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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### Contributing Factors in Violent Youth Behaviour: A Study in the Limpopo Province, South Africa

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#### Abstract:

##### Background:

Violent behaviour in youth is regarded as a significant public health problem associated with severe physical and psychological consequences. Despite the availability of rehabilitation programmes rendered at child and youth care centres (CYCC's) in the Limpopo Province, South Africa, there is an escalation and repetition of violent behaviours among the youth due to some underlying socio-economic factors.

##### Objective:

The study sought to explore and describe the factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth.

##### Methods:

A qualitative, explorative, and descriptive research design was used. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used to select participants in this study. The study population consisted of youth, from the age of 15-20 years old, who were admitted to the child and youth care centres due to violent behaviours. Focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews were used to collect data from participants. A semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion guide were used to collect data until data saturation which occurred after interviewing 48 participants. Data were analysed following Tesch's open code data analysis technique. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical principles were adhered to.

##### Results:

Two themes emerged from the analysed data, namely, the socio-economic factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth in CYCCs and the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes for violent youth behaviours in CYCCs. Eight sub-themes were derived from the two main themes. The home environment, the influence of delinquent peers, availability, and misuse of drugs and alcohol were most cited as the factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province. The study's findings revealed that youth had little knowledge of the impact that violent behaviour has on the victim, themselves, their families, and society.

##### Conclusion:

Rehabilitation programmes for violent behaviours among the youth will have better outcomes by involving the youth's family, especially the parents/guardians. Also, the child and youth care centres and youth violence policymakers need to emphasise family education as one of the most crucial violence prevention strategies in vulnerable youth.

**Keywords:** Child and youth care centres, Drugs and alcohol, Home environment, Peer pressure, Violent behaviour, Youth.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The home environment and society have a vital role in the prevention of violent behaviours among the youth. Violent be-

haviour and delinquency among youth have become a significant global public health issue. They are regarded as behaviours that do not fit into the established rules of a group of individuals or society. Moreover, young peoples' violence is considered a public health challenge with harsh and long-term effects on physical, mental, and social health [1 - 3]. The child

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and youth care centers (CYCCs) provide residential care and protection to vulnerable children whose lives are presumed to need care in the Children's Act no.38 of 2005. In addition, the Act specifies other factors that influence the need for care in these centres, including uncontrollable or violent behaviours among the youth and adolescents below the age of 21 for rehabilitation [4].

However, rehabilitation is defined as a set of measures that assist individuals who experience or are likely to experience difficulties in achieving and maintaining optimum functioning in interaction with their environments [5]. Rehabilitation programmes at CYCCs are important because they aim to prevent violent behaviours by assisting young people to become equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to manage themselves and successfully reintegrate into society. The home environment has been reported globally in several studies to contribute to violent behaviours in youth. Positive parenting provides a healthy base for successful child development and transition from one developmental phase to another. Furthermore, when parental strategies are ineffective and fail to promote positive outcomes in their children's problems, behaviours arise that have a severe and long-lasting effect on maturing youth and young individuals.

The parent-child relationship quality has a significant impact on the prevention of behavioural problems and their development. Youth are more likely to develop good behaviour when parents provide warmth and support appropriately, monitor behaviour, and practice discipline in non-coercive ways [6, 7]. Parents who are unable to instill proper discipline in their children contribute to their disruptive behaviours. However, healthy parenting behaviours, such as spending quality time with young adults, monitoring their activities, school activities, and providing them opportunities to disclose their challenges, prevent them from participating in violent activities. Moreover, broken families and those with inappropriate parenting practices that open disciplinary borders can lead to violent behaviours amongst the youth [8, 9].

For some time now, it has been known that young people succumb to violence at much higher rates than their adult counterparts. Much of the violence they experience occurs within the school environment, a context where they usually spend a substantial amount of their time [10]. Studies conducted by Haveripeth, Kaur, and Niwas [11, 12] in the United States of America and India indicated that the school environment is learners' first experience outside their home setting.

The home environment and the environmental factors such as the influence of delinquent peers and the availability and misuse of drugs and alcohol were also found worldwide to be crucial factors contributing to violent youth behaviours. As a result, young people acquire various attributes that negatively impact their lives. However, violent behaviour among the youths that lack parental supervision is considered a social problem that affects families, communities, and societies. In addition, lack of discipline in the home, a lack of parental monitoring, a large family size, associations with other delinquency, drug or alcohol abuse, and the criminal behaviour of parents and siblings were considered to be factors

contributing to violent youth behaviour [11, 12].

