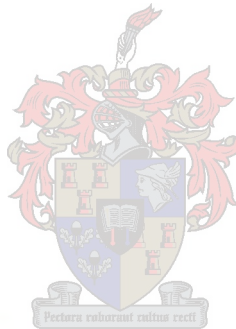# RESEARCHING SENSITIVE ISSUES IN EDUCATION IN THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE OF SOUTH AFRICA.

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DISSERTATION PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH.

PROMOTER: PROFESSOR J. MOUTON

APRIL 2004

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: 12 March 2004

ABSTRACT

Researchers in Social Sciences have generally encountered problems in ensuring data quality when dealing with topics that are regarded as sensitive. This thesis reports on an investigation into the methodology used for research projects around sensitive issues in education in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Data consists of twelve interviews with individual principals (each interview schedule containing semi-structured question items from ten categories) and a thirty-three item self-report questionnaire survey administered to one hundred and fifty principals drawn from two hundred and seventy two secondary schools over the course of an academic year (2002) and conducted in the Limpopo Province of South Africa..

Results reveal nine major categories of sensitive issues in school management on which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers: school policy, school financial issues, moral or social relations issues, learner and educator disciplinary issues, working conditions, absenteeism, developmental appraisal, educator unions, and religious matters policy issues. Principals have also reported on the various reasons why they regard each of the aspects as sensitive, thereby making it difficult for them to provide information around. Of these, moral issues were considered the most sensitive. The major reasons given were: confidentiality, intrusion of privacy, fear of legal sanction, threat to work and violation of the rights of the individual.

Analysis of the different sensitive issues also show that certain biographical characteristics – age of the principal and years of experience as principal – are significant mediators in principals' perceptions of sensitive issues in school management. That is to say, these contribute to principals' assessment of their emotional, physical and psychological well-being.

Sensitivity is a problem when collecting data for research purposes. It warrants the attention of all those involved in social science research. The findings in this study point to the issues in school management that are highly sensitive to provide information suggesting that data collected would therefore not be of a high quality.

ABSTRAK

Menige navorsers in sosiale wetenskappe het oor die algemeen probleme teëgekom met die versekering van data kwaliteit in sensitiewe onderwerpe. Hierdie tesis raporteer oor 'n ondersoeke in die metodologie gebruik vir navorsing projekte rondom sensitiewe onderwerpe in onderwys in die Limpopo Provinsie in Suid-Afrika.

Data bestaan uit twaalf onderhoude met individuele prinsipale (elke onderhoud se skedule bevat se gestruktureerde items van tien katagorieë) en 'n drie-en-dertig item (self-report) vraelys wat onder 150 prinsipale uitgedeel is, waarvan 272 sekondêre skole oor 'n tydperk van 'n akademiese jaar (2002) gebruik was in die Limpopo Provinsie van Suid Afrika.

Die resultate toon nege hoof onderwerpe in skoolbestuur waar prinsipale dit moeilik vind om informasie aan navorsers te verskaf: skoolbeleid, finansiële onderwerpe, moraliteite of sosiale verhoudinge, leerder en onderwyser dissiplinêre onderwerpe, werkverhoudinge, afwesigheid, personeelontwikkeling, onderwysunies, en godsdienstige sake. Prinsipale raporteer om verskeie redes waarom hulle elk van die aspekte as sensitief beskou. Onder hierdie is morele sake as die sensitiefste geklasifiseer. Die hoofredes hiervoor is gegee as vertroulikheid, inbreuk van privaatheid, vrees vir wettige sanksies, dreigemente in die werk en skending van die regte van die indiwideel.

Analiese van die verskillende sensitiewe sake toon aan dat verskeie biografiese eienskappe – ouderdom van die prinsipaal – is oorsake in die prinsipaal se persepties in die prinsipaal se sake onder die skool se bestuur. Dit se met ander woorde bo-genoemde dra by tot die prinsipaal se emosionele en fisiese geestelike toestand.

Sensitifiteit is 'n probleem wanneer data vir navorsing doeleindes verkry word. Dit regverdig die aandag van die mense betrokke in sosiale wetenskap navorsing. Die bevinding in hierdie studie verwys na sake in skoolbestuur wat hoogssensitief is om informasie te voorsien, en stel voor dat die data verkry is nie van hoë standard is nie.

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CHAPTER 1.

BACKGROUND AND AIM OF THE STUDY

1.1.   Overview

Many school principals in South Africa, particularly in rural areas, work under extremely stressful conditions due to various reasons. For example, situations which are dominated by a lack of resources and facilities which are essential for an effective teaching and learning environment; learner and educator disciplinary problems, and poor working conditions. In research done on sources of teacher stress in 1988 by myself, I found that it is difficult for teachers to give honest answers when asked sensitive questions regarding some school activities which are their source of stress.

