa and accounted for 45% of all non-natural deaths (Burrows, Bowman, Matzopoulos, & van Niekerk, 2001). According to an annual report on the crime situation in South Africa by the South African Police Service (SAPS), a total of approximately 2.1 million serious crimes were registered during the period of 2008/2009 in the Republic of South Africa with 32.7% being crimes against the person. Sexual offences accounted for 10.4% of the 32.7% figure of contact crimes. In addition, a total of 48 732 crimes ranging from murder, attempted murder to sexual offences and common assault against children under the age of 18 years were reported in the period of 2008/2009. Intimate femicide which entails men’s killing of their intimate female partners suggest that domestic violence is prevalent in South Africa (Vetten, 2005). Matthews et al. (2004) further reports that in 1999, 8.8 per 100 000 of the female population aged 14 and older died at the hands of their partners which is the highest rate reported in research worldwide.

According to Macmillan (2001) victimization is most prevalent during early life and as such is experienced during key stages of development and can influence developmental pathways as well as
shape the character and content of later life to a significant degree. In South Africa young people between the ages of 12 and 22 are generally victimized at twice the adult rate and even higher for violent crimes (Pelser, 2008). A further comparison of the South African Institute for Security Studies (2003), and the 2005 National Youth Victimisation Survey found that young people experience assault eight times the adult rate; theft at five times and robbery at four times the adult rate (Leoschut & Burton, 2005). Research has often examined the effect that experiences and circumstances in early life have on the functioning of individuals in later adulthood. The present study has a similar purpose but focuses on specific factors like the experiences of exposure to violence in adolescence and how this affects physical, emotional and cognitive functioning which is necessary for moral competence in later life. In light of the above mentioned it is imperative that the relationship between exposure to violence in early life and the development of morality be thoroughly explored. This chapter will review the incidence and prevalence of violence within the South African context, followed by the latest research findings regarding the influence of exposure to violence on subsequent violent behaviour. The relationship between exposure to violence and moral development will also be discussed. Finally, a biopsychosocial perspective of the connection between exposure to violence and moral development is presented.

### 3.2 Incidence and Prevalence of Violence

Exposure to violence has become a part of daily living for most South Africans as illustrated by various surveys and reports. In 2005 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) compiled a survey investigating the reported figures for several categories of violent crimes in over 23 countries with the highest rates of murder, South Africa had the second highest murder rate at
40.3 murders per 100,000 in the 2004-05 year (CSVR, 2007). In addition the SAPS annual report showed a total of approximately 2.1 million serious crimes being committed during the period of 2008/2009 in the Republic of South Africa of which 32.7% were crimes against the person. Furthermore, the highest ratio of murder reported during 2007/2008 was recorded in the Eastern Cape.

As highlighted in an aforementioned section the youth of South Africa have been most affected by the violence as the National Victims of Crime survey (2003) reports that young people are more likely to become victims of crime than adults. The National Youth victimization study (2005) states that between the period of September 2004 to 2005, 42% of South African youth were victims of crime and violence which included crimes like assault, sexual assault/rape, theft, and robbery (Burton, 2006). Furthermore, in the SAPS annual report it was revealed that, for crimes reported in 2004-05 year, 6% were victims of murder, 7% victims of attempted murder, 43% victims of rape, 48% victims of indecent assault, 9% victims of assault, and 11% victims of common assault were children under the age of 18 years. As mentioned previously, the SAPS annual report for 2008/2009 reported 48,732 crimes ranging from murder, attempted murder to sexual offences and common assault against children under the age of 18 years. A comparison of youth victimization by area type further revealed that those living in the metropolitan areas such as eThekwini, Nelson Mandela, Tshwane, Johannesburg and Cape Town were more likely to be victimized than those living in rural areas (Leoschut & Burton, 2006). The large amount of exposure to violence young people experience is supported by Ward, Flisher, Zissis, Muller and Lombard (2001) who investigated the prevalence of South African adolescents exposure to violence and resulting symptoms, it was found that approximately 81% of their sample had witnessed or been a victim of violence. They further found that exposure to one type of violence put children at higher risk for exposure to another type
of violence; in essence different types of violence were interrelated. According to Tolan and Guerra (1998) adolescence remains the age of highest risk for victimization. Numerous studies also report that by early adolescence most youths have endured encounters with shootings, stabbings and various other acts of violence within their communities (Bell & Jenkins, 19993; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Meyers, & Smith, 2000; Osofsky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993).

Community violence which is endemic in South Africa can be experienced in three main ways, hearing of violent events, witnessing the violence or being a victim of violence (Trickett, Duran & Horn, 2003). In a survey by Ward et al (2001) which included 104 adolescents in four secondary schools in Cape Town, it was found that the majority was exposed to at least one type of violent event either as a victim or as a witness, and at least 6% were likely to meet criteria for PTSD. The exposure to violence most commonly reported were witnessing community violence (63%), being robbed or mugged (35%), and witnessing a family member being hurt or killed (33%).

In addition to the above statistics, research conducted by the South African Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2008) found that 76.2% of young offenders had previously been victims of crimes ranging from assault (44.1%); robbery (43.5%); theft (22.3%) and home burglary (15.8%). These statistics highlight the type of impact exposure to violence can have on an individual and especially the developing youth. In light of the statistics and findings mentioned above the question arises to what extent exposure to violence affects the developing youth and whether or not exposure to violence has been instrumental in the creation of a violent culture and therefore violence prone individuals. In the next section the present researcher will review and discuss the findings of studies conducted on this topic in order to provide an answer to the question posed above.
3.3 The Link Between Exposure to Violence and Violent Behaviour

Research has consistently linked exposure to violence to the development of aggressive or violent behaviour. Various studies (Guterman & Cameron, 1997; Weist & Cooley-Quille, 2001) have revealed a connection between exposure to violence and later acts of violence and aggression in children and adolescents. Exposure to violence has also been linked to a range of mental health and behavioural sequelae, including, depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, low self-esteem, self-destructive behaviour and aggression (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Richters & Martinez, 1993; Giaconia et al., 1995). A longitudinal international study which investigated the effects of early physical abuse on later aggression as well as violent and nonviolent delinquency found that youth who had been abused before the age of six years were more likely to be arrested for violent and nonviolent offenses as juveniles (Lansford et al., 2003). A further study by Farrel and Bruce (1997) that included 473 urban African American students during the beginning, middle, and end of their Grade 6 year, revealed that there is a strong link between exposure to violence and becoming a perpetrator of violence. This study found that exposure to violence was the best predictor of committing violence amongst adolescents. Similarly, the results of an international study conducted by Pearce et al. (2003) showed a positive association between exposure to violence and an increase in conduct problems over a one year period. Research by Flannery, Singer and Wester (2001) has revealed that boys who have experienced or witnessed violence are more likely to become perpetrators of violence. Research has further shown a link between witnessing domestic violence and an increased risk of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence during adolescence (Wolfe & Korsch, 1994). Exposure to neighbourhood violence has also been positively related to violent behaviours (DuRant et al. 1994; Malik et al., 1997; Song, Singer & Anglin, 1998). Various studies
provide support for the above mentioned findings, where it has been shown that children exposed to interparental conflict more often exhibit externalizing problems which take the form of aggressive behaviour (Grynch et al., 2000; Kitimura & Hasui, 2006). In addition, it has been found that children exposed to domestic violence are at risk for developing mental health problems such as depression, anger, aggression, and anxiety (Hornor, 2005; Johnson et al., 2002).

According to Farrington (1991) children are more likely to engage in violent behaviour when they have been raised by parents who engage in violent behaviour and that the violent behaviour suggests an attitude supporting violence. Winstok et al. (2004) found that these children tend to develop a sense of entitlement to behave violently towards others, and believe that they deserve to be punished. In addition, co-occurrence between a child witnessing family violence and experiencing physical abuse was found to be at approximately 40% (Appel & Holden, 1998; Edelson, 1999).

Research by Barbarin, Richter and De Wet (2001) examining the effects of exposure to direct and vicarious political, family, and community violence on the adjustment of 625 six year old black South African children found that the most common effects of violence in these children occurred in the domains of attention, aggression, and anxiety-depression. Research by Margolin and Gordis (2000) support the link between exposure to community violence and aggressive behaviour. Research by Flannery et al. (2001) which involved the assessment of violent adolescents found that the violent males in the study were three to six times more likely than the nonviolent adolescents to have been exposed to violence or been victimized in their home, neighborhood or community.

According to Seifert (2003) 75% of violent, sexual offending and delinquent adults report histories of childhood trauma. The fact that an individual’s witnessing of violence often leads to becoming a perpetrator of violence is further emphasized by the study of Abrahams and Jewkes (2005). This study investigated the effects of South African men having witnessed abuse of their mothers during
childhood and their resulting levels of violence in adulthood. The study found a strong positive association between the witnessing of abuse during childhood and violent behaviour in the work, community, environment, and against the partner as well as other violent actions that lead to arrests.

The cycle of violence is further illustrated by Macmillan (2001) in reviewing the literature on violence and its life course. In this study it was found that both victims of child abuse and victims of non-familial violence indicate greater involvement in offending in adolescence as well as adulthood. Lewis agrees with the above mentioned finding and states that (2002) “Child abuse is the most powerful generator of child, adolescent and adult violence we know” (p. 393). According to McCloskey and Lichter (2003) exposure to parental conflict at a young age puts adolescents at risk for developing psychopathology as well as promoting aggression in dating relationships. Additionally Abrahams (2005; 2006) and Jewkes (2002) report that there exists a significant link between exposure to parental violence during childhood and physical violence against intimate partners in adulthood. The men who witness this type of violence as children are said to develop a view of this behaviour as normative. A further study by El-Sheikh, Harger, and Whitson (2001) support the above findings and provide additional information regarding the biological changes that occur as result of the exposure to marital violence. They have found that the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) in children exposed to marital violence may moderate their internalizing and externalizing behaviours. The PNS functioning thus increases physiological arousal influencing children’s internalizing behaviours (for example, somatic complaints, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal) and externalizing behaviours (for example, temper tantrums, aggression, and cruelty to animals).
3.3.1 Contextual Factors

The contextual factors related to exposure to violence have to be considered when discussing the extent of impact that exposure has on the functioning of an individual. The contextual factors can be identified as the proximity of an individual to the violence exposure, the timing of the exposure, the relationship of the individual to the perpetrator and victim as well as the chronicity of the violence exposure. In support of the above Rosenthal (2000) has found that victimization and witnessing of community violence leads to differential distress symptoms, victimization showed a stronger link to depression, whereas the witnessing of violence showed a stronger association with anger. Observing violence against another person has been referred to as covictimization; which has been identified as being detrimental to the optimal development of the youth (Kuther, 1999). Hill and Madhere (1996) studied 150 African American fourth through sixth graders from inner-city schools. It was found that child reports of covictimization were associated with an increased need for retaliation, confrontational behavior, conduct disorder characteristics, socialized aggression, psychotic behavior and motor excessiveness. Furthermore, it was found that covictimization could possibly influence areas of development where the integration of emotion, cognition and behaviour are necessary, such as moral development. It is therefore important to always consider the contextual factors when interpreting the possible effect that exposure to violence can have on children or adolescents.

In an aforementioned section of this chapter the development of Posttraumatic stress disorder and biological changes have been identified as possible sequelae of exposure to violence and will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.
3.3.2 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and brain abnormalities

Richter and Martinez (1993) found that children who have endured exposure to chronic violence display symptoms like anxiety, depression, psychosomatic disturbances, as well as symptoms characteristic of posttraumatic stress. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) develops due to the experience of a traumatic event or events and cause deficits in certain domains of cognitive, social, emotional and psychophysiological functioning. Associated symptoms of PTSD include, intrusive thoughts, withdrawal, fear, hyperarousal, affect disregulation, emotional numbing, dissociative reactions, and outbursts of anger (Barlow & Durand, 2005). De Bellis et al. (1999) have found that the cerebral volumes of children diagnosed with PTSD are 7% smaller than control participants and according to Glaser (2000), this abnormality is likely to affect intellectual achievement and behavioural functioning through resulting hyperarousal, aggressive responses, dissociative reactions, executive functioning difficulties, and educational underachievement. The changes in brain structure and physiology related to PTSD have also been shown to affect memory, learning, ability to regulate affect, social development and moral development (Solomon & Heide, 2005). The experience of traumatic events has also been associated with impairment of the orbitofrontal cortex which regulates emotional states and responses. The impairment of the orbitofrontal cortex decreases the ability to regulate affect and the regulation of aggressive impulses and thus could result in aggressive outbursts and violent behaviour (Solomon & Heide, 2005).

Deficits in executive functioning in turn have been associated with poor social information processing skills which result in the inability to cope with a variety of response options and the
failure to access socially appropriate alternatives. This deficiency then results in the automatic selection of default accessing aggressive responses to perceived provocative situations (Hoaken, Shaughnessy, & Pihl, 2003). The above discussion illustrates once again how exposure to violence can facilitate the development of aggressive behaviour through different pathways. In order to provide a comprehensive discussion of the exposure to violence adolescents experience daily all contexts within which these exposure can occur should be included. In the following section exposure to violence through various forms of media are highlighted as the media and associated technology has become a large and influential part of adolescents lives.

3.3.3 Media violence

Exposure to violence can take on various forms; one of these forms which have been thoroughly documented in research is media violence. Media violence in the form of radio, television, video games, cell phones and the internet have resulted in developing youth being constantly exposed to violence which inevitably influence their values, beliefs and behaviours. Media violence is said to possess the capacity to influence behaviour by means of desensitization, modeling, disinhibition, aggressive arousal, and reinforcing risk-taking (Derksen & Strasberger, 1996; Huesman, Moise & Posolski, 1997). Desensitization has also been associated with real-life violence as illustrated by the study of Farrel and Bruce (1997) which investigated children’s level of distress and aggression to community violence; they suggested that children with chronic violence exposure become desensitized to violence which facilitates increased aggression. Desensitization can be defined as the elimination of cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses to stimulus (Rule & Ferguson, 1986). Emotional desensitization is said to occur when there is numbing or blunting of reactions to event
that normally result in a strong response. Cognitive desensitization becomes evident when the belief of violence as being uncommon and unlikely develops into the belief that violence is mundane and inevitable (Funk, Baldacci, Pasold, & Baumgardner, 2004). Kydd (1992) have found that youngsters watching television shows in which the violence appears to be realistic, frequently repeated or unpunished are more likely to imitate what they have witnessed and become desensitized towards the horror of the violence and eventually use violence to solve their own problems. Molitor and Hirsch (1994) confirm the above findings as they found that viewing violence increases tolerance for violence in their study of exposure to media violence and aggressive behaviour.