Studies conducted in South Africa and Zimbabwe also highlighted that those young people who abused drugs were more likely to engage in violent behaviours, such as physical fights with others and the most extreme health effects of illicit substances related to death. Moreover, violence is a severe problem, especially in public schools, regardless of the teachers or curriculum, making it difficult for students to learn. The studies reported that although violent behaviour among the youth also occurs at other places, it is most common in schools where youth and adolescents spend most of their time [13, 14]. A study by Singh and Steyn [8, 15] outlined that both teachers and learners have become aggressive youth targets. The impact of this violent behaviour is that victims may display feelings of helplessness, humiliation, disappointment, poor self-concept, low self-esteem, and depression. As a result, the school environment also plays a vital role in learning and socialisation.

The authors of this study believe that schools offer a safe environment in which authentic learning and development can take place. Youth at high risk of violent behaviours usually come from dysfunctional homes characterised by various factors such as poverty and unemployment, parental conflicts, harsh punishments, and abuse, which are primarily out of their control. Due to poverty, the family members are often involved in quarrels, negatively impacting the children's minds. However, in order to be relieved from the family crisis, young individuals spend most of their time outdoors with their friends, who gradually influence them to become involved in criminal activities [16]. There are two CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, providing rehabilitation programmes among the youth with violent behaviours.

Nevertheless, there is an escalation or repetition of violent behaviours due to environmental factors. Moreover, most youths with violent behaviours are involved in violent behaviours due to their peers' influence. By spending much time together, it is easier for them to adopt and repeat their peers' behaviours. Peer influences among the youth include a social pressure on them to adopt certain types of behaviour, dressing style, or attitudes to be accepted as part of a group, and these factors affect them both positively and negatively. Peers can easily influence an individual to feel pressured into doing something that they would not normally do due to the desire for approval and acceptance [17, 18].

Therefore, this study explored the factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. Even though there are two child and youth care centres in the Limpopo Province rendering youth with violent behaviours, the participants believe that the escalation is due to unchanged socio-economic factors that young people are exposed to daily. This study explains the challenges faced by the youth adhering to the rehabilitation programmes that they have learned at the centres. No such study in the Limpopo Province has been attempted before. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the education of the youth on the impact of violent behaviours on the victim, themselves, their families, and society.

## 2. METHODS

A qualitative, explorative, and descriptive research design was used to explore and describe the factors contributing to violent youth in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

### 2.1. Study Setting

The study was conducted in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. The Limpopo Province of South Africa, one of nine provinces, is stationed on the Northward part of the countryside and borders Botswana to the West, Zimbabwe to the North, and Mozambique to the East. It has a high unemployment rate among young people. It is predominantly rural and one of the most underdeveloped areas in South Africa. The reasons for the increase in unemployment in this province are numerous, but the main one is that the formal sector of the economy has not created enough job opportunities for its growing labour force [19].

### 2.2. Study Population and Sampling

The study population was youths in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa, sentenced for different offences. The target population consisted of youth between the ages of 14-20 years who were in the process of being rehabilitated for violent behaviours. The inclusion criteria were that youth should have committed violent activities and been at the centre during the study period. Purposive sampling was used to select the child and youth care centres in Limpopo Province because they were only two in the province. Therefore they were all included in this study. Data saturation occurred after interviewing 48 participants through focus group discussions and in-depth individual interviews.

### 2.3. Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). Five FGDs comprising 5-8 members were conducted, and the number of FGDs was determined by data saturation. In-depth individual interviews were conducted as a follow-up to participants who committed serious crimes such as rape and murder, and data saturation occurred after interviewing eight participants. The languages preferred by the participants were used during data collection, such as English, Tshivenda, Sepedi, Setswana, and Xitsonga. The researchers were fluent in Tshivenda and English, and they were assisted by two research assistants who were well versed in the other indicated languages. The researchers asked one central question to all participants: "*What are the factors that contributed to your violent behaviour?*" The broad question was then followed by probing questions which were guided by the participant's responses.

The interview schedule was semi-structured, allowing the youth to speak freely about the factors that led to their violent behaviours. Before the interviews, written consent was obtained from all participants above the age of 18. For participants below 18 years of age, approval was given by the managers of the two institutions. In addition, permission to use a voice recorder was obtained, and recordings were transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The interviews were

conducted in a private room and lasted for 30-45 minutes. The researchers also used other data collection procedures such as making observations and taking field notes. The initial question was followed by probing as a communication skill that elicited more information from the participants, as De Vos *et al.* [20] outlined. Data were collected until data saturation was reached, as Babbie [21] postulated.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

The narrative data from the in-depth interviews were analyzed qualitatively using Tesch's open coding technique as outlined in Botma *et al.* [22]. The method included the following steps: the researcher read carefully through all the transcripts to understand the whole. After the completion of all transcripts, a list of similar topics was compiled. Two themes and their sub-themes emerged, and field notes were coded and categorized. Finally, a literature control was done to contextualize the results of the study in the existing literature.