This, I would suspect, might even be more difficult when principals are asked sensitive questions during research. Principals have more to loose in terms of status and reputation. They might be more likely to lie or give deceptive answers or even refuse to answer in order to keep themselves in their jobs or save face. I assumed that principals might experience conditions of adversity in the management of their schools, but the extent of this adversity is not always evident in their responses to questions in research. This highlights the fact that social science researchers experience problems in getting honest responses from those involved or in ensuring data quality when dealing with research projects that are regarded as sensitive. Issues of validity are acute given that the dissemination of invalid results and recommendations might lead to policy decisions that are not credible and potentially harmful.

1.2.   Background to the study.

From the preliminary study of literature, I found that sensitivity potentially affects every stage of a research process from design and implementation of the study, to dissemination and application of the findings. The problems and issues that arise at each stage take a variety of forms less commonly found in other kinds of studies, which may be methodological, technical, ethical, political or legal. Sensitive topics are emotionally loaded and only a highly skilled depth interviewer can get people to talk freely and with some degree of insight about their thoughts, feelings and formative experiences.

Further, I observed that methodological problems in research in sensitive topics are not only confined to the researcher. One of the distinctive features of social sciences is that

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to a greater or lesser degree, the participants in social research are aware of the fact that they are being studied and investigated and therefore tend to react to it. There could be various reasons for such reactions. Respondents may shade their responses to present a positive picture of themselves, which may be likely when respondents are asked about opinions, attitudes, appraisals, evaluations, values and beliefs. Disclosing personal information in interviews is problematic because it is difficult for individuals to judge how normal their own behaviour is compared to the other people.

Therefore, where research is perceived to be threatening, the relationship between the researcher and the researched is likely to become hedged with mistrust, concealment and dissimulation. This would affect the accessibility to and quality of data with usually adverse consequences for levels of reliability and validity. Stated otherwise, methods of asking sensitive questions in survey interview do not allow the respondents to provide potentially discreditable information without disrupting the interaction or causing embarrassment or loss of face to the participant. However, I could not find any literature about the methodology of studying sensitive issues in school management, in particular, in the Limpopo Province where principals work under extreme conditions of adversity. Thus, I did this research because I regard it essential in order to establish which aspects of school management principals regard as sensitive to provide information on and to understand why they regard these issues sensitive to provide information on. I hope this would enable researchers to establish the methodology of collecting information on those sensitive issues in school management.

1.3.   Aims of the study.

The main purpose of this study is to provide social researchers with an understanding of conditions of duress and adversity that exist in education that are potential methodological problems regarding the collection of valid and reliable information: researchers experience problems in getting honest responses from those involved in giving information about conditions of duress and adversity in education that they regard as sensitive. As a result, researchers would probably be in a better position to cope with the effects of sensitivity in research in education. In particular, the aim of the study is to

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- enquire into and critically assess research methodologies on sensitive topics with specific reference to educational research;

- empirically study a select number of cases in education where conditions of adversity and duress exist and assess their impact on responses of principals to research questions;

- investigate the association between the extent of overall sensitive issues in education reported by principals and their age and length of experience as principal;

- argue the need to establish a more appropriate research methodology for such research projects.

For an in-depth study of the problem, a number of questions have been addressed in order to meet the above objectives. The following is a sample of the major questions that have been used to guide the researcher:

- Which aspects of school management are sources of stress to you as principal?

- Which information about school management would you regard as sensitive and therefore have difficulty in providing information to researchers?

- To what extent is each of the issues sensitive to you?

- Why do you think the aspect is sensitive, and thereby making it difficult for you to provide information on?

1.4.   Significance of the study

No similar research has been carried out in the Northern Region of the Limpopo Province. This study therefore, would add knowledge on the problems principals in those schools are encountering in the management of their schools, and how researchers can identify those problems using the most appropriate methodologies through which reliable information can be collected.

It is hoped that this study will benefit principals and heads of departments in that it brings to light some educational and professional problems they should expose if they need expert assistance and improvement. To a greater extent, for social researchers, this study might provide valuable information on researching sensitive issues in school

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management and determine the most appropriate methodology for doing research on sensitive topics.

1.5.   Research design and methodology of this study

The empirical research done for this study consists of the following components:

1.5.1. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with a sample of principals of secondary schools in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

1.5.2. Surveys

Questionnaires were given to school principals through circuit offices were they were later collected.

1.6.   The structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of three parts. The first part reviews available literature on the methodological aspects, relying on literature around the methodology used in research projects on sensitive topics. By studying the most recent literature on research methodology, the study identified the researcher effects, observation effects and other sources of error that arise from studying conditions of adversity.

