

A THEORY-BASED SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS IN THE TSHWANE SOUTH DISTRICT, GAUTENG PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

Poppy Masinga

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There is a lack of theory-driven and evidence-based school violence prevention programmes targeting high school learners. In line with a developmental social work approach within a framework of stakeholder participation and empowerment, the Think Smart-Take Charge-Turn a New Leaf programme was designed and implemented. Following a one-group pre-test/post-test survey design, a focus group interview with eight Grade 11 learners to obtain information on their experiences and their opinions about the outcomes of the programme was conducted. This pilot evaluation determined that the programme effectively enhanced student knowledge and positively influenced attitudes towards violence, but did not appear to change behaviours.

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## **A THEORY-BASED SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME FOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS IN THE TSHWANE SOUTH DISTRICT, GAUTENG PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Escalating levels of violence in schools across the globe, particularly in the United States of America, reflect a growing and pervasive problem worldwide. South Africa is no exception to this trend, as the country is the 136<sup>th</sup> most violent country out of 162 (Smillie, 2015; Proudlock, Mathews & Jamieson, 2014). In 2011, the South African Council of Educators (SACE) (2011) reported that school violence negatively affected more than a million learners. Three years later, figures showed that 15.5 million children in South Africa experienced some kind of violence (Huisman, 2014). Often lacking the knowledge and skills to protect themselves, learners experience violence at the hands of both peers and educators. As a result, they suffer from the negative consequences with little support from teachers who are too overwhelmed and overworked to attend to any personal issues (Jansson, 2016) that the learners may bring to their attention. Violence negatively affects learners' health, behaviour, emotional wellbeing, academic achievement and future economic status (Burton & Leoschut, 2013).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) recognised the South African government and the business and NGO sectors for engaging in collaborative efforts to implement violence prevention programmes in the country (Tomlinson, Dawes & Flisher, 2012; Mncube & Madikizela-Madiya, 2014). Despite these accolades, the levels of violence in schools across the country have not declined. Most of the school violence prevention programmes are not based on stakeholders' implicit theory (Chen, 2016); there is usually no link between the programme objectives and identified problems or beneficiary needs, nor are the activities aligned with the goals, objectives and desired outcomes across a programme (Van der Merwe, Dawes & Ward, 2012).

Furthermore, service users often receive interventions that are neither theory-defined nor empirically evaluated, as most agencies lack the data infrastructure required for rigorous assessments and evaluations (Jansson, 2016; Proctor, 2017). Service users deserve to receive services that are based on beneficiary needs and that are monitored for effectiveness. Rounds and Sneed (2014) assert that social workers can make a valuable contribution if they focus on developing and using evidence-based programmes and interventions. As a result, an evidence-based school violence prevention programme was developed in line with Kwong's (2017) suggestion that social work practitioners should design, implement and evaluate their interventions to advance the social work knowledge base.

The urge to design the theory- and evidence-based programme was influenced by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) (2012). The Charter of Children's Basic Education Rights (2012) stipulates that every child has a right to education, to be free from violence, discrimination and exploitation, and to learn in a safe school environment. In an effort to advance human rights and social justice, a prototype of a school violence prevention programme was implemented and simultaneously evaluated, with the aim of educating high school learners about the negative effects of violence in schools and to influence behavioural and attitudinal change.

### **PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION**

The Think Smart-Take Charge-Turn a New Leaf Programme (Triple T) was designed to address both the lack of evidence-based interventions and to advance the knowledge base of social work practice (Masinga, 2017). The rationale is that 'thinking smart', 'taking charge' and 'turning a new leaf' are required to turn around school-based violence. The premise was that teaching socio-emotional and

ethical skills would enable learners to see violence as a violation of people's rights, to think about the consequences of their behaviour for themselves and others, and to subsequently turn around violent behaviour by learning decision-making, problem-solving, conflict-resolution and anger-management skills (Masinga, 2017).