### 2.5. Data Quality

The criteria for ensuring trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba were observed [23]. Credibility was ensured by prolonged engagement to build a rapport with the participants. Credibility was also provided through direct quotes from the study participants. The researchers contacted participants during the appointment-making session, the information session, and data collection. Referential adequacy was achieved by taking notes to record findings that provided a suitable record and the use of a voice recorder. The researchers identified themes and their relationships, and the sub-themes that have emerged after codes were identified and grouped. Thick descriptions of research methodology ensured transferability. To validate the truth and to confirm the results, a member check was also conducted. The themes were compared, and differences were discussed until a consensus was reached, as outlined by Brink *et al.* [24].

### 2.6. Ethical Consideration

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Limpopo Provincial Social Development Department and the managers of the institutions before conducting the study. The participants were provided with the necessary information regarding the purpose of the study. Their rights to confidentiality and privacy were observed throughout the study. Ethical clearance number SHS/ 20/ PH /15/0707 was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Venda. Written consent was obtained from all the interviewed participants. The participants were not exposed to any form of injury or maltreatment, and their taking part in the study was voluntary. The participants were informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time and that no remunerations were to be provided for being part of the study. In order to ensure anonymity, codes were used instead of participants' names.

## 3. RESULTS

Many irrational behaviours can be explained by realising that human beings do not simply attempt to maximise the

instrumentality of their actions to achieve a particular goal. But instead “deliberately choose suboptimal, less instrumental means for achieving their goals because that type of choice helps keep their lives interesting” [25]. Simandan [26] outlines that individuals learn from their living environments and become wiser than their earlier selves despite the inherent ambiguities of their positionality and the situatedness of their knowledge claims. The author criticized referring to others as either wise or fools and argued instead for an underlying behavioural continuum (analogue distinction) from foolishness to wisdom.

The study results indicated that socio-economic factors contributed to violent behaviours among youth in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. The findings also highlighted aspects that could be addressed for the effectiveness of the rehabilitation programmes rendered at the centres (Fig. 1).

In discussing the themes and sub-themes, quotations and relevant literature were used to emphasize the results. The two themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 1. The following is the demographic profile of youth with violent behaviours in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa.

**3.1. Demographic Profile of Youth with Violent Behaviours**

The study participants' ages ranged from 14 to 20 years old. Forty were males, with only 8 females. The findings revealed that in terms of academic levels, 44 of the participants in children and youth care centres ranged from grade 9 to 12. The highest qualification held by the other four participants was AET level 4 (Adult education training). Regarding the violent activities committed, out of 48 participants interviewed,

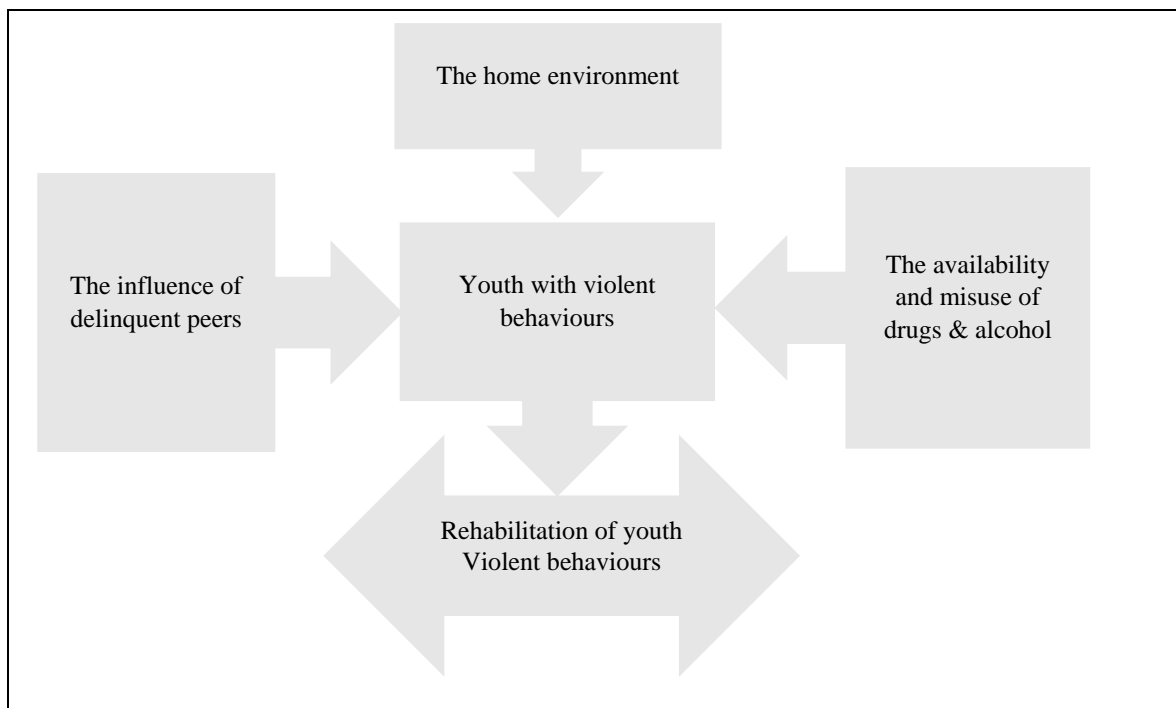
14 committed murder, 1 attempted murder, 14 rape, 5 house-breaking, 4 robberies, 4 theft, 3 shoplifting, and 3 common assaults. Furthermore, 30 participants were at the centres for the first time, 14 for the second time, and 4 for the third time, but for different offences. Forty-six of the study participants were classified as black, and 2 as white. Eight of the participants' home language was Tshivenda, 12 Xitsonga, 22 Sepedi, 3 Setswana, 1 English, 1 Afrikaans, and 1 was Shona.