The second part of the study focuses on investigating factors which affect the conditions under which principals manage their schools. The research was conducted in secondary schools in the Northern Region of the Limpopo Province.

The third part of this study analysed the results of the study and identified the research effects, participant effects, research subjects' effects and several other sources of error.

1.7.   Outline of the study

A review of relevant literature and related studies has been undertaken and is recorded in Chapters 2 to 3. This provides a theoretical foundation for empirical investigation, an account of which is given in Chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis.

In Chapter 2 the concept of sensitive research is explored by examining various definitions of sensitive research, with the emphasis on sensitivity in respect of possible consequences due to the threat it poses to participants as it may result in unwelcome consequences. Various issues that give a clear understanding of sensitivity and its effects in research are explored.

Chapter 3 provides a background for the understanding of educational research: the scientific inquiry applied to school management sensitive issues. A conceptual framework for categorizing sources of school managerial conditions of duress is presented, and an account is given of several research studies on sources of the conditions of duress in school management among school principals. The methodologies for collecting such sensitive educational information for research purposes are broadly explored.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of the methodology used in this investigation. The study involved interviews with a sample of twelve secondary school principals and a questionnaire administered to 150 secondary school principals. The Interview Schedule used as framework is found in Appendix B, and The School Management Sensitive Issues Questionnaire compiled for the purpose of this investigation is found in Appendix C.

In Chapter 5, the survey responses answers are presented. Data from the survey are used to establish

- the extent to which the sample of principals perceive questions to issues regarding school management to be sensitive in providing researchers with information and why such information is regarded as sensitive;
- the association between certain characteristics of the principals and their overall perceptions of sensitive issues in school management on which they have difficulty in providing information to researchers;
- the association between individual sensitive issues in school management and certain characteristics of the principals;
- and the association between sensitive issues in school management and the reasons for sensitivity.

In Chapter 6, the results of the empirical investigation given during interviews are presented in the form of coded answers and quotations produced through the Atlas/.ti. Programme and, are explained and analysed. The data were used to establish the extent to which reliable information from sensitive questions can be obtained and to determine the appropriate methodology that can be used in research projects on sensitive topics in educational management. Results of both the interview and the questionnaire are analysed and discussed. The relationship between the two sets of data is also indicated.

Chapter 7 provides a summary of the main findings of this study. A discussion of the implications of the most sensitive issues in school management on which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers thereby negatively impacting on the methodology of collecting such valuable sensitive information, is given. Suggestions for further research are also made.

8.   Conclusion.

This study highlights the importance of having reliable and valid measures of variables so that it may be possible to statistically control for these in prospective designs. This research illustrates the importance of researching sensitive issues in school management using the appropriate methodology. The study is a contribution towards addressing what is widely considered to be a major problem in social research and in particular in school management in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the definitions of sensitive research are outlined, after which an attempt is made to show whether sensitive research implies specific threats to the validity of research results, and if so, in what way. Several topics central to sensitive research will be focused on: estimating population size; sampling techniques; question strategies; access; researcher roles; handling data; and disclosure and dissemination.

Researchers often find it difficult to produce valid and reliable results in social research – perceptions of social groups are context sensitive rather than based on stable entities that are retrieved unaltered (Coates and Smith, 1999) - as it addresses life problems. Siber and Stanley (1993) point out that such research under conditions of duress, which delves into deeply personal experiences, addresses some of society's most pressing social issues and policy questions.

A worldview shaped by culture affects all aspects of the research process, that is, the influence of race, gender, and ethnicity on the subjects we study should be understood in the manner in which these factors affect our selves and the research process. The researcher is neither culture free nor a neutral observer. Individual researchers are themselves members of several subcultures of their society. Policies and procedures must be sensitive to the needs and cultural context of those being studied (Bhui, Christie and Bhugra, 1995; McRoy, R.G., Oglesby, Z., and Grape, H., 1997; Coats and Smith, 1999). These include the concepts and populations to be studied, ethical judgments, study design, the instruments used and the way they are administered. Multicultural sensitive research therefore requires constant awareness of the costs as well as the benefits of altering routine research procedures and approaches.

