

Moral Degeneration: Crisis in South African Schools?

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ABSTRACT The current study explored how teachers and parents could be equipped with the skills to teach learners about morals and values. The objective was drawn from the fact that one cannot speak of values without implicitly referring to morality and moral development, neither can one mention morality without having values in mind. The approach of this study was both quantitative and qualitative. Purposive sampling of participants included parents, teachers, principals, learners and community leaders. Focus group interviews were conducted with 6 to 8 teachers per each participating school. Same was applicable to parents. Four (4) community leaders who reside in the communities where the schools are situated were selected. The findings revealed that, to an alarming extent, the moral code in South African society is on the decline. Currently, education in the home, school and community does not convey a positive value system to learners - thus perpetuating the problem of a society in decline. The recommendation is that the mindset of children needs to be changed so that they become morally clear-sighted and responsible.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of moral ethics can be traced back to philosophers such as Aristotle, Socrates and Plato. One cannot speak of values without implicitly referring to morality and moral development, neither can one mention morality without having values in mind. Moral development is a process that coincides with cognitive development, because children cannot make moral judgments and choices until they have achieved a certain level of cognitive maturity and can shed egocentric thinking (Mariaye 2006; Lemmer and Badenhorst 1997). The concept morality is used in many different ways at different times by different people, but it can be interpreted to mean a person's or society's view of what is perceived to be the highest good. The highest good is often defined as a mindset and those actions and behaviours that contribute to what Aristotle refers to as *eudaimonia*, which means happiness, or a sense of well-being. Similarly, the other school of thought defines morality or a person's ethical sense, as an evaluation of what is good and what is bad in absolute terms (Aiken 2004). It entails praising what is good and condemning what is bad. Mid-2000s study (Mariaye 2006) concurs that the term morality can be used descriptively to refer to a code of conduct put forward by a society or an individual, and normatively, to refer to a code of conduct that, under specific conditions, would be put forward by all rational-thinking persons (Mariaye 2006). Different well-known thinkers

like Freud, Piaget and Erikson saw mankind through different prisms, and their ideas about our fundamental nature have given rise to various explanations or theories.

The Piagetian cognitive approach for instance was not as much in whether children can solve problems correctly or accurately but in why they behave in certain ways, and the type of reasoning that motivates them (Louw 1987; Lemmer and Badenhorst 1997). The author (Louw 1987) was thus interested in how children think. One of the assumptions of his theory on moral development is that it is dependent on the cognitive maturity of the child, because for a child to be able to distinguish between right and wrong, he or she must be capable of proper judgment, which is a direct outcome of his/her reasoning (Mariaye 2006). Children who are not intellectually mature, for instance, those in the sensory-motor stage, should not be held responsible for their inability to make moral decisions, because during this phase they mainly learn through trial and error. From his observations Mariaye (2006) concluded that cognitive or intellectual development takes place in different stages. Each stage represents a qualitative change from one type of thought or behaviour to another. Following the basis of the background which suggests that development of moral and value fiber have influence in society; the current study addresses the following research objectives in relation to South African school from the perspective of teachers, parents, community members and learners.

Research Objectives

- Ø determine whether the teaching of values in the family and in school will have an influence on the moral development of children and eventually on the moral fiber of a society
- Ø explore how teachers and parents can be equipped with the skills to teach learners about morals.

RESEARCH METHOD

The lessons were drawn from the comparison between the literature findings and the qualitative research. Trends that were found after the analysis of the questionnaires were further explored by means of in-depth interviews in the form of semi-structured interview (individual and focus group interviews). The participants were parents, principals, teachers, community leaders and learners. Data were collected in the Eastern Cape Province in East London over a period of five months.

The Population Sample: Sampling of participants included parents, teachers, principals, learners and community leaders. The sample consisted of:

Learners: Fifty Grade 11 learners were selected randomly from four schools in the Eastern Cape. The selected schools included two former Model C schools, a school in a previously Coloured township and a school in a rural area. Learners were the only participants to complete questionnaires. After the questionnaires were analysed, a number of learners who had completed the questionnaires were interviewed. These follow-up interviews were conducted to explore issues that were not clear from the questionnaires, and to probe trends or tendencies that emerged from the questionnaires in order to enhance understanding of the phenomenon to be researched.

Teachers: Focus group interviews were conducted with teachers from the four schools under study - one interview at each school. Focus group interviews were conducted with 6 to 8 teachers per each participating school.

Principals: Individual interviews were conducted with the principals of the four selected schools.

Parents: The researchers, as far as possible,

selected parents who had children in the selected schools. Focus group interviews were conducted with 6 to 8 parents per group.

Community Leaders: Four community leaders who reside in the communities where the schools are situated were selected. Individual interviews were conducted with the community leaders.

RESULTS

Learners from the four selected schools were given questionnaires to complete in order to determine their value systems and their attitudes toward moral values in their homes and in society. Table 1 reflects the demographics of the respondents (learners).