The researcher followed the Intervention Research - Design and Development (D&D) model (Rothman & Thomas, 1994) for designing the intervention. The concurrent or triangulated mixed methods (Creswell, Fetters & Ivankova, 2004:11) approach was adopted to collect both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time from learners and educators on the extent, causes, impact and current interventions, with the view to confirming the need for the proposed intervention. The intervention research model was followed from phase 1 (problem analysis and project planning) to phase 4 (early development and pilot testing). Based on the outcomes of the investigation, the findings revealed the need to develop the school-based violence prevention programme. Thus, the Triple T programme was comprised of six themes presented over six sessions, namely: (i) the nature, causes and impact of school violence, (ii) values, beliefs and the importance of supportive and caring interpersonal relationships, (iii) conflict resolution, (iv) problem solving, (v) decision making, and (vi) anger management. A hybrid method involved teaching and learning that incorporated didactic methods, group discussions, modelling, role plays, transfer training, positive role models, as well as information and communications technology (ICT). Considering Burton and Mutongwizo's (2009) recommendation to develop comprehensive, adaptive, dynamic and responsive solutions to address the environment and context in which young people live, the Triple T programme incorporated the use of a mobile phone as a technology-based teaching and learning tool that youths are exposed to and familiar with. The ICT tool was specifically included to enhance learning through edutainment and to assess knowledge gained and levels of understanding. The participants were assigned online take-home exercises and were given quizzes on content covered during the session to perform on their mobile phones as part of transfer training. Two qualified social workers (including the author of this paper) who have experience in working with children and youths as well as experience working in schools, facilitated the sessions. Both practitioners are skilled in group work as a method of intervention.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS UNDERPINNING THE PROGRAMME DESIGN**

In designing the programme, various theories, approaches and models guided the design and evaluation processes. This paper reports on only two key theoretical frameworks. Firstly, the developmental approach to social work was adopted. The developmental approach is a shift away from traditional problem-focused, remedial social work and social welfare service delivery to an approach that emphasises rights, strengths, empowerment, capacity building, service-user participation and partnerships. The developmental approach is a commitment of the social work profession to protect human rights and promote justice and equality (Lombard & Wairire, 2010). This is particularly relevant in schools where learners are exposed to many types of violence that are linked to multiple undesirable factors (Jansson, 2016) such as drugs and gangs.

Jagersma and Parson (2011) point out that learners are often excluded from participating in violence prevention programme design and evaluation. In the context of this study, the school learners, who are the stakeholders, participated in the design and evaluation of the programme. Moreover, Chen (2015) argues that stakeholder involvement and participation allow all parties to have a common understanding and to reach consensus about the objectives and outcomes of the programme and this promotes social justice. Learners were involved in key stages of the programme development, resulting in a programme theory, which is in effect the stakeholder's theory (Chen, 2015). Involving service users in programme design ensured a thorough understanding of stakeholders' needs and the processes necessary for an effective programme (WHO, 2013).

Equipped with input from the service users and information from the literature review, we followed the key elements suggested by Lipsey's model (Lipsey, 1993) for the overall design of the programme. Lipsey's Theory-Based Program Development and Evaluation Model is a useful tool for programme developers,

highlighting the need for the identification of a rationale, risk factors and targets for change, critical inputs and activities necessary to produce the expected outcomes (Lipsey, 1993). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) credits the model for specifying how a programme will achieve the set goals, for identifying possible barriers to successful programme implementation and for providing insights into how to refine and improve the intervention. Furthermore, Huijbregts, Kay and Klinck (2008) have endorsed Lipsey's model as a useful tool for developing, monitoring and evaluating new social interventions.

Thus, this model provided sensible guidelines for how such a school-based violence prevention programme should be designed (Huijbregts *et al.*, 2008), and which implementation process to follow in order to solve the social, educational, and health-related problems linked to school violence (Chen, 2012); it also explained why this intervention could effectively address the identified problems related to school violence and achieve positive outcomes (Lipsey, 1993). It indicated how the intervention was expected to have an impact on the specified target population of high school learners (Funnell & Rogers, 2011), and helped during the evaluation of programme outcomes.

Since social work practitioners are increasingly expected to deliver and document the effectiveness of interventions (Proctor, 2017), the Triple T programme was designed, implemented and evaluated according to this model's theory of change (Lipsey, 1993). We incorporated and utilised a theory-driven evaluation framework to evaluate the overall performance of the programme, in the way suggested by McGilton, Fox and Sidani (2005:32). With the theory-driven evaluation framework, we focused on three critical elements (McGilton *et al.*, 2005) namely: (i) whether the programme enhanced knowledge and skills, (ii) whether it influenced learners' attitudes, and/or (iii) whether it changed their behaviour. The next section outlines the evaluation methods used, in collaboration with high school learners, to evaluate the Triple T pilot programme.