Conventional researchers have often asked how to construct and conduct studies on sensitive topics (Jansen and Davis (1998). Some authors have claimed that quantitative research may not be the best choice because 'by its very disinterested nature, it often leaves subjects - especially those who are culturally distinct from the investigators - bewildered, alienated, and even hostile or afraid' (Goodson-Lawes, 1994: 21). According to this view, researching sensitive topics may be better achieved by a

qualitative approach, which offers more personal and interactive communication and has the potential to diminish the typical power relationships present in conventional research. Other authors have argued that participants may prefer more anonymous research contexts for reporting on sensitive topics and hence that the use of a questionnaire may be more appropriate. However, because the intent of interpretive research goes beyond reporting and looks for meaning, an approach that aims to elevate the perspectives of the participants may be well served by a method that includes face-to-face interaction (Jansen and Davis, 1998).

Sensitivity is highly situational, for what is sensitive changes relative to circumstance of the research and the biographical experiences of the people involved (Brewer, 1993). In the same vein, Sieber (1993) points out that sensitivity and the perception of risks are highly subjective. What the research participant or gatekeeper perceives as a risk or as a sensitive matter may not be perceived as such by the investigator. Some perceived risks or sensitivity may be connected only with imagined outcomes and not with outcomes that will actually arise. Fielding (1990) indicates that sensitivity is a social construction, and that what the researcher recognizes to be sensitive may not be what subjects find to be sensitive.

A large body of methodological evidence indicates that potentially embarrassing information or socially undesirable behaviours such as drug use, spouse battering and sexual behaviour, which are socially unacceptable, are often misreported (Bradburn 1983; Bradburn et al., 1978; Catania, McDermott and Pollack, 1986, Kilpatrick and Lockhart, 1991 and Tourangeau and Smith, 1996). Such topics are considered to be more sensitive than those in other areas of behavioural research. Threat associated with disclosing such information elicits bias.

Other social problems, such as rising rates of teenage pregnancy, have no doubt also contributed to the trend for surveys to ask increasingly sensitive questions.

Sensitive topics raise wider issues related to the ethics, politics and legal aspects of research. Issues of this kind, according to Lee (1993), impinge on all research, more compellingly however, in the case of research on sensitive topics. Their implications for sensitive research and how they affect validity will be explored.

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The study by Brewer (1993) indicates that the issue of sensitivity needs be raised from the shadows and be recognized, so that social researchers can give more attention to its negative effects. Because the research methods literature largely ignores the problem raised by sensitivity, there is little textbook advice on which to draw in solving them: solutions are devised in an ad hoc fashion on the basis of common sense and experience. This study suggested that when the research involves sensitive topics, the pragmatic compromise tend to increase in number and in magnitude of their departure from ideal practice.

The fact that sensitive topics pose complex issues and dilemmas for researchers does not imply that such topics should not be studied. As Sieber and Stanley convincingly argue:

> Sensitive research addresses some of society's most pressing social issues and policy questions. Although ignoring the ethical issues in sensitive research is not a responsible approach to science, shying away from controversial topics, simply because they are controversial, is also an avoidance of responsibility (1988: 55).

In the same vein, Lee and Renzetti (1990) and Lee (1993) argue that ignoring the methodological difficulties inherent in researching sensitive topics is socially and scientifically irresponsible because this ignorance may potentially generate flawed conclusions on which both theory and public policy may subsequently be built. He challenges researchers on this topic to seriously and thoroughly confront the problems and issues that these topics pose.

2.1. DEFINING SENSITIVE RESEARCH

Several researchers have attempted defining sensitive topics or research. A considerable contribution in defining sensitive topics is made by Lee (1993), a leading figure in this field (Denzin, 1995). Lee also made a contribution in the political, economic, social and personal aspects of sensitivity in his attempt at defining sensitive research.

Sensitive research is usually presented in a commonsensical way, with no attempt at defining it. The phrase is often used in literature as if it were self-explanatory (Lee, 1993; Lee and Renzetti, 1990; 1993). One approach to defining sensitive research would be to start from the observation that insofar as there is a common thread in the

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literature it lies in the implicit assumption that some kinds of topics potentially involve a level of threat or risk to those studied which renders problematic the collection, holding and or dissemination of research data (Lee, 1993; Lee and Renzetti, 1990). According to Lee (1993: 4), the term 'sensitive research' refers to 'research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it'. Threatening questions ask respondents about behaviours and conditions that are illegal, contranormative, or generally not discussed in public without tension, or relate to issues of self-preservation (Blaire, Sudman, Bradburn, and Stocking, 1977). Thus, according to Lee, the first approach to defining sensitive topics is that those topics that social scientists generally regard as sensitive are ones that seem to be intrusive in some way to those being studied.

Several studies on sensitive questions support this approach by Lee. According to Tourangeau and Smith (1996), a question is sensitive if it raises concerns about disapproval or other consequences (such as legal sanctions) for reporting truthfully or if the question itself is seen as an invasion of privacy. According to this view, research is sensitive when it intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience or when it deals with things sacred to those being studied that they do not wish profaned (Melton and Gray, 1988). However, Lee (1993) mentions that although it might seem obvious that research that intrudes into the private sphere is likely to have a sensitive character, this is not inevitably the case; topics and activities regarded as private vary cross-culturally and situationally.

