

**The Development of a Coping and  
Life Skills Programme for  
Adolescents in a Rural Area**

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1 Timothy 1:17 “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

# SUMMARY

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COPING AND LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME FOR ADOLESCENTS IN A RURAL AREA

**Key words:** adolescents, coping, life skills, rural, farm schools

The purpose of this study was to determine the sources of stress, support systems, coping strategies and psychological well-being of adolescents in a rural area, and to use this information to develop a coping and life skills programme.

While all families face stressor events and crises, some are more likely than others to experience a series of challenges that threaten their functioning. Rural families often face a greater variety of stressor events on a more continuous basis than do families in metropolitan areas (Dyk, 2003). Rural families do not have as many resources and services available to address their problems as do urban families (Deavers & Hoppe, 2001).

Farm schools suffer from a variety of shortages. Many schools suffer from a pressing shortage of space and educational aids and in most cases there is only one teacher for every 50 learners (Van Kleist, 2002). Some of the learners have to walk more than 10km to school everyday because of the lack of transport. Most schools lack proper sanitation

and electricity. Recreational and cultural activities are curtailed through shortages of equipment and suitable locations.

Education in life skills may contribute to the enhancement of life quality. The development of constructive coping strategies protects mental health and enhances bio-psycho-social well-being in times of high stress. Previously it was assumed that each individual acquired these skills as part of growing up. Alas, the truth is that many people do not cope with life and never learned these skills. These skills should therefore be taught in a direct and systematic way, rather than being left to be learnt incidentally.

The qualitative research design was based on a sample of 56 male and female adolescents between 12 and 16 years of age. The adolescents were from four farm schools situated in the Potchefstroom area. Sixteen learners were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews to obtain basic information for the pilot study. Approximately 37 learners took part in the programme. The learners attended Grades 4-7.

The development of the programme was done in five phases. During phase one semi-structured interviews were held with some of the learners. During phase two the interviews were evaluated thematically. The data was then organized into conceptual categories and was then analyzed. During phase three the programme was developed according to the themes derived from phase two. In phase four the programme was presented at the schools as a trial test. During phase five the programme underwent some changes according to the findings in phase four.

The development of the programme went well, however presenting the programme was a more demanding task. Almost none of the participants could properly speak or understand Afrikaans or English.

In view of the above it is clear that there is no doubt about the necessity of the programme for adolescents that have been exposed to the consequences of a rural area. Recommendations for further research and the practical application of the findings are made in the conclusion.

# OPSOMMING

## DIE ONTWIKKELING VAN 'N COPING- EN LEWENVAARDIGHEIDSPROGRAM VIR ADOLESSENTE IN 'N AGTERGEBLEWE AREA.

**Sleutelbegrippe:** adolessente, coping, lewensvaardighede, agtergeblewe, plaaskole

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die bronne van stres, ondersteuningsisteme, copingstrategieë en psigologiese welsyn van adolessente in 'n agtergeblewe gemeenskap te bepaal, en om hierdie inligting te gebruik om 'n coping- en lewensvaardigheidsprogram te ontwikkel. Hoewel alle gesinne stresvolle lewensgebeurtenisse in die gesig staar, is sommige meer geneig om 'n reeks uitdagings, wat hul funksionering bedreig, te ervaar as ander. Agtergeblewe gesinne word aan 'n wyer verskeidenheid stresvolle gebeurtenisse blootgestel en op 'n meer gereelde basis as gesinne in metropolitaanse areas (Dyk, 2003). Agtergeblewe gesinne het egter beperkte hulpbronne en dienste beskikbaar vir die aanspreek van hul probleme (Deavers & Hoppe, 2001). Plaasskole gaan egter gebukkend onder 'n verskeidenheid van tekortkominge. Baie skole het 'n tekort aan spasio en opvoedkundige noodsaaklikhede en in meeste gevalle is daar slegs een onderwyser vir elke 50 kinders (Van Kleist, 2002). Sommige van die leerders moet daaglik meer as 10km skool toe loop, vanweë die gebrek aan

vervoer. Die skole het nie behoorlike sanitasie of elektrisiteit nie. Rekreasie- en kulturele aktiwiteite word beperk tot die minimum as gevolg van 'n tekort aan spasie en toerusting.