A National Television Study by Wilson et al. (1997) revealed that violence found on television goes unpunished, is executed by models that have positive qualities children could identify with, show unrealistic consequences, and is portrayed as justified. The afore mentioned study leads one to conclude that children exposed to vast amounts of media violence could come to view violence as justified and right as well as an adequate means of solving problems. Modeling aggressive acts one has witnessed has been supported by theorists like Bandura (1983) as he argued that television can shape the form that aggressive behaviour takes as well as inform viewers of the positive and negative consequences of violent behaviour. Felson (1996) further supports research findings and reports on unusually aggressive acts being committed days after the precise aggressive acts were depicted on television, illustrating an imitation of the behaviours viewed on television.

A study by Joshi and Kaschak (1998) which explored adolescents exposure to violence in the media, home and community contexts, 75% of adolescents reported exposure to violence in the media within the moderate to high range and 10% of these adolescents experienced negative psychological effects from the exposure, like nightmares, feelings of anxiousness and withdrawal from friends. Huesmann et al. (2003) have assessed the longitudinal relations between children’s
exposure to television violence, aggression, and violent behaviour in young adulthood and found that the childhood exposure to media violence predicts young adult aggressive behaviour in males and females. Furthermore, Fraser (2002) proposes that exposure to media violence can influence a child’s character and personality as well as the willingness to commit violence. Research has illustrated that not only does media violence affect children’s personality, but the increase in graphic content in the media may be causing desensitization toward violence and aggression (Clark & Richman, 2002). Exposure to media violence has also been associated with lower empathy and the development of proviolence attitudes. Funk et al. (2004) report that playing violent video games could facilitate the development of proviolence attitudes as violence is normalized in these games and desensitization to real-life consequences of violence occurs. The internet has become another powerful media form exposing children and youth to various types of violence on a daily basis. The risks associated with the internet are outlined by Berson and Berson (2005) as online stalking, exposure to pornographic material, flaming (online verbal abuse), hate speech, threats of violence, unwanted advances, sexual predators and the transcendence of exposure to internet violence into real-life abuse. In addition, Berson (2003a) suggests that the internet serves to expose children and youth to information with questionable legitimacy, ideas that facilitate contradiction of positive behaviours, and messages that intend to manipulate their actions and beliefs.

The powerful influence of the internet on developing youth is explained by Anderson (2002) who suggests that the multiple sensory inputs are taxing on one’s cognitive resources and therefore have the capacity to overwhelm children’s ability to engage in thoughtful decision making, recognize risk and respond to threats. The images related to these digital messages are furthermore said to elicit a response from the limbic system of the brain which tends to be impulsive and emotional (Bergsma, 2002). In the absence of thoughtful critical thinking young people are likely to act and react without
consideration of the consequences for self and others (Bergsma, 2002). The pseudoanonymity provided by the internet further exacerbate risk taking behaviours and dangerous acts as individuals are able to engage in these behaviours or acts without revealing their true identity. The anonymity provided by the internet not only enables youth to engage in dangerous behaviours but has increased the activity of sexual predators and the perpetration of other criminal activities. Pseudoanonymity becomes deceiving as young people are increasingly lured into engaging in at-risk behaviours such as revealing personal information, real-life meetings, and exposure to threatening messages thus further exposing themselves to possible online and real-life violence.

Another form of exposure to violence relevant to the present study is community violence and as research by Kliewer, Lepore, Oskin and Johnson (1998) have found, exposure to community violence increases the risk of the development of psychopathology whether an individual is a direct victim or a witness of the community violence. McAloney et al. (2009) investigated the implications and prevalence of exposure to community violence amongst adolescents in post-conflict Northern Ireland. This study found that adolescents who had experienced violence in their communities were more likely to screen positive for psychosis and those adolescents who had knowledge of violent events were vulnerable to the development of psychotic symptomology. The effects of exposure to community violence is further emphasized by Slaby et al. (1994) which found that children who experience violence in their home or community are more likely to become aggressive and involved in violence.

Youth are experiencing violence in various contexts like media, home, and community as well as in their schools. Various researchers (Owens & Straus, 1979; Ritchie, 1983; Widom, 1989) have suggested that children growing up in violent families and school environments may come to think that violence is an acceptable behaviour. According to the Centre for the Study of Violence and
Reconciliation (2007) normalization of violence can occur as children growing up in families characterized by violence could internalize the acceptability of violence. The above statement is supported by Agudelo (1997) who explains that children living in an environment characterized by frequent and pervasive violence can lead to an acceptance of violence as a trivial matter of little significance. It is therefore evident from the above discussion that observation of certain violent acts and the modeling of these acts have a significant impact on the development of children’s views of violence. Research has shown that children who have been exposed to high levels of violence judged it more legitimate to inflict harm or deny resources when provoked and judged it as more reasonable to retaliate for reasons of retribution (Ardila-Rey, Killen, & Brenick, 2009). According to Anderson (1994; 1997) the code of the streets which determines what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a certain neighbourhood as well as children’s interactions in these neighbourhoods determine to a large extent the ‘scripts’ they acquire for handling interpersonal conflicts and identity formation. Scripts represent the normal sequence of actions related to an event and guides future behaviours in similar settings (Schank & Abelson, 1977). These children exposed to vast amounts of violence possibly learn ‘scripty’ behaviours for different situations; these are then stored in memory and recalled when activated by cues in the environment (Abelson, 1981; Huesmann, 1888; Dodge & Crick, 1990; Tedeschi & Felson, 1994). According to Dodge’s Social Information-Processing Model (Dodge, 1986); based upon their life experiences, children develop databanks of social knowledge regarding the norms for responding to aggression, aggressive tactics, and information-processing (Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Therefore the ‘scripty’ behaviours children exposed to violence display are aggressive and often violent ways of handling conflict situations which they have retrieved from their databanks or scripts informed by previous violent experiences. The above research findings
illustrate the influence that living in a community characterized by violence can have on the cognitions, views, and behaviour of developing youth.

It has been proposed by many social scientists that certain cognitive and moral deficits are causal in violent behaviour and vice versa and as such it is one of the aims of the present study to examine the relationship between violence and moral development. In considering the impact that exposure to violence has on moral development one has to consider the latest research and findings related to this topic.

3.4 The Link Between Exposure to Violence and Moral Development

The research concerning exposure to violence has more often focused on the psychiatric symptoms of Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and less focus has been placed upon how exposure to violence might impact upon normative development and specifically moral development. The hypothesis that exposure to violence has far reaching implications for normal development is supported by the views of Turner and Turner (2005) which state that the risks of exposure to violence, whether it be directly or indirectly on the well-being and mental health of adolescents is important as the influence of the exposure may not be limited to the event itself but may continue to affect their mental health and well-being into adulthood.

The impact of violence in childhood on later life is further emphasized by the fact that childhood and adolescence are the periods in which the personal and psychological resources that guide cognition and decision-making are developed (Caspi, 1987, Clausen, 1991, Elder, 1994). Various researchers (Gabarino, Kosteleny, & Dubrow, 1991; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Ney, Fung, & Wickett, 1994) support the above statement and have found that the impact of exposure to
community violence in particular not only results in emotional and behavioural disorders, but affect’s children’s view of themselves and the world, their ideas about the meaning and purpose of life, expectations for future happiness, and their moral development. Exposure to violence has also been implicated in causing desensitization which results in the interference of moral evaluation as the individual no longer perceives or reacts to the cues necessary to initiate this evaluation process and thus actions are taken without the due evaluation of their consequences (Funk et al., 2004).

Brooke et al. (2003) found that Columbian adolescents who were the victims of violence were more likely to exhibit violent behaviours and according to Gabarino et al. (1998) these children are more likely to develop negative views of the world and possibly less sympathy and perspective taking which affects prosocial reasoning (Eisenberg et al., 2001) According to Errante (1997) a non-restricted environment is essential for moral and intellectual development as children learn about the laws of nature and human relationships by exploring the environment, thus gaining social and intellectual experiences which facilitate learning about cause and effect, trust and empathy. Community violence frustrates the above mentioned process by restricting children’s exploration of their natural environment and inhibiting social experiences which are deemed essential for moral growth.

One form of exposure to violence that has been associated with deficits in normative development is maltreatment which includes physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Cicchetti (1990) describes the effects of maltreatment as resulting in disturbances of adaptive functioning in the following areas, the development of a secure attachment to the primary caregiver, affect and physiological self-regulation, the development of autonomy and a sense of self, the establishment of peer relationships, and the hierarchical integration of attachment, autonomy and peer relationships. Maltreatment has also been associated with deficits in theory of mind which refers to the understanding of human
action in terms of mental states like intentions, beliefs and desires (Zelazo, Qu, & Müller, 2005). Delays in maltreated children’s theory of mind have shown to impair their ability to attribute beliefs, desires, emotions, and intentions to others (Cicchetti, Rogosch, Maughan, Toth, & Bruce, 2003). The ability to attribute intentions to others has been identified in literature as instrumental to the development of adequate moral judgement (Kohlberg, 1987; Piaget, 1965).

A strong link has been established between childhood experiences and social and moral functioning in adolescence and adulthood. According to Brewer et al. (1995) the exposure to antisocial norms and values among peers, family and the community can have a negative effect on the behaviour of youth through normalizing violence and the modeling of an attitude that is supportive of violence. Emphasizing the importance of early experiences, Levy (1988) states that there are several indications that early adolescence is an important definitional stage during which a value system and behavior code is shaped. The impact of being the victim of violence or being consistently exposed to violence has on the moral development of adolescents has also been investigated by Garbarino (1999). His study of youth violence and the consequences of such trauma found that youths who have been victims of violence possibly undergo a shift in how they view violence. They are more likely to view violence as an attempt to achieve justice or retribution for the trauma or violence they have endured, and as such possibly feel justified in perpetrating violence against others. This view of violence as a means to achieve justice is similar to the reasoning one would find amongst individuals in stage 2 of moral development. In this stage there is the belief in ‘an eye for an eye’.

The relation between exposure to violence and lower stages of moral reasoning has also been suggested in a study conducted by Krcmar and Valkenburg (1999). This study assessed children’s moral interpretation of justified and unjustified violence and its relationship to television viewing
which showed a definitive association between media violence and less advanced levels of moral reasoning. They further found that televised violence may enforce early-stage moral reasoning as it portrays justified violence perpetrated by heroes with limited if any negative consequences which in turn leads to reduced empathy for the victim and perspective taking. The above illustrates how exposure to media violence reinforces the view of violence as justified. Astor (1994) investigated children’s moral reasoning about family and peer violence and found that violent children more readily categorized violent (for example, hitting) and nonviolent (for example, lying, stealing, name calling) moral provocations on the basis of ‘physical’ or ‘psychological’ harm and assigned similar weights to both categories. According to Astor (1994) one can possibly ascribe the violent children’s judgement to reality based personal theories that they are victims, social relations are continually unfair and hostile towards them and violence is a vehicle of reciprocity and justice. A study by Blasi (1980) supports the above mentioned as his study found that there is a definitive relationship between moral judgement competence and delinquency and that individuals committing serious delinquent acts have generally been found to function at stage 2 of moral development. The second stage of moral development is called the Instrumental Hedonism stage in which behaviour is driven by personal satisfaction and reward. Another aspect identified by this study was that many of these youths had not developed empathy and as a result depersonalized others and viewed them as objects; violence is more readily endorsed when individuals think of others as objects. The above studies suggest that exposure to violence results in lower levels of moral reasoning.
3.4.1 The social learning perspective

The social learning theory provides an additional perspective of the connection between exposure to violence and moral development. Bandura (1973) proposed that behaviour is learned through the observation of significant others. According to Bandura (1977) if one is exposed to aggressive models in various contexts there is an increase in the likelihood that developing youths can learn through behaviour modeling to imitate these aggressive actions they are exposed to and develop detrimental attitudes regarding violence. Aggression is learned by observing the behaviour of others and its positive consequences and therefore individuals infer that violence is an effective means for gaining control over the behaviour of others by observing or experiencing the use of violence for this purpose. These individuals who witness those using violence not being punished for their actions but rewarded are then more likely to use such tactics in interaction with others. Parental involvement in moral development is thus emphasized as children learn the moral meaning of violence from their parents or significant others. In the case where children witness violence at home, unintended messages are sent to developing children regarding the use of violence to solve problems. Kobeka (2008) explored the perceptions and experiences of black adolescent males and females regarding domestic violence in their homes of origin, most participants stated that they were taught through punishment at home that violence against loved ones are justified.

The social learning theory provides a further view of aggression and moral behaviour as they believe that the relationship between moral thought and action is dependent upon the exercise of moral agency (Bandura, 1986; Rottschaefer, 1986). Moral agency and self-sanctions are what inhibits individuals from engaging in behaviour which is contradictory to one’s moral principles, but is deactivated by moral disengagement (Bandura, 1986; 1991). Self-sanctions is the ability to self-
regulate one’s behaviour through considering all relevant moral information of a situation and one’s personal and moral standards before deciding upon the right or wrong action. Moral disengagement challenges the ability to use these self-sanctions and self-regulate behaviour. Moral disengagement can be explained as an individual’s ability to use certain mechanisms that facilitate selective disengagement of these moral self-sanctions. The various moral disengagement practices have been identified in Chapter Two as moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement or diffusion of responsibility, disregard or distortion of consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame (Bandura, 1991). These mechanisms enable individuals to engage in self-serving behaviour contradictory to their moral beliefs guilt free whilst maintaining their moral beliefs.

Numerous researchers (Bandura, Caprara & Zsolnai, 2000; Bandura et al., 1996; 2001; Caprara et al., 1996; Gini, 2006; Menesini et al., 2003) have established a strong link between proneness to moral disengagement and various measures of violence and aggression. Furthermore, adolescents who consider aggressive acts as morally acceptable behaviour are more likely to persistently act aggressively (Crane-Ross, Tisak, & Tisak, 1998; Huesmann & Guerra, 1997; Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2001). The results of a study by Paciello et al. (2008) which investigated moral disengagement and its impact on aggression and violence in late adolescence, found that the group of adolescents who showed high levels of moral disengagement over time could possibly be ascribed to the crystallization of moral disengagement mechanisms which legitimates the use of aggressive and violent acts.