Table 1: Demographic data of the learners

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage responses</i>
<i>Your School Location</i>		
Rural area (including farm)	64	40.0
Urban area (including township)	96	60.0
<i>Your Gender</i>		
Male	56	35.0
Female	104	65.0
<i>Your Age</i>		
11-15 years	2	1.2
16 years or older	158	98.7
<i>Number of Children in Your Household</i>		
An only child	9	5.6
Between 2 and 5	136	85.0
More than 5	15	9.3
<i>Are You the Oldest Child in Your Family</i>		
Yes	51	31.9
No	109	68.1
<i>Do You Live in Child Headed Family</i>		
Yes	8	5.00
No	152	95.0
<i>I Live With</i>		
my mother and father	79	49.4
my mother only	25	15.6
my father only	5	3.1
my mother and other relatives	36	22.5
my father and other relatives	2	1.2
other relatives	13	8.1
<i>Are Your Parents/People You Live With Employed?</i>		
Yes	106	66.3
No	54	33.7
<i>My Church is</i>		
Methodist	52	32.5
Roman Catholic	24	15.0
Assemblies of God	37	23.1
Dutch Reformed Church	3	1.8
Apostolic Faith Mission	25	15.6
African Gospel Church (including Zion)	3	1.8
Bahai Faith	4	2.5
None	12	7.5

Table 1 shows that the majority (65 percent) of the learners were girls, while 35 percent were boys. The resultant gender composition was by chance. The majority (60 percent) of the learners live in urban areas, which include townships. The majority of the learners were 16 years or older. Many of them live in households with between 2 and 5 children, and they were not the oldest in these families. Furthermore, the majority of the learners indicated that they lived with their mothers and fathers. Very few (5 percent) lived in child headed homes. One-third of the learners' parents were unemployed. Most of the learners attended church. The majority attended the Methodist Church, followed by the Apostolic Church. A few learners did not identify with any church.

Themes That Emerged

The following themes/tendencies emerged after the questionnaires had been analyzed: a) drug and alcohol abuse, b) incidents of crime c) involvement in (physical or sexual) violence, d) parents' awareness and reaction to their children's use of drugs/alcohol, e) strategies used by parents and teachers to dissuade children from using drugs/alcohol.

Drug/Alcohol Use

Table 2 shows the proportion of learners who indicated that they use drugs and/or alcohol. Less than half of the learners (43.75 percent) have used alcohol only, while 15.63 percent have used both drugs and alcohol. But 39.38 percent of the learners indicated that they have not used drugs or alcohol. However, many of those who used drugs/alcohol seem to have stopped, 86.25 percent of the learners indicated that they no longer drugs or alcohol. Only 13.75 percent of the learners in the sample still use drugs/alcohol.

Figure 1 reflects percentage distribution of learners and drugs/alcohol type that they are still taking. This figure also shows the percentage of learners who use drugs/alcohol by age groups.

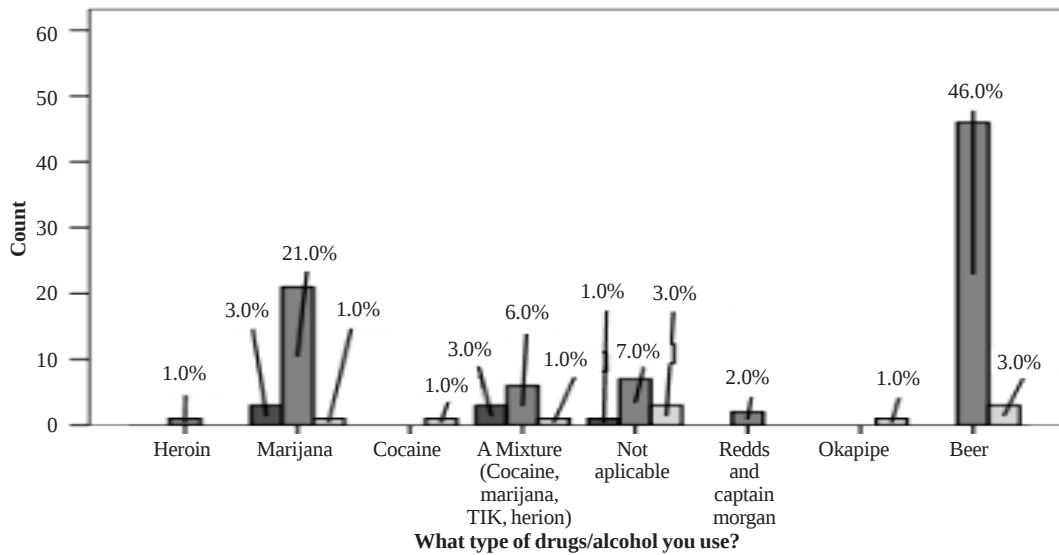
Figure 2 shows the types of drugs and alcohol which is used by some learners. More than 30 percent of the learners still take marijuana. A smaller proportion (4.55 percent) still takes a mixture of cocaine, marijuana, TIK, and heroin. In terms of alcohol, many learners still drink beer, Redds and Captain Morgan.