**Table 1. Themes and sub-themes on socio-economic factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth.**

Main-Theme	Sub-Themes
1. The socio-economic factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth in CYCCs	1.1. The home environment 1.2. The influence of delinquent peers 1.3. The availability and misuse of drugs and alcohol
2. Effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes for violent behaviours youth in CYCCs	2.1. Improvement of the home environment 2.2. Avoiding the influences of delinquent peers 2.3. Avoiding the misuse of drugs & alcohol

**3.2. Theme 1: The Socio-economic Factors Contributing to Violent Behaviours among the Youth in CYCCs**

The two themes that emerged from data analysis were socio-economic factors that contributed to violent behaviours among the youth and the rehabilitation aspects on preventing violent behaviours. Sub-themes that emerged from two themes were the home environment, the influence of delinquent peers, and the misuse of drugs and alcohol.



**Fig. (1).** Socio-economic factors contributing to violent youth behaviours.

### 3.2.1. Sub-Theme 1: The Home Environment

During the interviews, the home environment characterized by family conflicts, harsh punishments, poverty, and parents' unemployment does contribute to violent youth behaviours.

However, the youth indicated that when parents are directly involved in their children's lives and activities, they are more likely to open up on pertinent issues affecting their lives. Participants also stated that they believe that consistent guidance and love by their parents/guardians and other family members can positively adjust to life. The following sentiments were expressed by participants:

*"Mmm, I think that family conflicts and bullying does contribute to violent behaviour because as a child, I might feel unloved and having no sense of belonging. You will be abused all the time by the person who should always protect you, I regard my uncle as a father, but in my case, it was different."*

*"I was always fighting with my uncle at home because he used to "bully" me by telling me that I am ugly and not good enough. I ended up fighting for myself, and then there was this day when he was starting to "bully me" I took a knife and killed him....I was protecting myself because he usually does his things when I was alone with him when I told my siblings' no one uses to believe what I say." (Participant 1: 18-year-old female)*

Participants further reported that bullying, family conflicts, and harsh punishment appropriately solve some problems. As a result, children from such homes tend to develop violent behaviours due to learned behaviour.

*"I used to hang out with my friends at the streets and shops due to the situation at home. My parents used to fight in front of us, the children. As a result, I decided to spend most of my time outside. I got friends who were not afraid of stealing at the shops, and I decided to take their path as it feels incredible, and I always have most of the things I wanted because my parents could not provide for me."*

*"I knew that the life that I was living was not good, but I was unable to get out of it, and one day I got caught, and I was taken to this place." (Participant 3: 16-year-old female).*

*"Mmm, I would say that my parent's poor parenting skills have contributed to my violent behaviour because they were always fighting as they used to abuse substances, and they didn't want to listen to us as their children. I used to hang out with my friends in the street, and they didn't even bother to find out where I was even at night."*

*"It's tough, you know.....and hanging out with friends outside is the only solution." (Participant 4: 15-year-old male)."*

*"Eeh, I think having parents who are always fighting and not guide you as a child on what is right or wrong does contribute to violent behaviours. My parents were too lazy to work for us, and I was the one to makes sure that my younger sisters have food on the table."*

*"I used to have friends who would teach me how to make money fast by stealing from other people at the shops, and I was arrested for shoplifting with my friends, and I was then*

*taken to this place." (Participant 5: 16-year-old male)".*

*"Eeh, my father was an alcoholic who used to abuse us physically. He will come home and start to shout and beat us, including my mother, and he cannot provide for our basic needs. As a child growing up, I didn't want to see my mother crying and struggling to provide for us alone, so I ran away."*