Research involving victimized youth has shown that certain biases occur in their construals of causality regarding an action (Dodge, 1993; 2003; Graham & Juvonen, 2001). The social-information processing model provides an explanation for these construals of causality as children
who have experienced vast amounts of violence and have become aggressive more readily attribute hostile intentions to the actions of others. These hostile attributions are based upon previous social experiences which have been stored in memory and which influence their processing and interpretation of future actions and the intentions behind those actions (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Furthermore, research which involved aggressive children found that they differ in the type of contextual cues they remember from a specific situation and are more likely to attribute hostile intentions to others (Coie & Dodge, 1998; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Dodge, 2003). In addition, research has shown that when information regarding beliefs, intentions and emotions are provided moral judgement is affected. It is therefore reasonable to assume that individuals who readily attribute hostile intentions to others would display poor moral judgement competence when faced with a moral dilemma than their non-aggressive counterparts.

The findings of the above mentioned studies illustrate a reciprocal relationship between exposure to violence, moral development or deficit and resulting violence. The role that moral development or deficit plays in violence is further shown by the meta-analysis study conducted by Stams, Brugman, Dekovic, Van Rosmalen, Van der Laan, and Gibbs (2006), which found that developmentally delayed moral judgement is strongly linked with juvenile delinquency. The relationship between moral reasoning developmental delay and criminal activity in adolescents has also been supported by Blasi (1980); Gibbs (2003); Palmer (2003a); Nelson, Smith, and Dodd (1990).

In the previous chapter various moral development theories (Bandura, 1977; Kohlberg, 1971; Piaget, 1965; Reimer et al, 1983; Sigelman & Rider, 2006) have highlighted the importance of peer interactions as instrumental in the development of role-taking skills and third-person perspective which facilitates moral development. Research on the effect that exposure to violence has on
children and adolescents have found that it often leads to withdrawal, estrangement and reduced involvement in the external world (Rutter, 1983). Cooley-quille, Turner, and Beidel (1995) support the above and have found that the effects of violence often affects relationships with peers in the form of emotional withdrawal and aggressive behavior, these then contribute to rejection by those peers. The lack of peer interactions and relationships thus inhibits the acquisition of skills necessary for moral development. A study by Schiavone (2009) which investigated the effects of exposure to community violence on aspects of adolescent identity development, also found that exposure to community violence resulted in a reduction in certain developmental activities essential to moral development. In addition, the study identified themes that emerged from the narratives of the adolescents regarding exposure to violence as that of right and wrong and negotiating a moral self. The narratives revealed a struggle between wanting to be the good self, and having to take the necessary steps to survive in a hostile environment.

3.4.2 The cognitive-developmental perspective

Cognitive functioning has been emphasized by many theorists as an essential component of moral development. Executive functioning which comprises of the higher order processes such as self-regulation of thought, action and emotion is known to become more complex and developed into adolescence and adulthood (Lee & Hoaken, 2007). The normal development of executive functioning is thus required for perspective taking, inhibition of behaviour, and abstract reasoning and if a delay or distortion occurs at any level of executive development it could result in limited meta-cognitive abilities. Margolin and Gordis (2000) have shown that children who directly experience abuse are at a much higher risk of delayed cognitive development. Furthermore,
according to Perry (2003) children growing up in a violent environment are in a state of constant fear. The constant state of fear and the resulting neurophysiological adaptations to the fear can alter the development of the child’s brain, leading to changes in physiological, emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and social functioning. Perry (2003) further states that children in this state of chronic fear retrieve information from the world differently and experience a sense of a foreshortened future and consequently primarily focus on immediate reward. The sole focus on immediate reward thus results in the consequences of behaviour becoming inconceivable to the threatened child. The description above is similar to Preconventional morality (Reimer et al., 1983) where the concrete interest of the individual is paramount and the sole motivation behind behaviour is to gain personal reward. The above suggests that exposure to violence can have a significant impact on moral development through the deficits caused in cognitive development. It is possible that the violence children are exposed to in childhood are internalized, molding cognitive frameworks for interpreting events and interactions into adolescence and adulthood.

Furthermore, Goldsmith and Davidson (2004) have posited that there are developmental changes that occur in the neural circuitry with regards to affective states when individuals are exposed to stress or trauma. Experience is said to have a significant affect on the development of the Prefrontal Cortex (PFC) (Phil & Benkelfat, 2005). According to Arnsten and Shansky (2004) the exposure or experience of even mild uncontrollable stress can impair the cognitive functioning of the PFC. The PFC is responsible for executive functions such as memory, planning and execution of actions. The PFC can be divided into three regions each with their own functions, the orbital, medial, and lateral. The orbital and medial regions contribute to emotional behaviour; whereas the lateral region facilitates temporal organization of behaviour, speech and reasoning (Fuster, 2001). Damage to the PFC has been linked to individuals displaying impulsive and disinhibited behaviour as well as a
disregard for social and moral principles (Damasio et al., 1994; Fuster, 1997). The impairment of the Orbitofrontal Cortex has been briefly discussed in an aforementioned section of this chapter where it has been associated with the decreased ability to regulate affect and the regulation of aggressive impulses. In addition, the Orbitofrontal Cortex enables the understanding of others emotional experience allowing for empathic responding, if this part of the cortex is impaired it impedes the ability to develop empathy which impacts on emotional, social, and moral development (Schore, 1994; 1996; 2003). Lee and Hoaken (2007) further state that chronic exposure to trauma can fundamentally and permanently alter the brain and physiological development and that these changes in the brain could impact on how one processes and interprets information. The experience of maltreatment has been linked to aggression as well as the disruption of cognitive functioning and inevitably the development of higher order processes such as planning, reasoning and perspective taking (Lee & Hoaken, 2007).

In light of the above it becomes evident that exposure to violence can lead to significant damage to regions of the brain responsible for emotional behaviour and cognitive functions like reasoning. A healthy functioning PFC is thus a prerequisite for normal development, and specifically moral development. The experience of violence and trauma during childhood or adolescence could cause permanent changes to the brain circuitry that would become resistant to change in adulthood thus illustrating the long term negative effects of exposure to violence on normative development.

In addition to the above, many theories suggest the acquisition of knowledge structures as providing an explanation for the influence of certain life experiences on future behaviour. According to Dodge and Pettit (2003) such knowledge structures are actual belief systems, expectations regarding relationships, and memories of past social experiences which guides children’s interpretation of and response to the behaviour of peers and significant others during social
exchanges. Pettit (2004) further states that evidence exists that children’s predispositions, environment, and experiences influences the processing patterns they develop and that these patterns partially account for the effect of early life experiences on later conduct problems. Research suggests that children pay attention to the components of actions and interactions as their social judgement develops and that children viewing physical harm toward others is an important part in their formation of social inferences (Nucci & Turiel, 1978; Nucci, Turiel, & Gawrych, 1981). Furthermore, children’s direct experiences, possibly as a victim as well as their observation of the consequences of actions are considered as instrumental in the development of social judgement.

Turiel (1998) suggests that children’s development of moral concepts are based to a large extent on their social experiences, but what occurs when these social interactions are characterized by violence and how does it then impact upon one’s ability to act morally? The effect that being a victim of violence has on one’s view of others in society is explained by Janoff-Bulman and Frieze (1983) who found that victimization challenges perceptions of the world as meaningful and bound together by a shared sense of social order. The importance of a sense of social order is emphasized by many a theorist as essential to moral development. Macmillan (2001) further states that as victimization erodes cognitive ties with others it could alter how one interacts with others and use them in pursuit of individual goals.

Exposure to violence has also been associated with delays in emotional development which result in difficulty regulating intense emotions, struggling to distinguish emotions from facts and emotional reasoning (Rosenblum & Lewis, 2003). Physical abuse and neglect have different effects on emotional processing, with physical abuse leading to response bias to perceptions of angry facial expressions and neglect resulting in difficulty discriminating emotional expressions and a bias towards sad faces (Pollak, Cicchetti, Hornung, & Reed, 2000). In Chapter Two the importance of
emotional development was highlighted as an essential component of moral development, the interference caused by exposure to violence in emotional development therefore indirectly results in moral deficit.

3.5 Biopsychosocial Model of Exposure to Violence and Moral Deficit

In this chapter the negative impact that exposure to violence has on the general functioning and normative development of children and adolescents was discussed. In Chapter Two the different theories regarding moral development were reviewed. In the following section an integration of the negative sequelae of exposure to violence and the implications for moral development according to the different theoretical viewpoints are briefly described by making use of the biopsychosocial model. A brief summary depicting the contribution of the biological, psychological and social factors in moral delay or deficit is provided below.

3.5.1 Biological factors associated with exposure to violence

The normal development of executive functioning and cognitive structures have been emphasized by the cognitive-developmental perspective as essential for the development of perspective taking, role-taking skills, inhibition of behaviour, abstract reasoning and ultimately moral development. Exposure to violence has been associated with the following biological changes which interfere with moral development.

Exposure to violence has been linked to changes in brain structures such as the Prefrontal Cortex resulting in impulsive and disinhibited behaviour and a disregard for social and moral
principles. The changes in the Orbitofrontal Cortex is another consequence of exposure to violence and has shown to impede the ability to develop empathy which impacts on emotional, social, and moral development. A further consequence of exposure to violence has been the development of PTSD related changes in brain structure and physiology affecting memory, learning, and ability to regulate affect, social development and moral development. In addition, the deficits in executive functioning cause poor social information processing which result in automatic selection of aggressive responses to perceived provocative situations. Finally, exposure to violence can cause changes in the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) causing internalizing behaviours (for example, somatic complaints, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal) and externalizing behaviours (for example, temper tantrums, aggression, and cruelty to animals).

3.5.2 Psychological factors associated with exposure to violence

In Chapter Two various theoretical viewpoints on moral development were provided where the greater part of these theories postulated the importance of peer relationships, role-taking skills, perspective taking, empathy, self-regulation and decision-making ability as central in moral development. The impact of exposure to violence on the aforementioned abilities is described in the section below.

Exposure to violence is associated with social withdrawal which inhibits peer relationships and therefore the acquisition of skills necessary in moral development. The exposure to violence further influences areas of development where the integration of emotion, cognition and behaviour
are necessary and interferes with the ability to engage in thoughtful decision making which results in the incapacity to consider the consequences of actions for self and others.

Exposure to violence is associated with negative views of the world and self which often leads to reduced empathy and perspective taking which ultimately affects prosocial reasoning. In addition, physical, emotional and sexual abuse results in lack of theory of mind which inhibits understanding of human action in terms of intentions, beliefs and desires. Exposure to violence has also been associated with moral disengagement which decreases the ability to use moral self-sanctions and self-regulate behaviour.

Furthermore, youth who have been victimized experience biases in the construals of causality where they more readily attribute hostile intentions to the actions of others and view violence as justified. In addition, faulty knowledge structures are created which comprise belief systems and expectations regarding relationships, and memories of past social experiences which guide the interpretation of and response to the behaviour of peers and significant others during social exchanges. The violence children are exposed to in childhood are internalized as acceptable behaviour thus further molding cognitive frameworks for interpreting events and interactions into adolescence and adulthood.

3.5.3 Social factors associated with exposure to violence

Theories which consider socialization as central to moral development such as the social learning theory emphasize the importance of the internalization of moral standards as well as the evaluative reactions of parents, significant others, and peers. These theories further believe that adult role models who display different standards of conduct influence moral perspectives to a great degree. In
addition, society and the community’s approach to immoral actions are equally important in reinforcing moral or immoral actions. Sociocultural theorists stress that the moral content of one’s culture influences moral judgement and therefore moral action. In the following section the influence of exposure to violence on socialization, the internalization of moral standards and development of moral judgement are considered.

Exposure to violence, antisocial norms and values among peers; family and the community have shown to have a negative effect on the behaviour of youth through normalizing violence and the modeling of an attitude that is supportive of violence. In addition, exposure to media violence is linked to emotional desensitization and cognitive desensitization which result in numbing or blunting of reactions to events that normally result in a strong response and the belief that violence is mundane and inevitable. Exposure to violence has been implicated in the direct imitation of violent behaviours viewed within the family, community and on the television. Furthermore, violent and high-crime neighbourhoods inhibit social experiences which are deemed essential for moral growth. Additionally, many South African youth find themselves living in families where at least one family member has been involved in crime and a neighbourhood in which individuals earning a living from crime are tolerated. The messages sent to the youth are therefore that immoral actions can solve problems such as poverty and is acceptable.

In the section above a biopsychosocial perspective on how exposure to violence can result in delays in moral development and moral deficits was proposed by considering the impact that exposure to violence has on the biological, psychological and social systems of developing youth. The biopsychosocial perspective thus illustrates that intervention should consider the impact of exposure to violence on all systems of developing youth in order to prevent delays in normative development and maladaptive functioning.
3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the latest statistics and findings related to violence and crime in the South African context was provided. Furthermore, the link between exposure to violence and violent behaviour was explored as well as the impact of violence on the functioning of developing youth. Finally, a theoretical relationship between exposure to various forms of violence and deficits in moral development was established within this chapter. The vast amount of research reviewed regarding the influence of aggressive role models (for example, parent, peer, community or media) on adolescent functioning suggests that one cannot underestimate the role of social learning in the moral behaviour of adolescents. However, the link between exposures to violence and the biological changes as well as resultant deficits in cognitive or executive functioning are also highlighted as instrumental in delays in moral development.

Numerous studies were discussed regarding the impact of exposure to violence on the physiological, emotional, behavioural, cognitive, and social functioning of children and adolescents and its implications for normative development and moral development. In addition, a biopsychosocial perspective of the impact of exposure to violence on moral development was proposed. Delays in moral development have been indirectly linked to exposure to violence but limited research has explored the relationship between these two components. In light of the above this study aimed to further explore the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development. In the following chapter the research design and methodology used in this study will be discussed.
CHAPTER 4
Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter a theoretical overview of the research design and methodology selected for the present study will be included as well as the primary aims of the study. A description of the research method, the participants and sampling procedure used as well as the biographical data of the sample is provided. The research measures used to collect the data for this study, research procedure followed and method of data analysis are reviewed. Finally, the ethical considerations of the research study will be discussed.