## RESEARCH METHODS

A convergent mixed methods approach was adopted because mixing methods provides rigorous evaluation of intervention programmes (Ivankova, 2015) and advances knowledge and innovation (Testa, Livingston & Vanzile-Tamsen, 2011). One public high school was randomly selected from a list of 20 public and private high schools in the Tshwane South District obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education. Non-probability purposive sampling (Hesse-Biber, 2010) was used to recruit eight participants (4 males and 4 females) aged between 16-19 years from the Grade 11 class registers. All the participating learners had all experienced school violence as victims, perpetrators or bystanders. Quantitative questionnaires and a qualitative focus group interview were used to collect data. During the qualitative phase, a focus group interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule to evaluate the effectiveness of Triple T. Chen (2015) asserts that information from focus groups and small samples is appropriate during programme evaluation to identify programme weaknesses or obstacles. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify, analyse and report on patterns or themes using frequencies (Braun & Clark, 2006).

A non-experimental single-group pre-test post-test design was employed during the quantitative phase to evaluate the pilot programme using a self-designed measuring tool. Howard, Allen-Meares and Ruffalo (2007) note that a one-group pre-test post-test design has the potential to introduce bias, as it makes it difficult to determine causal relationships between the pre- and post-test results. The questionnaires were designed according to the programme's desired outcomes, thus testing pre- and post-test levels of learners' satisfaction with the knowledge and skills acquired. Table 1 below describes the variables used during the evaluation process involving the learners.

**TABLE 1**  
**DESCRIPTION OF VARIABLES USED TO EVALUATE THE OUTCOME OF THE SESSIONS**

Variables*	Description	Tests	
		Pre-	Post-

Length of sessions	Sessions of one hour each were presented one day a week after the school breaks, in order not to disrupt the academic programme.	No	Yes
Goal of each session	The goal for each session: 1: The nature, causes and effects, and prevention of violence; 2: Values and Principles; 3: Conflict Resolution; 4: Problem Solving; 5: Decision Making; and 6: Anger Control.	No	Yes
Knowledge gained	Knowledge regarding nature, causes and effects, and prevention of violence; moral values and principles; the importance of supportive and caring interpersonal relationships; conflict-resolution, problem-solving, decision-making and anger-control strategies were evaluated.	Yes	Yes
Skills gained	Skills in conflict resolution, problem solving, decision-making and anger control were evaluated.	Yes	Yes
Hybrid teaching	The programme was facilitated by using a hybrid method of teaching and learning, which included classroom-based didactic teaching; group discussions; information and communications technology (ICT); role play; modelling; transfer training and use of positive role models from the community.	No	Yes
Discussions	Learners evaluated didactic lectures and group discussions presented.	No	Yes
Homework	Learners evaluated take-home assignments given.	No	Yes
Materials used	Learners evaluated videos, music and hand-outs used.	No	Yes
Facilitators	Learners evaluated facilitators on efficiency, professionalism and ability to present the programme.	No	Yes
Desirability and support for the programme	We measured the learners' overall impressions of the programme and additional learning needs.	No	Yes

KEY: \*Were all measured by learners on a scale of 1-3, where 3 is high and 1 is a low score.

As can be seen in Table 1 above, only variables linked to knowledge and skills pertaining to school violence were included in the pre-test. Post-test evaluation included all other variables as shown in Table 1. These related to assessing the length and goal of each session; the process; the hybrid teaching and learning methods and material resources; and expected outcomes.

Emoticons were used for the evaluation of each programme session; responses were quantified by assigning the negative emoticon a code of 1 (implying a negative perception of the session); the uncertain emoticon a code of 2 (an uncertain perception of the session) and the positive emoticon a code of 3 (a positive perception of the session). Ibrahim (2012) has suggested that this approach is appropriate for analysing pre- and post-test data and is useful if one seeks to establish the effectiveness of an intervention. The arithmetical average was calculated across all sessions and all participants to indicate the level of satisfaction with the programme.

As there were few participants, descriptive statistics were computed using frequencies and cross-tabulations. The frequency with which all participants chose a specific emoticon was calculated to indicate the level of satisfaction with the programme. Cross-tabulations were used to compare and show relationships between pre- and post-test data (Alkin, 2011:172). This allowed the researcher to depict the number of participants who reported one of the categories, for example from "yes" to "no" in relation to the total number of participants. Therefore, we compiled cross-tabulations of the pre- and post-test results, where the pre-test results were listed vertically and the post-test results were listed horizontally. Descriptive statistics are routinely used to summarise pilot testing and evaluation outcomes of a study (Beins & McCarthy, 2012:106) and to describe the data sets (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2012:244), but not to examine the impact of an intervention (Tripodi & Bender, 2010:120). In alignment with the view of Tripodi and Bender (2010:123), the author used descriptive statistics to determine the degree to which the participants were satisfied with the intervention, their views on how

it was implemented, their perceptions of which lesson activities were effective or not, which materials and resources were adequate and efficient or not; and to suggest ways to improve the intervention.