Onderrig in lewensvaardighede mag bydra tot die ontwikkeling van verhoogde lewenskwaliteit. Die ontwikkeling van konstruktiewe copingstrategieë beskerm psigiese gesondheid en verhoog bio-psigo-sosiale welsyn in stresvolle tye. Vroeër is aangeneem dat elke individu hierdie vaardighede nodig het as deel van die groeiproses. Die waarheid is egter dat veel individue nie met die lewe cope nie en nooit hierdie vaardighede aanleer nie. Hierdie vaardighede moet daarom op 'n direkte en sistematiese wyse aangeleer word, eerder as per toeval.

Die kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp was gebaseer op 'n steekproef van 56 adolessente tussen die ouderdomme van 12 en 16 jaar en het seuns sowel as meisies ingesluit. Die adolessente was afkomstig van vier plaaskole in die Potchefstroom-area. Sestien leerders het ad-hoc deelgeneem aan semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude, sodat basiese behoeftes bepaal kon word. Ongeveer 37 leerders van twee skole het deelgeneem aan die beoogde program. Die leerders was verteenwoordigend van Grade 4-7.

Die ontwikkeling van die program het volgens vyf fases geskied. Tydens fase een is semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met sommige van die leerders gevoer. Tydens fase twee is die inligting, verkry vanuit die onderhoude, tematies evalueer en georganiseer in konseptuele kategorieë vir analise. Tydens fase drie is die program ontwikkel volgens die temas wat tydens fase twee na vore gekom het. In fase vier is die program aangebied en tydens fase vyf het die program enkele veranderings ondergaan.

Die ontwikkeling van die program het vlot verloop, alhoewel die aanbieding van die program 'n meer uitdagende taak was. 'n Groot persentasie van die deelnemers kon nie Afrikaans of Engels behoorlik verstaan of praat nie.

Vanuit die bogenoemde blyk dit duidelik te wees dat die nut en belangrikheid van 'n coping- en lewensvaardigheidsprogram vir adolessente, wat aan die armoedige gevolge van 'n agtergeblewe area blootgestel word, nie betwyfel kan word nie.

In die bespreking word aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing gemaak, sowel as vir die aanbieding van die bevindings.

## CONSENT

I the co-author, hereby give consent that Chantelle A. du Plessis may submit the manuscript for purposes of a dissertation. It may also be submitted to the South African Journal of Psychology for publication.

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Dr. A.W. Nienaber

Potchefstroom

November 2006

# **INTENDED JOURNAL AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS**

*South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP)*

The manuscript, as well as the reference list, has been styled according to the *SAJP*'s specifications.

## INTENDED JOURNAL AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

### SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY

#### INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

1. The manuscript should be typed in 12-point font (Times Roman) double spacing.
2. The first page should contain the title of the article, the name(s) of the author(s), as well as the address of the author to whom the correspondence should be addressed.
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4. The text of the article should be started on a new page.
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# MANUSCRIPT

# MANUSCRIPT TITLE, AUTHORS AND ADDRESSES

## TITLE

**The Development of a Coping and Life Skills Programme for Adolescents in a Rural Area**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this study the necessity of the development of a coping and life skills programme for adolescents in a rural area has been investigated. It was established that rural schools are at a depressing state at the present time. Pillay and Lockhat (2000), also identified huge discrepancies between rural adolescents and their urban counterparts in mental health presentations. They indicated the necessity for further research to understand this situation and to develop capacity-building-programmes where applicable.

The participants were 56 male and female adolescents, aged between 12 – 16 years, from four farm schools in the Potchefstroom area. Semi-structured qualitative interviews in conjunction with action research were utilized. The results and implications for the presentation of the programme are also addressed.