4.2 Primary Aims of the Study

This study aimed at exploring and describing the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. In light of the above the aims for this study were as follows:

4.2.1 To explore and describe adolescents’ exposure to violence as measured by the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ-SAA).

4.2.2 To explore and describe the moral development of adolescents as measured by the Moral Judgment Test (MJT).
4.2.3 To explore and describe the relationship between the exposure to violence and moral development of adolescents.

The current research is exploratory-descriptive in nature and as such no hypotheses were formulated and the aims of the study were used to inform the methodological components of the study.

4.3 Research Design and Methodology

According to Rossouw (1996) research design provides a blue print for addressing topics, boundaries and direction, and enables the researcher to anticipate potential obstacles. The research design used for this particular study is a quantitative design. Quantitative research entails the conceptualization of concepts that can be operationalized through measuring instruments (Neser et al., 1995). According to Louw and Edwards (1997) it is through quantification that comparisons are made possible and the testing of particular hypotheses. A further advantage of a quantitative design is that it is structured and controlled in nature and the scope of the research is larger and more universal (Grobbelaar, 2000). However, a disadvantage of this design is that data is converted into numbers and in the process the actual true nature of the psychological data can be lost in translation (Louw & Edwards, 1997).

The method used in the current study can be classified as exploratory-descriptive in nature. Exploratory research is often used to investigate areas of research for which limited information exists. Furthermore, exploratory research can be viewed as descriptive as it describes what happens in a particular situation, as well as providing an understanding or explanation of the situation (Reaves, 1992). Although a vast amount of research concerning the general effect of exposure to violence on children and adolescents exists, there has been limited exploration of the specific affect
of the exposure to violence on the moral development of adolescents. In addition, the exploration of
the above mentioned topic in the South African context has been limited. The current research study
can also be viewed as descriptive in nature. Descriptive research entails giving specific details of a
situation, social environment or relationship (Neuman, 1997). In this study the aim is to describe the
relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners.

Survey research was used to collect the quantitative data of this study. “A survey is a technique
for gathering information which consists of questioning individuals who are the object of research
and who belong to a representative sample, through a standardized questioning procedure, with the
aim of studying the relationships among variables” (Corbetta, 2003, p.159). Surveys entail using
self-report measurement techniques to gain information regarding individuals’ experiences,
attitudes, behaviours and demographics. The survey method is also recognized as a means through
which researchers can study relationships among variables as well as the manner in which attitudes
and behaviours change over time (Cozby, 1997). A further positive of the survey technique is that it
is cost effective and through the group administration of questionnaires it becomes less time
consuming. An additional advantage of the group administration of questionnaires is a high response
rate, and the researcher is able to verbally explain the purpose of the study and answer any queries
that may arise (Du Plooy, 2000). In addition to the above, the use of questionnaires allows for
anonymity of the participants and confidentiality. However, there are various disadvantages
associated with the use of written questionnaires. One disadvantage of this technique is that the
education levels of the participants have to be considered, as being unfamiliar with a questionnaire
format could lead to incorrect completion of the questionnaire and flawed data. Another
disadvantage is the possibility that the participants might answer questions in a socially desirable
way, especially if these questions are sensitive in nature. The survey technique allows for the self-
report of the participants own experiences of violence as well as how they would deal with moral dilemmas and is therefore suitable for the present research (Corbetta, 2003).

4.3.1 Participants and sampling

The current research study aimed to explore the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. In light of the research topic, adolescents in Grade 10 and 11 in a coeducational high school situated in the Nelson Mandela Metropole were selected as the sample for this study. Grade 10 and 11 participants were targeted as this age group would allow for sufficient exposures to violence and possible development of moral judgement. Gabarino et al. (1997) supports the above as he states that the stage of adolescence consists of the continual development of alternative points of view as well as the independent evaluation of the motives and behaviours of others.

The sampling method utilized in the current research was non-probability convenience sampling. In this sampling procedure a sample is selected in which the population may or may not be accurately represented (Van Rensburg, 2000). Non-probability sampling is relevant where the aim of the researcher is to generate theory and develop a wider understanding of social processes (Van Rensburg, 2000). An advantage associated with non-probability sampling is that it is time and cost effective. However, a disadvantage is the inability to calculate the sampling error (Collins et al., 2000); this inability results in a lack of formal procedure for generalizing from the sample to the population (Van Rensburg, 2000).

Non-probability sampling consists of various sampling techniques, these are convenience, quota, purposive and snowball sampling (Gavin, 2008). The sampling technique utilized in this study was
convenience sampling, which entails the selection of elements that are easily accessible until the sample has reached the desired size. This technique is time and cost effective. However, in using convenience sampling bias could occur as result of certain elements being overrepresented or underrepresented in the sample selected by the researcher (Van Rensburg, 2000).

The researcher targeted participants from the age of 15 and older for this study. In addition, an inclusion criterion for this study was that all participants be proficient in English in order to successfully complete the questionnaires. Approximately one hundred Grade 10 and 11 learners were approached to participate in this research study of which fifty five consented to participate. The overall response rate was lower than expected. All participants completed the questionnaires of which two were filled out incorrectly and excluded from the sample. The final sample thus comprised of 53 participants of whom 43 were females and 10 males. As mentioned previously, the sample was selected by using non-probability convenience sampling and thus generalization of the results to the population will be limited.

A biographical questionnaire (see appendix E) was administered in order to provide a more comprehensive description of the participating sample. The sample’s biographical variables are provided in the following subsection.

4.3.2 Biographical data

4.3.2.1 Age

The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 17 and older, the average age being 16.42 years. The frequency distribution of biographical data of the age variable is presented in Table 1.
Table 1

*Age Distribution of the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3.2.2 Grade

The sample consisted of 30 Grade 10 and 23 Grade 11 participants. The Grade distribution is presented in greater detail in Table 2.

Table 2

*Grade Distribution of the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4.3.2.3 Home language

Table 3 presents the home language distribution of the participants.

Table 3

*Home Language Distribution of the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xhosa</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 3, the majority of the sample’s home language was Xhosa followed by English. Although 68% of the sample’s participants are Xhosa-speaking they attend an English-medium high school and were required to be proficient in English in order to
participate in the study. In the following section the gender distribution of the sample will be presented in Table 4.

### 4.3.2.4 Gender

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample comprised of 53 participants of whom 81% were female and 19% male participants. Although the socio-economic background of the sample was not included in the biographical questionnaire they were selected from a high school with a quintile of 5. The quintile system was developed by the Department of Education in an attempt to promote equity and breach the gap between privileged and disadvantaged schools by providing necessary funding to those schools that are most underprivileged. In the quintile system schools are ascribed a rank which is based on a poverty indicator comprising of the income, employment and literacy of the community within which the school is located. Quintile 1 is equivalent to the poorest schools and quintile 5 representing the least poor. Although the poverty indicator considers the poverty of the community and school it is unable to accurately reflect the learner population of the school. The previous mentioned findings are supported by fieldwork conducted in Gauteng schools in 2009 which revealed that most of the learners lived in informal settlements approximately 5 km from the schools they were attending (Motala & Sayed, 2009). In light of the aforementioned, the quintile 5 ascribed to the school of the present sample and therefore the information regarding their socio-economic background
should be interpreted with care as it might not be a true reflection of the learner population of
the school.

4.3.3 Research measures

A biographical questionnaire and two self-report measures were used to gather data regarding the
exposure to violence and moral development of the adolescent learners. The two self-report
measures used allowed adolescents to complete the questionnaires based upon on their own
experiences and development. The three questionnaires administered to the participants was a
biographical questionnaire, the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire-South African Adaptation (HTQ-
SAA), and the Moral Judgment Test (MJT) and will be discussed in the following subsection.

4.3.3.1 The biographical questionnaire

The biographical questionnaire was developed by the researcher with the aim of providing a
comprehensive description of the sample. The questionnaire provided information regarding the
participants’ age, grade, home language and gender which facilitated a comprehensive interpretation
of the research sample and results (see Appendix E).

4.3.3.2 The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire- South African Adaptation (HTQ-SAA)

The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire-South African Adaptation (HTQ-SAA) (Ward, Flisher,
Zissis, Muller, & Lombard, 2001) was selected in order to assess the exposure of adolescents to
violence. Mollica et al. (1992) first developed the original Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ) to address the experience of Indochinese refugees living in the United States, but it has subsequently been adapted for use in other contexts. Ward et al. (2004) adapted the HTQ for the South African context by altering the questions regarding exposures to violence through including forms of violence which are more relevant to the South African context. An example would be that instead of asking about torture related events, such as lack of food and water, the questions were modified to ask about beatings, shootings, and stabbings. The original HTQ further consisted of a 30 item Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms checklist of which 16 are derived from the DSM-III-R and DSM-IV (1987, 1994) criteria for PTSD. The symptoms checklist was removed from the questionnaire for the purposes of the current research study.

As mentioned above, the HTQ-SAA has been revised for use in the South African context and assesses the extent to which individuals between the ages of 12 to 18 have been exposed to violence either directly or indirectly. In the adapted version (HTQ-SAA) respondents are asked to choose either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to indicate whether they have been exposed to any of the different types of violence. A variety of questions are included which address violence ‘experienced’, ‘witnessed’, or ‘heard about’. Examples of these questions related to direct experience are (‘I have been stabbed by a stranger’) or witnessing of violence (‘I have seen a stranger get stabbed’). In addition, questions are included which further establish the degrees of closeness of the perpetrator and victim to the adolescent.

The total scores for the HTQ-SAA are calculated by counting as one any response other than ‘no’ regardless whether it was ‘experienced’, ‘witnessed’, or ‘heard about’. The minimum score that can be obtained is 0 and the maximum score 49. However, for the purpose of this research study the participants selection of amount of exposures to violence was modified from either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to
include a category for ‘never’, ‘once’, ‘twice’, ‘3-5’ and ‘6 or more’. Numerical values were assigned to each category ranging from 1 for ‘never’ to 5 for ‘6 or more’. The changes made to the HTQ-SAA ensured a comprehensive assessment of the participants’ incidence of exposure to violence so that those individual who have endured multiple exposures could be identified. The total raw score that can be obtained on the modified HTQ-SAA is therefore 245 and the lowest 49. However, for the purposes of statistical analysis the raw scores obtained can be converted to a scale of 1-5 and a scale of 0-100. An averaged score of 5 represents the highest score obtainable and equal to 100 when converted to the 0-100 scale.

The HTQ has been used in a variety of international and South African studies exploring adolescents’ experience of exposure to violence and trauma (Elklit, 2002; Jones, 2002; Mollica et al., 1992; Sabin et al., 2003; Ward et al., 2004). In addition, a research study by Ward et al. (2001) found that the HTQ-SAA provides reliable information regarding adolescents’ exposure to violence and subsequent symptoms related to these exposures. The HTQ-SAA was selected for the current research project as the studies mentioned above and the adaptability of the measure to the South African context ensures its suitability for this study.

### 4.3.3.2.1 Validity and reliability of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ-SAA)

The face validity of HTQ-SAA was endorsed in Ward et al. (2004) and convergent validity implied as symptoms of anxiety and depression as well as PTSD symptoms addressed by this measure correlated in expected directions with the exposure symptoms (Ward, 2001). Furthermore, in the study by Ward et al. (2004), the HTQ-SAA showed good test-retest reliability as evidenced by most of the items falling within the Cohen Kappa range of 0.61-0.80 and a high percentage
agreement of 92% to 100% was calculated. The Cronbach’s alpha for the symptoms scale was found to be 0.92 and the concordance correlation coefficient between the total symptoms score was 0.64.

4.3.3.3 The Moral Judgment Test (MJT)

The Moral Judgment Test (MJT) was selected for this research study to assess the moral development of adolescents’ through measuring their moral judgement competence. The MJT was constructed in 1978 and is used to measure moral development by assessing an individual’s moral judgment competence (Lind, 2000). According to Kohlberg (1964, p. 425) moral judgement is “the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (that is, based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments”. The MJT is based upon the dual aspect theory of moral development which considers affective as well as cognitive aspects of moral behaviour as inseparable in explaining moral development. The measure therefore provides an estimate of an individual’s affective orientation and cognitive abilities when dealing with a moral situation. The MJT can be used with children as young as 10 years of age. In the MJT two moral dilemmas are posed and arguments pro and contra to the subject’s opinion pertaining to these dilemmas are provided. The first dilemma presents the participants with a mercy-killing dilemma in which euthanasia is committed by a doctor whose patient is suffering from cancer. The second dilemma is called the workers dilemma and entails the wrongful dismissal of factory workers; these workers obtain information in an illegal manner providing the union with evidence supporting action against the company. The subjects firstly give their opinion regarding the doctor and workers behaviour on a scale from -3 to +3. Secondly, they rate in favour or against the 12 arguments related to each dilemma by choosing from ‘I strongly reject (-4) to I strongly agree (+ 4)’. The moral attitudes of
the subjects are assessed by measuring the degree to which they accept or reject each of the 12 arguments which represent the moral qualities of reasoning described by the six Kohlbergian stages of moral reasoning (Lind, 2000).

The MJT provides the option of obtaining two sets of scores, one for the cognitive aspect and another for the affective aspect. The cognitive score is the C-Index score which indexes the participant’s moral judgement competence. Moral judgement competence can be defined as “the ability of a subject to accept or reject arguments on a particular moral issue consistently in regard to their moral quality even though they oppose the subject’s stance on that issue” (Lind, 2008, p. 199). The C-Index can range from 1 to 100 and is categorized as very low (1-9), low (10-19), medium (20-29), high (30-39), very high (40-49) and extraordinary high (above 50). The affective aspect is represented through scores for a person’s attitudes toward each of the six levels of moral reasoning identified by Kohlberg. In essence it provides an understanding of which stage of moral reasoning subjects prefer most and which they prefer least. The moral attitudes are a summary of all four arguments in the MJT which is representative of a Kohlbergian stage (Lind, 2008).

4.3.3.3.1 Validity and reliability of the MJT

The MJT is deemed as a valid measure of moral judgement competence and moral attitudes by way of rigorous test design and by meeting five empirical criteria derived from the dual-aspect theory of moral behaviour (Lind, 2008). These empirical criteria are: the preferences for the six Kohlbergian stages of moral reasoning (affective aspect) are ordered in a predictable way; the preferences form a quasi-simplex structure; cognitive and affective aspects are parallel; pro and contra arguments are equivalent; and finally, the MJT contains a real, difficult moral task and,
hence, the C-Index is an indicator of an individual’s moral judgement competence (rather than moral attitude) (Lind, 2000).