*"My mother was struggling financially, and she used to wash other people's clothes so that we could have food on the table." I dropped out of school thinking that I would get a piece job and assist my mother to raise my younger siblings." I ended up being with the friends who influenced me badly and didn't think of the consequences. I hate my father for putting us in this bad situation, and I ended up being at the centre for theft." (Participant 7: 17-year-old male)."*

### 3.2.2. Sub-Theme 2: The Influence of Delinquent Peers

The influence of delinquent peers was reported frequently as a factor contributing to violent behaviours among the youth in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province. The majority of the participants stated that peer pressure had influenced them significantly, causing them to be involved in criminal activities. These young people indicated that they needed acceptance from their peers more than their parents or close relatives to find a sense of commonality or common ground. Furthermore, the participants highlighted that they used to admire and respect their delinquent peers and needed a sense of belonging without realising the consequences of being involved in violent activities. It was confirmed by five participants:

*"Eeh, peer pressure has contributed to my violent behaviour because I used to have delinquent friends at school who influenced me to violent activities like fighting with other learners and bullying them by taking their pocket money and lunch boxes".*

*"I was part of the gang in the community, and I joined it because I wanted to be protected and have a sense of belonging."*

*"Yoh, I used to like fights at school and in the community, and I envied those that beat others even in television programmes, and I used to enjoy that because most learners used to praise me for what I was doing. I have been at this centre twice because of different offences." (Participant 3: 19-year-old male).*

*"Mmm, I think my violent behaviour was influenced by my delinquent peers whom I used to hang out with. I was the only child at home, and my parents used to provide for all my basic needs. I dropped out of school in grade 9 and joined the gang, and we were involved in car robberies and hijacking of cars".*

*"I joined the gang at the age of 14 because I wanted protection and a sense of belonging at school. At first, I was afraid of using a gun, but it became a habit as time passed. My parents were apprehensive about my behaviour, and I never listened to them. I got arrested for murder, and I always blame myself for choosing the wrong friends." (Participant 5: 16-year-old male)."*

*"Eeh, I think the influence of delinquent peers does contribute to violent behaviours. My parents used to provide*

for all my basic needs and wanted me to be educated. I was the firstborn in a family of three, and my younger siblings were looking at me as their role model.

“At school, I started hanging with friends who were older than me, and they were part of the gang. They influenced me to leave school and enjoy life outside by hanging out with girls and hijacking nice cars. One day I had this girlfriend I have known for two years, and she later accused me of rape, and I was then arrested and brought to this centre.” (**Participant 6:** 17-year-old male)

“Mmm, I think the influence of delinquent peers has contributed to my violent behaviours because my parents were working far and they usually come home after we have slept. I was under the care of my elder sister with my younger brother. I met these friends at school, and I didn't know they were part of the gang until I could not leave them due to fear of being hurt or dying.

“I will tell my sister that I'm going to school whereas I'm going to the shopping malls to hijack the cars being sent by the leader of the gang.” One day our plan didn't go as planned, and I was arrested for car robbery, and it was then that I was brought to this centre.” (**Participant 7**)

“I think the influence of friends has contributed to my violent behaviours. I used to listen to my friends more than I will listen to my parents, and I thought they were enjoying life to their fullest as they used to be taken by nice cars at school, and these were the gang leaders.” So I became involved in the gang's life and admired their nice cars and money by robbing the banks.”

“I was later arrested for theft and was brought to this centre. I hated the life I was living because I didn't accept what my parents were providing for me.” (**Participant 10:** 18-year-old male)

### 3.2.3. Sub-Theme 3: Availability and Misuse of Drugs and Alcohol

Participants mentioned that their violent behaviours were mainly influenced by exposure to drugs and alcohol. As a result, they became involved in unnecessary fights and other violent behaviours. Furthermore, participants added that witnessing their friends using these substances has contributed to their misuse of drugs and alcohol. It is supported by five participants as follows:

“Mmm, I think substance use can lead to violent behaviour because when you are under the influence of substances, you get involved in criminal activities like stealing and beating other learners at school being under the influence of substances.”

“I used to be expelled from school because of my behaviour, and I didn't bother myself of studying and doing other school work as I was always in the street.” (**Participant 4:** 16-year-old female)

“Mmm, I think substance use can lead to youth violence behaviour because when someone is under the influence of substances, he/she gets involved in criminal activities like stealing and getting involved in robbing others without

thinking about the consequences of his/her actions.”