## INTRODUCTION

This study forms part of the FLAGH-Project, (Farm Labour, Agriculture and General Health), conducted at the Northwest University's Potchefstroom campus. The focus of this study is on the development of a coping and life skills programme for adolescents living in a rural area.

It was not until the introduction of the Bantu Education Act in 1953 that the education of African children living in white-designated rural areas in South Africa became the state's concern (Levy, 2000). Prior to this the education of black children in white-owned farms had, along with the rest of black education, been left to private endeavour – either in the hands of missionaries or under the control of the farmers (Levy, 2000). The provincial administrations did not initiate education for the children of farm labourers and consequently few incentives existed for farmers to educate these children, other than those that still exist today, namely the desire for a literate (or semi-literate) labour force and the need to maintain a contented labour force. Schooling increasingly came to be seen as one way of attracting labour (Levy, 2000).

Levy (2000), also stated that if black children on white-owned farms received any education at all, it was along the lines of mission education. The emphasis was on religious education, followed by basic numeracy and literacy. Some children managed to succeed even in this

system and proceeded to further education, but for the majority education was rarely a feature of their lives. After African education was taken out of the control of the missionaries, farm-school education remained to all intents and purposes under the control of the farmer (Levy, 2000).

Harvey (2001), stated that most farmers, in response to questions about the benefits of education, claimed that they had established schools on their farms because they saw education as valuable in itself. Education was part of the sense of social responsibility they felt towards their labourers and the labourers' children, which went beyond mere material concerns. In poorer as well as wealthier areas there was consensus about education as conferring some social benefit and being part of a process of 'upliftment', which benefited the workers themselves, rather than the farmers (Harvey, 2001).

According to Van Kleist (2002), the farm school structure is in keeping with the national system for black primary schools as a whole. The primary-school course in farm schools is thus divided into two stages comprising the lower primary school (Grades 1 - 4) and the higher primary school (Grades 5 - 7). Educational provision in farm schools is variable (Van Kleist, 2002). Regional differences exist, with a higher concentration of schools in some areas and a dearth in others. Also, the size of schools might vary from the one-teacher school catering for the official minimum of 15 pupils to the larger schools such as the one on Crocodile Valley Estates in Mpumalanga, which has 14 classrooms and 474 pupils (Van Kleist, 2002).

Regarding school facilities, many schools suffer from a pressing shortage of space, while classrooms are often dilapidated (Hendrie, Kooy & Wilson, 2003). In many schools the shortage of accommodation necessitates combined class teaching, two or more classes

having to be taught by one teacher in one classroom. Combined class teaching in itself is not of overriding importance as far as educational achievement is concerned, though such a system requires considerable organizational abilities, resourcefulness, and stamina on the part of the teacher (Hendrie, Kooy & Wilson, 2003). It is when combined class teaching is associated with other factors widely prevalent in farm schools, such as poorly qualified staff, minimal materials, and inadequate facilities, that it has a decisive influence on the quality of education. In most schools there is a dearth of teaching resources, teaching aids, and libraries; inadequate classrooms prohibit the flexible use of space necessary in any form of 'open-plan' education (with smaller learning centers, a reading corner, project area, etc.) where teaching can be geared to individual children's needs, with children learning at their own rate, or to group work. In addition, teachers are poorly qualified, particularly in methods of combined class teaching (Hendrie, Kooy & Wilson, 2003).

According to Plaut (2002), two related factors merit attention: The high drop-out rate and the chronic poverty which permeates every aspect of rural life. Even of the small numbers of rural children who actually go to school, large numbers drop out, particularly in the higher standards. This coincides with the transition from the vernacular to English or Afrikaans as medium of instruction. Several Lowveld teachers believed that the dropout rate there was related to the tremendous difficulties pupils experience with the transfer to English (Plaut, 2002). To compound the problem (Maurice, 2000), the lack of infrastructure of literacy in rural areas – where there is little access to libraries, learning support centers, or adult education facilities – means that whatever minimal literacy level a child attains tends to deteriorate. Some schools in the Lowveld have introduced 'compulsory studies' after school hours. This enables children who have difficulty studying in homes, which are overcrowded

and have no electricity to do their homework under the supervision of the teacher (Maurice, 2000).