Although the MJT has not been used in the South African context it has been used in numerous international cross-cultural studies and has shown good cross-cultural validity (Colesante et al., 2002; Duriez & Soenens, 2006; Lind, 2005; Mouratidou et al., 2007; Shaogang & Huihong, 2008). In the MJT the emphasis is on the measurement of patterns and structures rather that itemized information and as such traditional item analysis and test reliability has not been calculated. However, in research by Lerkatbundit et al. (2006), a reliability coefficient of $r = 0.90$ was reported for the MJT. In light of the above mentioned the MJT can be used as a valid and reliable measure of moral judgement competence within the South African context.

4.4. Research Procedure

The research proposal was submitted to the Faculty Research Technology and Innovation Committee (FRTI) of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) for approval. The researcher subsequently made the necessary changes to ensure that the research would be conducted in an ethical manner. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the Eastern Cape Department of Education, Education Support Centre. The researcher contacted the principal of the participating high school, permission and consent was obtained to conduct the research. A subsequent convenient date and time was arranged in which the data collection could occur. An information letter (Appendix A) which includes a detailed explanation of the purpose and nature of the research as well as an informed consent letter (Appendix B) was sent to all the parents of the Grade 10 and 11 classes. The consent form included a declaration by the parents of the participants
providing their informed written consent by initialing each section of the form as well as signing and
dating the form, signifying that they understand and agree to all the stipulated conditions.

The return of the parents consent forms identified the Grade 10 and 11 pupils that would be
participating in the study and the necessary amount of questionnaires were prepared for the data
collection. On the agreed upon date and time of data collection an information letter (Appendix C)
featuring a description of the purpose, procedure and voluntary nature of the research was
distributed to all participating Grade 10 and 11’s and explained in detail by the researcher. In
addition, participants were asked to complete an informed consent form (Appendix D) which was
distributed and collected by the researcher upon completion.

The three questionnaires were bound together in order to ensure that all the questionnaires
completed by a particular participant will remain together. A set of standard instructions explaining
how to complete the three questionnaires was included and participants were instructed not to put
their names down for confidentiality purposes. The questionnaires were subsequently administered
to the Grade 10 and 11 participants and were completed in approximately one hour. The researcher
and a research assistant were present to provide the instructions as well as give assistance where
needed. The questionnaires were systematically collected and placed in a collection box at the
testing venue which ensured the confidentiality and security of the information obtained from the
participants. Confidentiality of all the information obtained during the research and dissemination of
the results was explained to the participants by the researcher. Furthermore, the participants were
informed that the researcher would not provide individual feedback, but would provide a report
consisting of a brief summary of the findings of the research study to the principle and the group as
a whole. Given the sensitive nature of the questions included in the HTQ-SAA questionnaire
participants were provided with the contact details of facilities who offer psychological services should they require assistance in this regard.

The questionnaires’ of each participant was allocated a number which was systematically entered into a computerized data set. The questionnaires were scored and re-scored by the researcher in order to eliminate the possibility of error. The data was subsequently analysed with the assistance of a statistician. A summary report was made available to the principal of the participating high school and group feedback was provided to the Grade 10 and 11 participants.

The data analysis was conducted in terms of the aims of the study and will be discussed in the following subsection.

4.5 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed according to the three aims of the study. This research study is exploratory and descriptive in nature and therefore descriptive statistics was used to describe and interpret the quantitative data obtained. Descriptive statistics enables the researcher to make precise statements regarding the data collected (Cozby, 1997). Furthermore, descriptive statistics organizes and summarizes the data in a manner which enables the researcher to identify underlying patterns in the data and thereby providing support for the hypothesis of the research (Van Eeden, 2000). Descriptive statistics were used to determine the mean, ranges, and standard deviations with regard to the first two aims of the study, which are (1) To explore and describe adolescents’ exposure to violence, and (2) To explore and describe the moral development of adolescents. The mean provides the arithmetic midpoint of the scores of a sample and represents all the scores in the sample (Van Eeden, 2000). In addition, the standard deviation and range of the sample were calculated in order to determine the extent to which the
scores in the sample differ from each other as well as how far they deviate from the central value (Van Eeden, 2000). The third aim of the study (3) to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development of adolescents was facilitated by means of calculating a correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient was used in the current research as it provides a measure of the degree and direction of relationship between two or more variables (Gavin, 2008). The specific type of correlation coefficient used in this study is the Pearson’s correlation coefficient ($r$). In addition the Chi square test was performed, this test is normally used to test for association between two categorical variables (Lachenicht, 2002). The Chi square was therefore calculated to determine the association between the levels of exposure to violence and levels of moral judgment competence.

The Cronbach alpha’s of the two standardized measures were calculated for this study. The Cronbach alpha is an estimate of consistency of the responses to the different items in scales and provides another form of reliability of a measure (Finchilescu, 2002).

### 4.6 Ethical Considerations

According to De Vos (2002) a number of unique ethical problems arise when human beings are the object of research and as such ethical guidelines should serve as the standard upon which the researcher should evaluate their own conduct. To ensure that ethical research practices were being adhered to permission to conduct the proposed study was obtained from the Ethics Committee (Human) of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). Informing participants of the voluntary nature of the research study has been emphasized as an important ethical practice (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2005; Gavin, 2008). The right to voluntary participation is especially important in a school context and therefore the researcher informed the participants of this right as well as the right to withdraw from the
study at any time. In addition, the researcher informed the participants of the purpose and risks involved in the study as well as their right to informed consent (see appendix D). Confidentiality and anonymity was discussed with the participants and maintained at all times. Participants further have the right to be informed whether they will be receiving feedback regarding the outcome of the research (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2005). The researcher informed the participants that feedback would be provided in the form of a brief summary of the findings of the research study to the principle and the group as a whole.

The research participants were informed regarding the assessment of exposure to violence and the potential negative consequences that might ensue due to the sensitive nature of the questions. In order to remove or correct the potential undesirable consequences the researcher provided the participants with contact details of facilities that render psychological services might they require debriefing or individual counselling.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter the primary aims of the study were reviewed along with the methodology and research design of this exploratory-descriptive study. The data was gathered using a biographical questionnaire, a measure assessing level of exposure to violence (HTQ-SAA) and a measure assessing moral development (MJT). The non-probability convenience sampling method was utilized to select the participants for this study. The ethical guidelines outlined within this chapter were strictly adhered to by the researcher throughout the research procedure. In addition, the statistical analysis method utilized in this study was described. The results obtained in this study will be reported and discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 5

Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. In order to achieve the primary aim mentioned a further two aims were added to the study.

The first aim was to explore and describe adolescents’ exposure to violence. In order to achieve this aim the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire- South African Adaptation (HTQ-SAA) was used to measure the amount of exposure to different types of violence the adolescents’ had experienced. The second aim was to explore and describe the moral development of adolescents, the Moral Judgment Test (MJT) measured the adolescents moral development through providing a moral judgement competence score for each participant. In order to achieve the primary aim the HTQ-SAA and MJT were used to investigate a possible relationship between exposure to violence and moral development.

The results obtained from the data analysis will be discussed according to the three aims of the study. In addition the frequencies and descriptive statistics of the overall sample for each measure will be presented and discussed in this chapter.
5.2 Results of the Structured Measures

The following section will address the main aims of the study. The first two aims of the study, to explore and describe the exposure to violence and the moral development of adolescents will be discussed. The discussion regarding the primary aim, to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners will follow. Furthermore, the quantitative results and qualitative findings pertaining to each measure will be presented in this section.

5.2.1 Research aim 1: To explore and describe the exposure to violence of adolescents

Exposure to violence

The exploration and description of the exposure to violence of adolescents in this sample was achieved through the use of the HTQ-SAA which according to Ward et al. (2001) provides reliable information regarding adolescents’ exposure to violence and subsequent symptoms related to these exposures. The descriptive results obtained from this measure will now be discussed.

The mean, range, standard deviation and Cronbach’s alpha of the HTQ-SAA are presented in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to Violence (n = 53)</td>
<td>11.41</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>36.22</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>35.71</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 illustrates the exposure to violence the participants in the present study have experienced. The mean score calculated for the sample was 11.41 with a standard deviation of 7.79. The mean calculated thus represents the average exposure to violence experienced by the sample as measured by the HTQ-SAA. The minimum score obtained was 0.51 and the maximum score 36.22. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the raw scores obtained were converted to a scale of 0-100. Although the maximum score of 36.22 obtained on this measure appears to be low in comparison to the highest possible score of 100, the incidence of exposures selected could account for this seemingly low score. Participants had to select very high incidence response rates in order to obtain a high score on this measure. So the obtained score could be seen to be an underrating of incidence of exposure to violence by the adolescent.

Thus, the exposure to violence of the sample could be interpreted as high considering that all of the participants reported to have being exposed to one or multiple types of violence on one or more occasions, but the incidence of exposures reported was lower than expected. The results of the present study which has shown that the entire sample has been exposed to violence either directly or indirectly are similar to the finding of Ward et al. (2001) who investigated the prevalence of adolescents exposure to violence and resulting symptoms and found that approximately 81% of their sample had also witnessed or been a victim of violence. Additional studies have also reported that by early adolescence most youths have endured encounters with shootings, stabbings and various other acts of violence within their communities (Bell & Jenkins, 19993; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Newman, Lohman, Newman, Meyers, & Smith, 2000; Ososky, Wewers, Hann, & Fick, 1993). The findings of a study conducted by Elklit and Petersen (2008) which investigated the exposure to traumatic events and prevalence of Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among adolescents in four
different countries by using the PTSD section of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire are very similar to the current study as it showed that 90% of the adolescents had been exposed to at least one traumatic event. A further study conducted in Cape Town revealed comparable results as almost the entire sample of 185 children between the ages of 8 and 13 years had witnessed some form of physical assault in the school and community context (Shields, Nadasen, & Pierce, 2008).

In Table 6 below a detailed description of the types of violence the participants have been exposed to and the frequency with which these exposures have occurred as measured on the HTQ-SAA are provided. Similar items measuring certain types of exposure to violence were grouped together and the highest score obtained on these items were selected to represent the exposure to that particular type of violence. In addition, broad contextual categories are provided such as exposure to violence within the community and family environment and comprise of the various types of exposures relevant to the category.
Table 6
*Types of Exposure to Violence and Frequency of Exposures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Violence</th>
<th>1-2 times</th>
<th>3/more times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heard gunshots</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed physical assault</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of physical assault</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed a stabbing</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of being stabbed</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of stabbing</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed a shooting</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of being shot</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of shooting</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chased by a gang</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kidnapped</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of attempted rape</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim of rape</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed a dead body</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessed an attempted suicide</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Witnessed violence against or involving family members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stabbed</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shot</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead body</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted suicide</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Witnessed violence in home</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical assault</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of stabbing</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats of shooting</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted rape</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interparental violence</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse between parents</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse between parents</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The types of violence the participants were exposed to will now be discussed in greater detail according to the categories presented in Table 6. Community violence is a category which includes exposure to types of violence which would have typically occurred in the school or community environment. Some of these types of violence such as physical assault, shootings and stabbings
include the witnessing of a stranger or someone familiar being harmed or being the victim of these types of violence perpetrated by a stranger or someone familiar.

The type of violence adolescents were most frequently exposed to in the community context was hearing gunshots with 64% of the sample being exposed to this on three or more occasions. More than half of the participants (55%) reported threats of being stabbed and 36% reported threats of being shot on one or more occasions. A total of 53% had witnessed the physical assault of a stranger or someone they know and 15% reported to being the victim of physical assault on one or more occasions. A further 42% of the participants reported being chased by a gang, 30% witnessed a stabbing and 36% witnessed a shooting on one or more occasions. In addition, 53% of the participants have observed a dead body.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the victimization and witnessing of community violence can lead to the development of PTSD, depression, anxiety-depression, decreased attention, anger and aggression (Barbarin et al., 2001; Richter & Martinez, 1993; Rosenthal, 2000). Exposure to community violence has been associated with the acceptance and normalization of violence (Franco Agudelo, 1997) and violent behaviours (DuRant et al. 1994; Malik et al. 1997; Song, Singer & Anglin, 1998). A further consequence of exposure to community violence is the development of emotional disorders and interference with moral development as it alters children’s view of themselves and the world and causes desensitization towards events that normally evoke a strong reaction (Funk et al., 2004; Gabarino, Kosteleny, & Dubrow, 1991; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Ney, Fung, & Wickett, 1994; Schiavone, 2009).

Witnessing violence against or involving a family member is an additional category and the participants reported that 25% of them witnessed physical assault, 11% the stabbing, 6% the shooting, 25% the dead body of and 21% the attempted suicide of a family member on one or more
occasions. Another category is witnessing violence occurring in the home which includes events such as seeing a stranger, familiar person, or family member being stabbed or shot in the home, this type of exposure was reported by 6% of the sample. The witnessing of violence against others has been identified as covictimization and can result in the need for vengeful, confrontational and aggressive behaviour (Kuther, 1999; Madhere, 1996). The victim of family violence is a further category which comprises of physical assault and abuse, threats of stabbing or shooting, being stabbed or shot, rape and verbal abuse by members of one’s family. The types of violence participants have been exposed to most frequently within this context was physical assault which includes beatings and hitting and which occurred on one or more occasions for 26% of the sample, 17% reported that it has happened on three or more occasions. Verbal abuse was reported by 26% of the sample which indicated that it has occurred on three or more occurrences. Physical and verbal abuse has been associated with the development of aggression and cognitive deficits which result in the reduced ability to perform higher order tasks such as abstract reasoning, perspective taking and the inhibition of behaviour (Bocks et al., 2001; Lee & Hoaken, 2007).

Interparental violence is a further category of exposure to violence and includes physical abuse such as hitting each other and verbal abuse such as screaming at one another. The witnessing of parents physical abuse of one another on one or more occasion was reported by 19% of the sample. A further 32% of the sample reported verbal abuse between parents on one or more occasion. Interparental conflict has been linked to aggressive behaviour (Gynch et al., 2000; Kitimura & Hasui, 2006), and exposure to domestic violence to mental health problems such as depression, anger, aggression, and anxiety (Hornor, 2005; Johnson et al., 2002). A South African study conducted by Abrahams and Jewkes (2005) support the above mentioned as the findings of this
study showed that the witnessing of parental abuse can lead to future violent behaviour in multiple contexts and against intimate partners.