The author ensured trustworthiness by employing strategies such as triangulation and the theory-driven model, which has high construct validity (Chen, 2015), to establish content validity and ensure that the measuring instrument provided accurate and warranted interpretations that can lead to valid inferences in the quantitative phase. As such, the author conducted an extensive literature review in search of techniques that other researchers have used to learn lessons that would guide her in the design of the data-collection instruments. (Rubin & Babbie, 2011:148; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:92). To ensure construct validity, the author sought feedback on the relevance and usefulness of the instruments she developed and received guidance and suggestions from a statistician to ensure that the instruments are valid to facilitate statistical analysis. To enhance the reliability of the measuring instrument, the author conducted the entire research process in a consistent manner, at all times ensuring there was standardisation in the way the data-collection instruments were administered (Creswell, 2014:201).

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Humanities Ethics Committee, Gauteng Department of Education, Tshwane South District Office and school principals. Additionally, informed consent was obtained from the parents and the learners themselves. All participants were aware of the purpose of the study and the consequences of their participation. Participation was voluntary (Rubin & Babbie, 2011) and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time if they wanted to (Braun & Clark, 2013:63). Every attempt was made to protect the participants from physical and emotional harm (Strydom, 2011:115) during the programme. As emotional harm can be difficult to identify, the facilitator informed the participants beforehand about the possible emotional consequences of participating in the study (Braun & Clark, 2013:65). Counselling services with school management and social workers in neighbouring areas were available for the learners if they required them. To ensure participants' privacy and avoid violating participants' right to confidentiality (Punch, 2014:47), the author used codes and numbers instead of names on documents, without destroying the integrity and usefulness of the data (Silverman, 2013:172; Punch, 2013:48). The data were stored securely in a locked room with restricted access.

### **RESULTS**

The results obtained after implementation of the six sessions aligned to the Triple T programme indicate mixed responses that ranged between being satisfied and positive to being entirely unsatisfied with the six sessions. Table 2 below presents the detailed results.

**TABLE 2**  
**OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE TRIPLE T PROGRAMME**

Theme	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Decision Making	8	3	3	3
Conflict Resolution	8	3	3	3
Nature, Causes and Impact of violence	8	2	3	2.87
Values, Beliefs, Supportive and Caring Interpersonal Relationships	8	2	3	2.87
Problem Solving	8	2	3	2.63
Anger Control	8	2	3	2.5

As Table 2 above shows, the respondents were satisfied with the programme because they had a positive experience with the decision-making and conflict-resolution sessions. With regard to the sessions that pertained to knowledge about types of violence and moral values, the respondents had a fairly satisfying experience. Although all the respondents had prior knowledge about the types, causes

and impact of school violence, the findings indicated that they had benefitted from the additional knowledge about the various forms and types of violence. Six respondents had vague descriptions of problem-solving, conflict-resolution, decision-making and anger-control strategies prior to participating in the programme.

Respondents were not entirely positive about and satisfied with the problem-solving and anger-control sessions. Although the post-test showed all students understood the skills required, they also felt they needed more time to practise them. The quantifying of the responses for the overall evaluation of the six sessions demonstrates that the lengths of the sessions were inadequate as the learners needed more time to practise the learned skills. Despite the time constraints, the results demonstrate that learners gained more awareness and knowledge about school violence. Overall, the programme made a positive contribution to the learners' attitudes, but could not yet change their behaviour because of the time constraints and the fact that change is a process.

With regard to the facilitators, the results demonstrate that the learners had a positive teaching and learning experience, because the hybrid method of teaching and learning enhanced the process. However, not all the methods of teaching and learning were successfully implemented because of time constraints. Despite the failure to implement the hybrid method of teaching and learning, the learners indicated their support for the programme and they articulated a desire for it to be implemented more frequently and over longer time periods. Table 3 below presents more details on the sub-themes of the evaluation.

**TABLE 3**  
**OVERALL EVALUATION OF THE SIX SESSIONS**

Evaluation Sub-theme	Sessions						Mean	Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
Length of Sessions	3	2.75	3	3	3	3	2.96	1
Goal of Session	3	2.87	2.87	2.86	3	3	2.93	2
Knowledge Gained	2.87	3	2.87	3	2.87	2.87	2.91	3
Facilitators	3	2.87	3	2.86	2.87	2.87	2.91	3
Group Discussions	2.75	2.87	3	3	2.87	2.87	2.89	4
Skills Acquired	2.88	2.75	2.87	3	2.87	2.87	2.87	5
Materials Used	2.87	2.87	3	0	2.75	2.87	2.87	5
Homework Assigned	0	2.71	2.75	2.86	2.63	2.5	2.69	6

### **Length of sessions**

The participants indicated that they needed more time for discussion, especially session two on values, beliefs and the importance of supportive and caring interpersonal relationships. Learners depended on public transport and could not extend the time even if they had wanted to stay longer and continue with the discussions.