The hardship and deprivation suffered by blacks living on white farms has been well documented. The ways in which the problems of rural poverty and dependence coalesce in farm schools will be highlighted (Maurice, 2000). Farm workers get no leave and put in more than 60 hours a week with no overtime pay and where 'women and children work for nothing more than tomatoes. Related to this is the problem of widespread malnutrition; some of the worst cases of malnutrition arriving at urban hospitals are of children who come from rural areas (Maurice, 2000). In the Schweizer-Reneke area some children walk approximately 5km to school each day without breakfast; nor do they take lunch. The lack of established rural clinics and preventive and primary health care services leaves health care largely in the hands of the farmer. As there are no government-subsidized feeding schemes, any form of school meals must be financed by the school itself or by the farmer (Maurice, 2000).

Hartshorne (2003) stated that, absenteeism and late arrivals are so common at some farm schools that teaching timetables have to be rearranged on a daily basis to ensure that subjects are distributed in such a way as to cater for children who have missed lessons. Transport to school is a problem which remains despite official policy 'to bring primary education to the doorstep of the child', in the words of Maurice (2000), reflecting government policy of providing primary school education in white-designated areas but secondary schools principally in the homelands. Given their circumstances, it is not surprising that many parents can only accord schooling a low priority (Maurice, 2000). The costs of education (including uniforms, books, and writing materials) tend to rise as children proceed to higher standards and become prohibitive at secondary school level. In addition, children's earnings,

however meager, are needed to supplement family incomes. It is interesting to note that the dropout rate climbs steadily once children are of an age to become a paying proposition on the labour market. Their labour, whether in the form of household chores, looking after younger siblings while parents work, or working on the farmer's land, sometimes takes precedence over education. And for those who do manage to complete primary school, the rural labour market offers limited possibilities (Hartshorne, 2003). Hartshorne (2003) also stated that, acute squalor, chronic poverty, an almost total lack of alternative employment opportunities, dependency for jobs and housing on local farmers, and isolation from mainstream culture are the customary expectations of the average farm worker.

According to Roberts (2004), it appears that the high dropout rate at the end of grade 4 coincides with the time that children are of an age to supplement the family income. The type and duration of the work children are required to do varies from one farm to the next. Sometimes children may not be in school at all; or the school may be closed during peak harvesting periods; or children may be required to work only in the afternoons, at weekends, or during school holidays (Roberts, 2004). Payment varies from a pittance either in cash or in kind to the case, for example, of children employed by a Lowveld manageress in the December holidays only for no less than the minimum rate for adults. The type of work also varies from fairly arduous labour on the land to lighter work where young girls are used for odd chores in the farmer's house (Roberts, 2004). Hanson (2000) stated that, whatever the nature and extent of the work involved, what is significant is that the use of child labour is entirely at the discretion of the farmer, who may lay down work stipulations which prevent full-time school attendance. Nor is the work children do in any way intended to combine in educative ways with what they are taught at school (Hanson, 2000).

Ndandani (2001) pointed out that, rural schools are in a depressing state at the present time. Some of them appear abandoned by both the Provincial Department of Education and the community. A Large number of farm schools don't even have proper pit toilets and they are not fit to keep children for seven school-day hours, let alone to learn anything from them (Ndandani, 2001).

Pillay and Lockhat (2000), identified discrepancies between rural adolescents and their urban counterparts in mental health presentations. They contribute this to the unique life experiences of rural adolescents and the deficiency in mental health facilities in their environments.

According to Louw et.al. (1999), it is important to take some of the characteristics of the adolescent life phase into account:

- Cognitive changes that allow adolescents to engage in abstract thought, thus expanding their horizons to include the world of possibilities, and
- Social and psychological changes that allow them to meaningfully contribute to society.