Table 2: Prevalence of drug/alcohol use

<i>Characteristics Have You Ever Used Drugs or Alcohol?</i>	<i>Do you still use drugs /alcohol?</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
<i>Yes, Alcohol Only</i>			
Frequency	15.0	55.0	70.0
percent within Have you ever used drugs or alcohol?	21.4	78.5	100.0
percent within Do you still use drugs?	68.1	39.8	43.7
<i>Yes, Drugs Only</i>			
Frequency	0.0	2.0	2.0.0
percent within Have you ever used drugs or alcohol?	0.0	100.0	100.0
percent within Do you still use drugs?	0.0	1.4	1.2
<i>Both Drugs and Alcohol</i>			
Frequency	7.0	18.0	25.0
percent within Have you ever used drugs or alcohol?	28.0	72.0	100.0
percent within Do you still use drugs?	31.8	13.0	15.6
<i>No, Neither Drugs nor Alcohol</i>			
Frequency	0.0	63.0	63.0
percent within Have you ever used drugs or alcohol?	0.0	100.0	100.0
percent within Do you still use drugs?	0.0	45.6	39.3
<i>Total</i>			
Frequency	22.0	138.0	160.0
percent within Have you ever used drugs or alcohol?	13.7	86.2	100.0
percent within Do you still use drugs?	100.0	100.0	100.0

As reflected in Table 3, the majority of the learners (36.87 percent) who use drugs/alcohol were introduced to them by their friends. Relatives (12.5 percent) also acted as a starting point to the use of these drugs and/or alcohol. Among the learners who use drugs/alcohol, *shebeens* and night clubs are the main places where they use these substances. It is not surprising therefore that the majority (41.25 percent) of learners use drugs/alcohol when they are out with friends at events such as parties. A small percentage (8.75 percent) use these substances while at home. The majority of the users (24.37 percent) use drugs/alcohol mainly during weekends, or when with friends.

The main reason for learners' use of drugs/alcohol is that it makes them feel good, or because they were/are bored. But what learners actually meant by 'feeling good' or because they are/were 'bored' is unclear. This factor was explored in the individual interviews that followed the questionnaires.



How older were you when you used it (drugs or alcohol) for the first time

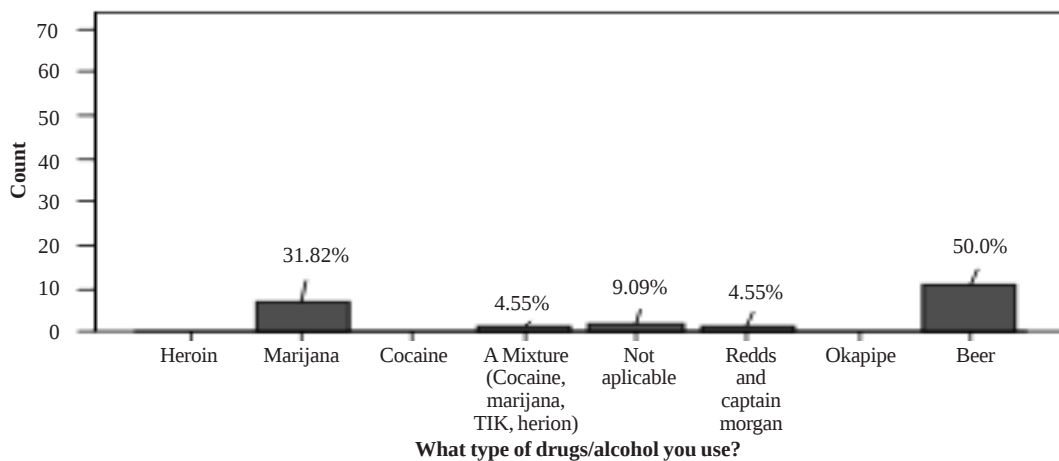
- Between 8 and 12
- Between 13 and 17
- Older than 17

Fig. 1. Type of drugs/alcohol taken by age groups

Figure 3 shows that the use of drugs/alcohol by learners has a noticeable effect on their behaviour. Whereas 10 percent felt no change, 6 percent of them indicated that they became violent, talkative, and promiscuous. Furthermore, 30 percent said they become more withdrawn. There were some learners who indicated that they felt happy.

Incidents of Crime

Table 4 shows the forms of crimes committed by learners. The majority (80.63 percent) indicated that they have not committed any crime. But, among the learners who committed some form of crime, stealing proved to be the most frequent (8.75 percent), followed by vandalism (3.13 percent).