### **Goal of sessions**

The low satisfaction scores awarded for session two indicated that talking about beliefs and the importance of supportive and caring interpersonal relationships was not given enough time. Sessions three, on conflict resolution and four, on problem solving, were also too short. All three of these sessions required more time for the facilitators to model the application of the steps and to allow the participants time to practise the skills they learned.

### Knowledge gained

Overall, knowledge gained received a positive rating by participants and they ranked it third out of the eight sub-themes. During the post-test the participants listed cyber bullying, rape and gender-based violence as the types of violence that they now know in addition to the more common forms of school violence. They gained new knowledge with regard to the values of respect, empathy, compassion and caring. They further learned that every person has a right to be treated with respect and dignity, and that each individual, in turn, has the responsibility to show respect, care and support to their peers and other people. The participants remarked as follows:

*“Because the moment you beat or steal something from someone you are violating that person's rights. Because they are denied their safety rights. Everyone has the right to safety and no-one wants to be abused. Everyone should feel safe, loved and cared for.”* (Participant 1)

*“Violence in class prevents others' right to education.”* (Participant 4)

The Participants indicated that learning and growth are an on-going process, as there was always something new to learn:

*“Knowledge and education has no limits. There is always something to learn.”* (Participant 1)

*“Yeah because before you never thought people can get irritated, but now you are more aware. You must learn people's responses when they react. You must be able to analyse when people are not enjoying it.”* (Participant 3)

The findings show that learners were empowered with additional information and knowledge to draw from and to avoid perpetrating violence against their peers and others, and not to behave violently in their daily interactions.

### Skills acquired

The positive ( $M = 2.87$ ) rating of the skills acquired during the sessions made it evident that skills training needed time. Session 2, which addressed values, principles and ethics, again stood out as dealing with a theme on which participants required more guidance. The session on this theme was more theoretical and somewhat abstract. The findings showed that participants could not relate to how it applied to their lived experiences.

With regard to violence-prevention skills, the majority of the participants ( $n = 7$ ) were aware that there were options other than violence, and steps to solving problems. One respondent reported using an escape strategy in the event of conflict or violence:

*“I run to my room. Go to a quiet place or put music on.”* (Participant 5)

After the intervention participants knew more about specific and concrete problem-solving, conflict-resolution, anger-control and decision-making steps and strategies:

*“Today I've learned a few steps in solving problems and they opened my eyes as to how to solve problems. Violence is not always the answer.”* (Participant 1)

*“Identify the problem first, look for positive and negative aspects. Take the positive way out and handle the situation.”* (Participant 6)

However, knowledge in itself is not sufficient to prevent violence. Mastering skills takes time. Participants did not get the opportunity to practise the problem-solving, conflict-resolution, decision-making and anger-control steps and strategies that they had learnt about because of the lack of time for role plays to model and practise the skills during the sessions. One participant voiced a need for more time for skills training:

*“I think we covered everything that happens on a day-to-day basis. One or two videos would have been enough. We could have used the extra time to do practical exercises.”* (Participant 4)

The overall ranking of skills attainment as fifth out of the eight sub-themes points to the lack of time for modelling, role play and transfer training to enhance skills transfer.

### **Attitudes and behaviour change**

The participants were asked to reflect and share their experiences and views regarding how attending the Triple T programme had influenced their attitudes and behaviour. Findings showed that the intervention had made a positive contribution to respondents’ attitudes, because it changed their mind-sets. However, to our knowledge, it has not yet changed their behaviour because of the limited implementation timeframes as behaviour changes gradually over time.

Participants said that they learned to be empathic and to take their peers and others peoples’ opinions and feelings into consideration. Additionally, they said the intervention built their character. They learned to be patient, calm, humble, forgiving and positive, and to walk away during a violent situation, even although sometimes they were tempted to retaliate. They said they had learned to think about the right thing to do, to avoid making the situation worse.