Six percent of the participants reported being raped by a stranger or someone familiar to them on one or more occasion and 4% reported rape by a family member. Research has linked sexual abuse to depression, low self-esteem, and PTSD (Roesler & McKenzie, 1994). The changes in brain structure and physiology related to PTSD have shown to affect memory, learning, and ability to regulate affect, social development and moral development (Solomon & Heide, 2005).

The type of exposure to violence reported by the majority of the sample was community violence with 64% of the sample reporting hearing gunshots, 53% witnessing physical assault on one or more occasion and 34% reporting three or more occurrences. A further 30% of the sample witnessed a stabbing and more than half of the participants experienced threats of stabbing personally. The witnessing of a shooting was also reported by 36% of the sample and 36% of them have experienced threats of being shot. Many of the participants also reported being chased by a gang (42%) and observing a dead body (53%). In the family context, 26% of the participants’ directly experienced physical assault and verbal abuse on one or more occasions and 38% were exposed to interparental conflict in the form of verbal abuse on three or more occasions. The above mentioned findings suggest that the adolescents in the sample were mostly exposed to the witnessing and threats of community violence, experience of physical assault and verbal abuse by a family member and the witnessing of verbal abuse between parents. The inclusion of the incidence with which these exposures occurred further revealed that the most reported types of exposure to violence are also the types of violence which occurs most frequently.

As illustrated in the above section the results obtained from the HTQ-SAA reflect that the entire sample have been exposed to various forms of violence either directly or indirectly. In the
discussion of these results it is important to review the literature presented in Chapter Three. In the aforementioned section the consequences and resulting symptoms of the exposure to different types of violence was discussed. In addition, Chapter Three highlights that exposure to violence has been linked to changes in mental health such as the development of depression, anxiety, reduced empathy, posttraumatic stress, and low self-esteem. Behavioural changes such as decreased school attendance, delays in development of social skills, self-destructive behaviour, aggression, conduct problems and becoming a perpetrator of violence (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993; Flannery et al., 2001; Giaconia et al., 1995; Pearce et al., 2003; Richters & Martinez, 1993; Schwab-stone et al., 1995). Exposure to violence has also been associated with biological changes such as changes to the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) resulting in somatic complaints, sleep disturbances, social withdrawal, temper tantrums, aggression, and cruelty to animals. Exposure to violence has been linked with decreases in the cerebral volumes of children diagnosed with PTSD leading to hyperarousal, aggressive responses, dissociative reactions, executive functioning difficulties, and educational underachievement (De Bellis et al., 1999; Glaser, 2000). Changes in the Prefrontal Cortex of the brain have also been associated with exposure to violence causing impulsive and disinhibited behaviour and a disregard for social and moral principles (Fuster, 2001).

The exposure to various types of violence in multiple contexts and its associated sequelae leads to the conclusion that exposure to violence affects children and adolescents on the biological, psychological and social domain ultimately resulting in deficits in cognitive, psychological, emotional, and social development.

The Cronbach’s alpha was calculated in order to investigate the internal consistency of the HTQ-SAA. Table 5 presents the results obtained for the HTQ-SAA as 0.89 which suggests that this
measure has very good internal consistency. According to Aiken (1982) (as cited in Tredoux & Durrheim, 2002) the reliability of a measure should be 0.65 to be able to compare groups of people and 0.85 in order to compare individual scores with another or against a set of norms.

5.2.2 Research aim 2: To explore and describe the moral development of adolescents

Moral Judgement Competence

Before addressing the findings of this study in relation to the Moral Judgement Test, it is necessary to review literature discussed in the previous chapters concerning moral development and moral judgement. As mentioned in Chapter Two, there exists three components of morality that inform theoretical perspectives on moral development; these are ‘moral reasoning’ (cognition), ‘moral emotions’ (affect), and ‘moral conduct’ (behavioural) (Kochanska & Askan, 2006; Kochanska, Forman, Askan, & Dunbar, 2005; Perry & Busey, 1984). Kohlberg’s (1964; 1984) definition of morality as a capacity or competence which is based upon one’s internal moral principles combines the affect, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of morality. This competency described by Kohlberg (1964, p. 425) is moral judgement which he defined as “the capacity to make decisions and judgments which are moral (that is, based on internal principles) and to act in accordance with such judgments”.

The Moral Judgement Test (MJT) was developed in order to assess individuals’ ability to judge arguments pro and con with regards to a controversial moral problem based upon their own moral principles and despite their own opinion about the problem (Lind, 2008). Furthermore, it was designed to measure individuals’ attitudes towards the six Kohlbergian stages of moral reasoning. The MJT is based upon the dual aspect theory of moral development which considers affective as
well as cognitive aspects of moral behaviour as inseparable in explaining moral development (Lind, 1985a; 2002). The measure therefore provides an estimate of an individual’s affective orientation and cognitive abilities when dealing with a moral situation and as such provides the option of obtaining two sets of scores, one for the cognitive aspect and another for the affective aspect. The cognitive score is the C-Index score which indexes the participant’s moral judgement competence and is defined as “the ability of a subject to accept or reject arguments on a particular moral issue consistently in regard to their moral quality even though they oppose the subject’s stance on that issue” (Lind, 2008, p. 199). The affective score represents individuals’ attitudes toward Kohlberg’s six stages of moral reasoning through examining their preference for certain stages of moral reasoning for certain dilemmas. The arguments participants are asked to rate in the MJT represent the different moral qualities of reasoning of Kohlberg’s stages of reasoning (Lind, 2008).

The mean, range, standard deviation and Cronbach’s alpha of the MJT is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7  
*Mean and Standard Deviation of the MJT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>St. Dev.</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Judgement Competence</td>
<td>13.45</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>45.58</td>
<td>11.23</td>
<td>44.55</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the C-Index can range from 1 to 100, and can be categorized as very low (1-9), low (10-19), medium (20-29), high (30-39), very high (40-49) and extraordinary high (above 50). Table 6 presents the results of the participants with regards to their moral judgement competence as measured by the MJT. The mean score obtained by the participants
provides information regarding the moral judgement competence level of the participants. The mean of 13.45 suggests a low level of moral judgement competence obtained by the overall sample. The lowest score obtained on the MJT was 1.03 and the highest score was 45.58. The breakdown of the C-index scores and the categories assigned to these scores are provided in Table 8 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>C-Index scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Low (1-9)</td>
<td>25 (47%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low (10-19)</td>
<td>15 (28%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (20-29)</td>
<td>7 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High (30-39)</td>
<td>4 (8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High (40-49)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraordinary High</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(above 50)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As illustrated in Table 8, the majority of the sample scored within the very low to low category. The difference between a high and low scoring participant is that participants with a high C-index score consistently judge the arguments of the dilemmas in terms of the moral quality of the arguments, rather than judging based upon one’s own stance or opinion of the situation depicted (Lind, 2008). The results of the sample presented in Table 8 therefore indicates that the majority of the participants neglected to consider the moral qualities of the arguments surrounding the dilemmas but judged the situations based upon their own opinion.

The mean C-index score of 13.45 obtained by the sample in the current study which corresponds to the low category of moral judgement competence is slightly lower when compared to other studies in which the MJT was used. In a study by Duriez and Soenens (2006) the moral judgement competence of 338 Dutch-speaking Belgian adolescents between the ages of 14- 20 was assessed by using a Dutch translated version of the MJT. The mean C-index score for the sample of that study
was 23.66 which is equivalent to the medium category of moral judgement competence. A study performed in Greece in which a Greek translated version of the MJT was used to assess the moral development of 157 Greek high school students, mean C-index scores ranging from 15.62 to 17.21 were reported for the different groups of high school students (Mouratidou, Goutza, & Chatzopoulos, 2007). Another study conducted in Latvia which included Grade 9 and 12 students, a mean C-index score ranging from 17.6 for the Grade 9 and 17.8 for Grade 12 was reported (Gints, 2002). A study conducted in Brazil with groups of students in Grade 6 and 7 and Grade 11 and 12, reported mean C-index scores of 17.00 for the Grade 6 and 7 group and 25.00 for the Grade 11 and 12 groups (Bataglia, 1995). A Chinese study which used a Chinese translated version of the MJT assessed the moral judgement competence of two groups of adolescents, one group of 148 students in Grade 1, 2, and 3 in junior high school with a mean age of 14.21 years and another group of 192 students in Grade 1, 2, and 3 in senior high school with a mean age of 16.9 years. The results showed the mean C-index scores of the three grades in junior high school as follows, Grade 1 was 24.33, Grade 2, 21.85 and Grade 3, 21.22. The mean C-index scores for the three grades in senior high school was 30.22 for Grade 1, 30.98 for Grade 2 and 27.06 for Grade 3 (Shaogong & Huihong, 2008).

The findings from the majority of studies in the aforementioned section illustrate that the mean moral judgement competence scores of the adolescents in these studies are equivalent to the low to medium category of moral judgement competence. In comparing the findings of the research studies with the results of the present study the following should be considered. In many of the research studies reviewed the MJT was translated into the main language of the country which possibly facilitated a better understanding of the content of dilemmas and influenced the moral judgement competence of the participants in dealing with the dilemmas posed in the MJT. In the present
In the present study the main aim was to investigate the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. In light of this research aim, the moral judgement competence score was used to provide an indication of the adolescents moral development as the affective score merely represents individuals’ attitudes toward Kohlberg’s six stages of moral reasoning through examining their preference for certain stages of moral reasoning. Previous research in which the MJT was used has shown that individuals prefer stage 6 reasoning in relation to the Doctor’s dilemma and stage 5 reasoning with regard to the Worker’s dilemma (Lind, 2000a). Piaget (1976) initially suggested cognitive-affective parallelism in which the cognitive and affective aspects of human behaviour are viewed as inseparable. Lind (1985) has found support for this idea with the MJT, as the cognitive and affective scores are related in a positive and linear fashion, “the higher a subject’s moral judgement competence is, the more clearly does he or she
accept higher stage arguments and reject lower stage arguments” (p. 20). In other words, moral
attitudes systematically correlate with moral judgement competence. In addition, findings of 17
cross-cultural validity studies of the MJT have further supported the affective-cognitive parallelism
and shown that the higher an individual’s moral judgement competence, the more they prefer higher
stages of reasoning over lower stages (Lind, 2005). In terms of the above mentioned, the calculation
of the MJT affective scores falls outside the scope of the present study as literature and cross-
cultural research have shown that the higher an individual’s moral judgement competence score the
more they prefer higher stages of moral reasoning. The C-index scores of the present research
sample therefore provide a sufficient indication of the preference for different stages of moral
reasoning. In the following section the results of the third and main aim of the study which is the
relationship between exposure to violence and moral development of adolescents are presented and
discussed.

5.2.3 Research aim 3: To explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence
and moral development of adolescents.

Exposure to violence and moral development

The relationship between exposure to violence and moral development has been theoretically
established in Chapter Three and will be summarized in order to provide a better understanding of
the results presented and discussed in this section. Exposure to violence has been associated with
various emotional and behavioural disorders and delays in moral development (Gabarino,
Kosteleny, & Dubrow, 1991; Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Ney, Fung, & Wickett, 1994). Exposure to
violence has also been associated with a reduction in social experiences, peer relationships, and
perspective taking (Cicchetti, 1990; Eisenberg et al., 2001). In addition, decreased theory of mind which entails the ability to attribute beliefs, desires, emotions, and intentions to others (Cicchetti, Rogosch, Maughan, Toth, & Bruce, 2003) has been shown to be the result of exposure to violence and inhibits moral judgement.

Exposure to different forms of violence such as media, family and peer violence has also been associated with altering individuals’ view of violence so that they view it as a means to achieve justice similar to stage 2 moral reasoning. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the changes in brain structure and physiology related to PTSD have also been shown to affect memory, learning, ability to regulate affect, social development and moral development (Solomon & Heide, 2005). The link between exposure to violence and lower stages of moral reasoning, has been documented in numerous researcher studies (Blasi, 1980; Garbarino, 1999; Kobeka, 2008; Krcmar & Valkenburg, 1999).

Many theories focussing on the etiology behind the influence of exposure to violence on moral development have emerged in Chapter Three. Biological abnormalities, impaired cognitive functions like perspective taking and role-taking, information processing, lack of empathy, moral disengagement, depersonalization or dehumanization of individuals, as well as observing and learning moral behaviour from aggressive role models have been highlighted as the means by which exposure to violence cause moral development delays.

In Table 5 and 6 the results of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ-SAA) were presented illustrating the participants’ exposure to different types of violence and the incidence with which it occurred. Table 7 and 8 in turn provided information regarding the results of the Moral Judgement Test (MJT) and therefore the moral judgement competence of the participants. In order to investigate the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development, the Pearson’s
correlation coefficient (Pearson $r$) was calculated. The Pearson’s correlation coefficient ($r$) can range from -1 to 1 where 1 reflects a perfect positive correlation (the values of the variables increases and decreases together) and -1 a perfect negative correlation (as the value of the one variable increases so the value of the other decreases). An $r$ of 0 reflects zero correlation or relationship between variables (Tredoux & Durrheim, 2002). Guilford (cited in Sprinthall, 1987) provides informal interpretation categories of the Pearson correlations as presented in Table 9 below:

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of $r$ (+ or -)</th>
<th>Informal interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 0.2</td>
<td>Slight; almost no relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.2 - 0.4</td>
<td>Low correlation; definite but small relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.4 – 0.7</td>
<td>Moderate correlation; substantial relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.7 – 0.9</td>
<td>High correlation; strong relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.9 – 1.0</td>
<td>Very high correlation; very dependable relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.3.1 Interpretation of the Pearson’s correlation coefficient

In Chapter Three, numerous studies were highlighted which revealed that a relationship between exposure to violence and moral development exists. The correlation coefficient calculated for this study produced a Pearson $r$ of .0003. According to Guilford’s informal interpretations the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development of adolescents in this study is slight to almost no relationship.

Possible reasons which account for the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient are discussed in the following section. A potential reason behind the lack of correlation calculated could be the scores the participants obtained on the modified HTQ-SAA. Due to the addition of incidence
response options the participants had to consistently select the higher incidence response in order to obtain a high score on this measure. The highest score and therefore the highest exposure to violence measured on the HTQ-SAA was 36.22 out of the possible maximum score of a 100. The seemingly low score could have influenced the degree of correlation calculated between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence.