Do you still use drugs

- Yes

Fig. 2. The proportion of learners who still take drugs

Table 3: Frequency and reasons for drug/alcohol use

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Who Introduced You to Drugs/Alcohol?</i>		
Friends	59	36.8
Friends and classmates	16	10.0
Relatives	20	12.5
I do not use drugs	58	36.2
Not applicable	6	3.7
Self	1	0.6
<i>Sources of Your Drug/Alcohol</i>		
Friends	18	11.2
Shebeens/taverns/nightclubs	67	41.8
Pimps	4	2.5
Relatives	5	3.1
Multiple sources	5	3.1
I do not use drugs	52	32.5
Not applicable	9	5.6
<i>I Use Drugs or Alcohol Because</i>		
It makes me feel good	22	13.7
I'm under pressure from my friends to take them	9	5.6
They are easily available	8	5.0
Usually I'm bored	22	13.7
Most of my friends use drugs	6	3.7
multiple reasons	6	3.7
Not applicable	66	41.2
To hang out with friends and enjoy self	7	4.3
Just thought should try	8	5.0
When am upset	3	1.8
I no longer drink	3	1.8
<i>I Usually Use Drugs/Alcohol When I'm</i>		
at home	14	8.7
Out with my friends (for example, at parties, night clubs etc.)	66	41.2
At school	2	1.2
At different places	8	5.0
I do not use drugs/alcohol	55	34.3
Not applicable	8	5.0
No comment	7	4.3
<i>How Often Do You Take Drugs/Use Alcohol?</i>		
Usually on weekends only	39	24.3
During the week and on weekends	4	2.5
Whenever I'm stressed	6	3.7
When I'm with my friends	15	9.3
I do not use drugs/alcohol	61	38.1
Not applicable	8	5.0
I drank once	3	1.8
Whenever I feel like	19	11.8
No comment	5	3.1

Table 4: Forms of crimes committed by learners

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Stealing	14	8.7
Robbery	3	1.8
Vandalism	5	3.1
A combination of the above	5	3.1
Other (for example, under age drinking)	4	2.5
No (I do not commit any crime)	129	80.6
Total	160	100.0

Table 5 shows that the majority (85 percent)

of the learners had no comment regarding the reasons for committing crimes. It should be noted that most of these learners were among those who had not committed any crime, as reflected in Table 4. Some learners gave reasons for committing crimes. Learners who were involved in theft indicated that they stole because: (a) they wanted money, (b) satisfaction, (c) they felt bored, or (d) they wanted to see if they would be caught and what would happen. Peer pressure played some role in this process. Learners who were involved in vandalism indicated that they did so because: (a) "I kicked down the school fence so as to *bunk* class" and (b) "It gave us something to do at night". Learners who committed rape indicated that they did so because they wanted sex. Those learners who were involved in under-age drinking were among the ones who made no comment regarding their motivation for their actions.

Table 5: Reasons for committing crimes

<i>What was your reason for committing the crime(s)?</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No comment	136	85
I needed money	5	3.1
For entertainment	4	2.5
I felt bored	2	1.2
I kicked down the school fence so as to 'bunk' class	2	1.2
It gave us something to do at night	2	1.2
Just to see if I would be caught and what would happen	2	1.2
Peer pressure	2	1.2
I steal because the money was available	2	1.2
For satisfaction	1	0.6
I didn't study for the test so I copied	1	0.6
I raped because I wanted sex	1	0.6
Total	160	100

Table 6 shows that less than 5 percent of the learners indicated that they stole in order to get money to buy the drugs/alcohol that they used.

Table 6: Motivation for stealing

<i>Have you ever had to steal in order to buy drugs/alcohol?</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Yes	7	4.3
No	153	95.6
Total	160	100.0

Figure 4 shows the feelings of learners after they had committed crimes. Less than 5 percent of the learners had feelings varying from

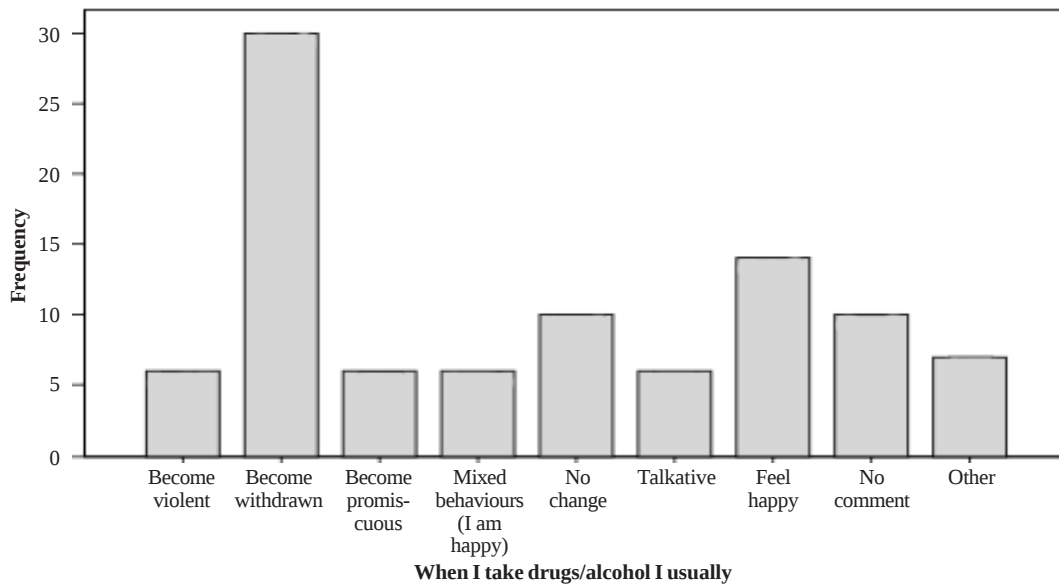


Fig. 3. Effects of drugs/alcohol on learners

remorse and regret to that of delight. A few did not experience any of these emotions, and did not specify what emotions they had experienced.