Research is sensitive because of the guilt, shame and embarrassment associated with the societal stigma (Jansen and Davis, 1998); or 'because of the potential for violating the sacredness of the cultural heritage and the vulnerability in the inequality of the researcher-respondent relationship' (1998: 290). Loss of control over such information required by researchers, whether through compelled disclosure or breach of confidentiality, subjects individuals to embarrassment and degradation (Melton and Gray, 1988; Sieber, 1993).

Melton and Gray further point out that beyond the abstract violation of a zone of privacy and resulting threat to personal dignity, participants may be in danger of substantial direct harm. For example, questioning about one's status, as a patient with

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grave illness – or even the possibility of one becoming a patient - is likely to engender distress. Moreover, disclosure of participants' social status, even if simply as members of a risk group, may result in their being subjected to social stigma and legal sanctions. The major risk, Melton and Gray conclude, would occur if the level of intrusion broadens significantly.

Reeser and Wertkin (1997) studied the sharing of sensitive information with field instructors. According to these researchers, information is defined as sensitive if it entails personal or family problems, illness, or disability (e.g., criminal history, psychiatric diagnosis, or substance abuse). For this reason programs should delineate the rights of individuals to privacy, of clients to have their welfare protected, of agencies to make informed choices and have relevant personal information. Schools of social work, however, are currently struggling with standards, policies, and practices focused on the confidentiality of personal information. Without definitive policies and procedures regarding the sharing of sensitive information, schools risks charges of invasion of privacy.

The other approach of defining sensitive topics is to observe that those topics that social scientists generally regard as sensitive are ones that seem to be threatening in some way to those being studied (Lee and Renzetti, 1993; Renzetti and Lee, 1993). Another way to put this is to say that studying sensitive topics presents problems because research into them involves potential costs that may take the form of psychic costs, (such as guilt, shame or embarrassment) to those participating in the research. For a topic to be sensitive, the threat it poses should at least be moderate, although probably more often it is severe.

According to Sudman and Bradburn, (1974) threatening questions may introduce an element of tension into the interview, which alters the relation between interviewer and respondent and may interrupt the easy flow of information. Although good interviewers are trained to minimize such tension, Sudman and Bradburn (1974) and Catania, McDermott and Pollack (1986) point out that the potentiality for bias is always there, and is one of the more important sources of response effects. They point further that the higher the threat, the greater the response effects. According to this view, threatening behaviour questions are intrinsically more difficult to ask than non-

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threatening questions. As the questions become more threatening, substantial response biases should be expected, regardless of the survey techniques or question wordings used (Blair et al., 1977; Bradburn et al., 1978; Sudman & Bradburn, 1992).

Lee (1993) points out that there are areas in which sensitive research is more threatening than in others. These are:

❖ Where research intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience.

Intrusion into the private sphere need not always be threatening because there is no such a thing called private sphere. Topics and activities regarded as private vary cross-culturally and situationally. However areas of social life concerned with sexual or financial matters are highly conflictual. Other areas of personal experience e.g. (bereavement) are not so much private as emotionally charged. Researches into such areas threaten those studied through the levels of emotional stress they produce.

The situational nature of sensitivity raises a question about the degree of intrusiveness that is ethically permissible in sample recruitment and actual research procedure (Melton, Levine, Koocher, Rosenthal and Thompson, (1988). The degree of intrusion will therefore change relative to the circumstances of the research. For example, Brewer's research on police shows sensitivity to be highly situational. What has become sensitive to police officers in the context of Northern Ireland's divided society is not what other researchers considered being sensitive when studying the topic.

❖ Research concerned with deviance and social control.
Investigation into deviant activities is regarded as having a sensitive character. Those studied are likely to fear being identified, stigmatised or incriminated in some way.

❖ Where the research impinges the vested interests of powerful persons.
Areas of social life that are highly conflictual often produce topics for

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research that are sensitive. In such situations research can be seen by those involved as threatening the alignments, interests, or security of those in conflict, especially those in positions of relative power.

❖ Where the research deals with things sacred to those being studied.
The values and beliefs of some groups are threatened in an intrinsic way by research. Such groups as fundamentalists regard research into their beliefs and activities as anathema (a curse) (Homan and Bulmer (1982).

Deception and concealment are unacceptable and infeasible in sensitive research. These factors have obvious detrimental effects on levels of reliability and validity and raise a concomitant need for ethical awareness on the part of the researcher. According to Sieber (1993), issues of competency and validity are acute given that the dissemination of invalid conclusions might lead to harmful policy decisions.