“I started using drugs and stealing when I was 12 years old. My uncle was the gang leader where I was staying, and he used to teach my friends and me how we can make money fast by breaking other people's houses and hijacking cars at the Shopping malls.” (**Participant 5:** 16-year-old male)

“Eeh, I believe that substance use can lead youth to be involved in violent behaviours. For example, I was a perfect kid at home and at school who never have many friends, but because my uncle used to drink in front of me and also sent me to buy alcohol and drugs for him, I started to learn to drink and to smoke.”

“At first, I used to hide it, but I ended up doing it without being ashamed. I used to have a knife in my pocket when I went to the taverns, and one day I was coming from the tavern, and I met my ex-girlfriend, and I called her, and she ran away. I then followed her and asked her to go home with me, and she refused, and I told me that she would report me for raping her and I then took a knife and stabbed her on the right arm, but she didn't die, and I was charged with an attempted murder.” (**Participant 6:** 15-year-old male)

“I believe that alcohol and drug misuse does contribute to violent youth behaviour. When I was growing up, I was that kind of person who always wanted to fit-in in with specific groups of those friends who used to abuse substances, and I thought I was clever, and I also wanted to forget the situation at home.

“It was good hanging with my friends, but they were a bad influence as they taught me to be involved in delinquent behaviours like fighting other learners at school by taking their pocket money and stealing for other people at the shops. I ended up being caught and realised that the life I was living was not good at all.” (**Participant 7:** 17-year-old male).

“Eeh ....I was that kind of person who wanted to prove a point that I am not stupid by using drugs and alcohol and being involved in gangster groups. So one day, I stole a gun at the farm where my cousin was working for white people, and I hid it wanted to protect myself when I'm with my friends.”

“The following day, I tested the gun to find out if it's working by pointing it on the ceiling, and when my cousin comes after hearing the noise of the gun and ask me what was happening, I pointed at him with that gun out of fear, and I killed him.”

“Ooh, I didn't want to do that, ... I didn't mean to kill him and feel sorry for what I have done, and I wish I could find him next to my bed one day to tell him how sad I was as it was not my intention to kill him ... (Shaking his head). Guys killing a person is not a game. You saw that person in your dreams every time.” (**Participant 8:** 20-year-old male).

### 3.3. Theme 2: Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Programs for Youth with Violent Behaviours

The participants highlighted that for the rehabilitation programmes to be effective, they have suggestions to improve the factors contributing to violent youth behaviours.

### 3.3.1. Sub-Theme 1: Improvement of the Home Environment

The participants stated their views and opinions to assist the youth who have been rehabilitated to prevent re-offending. One of the indicated factors was the improvement of the home environment among the youth. This might be shown as a factor that could help as young individuals would not be exposed to family conflicts, poverty, and harsh punishment and abuse, which often drives them to the streets with delinquent peers. They also indicated that the improvement of the home environment would assist the youth in empowering them with the knowledge of the impact of violent behaviours. Furthermore, it was stated that if the home environment were conducive for the youth, the number of the youth in conflict with the law would have improved from worse to better. The following excerpts confirm this:

*“Eeh, I think it will be helpful if the parents are informed or educated about the consequences of poor home circumstances on the young individuals. Some parents are not ashamed of fighting for their children and not providing for their basic needs. It makes the child run away to the streets, avoiding the situation at home.” (Participant 1).*

*“I believe that if parents can change the way they relate with their children and have parental-child attachment, it might assist in finding it earlier if the child is involved in violent activities or not.*

*“Some of the parents don't even bother to find out about their children's whereabouts, and they went to the extent of accepting the things that their children have brought home even though their children are unemployed.” (Participant 2)*

### 3.3.2. Sub-Theme 2: Avoiding the Influences of Eelinquent Peers

The participants indicated that youth should adhere to the parents' and educators' rules and guidance to avoid conflict with the law. Young people should be educated on the impact of violent behaviours and be encouraged about the importance of education as a route to success. Furthermore, it was highlighted that youth should learn to avoid the influence of delinquent peers and obey the rules and guidance of their parents and educators. It was stated by one participant who said the following:

*“I think youth should accept their family situations and learn to seek for assistance on the relevant individuals, and youth needs to be provided with more education at school to increase their knowledge of the impact of violent behaviours.” (Participant 5: 16-year-old male)*

Another participant said:

*“I believe that parents should learn to provide the basic needs for their children to avoid running to streets for friends who might teach them violent activities. I think that doing this will assist in preventing the youth's violent behaviours and assist in re-offending. (Participant 7:17-year-old male)*

### 3.3.3. Sub-Theme 3: Avoiding Availability and Misuse of Drugs and Alcohol

Participants emphasized that the misuse of substances

among youth does not affect their character and results in poor cognitive functioning and physical health. They indicated that most young individuals who misuse drugs often suffer from short-term memory loss. It also creates a greater chance for them to behave in a specific manner without realizing it. Most learners and educators have become victims of learners who use drugs at school as they usually involve themselves in fights and other violent behaviours caused by these substances. Furthermore, it was stated that instability in the family and community regarding the availability of drugs and alcohol might influence young people to form gangs which may be extended to the school premises. One participant said:

*“I think that if parents/guardians can avoid sending young people to buy drugs and alcohol, it might help as they may develop the tendency of using such substances.” (Participant 6: 17-year-old male)*

Another participant said:

*“It will be helpful if parents/guardians can limit or avoid giving young people excessive money to school as this might influence them to violent behaviours. “I think giving enough pocket money and monitoring the usage of it could be much better in limiting some violent activities.” (Participant 10:18-year-old male)*

## 4. DISCUSSION

The study's findings revealed socio-economic factors such as the home environment characterized by family conflicts, divorce/separation, poverty and unemployment, harsh punishments. Environmental factors such as the influence of delinquent peers and availability and misuse of drugs and alcohol were significant factors that contributed to violent behaviours among the youth in selected child and youth care centres in South Africa. The study's findings further revealed that if the factors mentioned above mainly characterize the home environment, children often conflict with the law. However, it was also stated that witnessing parental conflicts has a high rate of influencing violent behaviours among the youth. As a result, they tend to spend most of their time with friends in the streets to avoid home situations.

The study results agree with Mudau *et al.* and Miomira [27, 28], who explained that the results of parental conflicts in a family are a more excellent predictor for their behaviours among the young adults who are vulnerable to any form of deviant behaviour. In addition, the study found that the impact of the home environment led the youth to take shortcuts in their lives due to involvement in violent behaviours. Most participants highlighted that various factors in their home environment had influenced them towards engagement in violent behaviours. Several authors agree that broken homes have serious effects on a young person's behaviour and their entire development. Being raised in a broken home often influences young people to behave in a deviant way, such as resorting to criminal activities to deal with the pain inside them caused by their parents [27 - 30].

Furthermore, studies conducted by Mudau *et al.*, Miomira, Fagan and Churchill, and Theobald *et al.* [27 - 30] indicated that the parents and family members help build children's

overall development and competence to adapt to the social structure and block children from harmful criminal activities because home and family are regarded as the primary growth centre for the children. The study found that parents argue and often resort to physical fights in front of their children, which affects a young person's psychological well-being due to growing up in a dysfunctional family. In addition, the home environment was influenced by various aspects that the participants were unable to control, such as family conflicts, divorce/separation, poverty, and unemployment among the parents. The other reasons stated indicated a lack of parental attachment. Participants outlined that their parents' lack of true love and guidance and other home circumstances have influenced violent behaviours.

The study also found poverty and unemployment of parents as a factor that contributed to violent youth behaviours. As most of the participants reported that their parents could not provide for their basic needs, this resulted in hanging out with delinquent friends in the streets and stealing to provide for themselves and their families. These findings are similar to a study [31, 32], which reported that the history of ill-treatment among the juvenile's families of roughly 90% had been observed in South Africa, and the highest risk for violent and criminal behaviour is presented among the young individuals without parents or parental supervision. These authors further explained that these households are more likely to be exposed to the misuse of alcohol and illegal substances and face financial difficulties. These findings align with Mudau *et al.* [27] and Wairimu [33], who showed a strong link between poverty and violent youth behaviours.

They further explained that the experience of staying in a slum and poverty among young individuals plays a dominant role in exposing youth destructive behaviours. In order to escape the reality of living in poverty, young people from poor backgrounds are more likely to engage in violent behaviours. The current study aligns with another research that points out high risks of educational underachievement among children from low-income households [34]. Furthermore, the problem usually emanates at the primary level to other levels of education. These young individuals tend to drop out of school and engage themselves in delinquencies in the community. Similar results were also confirmed in a study [16] that postulated that in many low-income families, family members are always involved in a quarrel due to poverty, which negatively impacts the children's minds.

However, young individuals need to be relieved from the family crisis. They tend to spend most of their time outdoors with their friends, which gradually influences them in many criminal activities. The study conducted by Chowdhury, Khan, Uddin [16] further explained that children from low-income families usually run to drugs and are interested in violent actions to escape reality because their parents cannot provide for their basic needs. As a result, they suffer considerable stress due to their low-income homes. These findings are also supported by further studies [27, 30, 33], which indicated that young people from poor backgrounds often become vulnerable to drugs to relieve and escape their situation. Furthermore, it was reported that the low-income family is a strong predictor

of drugs among young people.

This study found that young individuals could not handle their situations due to factors in the home environment such as poverty and unemployment, family conflicts, and harsh punishments and abuse by parents and other family members. Instead, they resort to comfort from friends as it was not found at home. Similar results were reported by Nkhata and Mwale [35] in their study. They mentioned that youth is a time in which individuals experience physical and cognitive changes. They start making decisions and demands that might have implications for their engagement in risky behaviours. The study findings regarding the influence of delinquent peers reveal that most of the study participants found themselves in conflict with the law due to the effect of peers.