Involvement in Physical or Sexual Activities/Violence

Table 7 shows that one-third of the learners have been involved in physical violence. This involves fighting, which took place in-/outside

the school premises. Furthermore, about 16 percent of the learners indicated that they instigated the fights.

The reasons that learners gave for being involved in fights are shown in Figure 5. The reasons varied, and suggest that their actions were prompted by others. The majority of the learners made no comment because they had not been involved in fights. The 5.62 percent of other reasons that were cited include: (a) she was gos-

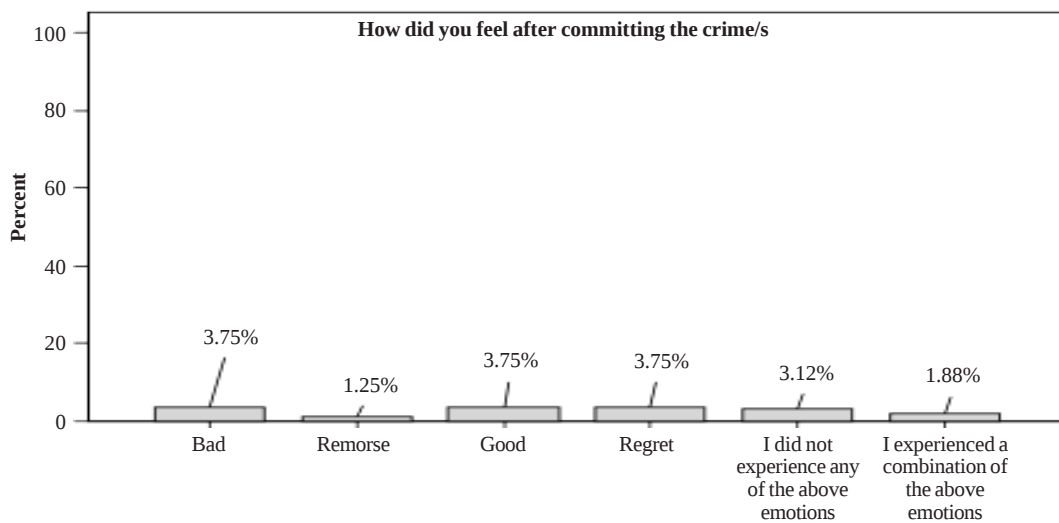


Fig. 4. Feelings of learners after they had committed crimes

Table 7: Learner involvement in physical violence

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Have you ever been involved in a fight in/out of school?		
Yes	54	33.8
No	106	66.3
Have you attacked anyone in/out of school before?		
Yes	27	16.9
No	133	83.1
If you have been involved in a fight, are you the one who started the fight?		
Yes	6	3.7
No	154	96.3

siping about me (b) he/she was on my case for four years, so I got fed-up (c) we had an argument (d) I needed some money and was influenced by friends and (e) he beat my father

Table 8 shows the sexual status of learners and the age at which they got involved in sexual activities. The majority of the learners indicated that they have had sexual encounters. Approximately 83 percent of learners were between 13

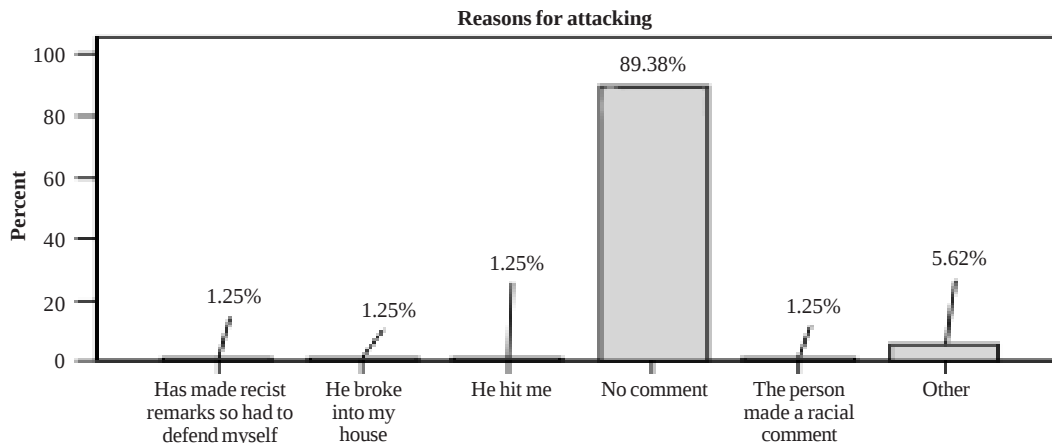
and 17 years when they had sex for the first time and 10 percent had sex after the age of 17 years.