In sociology, the sensitive nature of a study has frequently been used as a justification for the use of covert methods, a practice that many regard as ethically dubious. The argument is made that, because the topic under investigation is sensitive, research into it can be conducted only in a covert way (Lee & Renzetti, 1993).

Research that harms or offends, or that appears to be conducted incompetently, invalidly, or without due regard for consequences, is likely to result in someone questioning the prerogative of the scientists to conduct such research (Sieber, 1993).Sieber and Stanley define socially sensitive research as:

> Studies in which there are potential consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research. (1993: 3)

This definition introduces another approach of defining sensitive topic: that of considering sensitivity in respect of possible consequences. Sensitive topics are threatening because participation in research can have unwelcome consequences. For instance Lee (1993) states that wrong doing uncovered by research might bring with it the possibility of discovery and sanction result, and the relationship between the researchers and the researched may become hedged with mistrusts, concealment, and

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dissimulation. Such consequences have obvious detrimental effects on the levels of reliability and validity and raise a concomitant need for ethical awareness on the part of the researcher (Lee and Renzetti, 1993). Researchers have, on the other hand also demonstrated that persons who perceive fewer threats in the environment, who cope more adaptively, experience lower levels of emotional distress which may contribute to the collection of accurate data (Fawzy et al., 1990; Nyamathi et al., 1997). This suggests that a sensitive topic is one that potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which affects the researcher and or research data.

In their definition, Sieber and Stanley (1993) refer to 'potential consequences or implications' in the study in which the topic is sensitive. However, according to Lee and Renzetti (1993), this definition encompasses research that is consequential in any way as they do not specify the scope or nature of the kinds of consequences or implications that they have in mind. Therefore, the term 'sensitive', as used by Sieber and Stanley, almost seems to becomes synonymous with controversial.

Lee's simplistic definition referred to earlier is quite inclusive; it deals with behaviour that is 'intimate, discreditable or incriminating' (Kadushin, 1997: 1). It gives an indication that costs involved affect the researcher and the researched.

Research on sensitive topics raises a whole range of problems including those of a more specifically technical and methodological kind, from which this definition tends to direct attention away. For the purpose of this study, I regard the following as a working definition: Sensitive research topics are those topics that potentially pose a threat in some way to those participating in the research – the researcher and the researched.

2.2. THE PHENOMENON OF SENSITIVE RESEARCH

Before research on sensitive topics can be carried out, a clear understanding of sensitivity is vital. In the section above, an attempt has been made to define sensitive topics and research. In this section a review will be made of various issues related to sensitive topics that have been put forward by researchers in an attempt to give a clear understanding of sensitivity and how it affects research.

This section looks at the question of whether sensitive research implies specific threats

to the validity of the results and if so, in what way. The literature on sensitive questions demonstrates that the social desirability of the information being collected and the method of collecting such data can affect the accuracy of the answers that are obtained (Kilpatrick and Lockhart, 1991; Tourangeau and Smith, 1996). Several researchers contend that there are many problems that arise in studying a sensitive topic, among others, the ethical, technical and methodological, contextual and personal security problems that threaten the validity of the results (Brewer, 1990; Sieber and Stanley, 1988; 1993; Reeser and Wertkin, 1997). Such problems, which may potentially generate flawed conclusions (Brewer, 1990; Kilpatrick and Lockhart, 1991), will be discussed in this chapter in detail.

According to Brewer (1990), problems experienced in conducting sensitive research may defeat the researcher unless they bring a tough, single-minded, tenacious but pragmatic attitude to the task. Although these problems are not restricted to sensitive research, they are however, more severe when dealing with sensitive topics. They become a prominent feature of the research design and fieldwork, having to be continually borne in mind by the researcher at all stages of the research rather than just contemplated as a vague possibility or a theoretical truism once fieldwork is completed. Brewer writes further that some of the problems raised by sensitivity are easily solved, while others are intractable.

Where people are the subjects of research, their views of the researcher and the research itself will affect their responses and behaviour. The whole research process is, as Lewis and Meredith (1988) put it, subject to double subjectivity: that of the respondent and that of the researcher.

Henderson; Sampselle, Mayes and Oakley, (1992) and Schlesinger, and Devore, (1994); examined the conduct of research in a multicultural society. They framed their discussion within the understanding of culturally sensitive research - research methods are developed in a dominant culture to other cultures. According to these researchers, applying research methods and techniques developed in a dominant culture to other cultures can threaten the validity and generalizability of research conducted with other cultures. As Ben-David and Amit (1999) put it, cultural self-awareness helps prevent distorted perceptions of particular groups and helps the individual realize how much

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our own value, knowledge and biases affect our perceptions and service delivery to different groups. Being culturally sensitive is understanding the values and reward systems of a given community (Bickel and Hattrup, 1995; Hattrup and Bickel, 1993). Research with culturally diverse clients would require unique methodological considerations (Sohng, 1994; and Rodgers and Potocky, 1997).