However, always remember that, while physical changes during adolescence are universal, social and psychological dimensions of development depend on cultural context (Louw et.al., 1999).

Adolescence is a very challenging and demanding life phase. Young people's lives are considerably influenced by the significant physical, cognitive, biological and development tasks. (Louw et.al.,1999). Key concerns for adolescents, as mentioned by Du Toit (1999), relate to issues like identity, autonomy, peer relations intimacy and sexuality, as well as achievement. Psychological distress, physical dangers and other possible problems can be reduced by the development of life skills and coping strategies. It can also assist learners in

the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood during the adolescent phase (Du Toit, 1999). Holistic well-being can be fostered by the development of life skills and coping strategies, as well as the prevention of the development of some problems and the enhancement of the ability to cope with others (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003). Du Toit (1999), also stated that the facilitation of these abilities may help adolescents in the following areas:

- Improvement in relationships
- Coping with feelings
- Stating of needs and expressing what they want
- More positive views of themselves and others
- Making of informed decisions on sexual behaviour.

According to Ebersöhn and Eloff (2003), 'life skills' is the general term for all the skills and capacities needed by an individual to meaningfully enrich his or her life. It refers to a range of proficiencies important for the individual's effective functioning in the modern world. The basis for the concept 'life skills' is to focus on those skills and strategies that enable an individual to act in accordance to the demands of the self, others and the environment. In other words, the essential skills for people to cope independently and proficiently with demands and changes in various environments on a daily basis (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003). It is believed that everybody already has a magnitude of life skills, some they're not even aware of. The approach to life skills is proactive and preventative. Helping adolescents acquire life skills means that the intensity of all challenges, crises, misunderstandings and adjustments in the future is lessened. Ebersöhn and Eloff (2003) also pointed out that, with the help of life skills, you are capable of making confident and responsible contributions to your life, as well as influencing your environment in a proactive way.

Coping mechanisms and psychological defending mechanisms are being differentiated (Blignaut, 2004) although they overlap in the meaning of those constructs. Coping is mainly used in a salutogenic way. According to Ebersöhn & Eloff (2003), coping can be defined as: 'The efforts we make to manage situations we have appraised as potentially harmful or stressful'. Ways of coping play an important role in adolescents' unique reaction to stress. Coping styles that confront problems are more responsible for physical well-being than coping styles that are problem ignorant. The effectiveness of a certain coping style depends on various variables such as, intensity and controllability of the stressful events, the phases of the stressful events, approachable support systems, personality factors, cognitive evaluations and values (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003). It is important however, that the individual should be efficiently equipped to pursue the relevant objectives effectively. In this respect psychology can play a role in constructing psycho-training programmes which are appropriate for the needs of the individual or community concerned, are theoretically well-grounded, and are firmly anchored in values (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2003).

Recent research confirmed the vulnerability of adolescents (Blignaut, 2004) and showed that adolescents have the ability to obtain a variety of new emotional and cognitive skills in short periods of time. The preventative role of the promotion of adolescents' coping skills is emphasized. The development of a scientific reliable and responsible programme to promote the psychological well-being of adolescents is therefore very important (Blignaut, 2004).

In view of the above, the following research questions can be formulated:

1. What are the coping strategies and psychological well-being of adolescents in a rural area?

2. What are the implications of these findings for the development of a capacity-building programme?

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## Design

A qualitative design in conjunction with action research was used. Action research is directed toward social change; that means that its purpose is to try to involve the actors being studied in a manner that can lead to improvement in their social situation. Hence, action research is focused on the outcome that might result from the research being done. Its purpose is both to engage the subjects being studied as participants and to lead to practical outcomes. This type of research is common in studies of schools and other organizations (McBurney, 2001).