As Table 9 shows, 35.63 percent of the learners indicated that they used protection during their sexual encounters. A quarter of the learners used no protection. While, learners engaged in sexual activities, it was not consensual for some. Approximately 18 percent indicated that the sex was not consensual. Furthermore, for 23 percent of the participants, their first sexual experience was not with their boy/girlfriend

Table 10 shows that 5 percent of the female learners indicated that they had been pregnant. All but one indicated that they are mothers.

Parents' Awareness and Reactions to Children's Drug/Alcohol Use

Table 11 shows that, while 13.8 percent of the learners indicated that their parents are aware of their use of drugs/alcohol, there were

**Fig. 5. Reasons for being involved in violence****Table 8: Learner involvement in sexual activities**

Characteristics		How old were you when you had sex for the first time				Total
Are You Sexually Active?		8-12	13-17	Older than 17	Not applicable	
Yes	Count	4	71	10	0	85
	percent within Are you sexually active?	4.71	83.53	11.77	0	100
No	Count	0	0	0	75	75
	percent within Are you sexually active?	0	0	0	100	100
Total	Count	4	71	10	75	160
	percent within Are you sexually active?	2.5	44.375	6.25	46.88	100

a sizeable 41.3 percent whose parents were unaware of their behaviour, while 13 percent of the learners indicated that their parents/teachers who were aware of their drug/alcohol use tried to dissuade them from continuing to use it. A sizeable proportion (30 percent) of parents also used drugs or drink alcohol.

Table 9: Proportion of learners who used protection during sex

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<i>Did You Use Protection?</i>		
Yes	57	35.625
No	42	26.25
Not applicable	61	38.125
<i>Was Your First Sexual Encounter Consensual (In Other Words, Did You And Your Partner Agree To Have Sex)?</i>		
Yes	69	43.125
No	30	18.75
Not applicable	61	38.13
<i>Was Your First Sexual Experience With Your Boyfriend/Girlfriend?</i>		
Yes	62	38.75
No	37	23.13
Not applicable	61	38.13

Strategies Parents and Teachers Use to Dissuade Children from Abusing Substances

Figure 6 shows the strategies that parents/teachers use to try to dissuade learners from using drugs/alcohol. The learners indicated that the most popular strategy used by their parents/teachers is to 'ground' them (11.25 percent) or take away their privileges (5.62 percent).

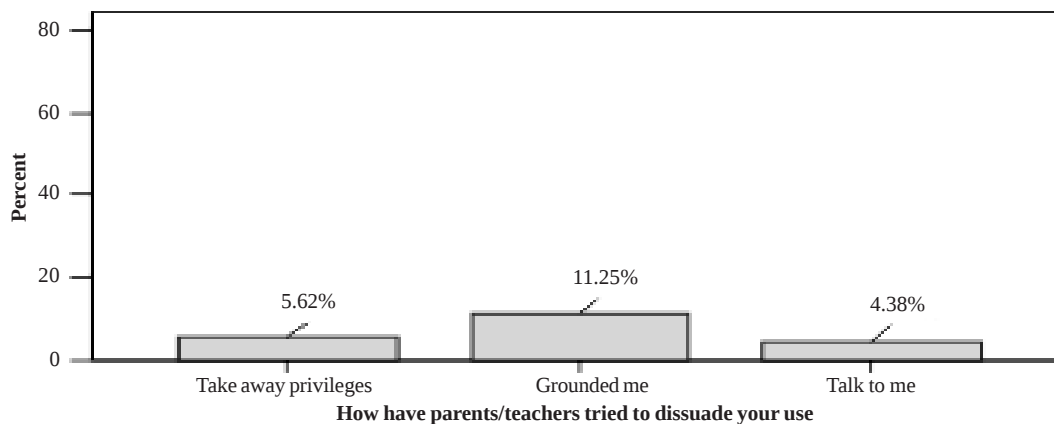


Fig. 6. Parents' and teachers' strategies to dissuade learners from drug/alcohol abuse

Table 10: Proportion of learner pregnancy

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<i>If you are female, have you ever been pregnant?</i>		
Yes	8	5.00
No	92	57.50
Not applicable	60	37.50
<i>If you are female, are you a mother?</i>		
Yes	7	4.38
No	93	58.13
Not applicable	60	37.50

Table 11: Parents' awareness of children's drug usage

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
<i>Are Your Parents Or Teachers Aware Of The Fact That You Are Taking Drugs/Use Alcohol?</i>		
Yes	22	13.8
No	66	41.3
I do not use drugs/alcohol	72	45.0
<i>Have Your Parents/Teachers Tried To Dissuade You From Using Drugs/Alcohol?</i>		
Yes	21	13.1
No	139	86.9
<i>Do Any Of Your Parents Use Drugs/Alcohol?</i>		
Yes	48	30.0
No	112	70