Lee (1993) states that reliable and valid data can be produced from such studies in sensitive research without anxiety or hostility to the research on the part of those studied. Yet, in Britain, as well as in the United States, such surveys have incurred opposition that has persuaded politicians to withdraw funding. Sieber (1993) notes that such situations are not uncommon. Research on difficult issues is frequently open to misinterpretation by those who see political opportunities in denigrating social science.

According to Blair et al., 1977, and Tracy and Fox (1981), the potential for response bias in surveys of sensitive information can be considered particularly problematic: random response errors reduce the reliability of measurements; and systematic response errors jeopardize the validity of measurements. Tracy and Fox further report that the differing propensities among respondents to underreport or over report sensitive behaviours can lead to erroneous inferences regarding the extent and correlates of the behaviour. Consequently, such bias can vitiate the self-report technique, a method that, they report, is frequently the only way to measure certain behaviours.

According to Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) reliability of information is also affected by the researcher's dependence on data from retrospective studies. Most studies of spouse abuse as well as studies of childhood sexual experiences are retrospective; thus inaccurate recollection of details must be considered. Incidents may be forgotten or redefined. For example, a battered wife for whom the violence has ceased may redefine an incident that she considered extremely violent when it occurred as a partner's 'loss of temper' or 'a few minor slaps.' Validity of data is affected by data to be obtained only from a spouse, usually the wife. The incongruence of a husband and wife's responses, as well as the responses of children and other third parties, also needs to be considered.

Research involving the investigation of deviant activities is frequently regarded as having a sensitive character (Boruch and Cecil, 1993; Bergen, 1993; Lee, 1993; Liazos, 1972). Those studied are likely to fear being identified, stigmatized, or incriminated in some way. Areas of life that are contentious or highly conflictual often produce topics for research that are highly sensitive. This is because in such situations research can be seen by those involved in a conflict as threatening, for example, those who are in positions of power, those who are in a marriage dispute, or are suffering from one of these dreadful diseases like AIDS (Adler and Adler, 1993; Cole, Kemeny and Taylor, 1997; Herek, Gillis, Glunt, Lewis, Welton and Capitano, 1998).

Lee (1993) observes particular difficulties, which arise when research on 'sensitive' matters is carried out with members of the same family. For example, there is a range of patterns, which may emerge in the relationship between husband, wife, and interviewer. According to Lee, each partner may seek to obtain considerable information about the other from the interviewer. Alternatively attempts may be made by each partner to draw the interviewee into a collusive relationship in order to keep information away from the other partner.

Another example of studies carried out with members of the family is that of using children as research subjects. Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) mention that in order to study the family, most researchers use methods and instruments that allow them to penetrate the walls of the family without actually going into homes of families. The delicate issue of invading the privacy of the family in order to gain accessibility to the child and to obtain parents' permission to interview the child is also a problem (Herzberger, 1993). Researchers who study sensitive family issues involving children encounter difficulties. Consider, for example, the researcher who wishes to study the consequences of various sexual experiences and faces the moral dilemma of asking children sensitive questions about their sexual behaviour or about the sexual behaviour of family members and/or acquaintances. Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) conclude that asking 'insensitive' questions about sensitive family issues can harm the child especially if an adult has threatened the child with dire consequences for telling.

Another area of research regarded as sensitive is that of Human Immune Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). According to Kadushin (1997),

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the investigation of perceptions of social support by gay men with HIV/AIDS also qualifies as a sensitive topic because it requires men to acknowledge homosexuality or bisexuality as a minimum requirement for inclusion in the sample. Several of the study questions also asked about family knowledge regarding homosexuality and about the impact of the respondent's sexual orientation on family relations.

Homosexuality is also a sensitive topic. Kadushin (1998), in a recent report, confirmed what has earlier been reported by other researchers (Martin and Dean, 1990; Martin and Dean, 1993; Lee and Renzetti, 1993; Downes and Rock, 1982) that homosexuality is considered a sensitive topic because it is not only a private behaviour but also a behaviour that is widely condemned and frequently carries serious legal and social ramifications. The prospect of conducting feminist-inspired sensitive research on non-feminist populations also raises some methodological difficulties (Eichler, 1991; Millen, 1997; Connel, 1997)

As we move into the 21st century, cultural sensitive research is taking on new meaning (Henderson et al. (1992). A number of the assumptions on which social science research has been based are being challenged. According to Lee (1993), research on sensitive topics has tended to have rather two contradictory outcomes:

- the difficulties associated with sensitive research have tended to inhibit adequate conceptualization and measurement; and
- problems have also led to technical innovation, however, in the form of imaginative methodological advances.