The small sample size of the study could be an additional factor contributing to the lack of relationship found between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence by preventing the detection of a statistically significant result. Lachenicht (2002) stated that correlations can be misleading if the underlying populations are not homogenous. The current research sample is heterogeneous in nature as 68% of the participants are Xhosa speaking South Africans and 81% of the participants are female. Although there are international and South African studies showing no gender differences in the exposure to violence of adolescents (Mouratidou, Goutza, & Chatzopoulos, 2007; Seedat et al., 2004; Shaogong & Huihong, 2008; Shields, Nadasen, & Pierce, 2008) other research studies contradict these findings as they suggest that gender differences do exist in relation to adolescents exposure to violence (Barabarin, 1999; CSVR, 2007; McAloney et al., 2009; Slovak et al., 2007). In South Africa, research concerning ethnic differences to exposure to violence is limited; however a study by Shields et al. (2008) conducted with adolescents showed that ethnicity played a role when reporting exposure to community violence. Research studies such as the aforementioned study have shown that gender and ethnicity possibly influence the amount of violence individuals are exposed to. It is therefore possible that individuals of certain ethnicity or gender would experience and therefore report more exposures to violence thus obtaining a higher score on a measure such as the modified HTQ-SAA. The present research sample was heterogeneous and thus ethnicity or gender could have influenced the scores obtained on the HTQ-
SAA and thereby influencing the correlation calculated between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence as these variables could be non-linearly related. Lachenicht (2002) suggests that one has to consider that two variables might be non-linearly related if the correlation coefficient is insignificant. This means that one variable could have a minimal impact on the other variable until it reaches a certain point or level after which it affects the other variable significantly in either a positive or negative direction. In other words, in the current study it could be that a certain amount of exposure to violence has a limited effect on moral judgement competence but once a certain level of exposure to violence is reached it results in a significant increase or decrease of moral judgement competence. Although no significant correlation was calculated for exposure to violence and moral judgement competence in the present study, the possibility of an association between these two variables cannot be completely discounted as the relationship could be a non-linear inverse relationship.

Finally, the lack of correlation could be as result of other confounding variables which influence the relationship between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence such as socio-economic background, family and social support, education and religion.

Despite the slight to no relationship calculated by means of the Pearson $r$, the comparison of the results of both the HTQ-SAA and MJT provides noteworthy information. In comparing the scores of each participant on these measures it becomes evident that a number of the participants with low scores on the HTQ-SAA achieved higher moral judgement competence scores. This means that some of the participants who have been exposed to lower or less frequent exposures to violence have better moral judgement competence. The results indicate that there are also a few participants who have been exposed to higher or more exposures to violence yet obtained poorer moral
judgement competence scores. Figure 1 below depicts the comparison of the scores of the HTQ-SAA and MJT for each participant.

Figure 1

*Scores of the HTQ-SAA and MJT for Each Participant*

In Figure 1, the scores that each participant obtained on the HTQ-SAA is presented in ascending order and the corresponding scores obtained on the MJT for each of those participants. In this Figure it is possible to examine the degree to which the amount of exposure to violence impacts upon moral judgement competence. Although there are a few scores in the data set which illustrate that a higher amount of exposure to violence can result in a lower moral judgement competence score, the overall pattern of the data however does not show a significant relationship.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, the results of the Moral Judgement Test (MJT) can be categorized and as such the Pearson Chi square test of association can be performed when the results from the
Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ-SAA) is similarly categorized. In order to perform the Pearson Chi square test the scores from both the MJT and HTQ-SAA was divided into low, average and high categories. The Pearson Chi square test allows for the testing of association between these two categorical variables (Lachenicht, 2002). The Chi square test found no significant relationship between the level of exposure to violence and moral judgement competence as $\chi^2(4, \text{N}= 53) = 1.40, p (.844) >.05$. The p-value is bigger than the chosen significance level and therefore indicates a lack of significance in the association between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence in this particular study.

5.3 Conclusion

In this chapter the results of the three aims were presented and discussed. The results of the sample were linked to studies and literature reviewed in previous chapters. The exposure to violence of the sample was high as all of the participants reported being directly or indirectly exposed to one or multiple forms of violence. The incidence of reported exposures to these different types of violence was however lower than expected. The moral judgement competence scores obtained by the majority of the sample fell within the very low to low category. The results from the correlation coefficient test between the MJT and the HTQ-SAA suggested a slight to no relationship and the chi-square investigations showed a lack of significant association between levels of exposure to violence and moral judgement competence. Adolescents’ high exposure to violence found in the present study is consistent with other research studies, however the insignificant relationships found between the impact of exposure to violence and moral development is contradictory to research findings discussed in Chapter Three. Various research studies found that exposure to violence does
indeed influence children’s cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. In the present study reasons that could account for the lack of association found were briefly mentioned in this chapter and will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter. The findings of this study suggest that future research is perhaps necessary to investigate the possible influence of other confounding variables on the relationship between violence and moral development. The conclusions and value of the present study, as well as the limitations and recommendations for future research is discussed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 6
Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the results of the study were presented and discussed. In this chapter the main conclusions drawn from the findings are discussed as well as the value of the study. Finally, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are presented in this chapter.

6.2 Aims of the Study Revisited

The present study aimed to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. The three primary aims of the research were:

6.2.1. To explore and describe adolescents’ exposure to violence as measured by the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire (HTQ-SAA).

6.2.2 To explore and describe the moral development of adolescents as measured by the Moral Judgment Test (MJT).

6.2.3 To explore and describe the relationship between the exposure to violence and moral development of adolescents.
6.3 Main Conclusions Based on the Aims of the Study

The main conclusions of this study will now be discussed in terms of the previously mentioned aims.

6.3.1 Description of the exposure to violence of the sample

The first aim of the study was to explore and describe the level of exposure to violence of the adolescents in the sample and was achieved by means of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire-South African Adaptation (HTQ-SAA). The mean raw score of exposure to violence obtained on the HTQ-SAA was 11.41 which appeared low when compared to the maximum possible score of 100. However, the addition of incidence with which exposures occurred resulted in participants having to select higher incidence response options more readily in order to obtain a high score on the modified HTQ-SAA. The researcher speculates that the low incidence of exposure to different types of violence could be due to the nature of the sample which was selected from a quintile 5 high school. The gender and ethnicity of the current research sample should also be considered as contributing to the incidence of exposure to violence reported.

Although the incidences of exposure to violence were low, the impact of any exposure to violence on the development and normal functioning of children and adolescents have been well documented in literature. Violence has been shown to affect children even if they are not the direct victim of the violence but merely witness violent events through covictimization
(Kuther, 1999; Madhere, 1996). Therefore, a conclusion that can be drawn is that the exposure to even a single traumatic event directly or indirectly can have a detrimental effect on normative development and should be considered when interpreting the findings of the HTQ-SAA.

Despite the lower incidence of exposures the entire sample was exposed to or experienced one or multiple types of violence either directly or indirectly. The findings of the study therefore suggest that the participants’ exposure to violence was high. These results are similar to other research findings of adolescents’ exposure to violence (Bell & Jenkins, 1993; Martinez & Richters, 1993; Newman et al., 2000; Osofsky et al., 1993; Shields, Nadasen, Pierce, 2008; Ward et al., 2001). The participants in the sample were mostly exposed to hearing, witnessing and experiencing threats of violence in the community. The experience of physical assault and verbal abuse by a family member and the witnessing of verbal abuse between parents were also reported by a high percentage of the sample. The incidences of exposure to these types of violence mentioned in the above section were also the highest with participants being exposed on three or more occasions.

The results from the HTQ-SAA suggests that the all of the participants in this sample were exposed to one or multiple types of violence either as a victim or witness and that for some these exposures occur on a more regular basis. The destructive effect that exposure to violence has on the biological, psychological, and social functioning of adolescents, their subsequent development and resulting future behaviour have been discussed in great detail in this study. The findings of this study therefore suggest that due to the large proportion of the participants in this sample being exposed to violence many are at an increased risk for possible developmental delays or deficits if intervention is not considered. In the following subsection
the moral development of the sample as measured by the Moral Judgement Test (MJT) is described.

6.3.2 Description of the moral development of the sample

The second aim of the study was to explore and describe the moral development of the sample of adolescents. The Moral Judgement Test (MJT) was used to provide an index of the moral development of the sample by providing a moral judgement competence score for each participant. Moral judgement competence is defined by the developer of the measure as “the ability of a subject to accept or reject arguments on a particular moral issue consistently in regard to their moral quality even though they oppose the subject’s stance on that issue” (Lind, 2008). According to the results obtained on the MJT the mean moral judgement competence score obtained by the sample was 13.45 suggesting a low level of moral judgement competence when using the categories provided by Lind (2008). The majority of the sample scored within the very low to low category and a quarter obtained scores within the medium to very high category. None of the participants scored within the extraordinary category. These findings suggest that the majority of participants neglected to consider the moral qualities of the arguments surrounding the dilemmas but judged the situation based solely upon their own opinion.

As discussed in Chapter Two, moral judgement or moral development is dependent upon various components such as cognitive skills, social experiences, empathy, modeling and reinforcement. In the present study exposure to violence was identified as indirectly compromising these skills and experiences essential to moral development. Although no
correlation was found between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence in the present study, the whole sample was exposed to violence and literature has established a link between these two concepts. The impact of exposure to violence should therefore still be considered in the interpretation of the C-index scores of this sample. In addition to the possible impact of exposure to violence on moral judgement competence there are other factors that could also account for the lower C-index scores obtained and are therefore worth mentioning.

In Chapter Two, the influence of the norms, beliefs and ideologies of one’s culture on moral judgement was discussed. Culture is therefore an additional variable to consider when interpreting the C-index scores of this sample. Chapter Five highlights the use of the MJT in various international studies with diverse cultures. The differences found among the moral judgement competence scores of these studies illustrate the possible influence of culture on moral judgement. However, the cross-cultural validity of the MJT has been proven as the C-index score reflects only the participant’s ability to apply their own moral orientation consistently and is not tied to (although it is based upon) the participant’s moral orientation (Lind, 2005). In other words, the participants do not have to ascribe to a particular moral orientation supported in another culture in order to obtain a high C-index score in the MJT, but merely consistently apply their specific moral orientations to the dilemmas. Lind (2005) reports that despite the cross-cultural validity of the measure, the C-index scores vary greatly between cultures and therefore one should consider the influence of quantity and quality of education when comparing competence scores across cultures. A further factor contributing to the moral judgement competence of the current research sample could therefore be education. According to Lind (2003) if education is of a good quality and strives to foster moral abilities rather than only drilling skills it can facilitate moral judgement competence. This means that
although the sample was selected from a reputable high school, the degree of focus on moral competency in the curriculum of the school would contribute to the moral judgement competence of the participants. Finally, the language version of the MJT should also be considered as possibly contributing to the sample’s C-index scores. Although the English version was administered to English proficient participants, the majority of the sample was Xhosa speaking and as such English is not their first language.

The results of the MJT suggest that the participants in this sample have low moral judgement competence which represents a decreased ability to consider the moral qualities of arguments surrounding moral dilemmas. In an aforementioned section exposure to violence, cultural context and education were highlighted as possible variables influencing moral judgement competence. Further research is however necessary to expand understanding of how these and additional variables affect moral judgement competence and moral development and the possible intervention programs necessary to counter this effect. In the following subsection the correlation between exposure to violence and moral development of the sample is described.

6.3.3 Description of the correlation between exposure to violence and moral development of the sample

The third and final aim of this research was to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development of the adolescents in this sample. No significant relationship was found to exist between the amount of exposure to violence as measured by the HTQ-SAA and moral development as measured by the MJT for this sample group. The
findings were unexpected and in contrast with literature which suggest a relationship between these constructs. In Chapter Five, possible reasons accounting for the lack of association found between these concepts were presented. One of the factors mentioned likely to have contributed to the non-significant correlation found is the addition of the incidence response options to the HTQ-SAA. This addition decreased the total score of exposure to violence the participants obtained on this measure. A further factor was the size, and heterogeneous nature of the sample used in this study. The probability of a non-linear relationship was also suggested as contributing to the correlation outcome. Furthermore, the possible influence of other confounding variables such as socio-economic background, family and social support, education and religion on the relationship between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence was considered. These variables could act as protective factors which would serve to mediate the influence of exposure on subsequent moral judgement. Additional protective factors that have been identified are effective problem-solving ability, peer support and opportunities for success at school (Margolin & Gordis, 2004). Pearce et al. (2003) have also found that religion and parental involvement has a mitigating effect on exposure to violence for urban youth at high risk of developing conduct problems. Religion has been viewed as a means through which youth’s behaviour is regulated through the promotion of normative beliefs and moral values (Cochran, Beeghley & Bock, 1988).

Although a non-significant correlation was calculated between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence certain observations are noteworthy. The examination of each participant’s exposure to violence score and C-index score revealed that a number of participants in the sample group with high exposure to violence obtained low moral judgement competence scores and vice versa. Despite the above mentioned observation this is an
exploratory-descriptive study and therefore no causal or explanatory links could be made. The results of the correlation between exposure to violence and moral judgement competence have showed that further research is necessary which takes into account the effect of the variables mentioned above. In the following section the value of the present research will be discussed.

6.4 The Value of the Research

The value of the present study is the contribution it has made to research concerning the exposure to violence of adolescent learners in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. This study further served to provide detailed information concerning the various negative consequences of exposure to violence and its potential impact on normative development.

Another value and strength of the study was the information obtained from the modified HTQ-SAA which specified the participants’ exposure to violence and the incidence of exposure to the different types of violence. The addition of incidence response options which account for the amount of times participants were exposed to a particular type of violence has provided additional information about how regularly these exposures occur. The results of the study indicated that the entire sample was exposed to one or multiple types of violence on one or numerous occasions. The information obtained from the HTQ-SAA regarding the amount of community violence, violence within the family and interparental conflict the adolescents in the sample have been exposed to serves to highlight the need for addressing these exposures and the meaning thereof within the family or school context through intervention programs in order to prevent negative consequences and developmental deficits.
A further value of the present study is that it contributed to research regarding the moral development of the adolescents in this sample by providing information regarding their moral judgement competence. Moral judgement competence is viewed as a central component of moral development by many theorists as highlighted in Chapter Two. The results from the MJT served to inform the principal, teachers and parents of the moral judgement competence of the adolescents in this sample. This information could assist future interventions such as discussions of moral dilemmas and providing role-taking opportunities within school and in the family context which would inevitably promote moral growth.