Cross-validating Questionnaires and Interviews

After the questionnaires had been analyzed, interviews were conducted with 24 learners from the four selected schools to further probe the themes that emerged from the questionnaires. The researchers aimed to determine whether the

answers - given in the questionnaires were answered honestly. The meaning and implication of some of the answers were not clear from the questionnaires, therefore further probing was done during the interviews. Some learners also chose not to respond to some of the questions in the questionnaires. These questions were explored during the interviews. The same themes that were used in the questionnaires were used to guide the interviews. *Verbatim* quotations are used to indicate the exact words of the learners.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

The question that was asked was: "Do you drink, smoke or use other types of drugs?" According to the analysis of the questionnaires, only a small percentage of the learners indicated that they have used drugs, whereas alcohol is used by 43.75 percent. During the interviews, a number of learners also indicated that they have used alcohol, and they mostly used alcohol when they are with their friends. Some indicated that they have used drugs, but that they have stopped. When they were asked why they use alcohol, they claimed that it makes them feel good, and they want to be 'in'. Learners stated that they used the substances mainly on weekends, because taverns are open on weekends, and parties usually take place over weekends and when the schools are closed. Many learners claimed that 'times have changed' from the time their parents were young, meaning that substance abuse, especially alcohol and cigarette smoking, is now an everyday occurrence among children. The learners thus, according to the interviews, equate 'changing times' with drinking, smoking and being involved in sexual activities. In fact, a learner said:

Learner 1: "Most of my friends drink and smoke. We do it almost every weekend. It's just nice, plus there's nothing better to do. It's much nicer than to do homework, or to sit at home with my parents. Sometimes after drinking we end up having sex. My teachers also know I drink. Some of them drink with me".

Additionally, another learner echoed that:

Learner 3: "My mother is not moving with the times. She wants to raise me the same way she was raised. She grew up in the sixties. We are now in 2008. Things have changed. Everyone drinks; it's not even unusual anymore. My dad knows I drink, but there's nothing he can do about it".

These findings seem to indicate that learners do not respect their bodies, although, from the questionnaire findings, 92.5 percent of the learners indicated that they do. It is possible that learners were not honest when they completed the questionnaires. Children also seemed to abandon going to church. However, they claimed that they do believe in God and sometimes read their Bibles, even if they use drugs/alcohol, engage in pre-marital sexual activities and do not often go to church. Restructure this sentence to make meaning. This seems to support the argument emanating from the literature that children know what is right, but they choose to do the wrong thing, or to behave immorally.

Parents' Awareness and Attitude Towards Their Children's Use of Drugs/Alcohol

As indicated above, parents often neglect their task of imparting positive values in their children. Literature indicates that many parents leave this task to the school. The interview findings indicate that some parents and teachers become aware of children's use of drugs/alcohol, and that they sometimes do try to dissuade the children from using these substances. Parents use different methods to dissuade their children, for instance they take away privileges like cell phones, or they refuse to buy their children certain things. However, it seems as if these methods or strategies are not very effective, as learners claim that they still continue with their actions. Even though parents are trying to discipline and educate their children, their strategies are not effective. What also emerged from the interviews with learners is the fact that some teachers are not positive role models for children. Children indicated during the interviews that some teachers socialize and use alcohol with them (children). They claim that teachers often supply them with alcohol, especially in night-clubs, parties and *shebeens*. Children do not seem to be getting the necessary guidance from teachers, as is also indicated in the literature.

DISCUSSION

Findings from the literature suggested that the East London society is experiencing a moral crisis, which is also evident in schools around the country. This moral crisis has negative implications for schools and the society, amongst

others the lack of discipline in children, and an increase in crime and substance abuse, especially among young people (De Wet 2003b; Prinsloo and Du Plessis 2006). However, the analysis of the questionnaires indicated that learners feel that the social ills are not out of control. Even when the children were interviewed, they still seemed to think that the issue of the moral crisis is blown out of proportion. During the interviews they openly admitted that they use drugs/alcohol; engage in pre-marital, often unprotected sex, are ill-mannered, and they approve of negative values like dishonesty and disrespect. They did not think that their behaviour and actions were immoral. Adult participants, however, acknowledged that there was a moral crisis in the society (East London). From the literature social ills which can be seen in schools and in the wider society, are regularly reported by the media (Bottery 1990; Abosi and Kandjii-Murangi 2004). Teachers often complain of unruly, undisciplined, disrespectful and disobedient learners. There is a lack of a culture of teaching and learning in many schools. Children bully one another in schools, carry weapons to school, sell drugs and alcohol, and use their cell phones to communicate via chat services like MXit. Nonetheless, teachers, parents and community leaders complained of undisciplined children and children who lack social and moral responsibility. The teachers reported that they spend much time, which is allocated for teaching, to discipline learners. Valuable teaching time is lost in the process. Because of these problems, teachers reported that they do not enjoy being teachers any more, and would quit teaching if they could.

With reference from previous studies, the moral crisis is attributed to a lack of values in children and adults (Carl and Johannes 2002; United Nations-UNAIDS/WHO 2006). In the literature it was found that parents often neglect their educational task, and expect the school to educate their children. Children are increasingly failing to live according to positive values like *ubuntu*, a positive attitude towards authority, altruism and mutual respect. Yet, the findings indicated that teachers hold the parents responsible for their children's lack of a value system. Parents themselves agreed that they have failed in their educational task and that their children seem not to practice positive values.