*“It taught me not to be violent because I was a violent person before. I get angry very quickly. Should you poke me, I react. But now it showed me that when someone pokes you, just take them as a never mind [ignore] because.... Therefore, when you..., I don’t fix my anger with something wrong, that is where I take the saying “an eye for an eye will only make the world go blind” because it touched me a little bit.”* (Participant 1)

*“I’ve learnt to manage my anger, not to react in a violent or negative way but to keep my mind open that there are other strategies to keep me from acting violently. I think one thing that got me was when we said that if you find yourself in a position where you are going to react in a violent manner, you should stop and think about it and ask yourself is this going to benefit me or hurt the other person.”* (Participant 4)

As an outcome of participating in the programme, the participants became self-aware and realistic about what influences their behaviour. They said that they realised that change was a process. They expressed their wish for the sessions to continue to assist them, particularly when they relapsed into violent behaviours.

*“I would say that there is always room for improvement than where I am now. I can still improve with regards to attitude.”* (Participant 1)

*“And personally I don’t think these groups should happen only once because during this programme (participants 1, 2, 3), we all got into fights during the course of this programme because we are still in the process of learning. So if we do it once and stop, then we forget. I think we should do it once in a week so that we don’t forget. And if I lose my temper, you will still be there to remind me to keep calm and to contain my temper. Yes, maybe twice or once a week.”* (Participant 3)

### **Facilitators of the programme**

Overall, the results indicate that the respondents had a fairly positive experience because of the professionalism, efficiency and the overall manner in which the facilitators presented and facilitated the lessons. However, findings indicate the link between the role of the facilitators and some sub-themes. While the efficiency of the facilitators received a positive rating, with regard to sessions 1 and 3, the respondents were not satisfied with the manner in which we conducted session 4, probably because of time constraints that prevented skills development.

### Hybrid method and material used

The didactic lectures and group discussions received a positive rating ( $M = 2.89$ ). The lower ranking of session one indicated that respondents did not appreciate an overload of theoretical information as this session was presented through a didactic lecture in relation to the different types and causes of violence and their effects.

The rating of homework handed out during the sessions to be performed at home after school using the ICT-based WhatsApp mobile phone was poor. The homework sub-theme was ranked last out of the eight sub-themes. Overall, homework was not regarded in a positive light, as participants did not do it. Learners perceived these homework assignments as a chore. One participant explained:

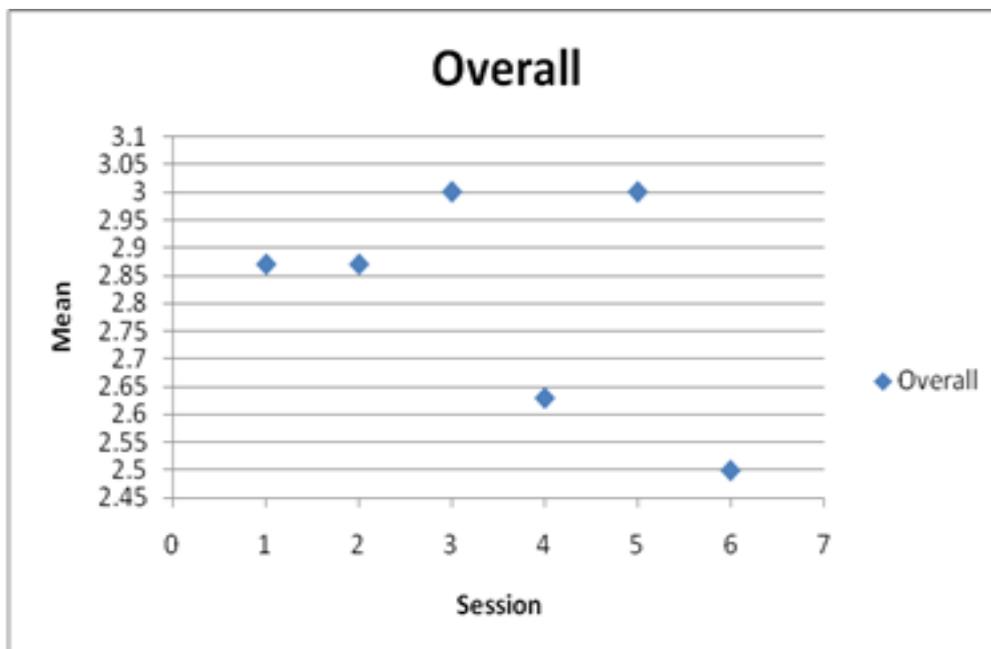
*“I think in terms of homework, better if you make it an activity that we do here because some of us when we get home I don’t even have time to check my phone.”* (Participants 3)

Overall, the use of ICT and transfer training was unsuccessful because there was not enough time to internalise it. The participants preferred educational games incorporating ICTs, presented as edutainment during the group work sessions. Other popular teaching and learning materials included music, films and listening to personal stories of victims of violence. The sub-theme of materials used was not rated in session 4, because the researcher mistakenly omitted the item during the compilation of the questionnaire.