## Participants

Two farm schools, Sizamele Primary and Vyfhoek Primary, were involved in the development of the programme. Both schools are situated in the Northwest province in the vicinity of Potchefstroom. At Sizamele Primary there were 24 participants. The 24 learners consisted of two boys at the age of 12 years, one boy at the age of 13 years, three boys at the age of 14 years, two boys at the age of 15 years and another five boys at the age of 16 years. There were also one girl at the age of 12 years, four girls at the age of 13 years, four girls at the age of 14 years, one girl at the age of 15 years and another girl at the age of 16 years.

At Vyfhoek Primary the 13 learners that were involved consisted of one boy at the age of 13 years, three boys at the age of 14 years and one boy at the age of 15 years. There were also one girl at the age of 13 years, four girls at the age of 14 years and another four at the age of 15 years. At both schools the learners attended a mixed class of Grades six and seven.

## **Procedure**

The research was done in five phases:

1. During phase one interviews were held with eight learners of Sizamele Primary. These eight learners consisted of four boys and four girls. The interviews were done in Afrikaans. The eight learners who took part in the interviews could all understand and speak Afrikaans. Typical questions asked were:

- How many people stay at your house?
- How far is your home from the school?
- How do you get to school?
- What frightens you?
- What makes you happy?
- Who do ask for help when you have a problem?

2. In phase two the interviews were evaluated thematically. The researcher, together with a qualified data analyst, organized the raw data (transcribed interviews) into conceptual categories, and created themes or concepts, which they then used to analyze the data. Initially they immersed themselves in the data to identify the dimensions or themes that seemed meaningful for the participants in terms of coping strategies and life skills (first order interpretation); subsequently they then used some categorical schemes suggested by theory (second order interpretation). The themes derived from the first order interpretation were then classified in the following categories:

- Building and maintaining relationships with the extended family.
- Building and maintaining relationships with friends.
- Building a self-esteem.

- Improving communication skills.
  - Understanding basic human needs.
  - Coping with alcohol abuse.
  - Coping with conflict.
  - Coping with and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.
  - Understanding feelings and emotions.
  - Improving problem-solving skills.
  - Improving decision-making skills.
  - Debriefing
3. During phase three the programme was developed according to the themes derived from phase two.
4. In phase four the programme was presented at both schools as a trial test. No interviews were held with the learners of Vyfhoek Primary. The schools are almost identical and therefore the programme was just presented at Vyfhoek Primary as a trial test. The programme consisted of 12 sessions and the above-mentioned themes were included in the sessions. The researcher visited each school twice a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays, for a period of six weeks. Each session had a duration of 50 minutes. The programme was tried and tested to determine its level of difficulty and understandability.
5. During phase five the programme underwent some changes according to the findings from phase four. The results were the same at both schools. Although the learners from both schools attended Grades six and seven, the difficulty level of the programme had to

be changed to a Grade two standard. The reason for this was that Afrikaans is the learners' second language which means that they couldn't understand some terms connected to coping skills, for example: conflict, communication, emotions, basic needs etc. There was also discovered that the learners tend to understand the sessions better when graphic illustrations were incorporated in the programme. The sessions were therefore altered to be based on activities rather than theory. The data analyst also scanned the recommended programme to insure the trustworthiness of the data.

### **ETHICAL ASPECTS**

The Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences (NWU) - no. 01M04 – granted permission for this study to be part of the FLAGH – Project (Farm Labour, Agriculture and General Health). Informed consent from the parents or caretakers of the participants was obtained. The principals of the participating schools granted permission for the study to be conducted at the schools. The learners were under no obligation to participate and anonymity was maintained throughout the study.