Literature suggest that in order to address

this value crisis, South Africans need to practice values that will promote nation-building, safe and stable schools and societies, and a sense of pride in themselves and their country (Prinsloo 2005). Values thus play an important role in education, and especially in moral education, whether it is school-typical education or education at home. Consistently, all the participants, except the learners, generally agreed that in order to reclaim and restore society, we need to focus on and live according to positive values. They agreed that without values education, we cannot have united and safe societies and schools.

The background of the current study revealed that values need to be instilled in learners by parents, teachers, the state and the church, although the church and the state are only indirectly involved with education. In order to produce morally mature citizens, these societal institutions should work together for the provision of moral education. Legislation also emphasizes co-operation and the involvement of parents and communities in school-typical education. In contrast, the findings indicated that parents should be mainly responsible for instilling values in their children. The role of the state and the church was not discussed in detail during the interviews. However, the community leaders and the children themselves reported that children often go to nightclubs and other places of drinking, but fail to attend church or involve themselves in projects that can uplift their communities – places where they can be taught about morality and morals.

Literature suggests that in order to address this value crisis, South Africans need to practice values that will promote nation-building, safe and stable schools and societies, and a sense of pride in themselves and their country (Smit and Liebenberg 2003). Values thus play an important role in education, and especially in moral education, whether it is school-typical education or education at home.

Values need to be instilled in learners by parents, teachers, the state and the church, although the church and the state are only indirectly involved with education (Rens et al. 2005). In order to produce morally mature citizens, these societal institutions should work together for the provision of moral education. Legislation also emphasizes co-operation and the involvement of parents and communities in school-typical

education. In contrast, the findings indicated that parents should be mainly responsible for instilling values in their children, but that teachers also have a responsibility in this regard. The role of the state and the church was not discussed in detail during the interviews. However, the community leaders and the children themselves reported that children often go to night-clubs and other places of drinking, but fail to attend church or involve themselves in projects that can uplift their communities – places where they can be taught about morality and morals.

Lastly literature stated that parents often neglect this important task (Straughan 1988; Rens et al. 2005). A number of reasons can be the cause of this parental neglect, amongst others role differentiation and role uncertainty, and emotional vulnerability, that many families experience. On the contrary, parents claimed that they are not neglecting their responsibility, but they do not know what to do anymore. The interviews indicated that many parents are aware of their children's immoral behaviour, but they do not know how to successfully dissuade learners from engaging in these immoral and often fatal acts.

The lessons that are drawn from the comparison between the literature findings and the qualitative research are the following:

- The South African society and schools are experiencing a moral and social crisis. This crisis is evident in the social ills that are experienced on a daily basis.

Education Labour Relations Council (2003) suggests that there is an urgent need to establish ways of finding answers to the value crisis in South Africa. These sentiments were also voiced by participants, although some learners seemed to disagree with the notion that we are experiencing a value crisis.

- Many social ills, for example, drug/alcohol abuse, crime, HIV/AIDS, and the practicing of negative values, such as dishonesty, seem to be prevalent among children. However, the interviews with the learners indicated that they do not see their (immoral) behaviour as unacceptable, wrong, or out of the ordinary. They see their behaviour, as well as the immoral behaviour of adults, as characteristic of the modern times. Many learners claimed during the interviews that they drink, use drugs and have pre-marital sex because 'everyone else does it'. There-

fore, they disagree that the South African society is in decay. It is clear that the adolescents do not realize that 'the way of life' that they accept as normal is immoral and typical of the loss of a positive value system. The other participants (adults) who were interviewed agreed about the moral crisis, and they were concerned and eager that solutions be found.

What was apparent from the interviews is the fact that many adults claim to try to be good role models for their children, and to impart in them values that they think are worth living by, but, despite that, the children still seem to do what they like. The adolescents do not want to listen to adults, whether these adults are parents, teachers, or other community leaders. On the other hand, one has to consider the possibility that these adults – mainly parents – have not been adequately involved in their children's moral, emotional and intellectual development during their early childhood. This could be the reason why they do not have much influence on their behaviour in the adolescent years. The mindset of children needs to be changed so that they can become morally clear-sighted and responsible. They need to be convinced to change their behaviour – this will have to be done by their educators. If this is not done, the society will continue to experience the moral crisis.

CONCLUSION

There are numerous reasons for this moral dilemma, but there exists agreement that the lack of values in society, especially as far as children are concerned, is the most apparent reason. Many children do not have a proper value system because they lack positive moral guidance from adults, in particular from parents and teachers. Although the responses in the questionnaires seemed to contradict the literature findings, the information from the interviews, however, corresponded with the findings from the literature. The researchers recommend that the study be extended to other provinces in the country, because the extent of the problem as well as the guidelines may differ according to different circumstances. Additionally it is important

teachers, parents and community members seek to solve the challenges schools face.

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