### Desirability and support for the programme

In order to assess the desirability and support for the Triple T programme, the respondents had to rank the programme. The results suggest that the respondents were supportive of the majority of the sessions, with the exception of sessions 4 and 6. The results are displayed in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1  
OVERALL IMPRESSION**



Overall, session 3 (conflict resolution) and session 5 (decision making) received a positive rating ( $M = 3$ ) from all participants, whilst sessions 1, which focused on types, causes, impact of violence, and session 2, which focused on values, principles and morals, were rated fairly positively ( $M = 2.87$ ). These were followed by session 4 on problem solving, which received a slightly lower rating ( $M = 2.63$ ), implying that the respondents were not entirely satisfied with the session. The respondents were

uncertain about the last session (6), which related to anger control because it was rated the lowest ( $M = 2.5$ ). This was probably related to time constraints which did not allow for skills transfer. Overall, Figure 1 shows that the participants supported the programme and wished to see it being adopted and implemented once or twice per week. They suggested more time for modelling and role play for skills development.

## DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of the evaluation was to obtain inputs from the learners about how to refine and improve the programme, focusing on what items to retain, remove or add. The evaluations of the outcomes of these six sessions with learners were related to the length and goal of each session; knowledge gained and skills acquired; attitudes and behaviour change; facilitators of the programme; materials used for hybrid teaching and learning; and the desirability of and support for the programme. The achievement of each goal was linked to the acquisition of either knowledge, skills or both. Using the theory-driven model (Lipsey, 1993:33) reduced the possibility of bias. In support, McGilton *et al.* (2005:27:31) argue that a theory-driven model is an alternative to randomised controlled trials, as it can be used to design, implement and evaluate interventions, making it is easy to account for the processes and outcomes of the intervention.

As such, a developmental form of formative evaluation was conducted in line with the developmental approach. Developmental evaluation – a form of formative evaluation – relied on the engagement and involvement of the service users as partners in order to obtain their feedback and inputs. Lennie and Tacchi (2011) and Lewis, Packard and Lewis, (2012:220) concur that developmental evaluation has a participatory and empowerment focus, which was relevant to this study. The participating learners were involved in the formative evaluation as partners with the author, whereby they were engaged in a consultative and collaborative process to ensure that the preliminary programme can be improved and disseminated to other schools.

The preliminary findings reveal that the participating learners were able to gain more knowledge, including types of violence, the multi-level causes of violence, the effects of violence, and various types of violence-prevention steps and strategies. Additionally, myths and misinformation pertaining to the various types of violence, the causes and effects on the victim, the perpetrator and on teaching and learning were corrected. Ghosvandi and Ramesh (2014) argue that more awareness and information help to improve conceptions of the self and/or to modify misconceptions. Thus, knowledge and understanding of the seriousness of the physical, emotional, academic and long-term economic consequences of violence are essential for learners to refrain from perpetrating violence in schools. Moreover, Ervin, Wilson, Maynard and Bramblett (2018) assert that preventive interventions that address behavioural problems through social and behavioural skills training are effective in changing the undesirable behaviour of school-going children.

The participants learned that violence not only affects the individual victim, but his or her family, peers, the perpetrators, the school system, and the teaching and learning environment. As the learners gained more insight into the impact of their behaviour on themselves and on others, they learned about ethical values, to be remorseful and to show a caring and supportive attitude. This was crucial, as Rothery (2008) states that “Values are beliefs that determine who we are and how we will respond to situations”. Le Roux and Mokhele (2011) are of the view that antisocial behaviour can be changed by teaching positive behaviour and instilling in learners a sense of respect for self, their peers, parents, school authorities and property.

However, the findings indicated that the participants needed more time to discuss values and beliefs, and reflect on the importance of supportive and caring interpersonal relationships. The information and knowledge gained were adequate to influence participants’ attitudes to some degree. They learned about the importance of adopting positive and non-violent attitudes such as empathy, *ubuntu* (a sense of belonging and humanity) and respect for human rights. Le Roux and Mokhele (2011) suggest that

schools should introduce such lessons to help establish positive relationships between individuals and groups. However, the intervention could not show any effects on behaviour change.

The results for this programme showed challenges with implementing the hybrid model of teaching and learning. The use of transfer training, homework, ICT, modelling and role play was unproductive. Although Mancini and O'Reilly (2013) argue that new technologies are not a panacea for preventing and reducing violence, Adair (2006) argues that interactive multi-media and ICT are effective tools to provide lessons and skills-training activities. The primary obstacle the facilitators encountered was time constraints to deal with homework exercises, modelling and role plays in order to promote skills development. Thus, it is crucial that interventions are robust enough to withstand disruptions by extraneous variables in the classroom and practical enough to be implemented by other professional, such as teachers, during normal teaching and learning hours (Ervin *et al.*, 2018).