### **RECOMMENDED PROGRAMME**

The recommended programme includes the themes and categories that derived from the data analysis that were done in phase two of the programme development and includes the following:

1. Building a self-esteem
2. Improving communication
3. Building and maintaining relationships with the extended family

4. Building and maintaining relationships with friends
5. Understanding basic human needs
6. Coping with alcohol abuse
7. Coping with conflict
8. Coping with and prevention of HIV/AIDS
9. Understanding feelings and emotions
10. Improving problem-solving skills
11. Improving decision-making skills
12. Debriefing

**(\* See addendum A for the full recommended programme)**

## CONCLUSION

Research studies on farm schools allow us to reach a number of useful conclusions. While investigating four farm schools in the Northwest Province, it was established that the adolescents attending these schools are exposed to conditions of extreme poverty and social neglect. The average adolescent living in a rural area must walk between 5-10 km to school each day because of a lack of transport services, completing such a long distance, especially in extreme weather conditions can take anything between 50 minutes to two hours. The schools open at 08h00, which means that the learners have to get up at 05h00 in the morning to allow them enough time for the long walk. Due to this as well as having to perform household duties before leaving many of the adolescents don't arrive at school before 09h00. Due to financial restraints these adolescents can't enjoy any breakfast in the morning, which means that they have to walk the long distances and attend school for the full seven hours on an empty stomach which in turn affects their concentration and scholastic performance to a great extent. The schools in this area are not subsidized by the government and therefore they can't provide the learners with the necessary meals or any form of nutrition. Most of the schools lack proper sanitation, which poses a definite health risk. The lack of basic amenities such as electricity, limits the exposure of the pupils to modern learning aids i.e. computers or the use of other learning aids such as overhead projectors although many of the classrooms even lack basics such as a black board. One cannot understand why these learners then even bother to attend school. An assumption can be made that the adolescents attend school to avoid

the circumstances they are exposed to in their homes and communities. Rural communities are known for high rates of alcohol abuse, domestic violence, child labour, etc. Most of the adolescents are staying with their grandparents or other members of the extended family because of their parents working away from home to earn more money or even just to find a job. This is a matter of great concern as they don't have any frequent or quality time spent with their own parents because their parents are either working or staying in the city for some or other reason. This means that some adolescents are obligated to be the head of the household during the week and have to care for their younger siblings. After school the adolescents must attend to household chores, which leave them no time to concentrate on their studies or to relax or participate in sport for that matter. The schools also don't accommodate any recreational activities due to shortages of space and equipment. In most cases one single teacher must supervise an average of 50 learners simultaneously which means that the adolescents don't enjoy any individual academic attention at school and in many of these schools discipline is simply non-existent. Given the illiterate rates among older people in rural areas means that the adolescents have nobody to turn to when they need any help with their studies.

The nature of the circumstances of these adolescents can't be altered with a quick fix. Du Toit's (1999), statement that adolescents who cope most successfully under these conditions are the ones who are equipped with a battery of coping strategies and who are flexible in adapting their responses to the situation, is therefore supported. Over and above the external influences of a rural community there are also internal factors that influence the well-being of the adolescents i.e. the transition from childhood to

adulthood. Therefore holistic well-being must be fostered by the development of life skills and coping strategies as previously stated by Ebersöhn and Eloff, (2003). In view of the above it is clear that the necessity of a coping and life skills programme for adolescents living in a rural area can't be ignored. A proposed life skills and coping programme for these adolescents was therefore developed. This programme was then tried and tested at the four participating farm schools. During the trial test of the programme it became apparent that the programme had certain limitations, mainly because of a lack of communication due to the language barrier. After the trial testing of the programme it underwent minor alterations such as simplifying some of the terms that were used i.e. conflict. An elaboration on the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for further studies will now follow.

### **Personal Reflection**

Visiting the schools for the first time was a pleasant experience. The principles as well as the learners were very receptive and eager to see of what benefit the programme can be to them. Presenting the first two sessions was a demanding task as it was a matter of trial and error. The researcher had to create an understanding of the academic level of the participants, whether they're more theoretically or practically orientated, and exactly how much of a problem the language barrier was. At first the participants were very shy to respond to questions and didn't really engage in the activities or discussions. As time went by they developed some trust in the researcher and realized that the programme was solely for their own benefit. They came to see the correlation between the weekly sessions and their own true-life experiences and circumstances. In the later sessions

though it became more difficult to maintain discipline for the full duration of the sessions due to the learners becoming more familiar with the situation and the researcher bringing their lack of discipline to the fore. The learners became disobedient and sometimes it was necessary for the researcher to terminate the sessions earlier than planned.