The research established that young people place great importance on their peers and relationships to develop self-identity and self-confidence. Some participants in the current study indicated that peer pressure had influenced them significantly, causing them to be involved in criminal activities. To find a sense of commonality or common ground, they needed acceptance from their peers more than their parents or close relatives. The availability and misuse of drugs and alcohol were mentioned as contributing to violent behaviour among the youth. Participants indicated that drugs and alcohol had contributed a lot to their violent behaviour because they could not differentiate between right and wrong due to excessive use of substances.

The majority of the participants further stated that witnessing their friends and other family members using the substances has contributed to their misuse. Several authors agree that substance use among young individuals at an early age often leads to numerous individual, family, and peer risk factors associated with poor developmental outcomes. Also, personal characteristics include early initiation, externalizing symptoms-hyperactivity, impulsiveness, inattention, and aggressive behaviour. In addition, the frequency of negative emotions is influenced by novelty-seeking, sociability, and activity, especially among girls [36 - 40]. These findings are similar to the study by Nevhutalu [41 - 45], who discovered that youth who abuse substances tend to increase their risk of substance abuse and are more likely to have suicidal thoughts and depression.

Furthermore, Nevhutalu [41 - 45] stated that marijuana could lead to other mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or suicide. It worsens depression and drug abuse, which increases the severity of emotional problems and can result in issues such as anxiety, mood swings, and schizophrenia. As a result, young individuals are at a higher risk of social problems, depression, and violence by being involved in substances. Similar results were reported by Mathungeni [46] and Tshitangano [47]. They showed that drug abuse among young adults had contributed to school crime in a decade, increasing its negative impact on their cognitive development. Furthermore, these individuals might have serious physical injuries as a result of consuming excessive amounts of substances without realizing it.

In his study on the wise stance, Simandan [48] highlighted that how we learn from life depends not only on breadth of experience, such as the number of years lived, but also on our ability to learn from those experiences. This author added that the wise stance seems to be more "conservative", built on time-



tested knowledge, acknowledges the value of tradition and experience, and questions the excessive reliance on changing one's environment as the main strategy of one's successful adaptation 25 [26].

Sternberg [49] is also of the opinion that people may differ in the extent to which they seek a common good and thus in the extent to which they aim for the essential goal of wisdom. The author added that individuals also differ in their balance of responses to environmental contexts. Their responses always reflect the interaction of the individual making the judgment and the environment, and they can interact with contexts in a myriad of ways [49]. Based on the above findings, it may be concluded that the availability and misuse of drugs and alcohol put young individuals in stressful and traumatic situations. Consequently, after exposure to those substances, youth are more likely to see violence and other criminal activities to solve their challenges.

## 5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province of South Africa and focused on the youth's violent behaviours. Therefore, the study results cannot be generalised to all CYCCs in other provinces of South Africa. However, other researchers may explore the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes to assist the youth further.

## CONCLUSION

The study results revealed various socio-economic factors contributing to violent behaviours among the youth in CYCCs in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. The results discovered that the home environment is characterized by family conflicts, poverty, unemployment, harsh punishments, abuse, *etc.* In addition, environmental factors such as the influence of delinquent peers and availability and misuse of drugs and alcohol played a vital role in youth engagement in violent behaviours. Therefore, involvement with delinquent peers tends to influence young individuals to be involved in violent activities without being aware of the consequence of such behaviours.

Workshops for parents, guidance and advice on the importance of parental-child attachment, ways of dealing with family conflicts, and how to eradicate poverty and unemployment by starting income-generating projects in their communities should be provided by CYCCs providing rehabilitation programmes to youth with violent behaviours. Moreover, they should also provide information on seeking donations to start the income-generating projects and their sustainment. In addition, the child and youth care centres should always emphasize educating the youth on what is meant by violent behaviours and their impact on the victim, themselves, families, and society during family visits and gatherings.

## ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The study was approved by the Ethics and Research Committee of the University of Venda, South Africa (SHS/20/PH/15/0707).

## HUMAN AND ANIMAL RIGHTS

No animals were used in this research. All human research procedures were followed in accordance with the ethical standards of the committee responsible for human experimentation (institutional and national), and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2013.

## CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and consent from the institutional managers was provided for all minors.

## STANDARDS OF REPORTING

COREQ guidelines and methodologies were followed for this study.

## AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

The data that support the findings of this study will only be available from the corresponding author [N.S.M], upon reasonable request.

## FUNDING

None.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest, financial or otherwise.

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