Ohmer, Warner and Beck (2010) confirm that role plays are effective for building and enhancing learned skills and helping learners to internalise and apply these skills in their own lives, the school and communities. Despite the drawbacks, the other methods used such as didactic lecturing, group discussions, videos and music contributed to the positive outcomes of the programme. Wodarski and Hopson (2012) show that group work provides opportunities for social skills training, where new behaviours can be tested in realistic contexts and where immediate peer feedback is provided. The programme empowered participants' knowledge base on prevention steps and strategies, and encouraged them to be empathic, respectful of diversity and others' rights, caring and supportive. Participating in the programme has had a positive influence on their beliefs about and attitudes towards violence.

The participants needed more time to practise skills during and between sessions. Smith and Low (2013:283) affirm that the key to skill acquisition is practice and that skill training in the classroom is likely to be more effective if positive behaviour is modelled, rehearsed, encouraged and rewarded. Snodgrass and Haines (2005) emphasise that conflict-resolution, anger-management, problem-solving and decision-making skills are supposed to be taught in the primary social groups such as family and school, where learners engage in social activities such as sports. In such settings, the possibilities for conflict are rife; therefore, they provides a good setting for intervening.

The programme has to be strengthened in the area of skills development. The participants indicated a desire for continued education and skills training relating to all the themes contained in the sessions, because they realise that changing one's behaviour is a process. As Michau (2005:4) notes, change is complex and not a linear sequential process, particularly when one is dealing with a complex issue such as school violence. Funnell and Rogers (2011:326) explain how change unfolds; some individuals may encounter difficulties and relapse back into their problematic behaviours; some may change their attitudes and behaviour because of new information about the risks and benefits they receive from participating in the intervention, whilst others may change in response to tangible incentives.

As such, facilitators play a critical role in skills development. Antikainen and Ellis (2011) and Huitt and Dawson (2011) emphasise that facilitators need to be conscious of the uniqueness of individuals, their strengths and weaknesses, different learning styles and the fact that learning takes place through cycles of reflection-action-reflection. As Glick and Gibbs (2011) state, facilitators are critical stakeholders who can effectively facilitate change by demonstrating the desired skills or behaviours they want the participants to learn. It is equally important to give participants opportunities to rehearse the learned skills in simulated situations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) and then provide the participants with constructive feedback. As Antikainen and Ellis (2011) state, individuals have different learning styles and capabilities, hence it is critical to use various methods and different teaching aids.

Many of the implementation gaps of the pilot intervention indicate that one hour per session was inadequate. In addition to having a relevant theory-based programme, the period of implementing a prevention programme is significant in achieving the planned outcomes of the intervention. Therefore, adequate time for reflection and role play is critical. The programme should allow sufficient time to

enable skills training and to accommodate learners who relapse, because some people are notoriously resistant to changing their values and habits (Chen, 2015). This implies that a more flexible timeframe needs to be negotiated with the learners to accommodate their learning pace.

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

The limitations are evident. The paper reports only on the findings of a pilot non-experimental study that involved a small sample and did not include a comparison group. As such, extreme caution should be exercised in interpreting the results. The preliminary programme should be refined using the feedback received from the participants. This should be followed by an experimental longitudinal study involving a large diverse population of high school learners to gauge the outcomes and impact of the intervention. Based on the evaluation outcomes, an advanced version of the violence prevention programme should be developed and disseminated to a large number of schools.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The design, implementation and evaluation of prevention programmes necessitate a learner-centred approach. In line with the developmental approach, learner participation is an appropriate step for advancing the rights of learners to access education in violence-free, caring and empowering school environments. Preventing school violence must therefore begin with learners themselves. Social workers are mere facilitators of change. Sufficient time should be allocated for skills training. It is recommended that the course work should be done at school rather than being given as homework. In addition, it appears that edutainment should be considered an important tool for teaching and learning how to reduce violence at school.

Therefore, the Triple T programme should be refined in accordance with the findings of the study. The refined version should then be further studied with larger and more diverse learner groups. This pilot study indicates that the Department of Education and the school authorities should review and implement policies and procedures along with learners as critical stakeholders. Finally, a school-based violence prevention programme such as Triple T should be adopted by the Department of Education and implemented in schools, as part of the Life Orientation (LO) module.

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