The current research study investigated the strength of relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. Although a non-significant correlation was found between these two constructs it has provided a foundation for further research questions concerning violence and moral development and the possible confounding variables which should be considered.

The participants in this study received general feedback regarding the results and findings of this research study. In addition, they were reminded of the counselling services available at the University Psychology clinic if they required assistance in that regard. Although the present research provided valuable findings and information as highlighted in the aforementioned section, there are various limitations to this study which deserve further discussion. The limitations are therefore discussed in the following section.
6.5 Limitations of the Research

A limitation of the study that should be mentioned is the use of convenience sampling; this sampling method resulted in sample bias in which certain elements were over or underrepresented and limited the generalizability of the study. As a result of this method, gender and ethnicity were not equally represented within the current research sample. In addition, the sample was selected from a quintile 5 high school which suggests that different socio-economic backgrounds were not represented within this sample. A further limitation is the small size of the sample. Informed consent had to be obtained from the parents of the adolescents which could have been influenced by the sensitive nature of the study as participants would be asked to potentially re-experience traumatic experiences by completing the HTQ-SAA. Another factor contributing to the small sample size was the collection of the informed consent forms from the parents and the voluntary nature of the study. In light of the above mentioned, the size and nature of the sample could therefore partly account for the lower incidence of exposure to violence found amongst this sample.

The main focus of the present study was to investigate the impact of exposure to violence on moral development and as such the direct influence of other variables like ethnicity and gender were not considered. The lack of specific consideration of these variables can be seen as a limitation of the present study as there is evidence from research studies suggesting that ethnicity and gender differences do exist with regard to exposure to violence.
Despite the value of adding response options to the modified HTQ-SAA which accounted for the incidence of exposures, this also served as a limitation as participants had to select higher incidence response options in order to obtain a high score. The aforementioned limitation could have distorted the results so that it appeared as though participants experienced low exposure to violence when in fact they had experienced high exposure to violence but less frequently.

A further limitation that should be considered is the possibility that the two dilemmas of the standardized version of the Moral Judgment Test (MJT) should be adapted to the South African context. A South African version of the MJT would incorporate dilemmas comprising of moral situations which South Africans are faced with on a regular basis. Although the sample was English proficient, the majority of the participants’ first language is Xhosa and therefore the language version of the MJT was an additional limitation in this study.

Since the aims of the study were to explore and describe the results obtained from the different measures, namely the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire-South African Adaptation and the Moral Judgment Test, the above mentioned limitations seem to be justified. The recommendations for future research are discussed in the following section.

6.6 Recommendations for Future Research

The present research served to provide a foundation for further research in this field within the South African context. The exploratory-descriptive nature of the study has highlighted other important research avenues to be investigated. A future research study
should reflect the influence of adolescents’ gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background on the amount and incidence of exposure to violence. In addition, as the small sample size of the present study could have influenced the results it is recommended that a larger sample be selected for future studies as this will ensure a broader and more representative sample. A larger sample size would also allow a greater degree of generalizability to adolescents in South Africa.

A further avenue of research is the consideration of confounding variables such as the protective factors and the mediating role of these factors when exposed to violence within the South African context. In addition, the investigation into the impact of exposure to violence when interacting with other risk factors and stresses such as living in a family with a low income and low education, living in a high-crime neighbourhood, and lack of social support could also generate valuable findings.

It is recommended that a South African version of the MJT which has been translated and standardised for all the main language groupings be used in future research studies exploring the moral judgement competence of adolescents in South Africa. Future research could also include qualitative methods of exploring moral development as this could enhance the existing quantitative information and add to the knowledge base of the moral development of South African adolescents. Furthermore, an investigation into the influence that moral discussion in the classroom could have on the moral judgement competence of the learners would be beneficial. A high moral judgment competence score has been associated with increased learning ability and application of newly learnt information (Heidbrink, 1985; Lind & Knoop, 2001). Lind (1993; 1995; 1998) has also suggested that the longer individuals do not practice their moral abilities the faster they
lose them as moral competence does deteriorate if not exercised. The moral judgement competence of adolescents therefore needs to be stimulated and exercised in order to promote moral development.

In this study the various factors that influence moral judgement and moral development were discussed and culture was highlighted as one of these factors. South Africa comprises of many unique and diverse cultures influenced by historical events such as the political violence in the apartheid era as well as the beliefs, values, ideologies and religions endorsed by each culture. The investigation into the influence of culture on the moral judgement and moral development of South African youth is therefore recommended.

Finally, through this study the various moral development theories and the impact of exposure to violence were integrated into a biopsychosocial model which provided a different perspective of the etiology of moral deficit. The introduction of the biopsychosocial approach to understanding the moral deficits of youth exposed to violence has laid the groundwork for future research in which interventions with at risk youth should be explored.

6.7 Conclusion

This study attempted to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. The focus of the majority of research in the field of exposure to violence and trauma has been on the resulting development of Posttraumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents. In the present study the focus was on the specific impact exposure to violence has on the moral development of adolescents. The present study thus provided insight into the detrimental effect that exposure to violence has on
children’s general functioning and ultimately their moral development. A biopsychosocial approach to understanding the aforementioned relationship between exposure to violence and moral development was also proposed.

Despite the various limitations of this study it has yielded valuable information regarding the exposure to violence of adolescents in this sample as well as providing information concerning their moral judgement competence. The results from the study has identified the possible areas in need of intervention and provided guidance for future research within the field of violence and moral development in the South African context.

The enormous amount of violence the youth of South Africa are exposed to on a daily basis is of great concern when one considers the impact of these exposures on their general functioning and their sense of right and wrong. In light of the aforementioned it becomes evident why studies such as the present study are crucial in identifying various preventative interventions which could assist in diminishing the impact of exposure to violence on the moral development of the South African youth.
References


Appendix A

Information Letter for Parents
Dear Parent

I am currently completing my Masters degree in Counseling Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and as part of the degree I need to complete a research treatise. The topic I have chosen to research entails exploring and describing the relationship between the exposure to violence and the moral development of adolescents.

In the South African context we live in adolescents are increasingly exposed to violence on a daily basis. The role that exposure to violence has on the development of aggressive behavior has been thoroughly researched; however the affect that the exposure has on the moral development of adolescents remains vague. The aim of the study is therefore to gain some insight into the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development. If you decide to allow your child to participate in the research study they will be asked to complete three self-report questionnaires which are listed below.

1. A short biographical Questionnaire
2. The Harvard Trauma Questionnaire and
3. The Moral Judgment Test

The questionnaires will take approximately 1 hour to complete and will be scheduled to take place during school hours.

Participation in this study is voluntary and if you decide to allow your child to participate in the study you or they may withdraw from the study at any time. The information obtained during the study will be kept confidential at all times and no identifying information will be required from the participants. The results of the treatise will be used for a brief report concerning the outcome of the group as a whole. The brief report will be provided to the group of participants as well as the principal of the school.

If you decide to allow your child to participate in the study please complete the attached informed consent form and return it to the principal as soon as possible. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions related to the study, please do not hesitate to contact me on 083 288 4796

Ms. Ilana Klopper          Prof. Greg Howcroft          Prof. Louise Stroud
RESEARCHER                 SUPERVISOR                  CO-SUPERVISOR
Appendix B

Informed Consent Letter for Parents
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

Dear Parent

My name is Ilana Klopper and I am currently completing my Masters degree in Counseling Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. As part of the requirements of the degree I need to complete a research treatise. The topic I have chosen to research entails exploring and describing the relationship between the exposure to violence and moral development of adolescents.

In the South African context we live in adolescents are increasingly exposed to violence on a daily basis. The role that exposure to violence has on the development of aggressive behavior has been thoroughly researched; however the affect that the exposure has on the moral development of adolescents remains vague. The aim of the study is therefore to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners.

In order for the study to be a success, I require 120 Grade participants from Grade 10 and 11 classes to participate in the research. I would be grateful if you would consent to your son/daughter participating in my study. If you decide to allow your child to participate in the research study they will be asked to complete three self-report questionnaires, namely a short biographical questionnaire, the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire, and the Moral Judgment Test. The questionnaires will assist in gaining an understanding of their exposure to violence and their moral development. The completion of the process will take approximately 1 hour and will be scheduled to take place during school hours.

Participation in this study is voluntary and if you decide to allow your son/daughter to participate in the study you or your son/daughter they may withdraw from the study at any time. The information obtained during the study will be kept confidential at all times and no identifying information will be required from the participants. The results of the treatise will be used for a brief report concerning the outcome of the group as a whole. The brief report will be provided to the group of participants as well as the principal of the school.

If you would like any further information or are unclear about anything, please feel free to contact me via e-mail: ilana.klopper@gmail.com or telephonically on 083 288 4796.

Your cooperation and your son/daughter’s participation is valued and appreciated.

Ms. Ilana Klopper            Prof. Greg Howcroft            Prof. Louise Stroud
RESEARCHER                   SUPERVISOR                     CO-SUPERVISOR
DECLARATION BY PARENT OF PARTICIPANT

I, _________________________ (I.D. number___________________________)

in the capacity of parent/guardian of

__________________________ (I.D. number ___________________________)

hereby confirm as follows:

(Please initial against each paragraph)

1 My child was invited to participate in the above mentioned research project, which is being undertaken by Ilana Klopper of the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

2 This research aims to explore and describe the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development amongst adolescent learners. The information will be used as part of the requirements for Masters degree in Counseling Psychology. The results of the study may be presented at scientific conferences or in specific publications.

3 I understand that I will need to complete the consent form and return it to the researcher on completion. In addition, my child will be required to complete three questionnaires.

4 My child’s identity will not be revealed in any discussion, description or scientific publication by the researcher.

5 My child’s participation is voluntary. My decision whether or not to allow my child to participate, or my child’s decision whether or not to participate, will in no way affect his/her present or future school career or lifestyle.

6 No pressure was exerted on me to consent to my child’s participation and I understand that I may withdraw my child, or he/she may withdraw at any stage without penalization.

7 Participation in this study will not result in any cost to my child or myself.
I CONSENT VOLUNTARILY TO ALLOW MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE
ABOVE-MENTIONED PROJECT.

Signed at ________________ on ________________ 2009.

Signature of parent or guardian of participant: ______________________
Appendix C

Information Letter for Participants
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADOLESCENTS

Dear Participant

I am currently completing my Masters degree in Counseling Psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and as part of the degree I need to complete a research treatise. The topic I have chosen to research entails exploring and describing the relationship between the exposure to violence and the moral development of adolescents.

The importance of researching the impact of exposure to violence on individuals has become essential if we consider the South African context we live in and the current high crime rates we are experiencing. The aim of the study is therefore to explore the relationship between exposure to violence and moral development. By participating in this study you will be asked to recall times when you were exposed to violence which could cause you some emotional distress and therefore you will be provided with the contact details for psychological services should you require it.

By participating in the study you will enable psychologist and society in general to gain a better understanding of the relationship between exposure to violence and the moral development of adolescents.

If you decide to participate in the research study you will be asked to complete three self-report questionnaires, namely a short biographical questionnaire, the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire and the Moral Judgment. The questionnaires will take approximately 1 hour to complete and will be scheduled to take place during school hours.

Participation in this study is voluntary and if you decide to participate in the study you may withdraw your consent at any time. The information obtained during the study will be kept confidential at all times and no identifying information will be required. The results of the study will take the form of a brief report concerning the outcome of the group as a whole. The brief report will be provided to the group of participants as well as the principal of your school.

If you have any questions or any problems related to the study, please do not hesitate to contact me on 083 288 4796.

Should you be willing to participate in this study, please complete the attached informed consent form and return it to your teacher. Your participation will be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Ms. Ilana Klopper
RESEARCHER

Prof. Greg Howcroft
SUPERVISOR

Prof. Louise Stroud
CO-SUPERVISOR
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form for Participants
Dear Research Participant

You are being asked to participate in a research study. We will provide you with the necessary information to assist you to understand the study and explain what would be expected of you (participant). These guidelines would include the risks, benefits, and your rights as a study subject. Please feel free to ask the researcher to clarify anything that is not clear to you.

To participate, it will be required of you to provide a written consent that will include your signature, date and initials to verify that you understand and agree to the conditions.

You have the right to query concerns regarding the study at any time. Immediately report any new problems during the study, to the researcher. Telephone numbers of the researcher are provided. Please feel free to call these numbers.

Furthermore, it is important that you are aware of the fact that the ethical integrity of the study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Human) of the university. The REC-H consists of a group of independent experts that has the responsibility to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants in research are protected and that studies are conducted in an ethical manner. Studies cannot be conducted without REC-H’s approval. Queries with regard to your rights as a research subject can be directed to the Research Ethics Committee (Human), Department of Research Capacity Development, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

If no one could assist you, you may write to: The Chairperson of the Research, Technology and Innovation Committee, PO Box 77000, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

Participation in research is completely voluntary. You are not obliged to take part in any research. If you do partake, you have the right to withdraw at any given time, during the study. However, if you do withdraw from the study, you should return for a final discussion or examination in order to terminate the research in an orderly manner.

Although your identity will at all times remain confidential, the results of the research study may be presented at scientific conferences or in specialist publications.

This informed consent statement has been prepared in compliance with current statutory guidelines.

Yours sincerely

Ms. Ilana Klopper  Prof. Greg Howcroft  Prof. Louise Stroud
RESEARCHER  SUPERVISOR  CO- SUPERVISOR
STATEMENT OF CONSENT

I, ________________________________ declare that

1. I have received the necessary and pertinent information concerning my participation in the research study conducted by Ilana Klopper.
2. I am willing to participate in the required activities.
3. I am aware of the fact that I may withdraw at any stage.
4. I am aware that my identity will not be revealed at any stage of the study.

Signed at ______________________ on __________________________ 200 __________

(Place) (Date)

______________________________ ________________________________

Signature of Participant Signature of Witness
Appendix E

Biographical Questionnaire
BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Please provide the relevant information in the spaces provided below and indicate with an (X) in the boxes that apply to you. The information obtained will remain confidential.

1. Age:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Older</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Grade:

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Home Language:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afrikaans</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Xhosa</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. Gender:

| Male | Female |