Despite the above-mentioned facts it became clear, through the behaviour of some of the learners that the programme was actually of some benefit to those who fully participated.

### **Limitations of the study**

The language barrier was the biggest limitation of this study. During the presentation of the programme it was established that almost none of the participants could properly speak or understand Afrikaans or English. Therefore the researcher had to simplify some of the concepts and ways had to be found to present the programme in a practical way with limited equipment available. The attendance rate of the learners was low. This can probably be ascribed to the lack of transport as well as the unforeseen circumstances the adolescents are exposed to. Once the learners were accustomed to the researcher it became difficult to maintain obedience and the teacher did little to restrain the learners. The lack of equipment made practical illustrations very difficult.

### **Recommendations for further research**

Further research on more farm schools is imperative. To create a better understanding of the exact circumstances and needs of adolescents in a rural area it is necessary to perform semi-structured interviews with all the role players including the extended family, the

teachers and the farmers. By so doing the developed programme can be fully engaged into every aspect of their daily life.

### **Practical recommendations**

Due to the long distances the adolescents have to walk to attend school, it would be best not to present the programme during the winter season or early in the morning for that matter. The learners very often lack concentration because of hunger or other factors. Therefore it would be best to break one session into two parts and present only one session per week but on two consecutive days. To maintain obedience it would be preferred to involve the teachers as much as possible. Ways have to be found to present the programme practically and the preferred language should be established before onset.

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## **ADDENDUM A**

### 1. Building a self-esteem

- To provide the learner with aids for self-examination in order to know – and therefore understand – himself better.
- To recognize that he – like all other people – have some strengths as well as weaknesses.

### 2. Improving communication

- To list barriers in good communication.
- To identify good communication skills.

### 3. Building and maintaining relationships with the extended family

- To let learners know that the family structure varies greatly with no ‘better’ family than others.
- To create an understanding that problems between siblings and other members of the family are encountered at some stage in almost all families.
- To promote an understanding of MY place in the family.
- To promote an understanding of the family dynamics.
- To provide insight into personal responsibility for family relations.

4. Building and maintaining relationships with friends

To create an awareness that:

- Friendship is an art that can be cultivated.
- To be good friends is desirable in life.
- To give insight into personal preferences about friends.
- To help assess conversation skills to overcome problems with friends.

5. Understanding basic human needs

To create an awareness that:

- All human beings have certain basic needs.
- Our goals arise from an effort to satisfy these needs.
- Good relationships involve a consideration of mutual basic needs.
- To give insight into how we attempt to satisfy our basic needs in everyday living.

6. Coping with alcohol abuse

- To understand the effect of alcohol on the body and behaviour.
- To understand how alcohol affects individuals, their families and society.

7. Coping with conflict

- To communicate that conflict in relationships is normal.
- To give insight into personal responses to conflict.
- To give an opportunity for practice in responding to criticism.
- To differentiate between self-assertion and aggression.

8. Coping with and prevention of HIV/AIDS

- To address facts and myths about HIV/AIDS.
- To address the concept that:
  - (a). AIDS is a problem.
  - (b). You have the power to do something about it.
- To promote an understanding of the seriousness of HIV/AIDS in communities.

9. Understanding feelings and emotions

- To promote insight into the extent of personal maturity.
- To provide criteria for assessing the pattern of maturity in those around you.

10. Improving problem-solving skills

- To behaviourally participate in activities and implement problem solving in their own lives.
- To cognitively understand the steps of creative problem solving.

11. Improving decision-making skills

- To examine the influence of decision-making.
- To understand the importance of responsible decision-making.
- To understand the thought processes involved in decision-making.

## 12. Debriefing

- To give the participants a summary of what have been discussed.
- To allow some time for the learners to ask some questions regarding any of the presented sessions.
- To prepare the learners for the termination of the sessions.
- To motivate the participants to use the skills they have accumulated from the programme.