As a result, research on sensitive topics has contributed to methodological development in both the widest and the narrowest sense. Coxon and colleagues, (1993) writing on the strategies in eliciting sensitive sexual information, point out that some methodological innovations have been developed to help produce better – more detailed, more reliable, more valid – data. Lee (1993) also gives some examples of such methodological developments. These will be discussed in detail later in this thesis. The methodological development examples Lee gives are:

- developments of strategies for asking sensitive questions on surveys;
- technical means for preserving the confidentiality of research data, and

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- sensitive topics raising wider issues related to the ethics, politics, and legal aspects of research.

2.3. PROBLEMS RELATED TO SENSITIVE RESEARCH.

Studies have identified five major problems encountered with regard to sensitivity that threaten the validity of the results; these are methodological problems, problems of technique, ethical, social context and personal security problems (Brewer 1990; Sieber and Stanley, 1993; Scarce 1994, Reeser and Wetkin, 1997). Sensitivity can also affect research design. These problems will be addressed below.

2.3.1. Methodological problems.

Sensitive questions are difficult to deal with methodically (Ackoff, 1953; Hedrick and Shipman, 1988; Gill, Hearnshaw and Turbin, 1998). Most researchers are unlikely to accept empirical data automatically without careful evaluation (Lieberson, 1988). Research practitioners must respect how clients perceive and give meaning to their life experiences (Holman, 1996; Haj-Yahia, 1997; Johnson, O'Rourke, Chavez, Sudman, Warnecke and Lacey, 1997). For example, Henderson, Sampselle, Mayes and Dakley (1992), in their study of the conduct of research in a multicultural society, enumerate the specific dangers to validity and generalizability of applying research methods developed in a dominant culture to other cultures. They describe a developmental model of cultural sensitivity and offered guidelines for culturally sensitive research projects. They conclude that applying research methods and techniques developed in a dominant culture to other cultures can threaten the validity and generalization of research conducted with other cultures. Some questions may be considered too personal and sensitive by some cultural groups, for example, questions about past and current sexual, physical, verbal, or emotional abuse. Such questions are difficult to approach.

A number of assumptions on which social science research have been based are being challenged. "Feminists and post-modern theorists have taken it further, suggesting that the authoritatively voice of the researcher be replaced by the openly acknowledged subjective voice of the researcher" (Henderson et al. 1992: 340). According to these researchers, inherent in these positions is an understanding of the power of culture in shaping the individual, which if not considered, according to Rooney and Bibus III

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(1996), may produce a constricted mindset not useful for interpreting and responding to complex human situations. Researchers must understand these diverse sensitive cultural issues and problems before they decide on what methodology they are going to use (Henderson et al. 1992; Williams, 1992; Kaslow and Brown, 1995; Shin and Abel, 1999).

Following is a discussion of the methodological stages in the research process and how they affect sensitive research.

2.3.1.1. Sampling

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the aim of sampling is to uncover as many potentially relevant categories as possible, along with their properties and dimensions.

Major problems faced by researchers who study sensitive topics (or high-risk behaviour) are in locating or attempting to delineate the appropriate populations that can be claimed to be representative (Ayella, 1993; Kilpatrick and Lockhart, 1991; Coxon et al., 1993; Martin and Dean, 1993). Coxon and colleagues write that it is unfeasible or grossly expensive to attempt to operationalize the appropriate populations although they may well be 'all male-to-male sexual behaviour' or 'intravenous substance use activities'. It is equally beyond the resources of conventional research funding agencies to carry out population-wide studies to identify minority and socially invisible groups.

Sensitivity leads to problems of selection. It is difficult to determine whom to interview. In studies of relatively innocuous behaviour or issues, complete sampling frames are often available that allow for random sampling and a sound estimate of sampling bias. The more sensitive or threatening the topic is under examination, the more difficult sampling is likely to be, because potential participants have greater need to hide their involvement (Sieber, 1993). In a similar vein, Renzetti and Lee (1993) further indicate that it is not unusual for the powerless or the disadvantaged to treat the researcher with scepticism, fearing that cooperation will further bring in its wake only their further exploitation. Treno et al., (1998) writes that the influence of selectivity bias on research results likely varies from community to community and from culture to culture.

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The researcher searches for information-rich key informants, groups, places, or events to study, that is, samples are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon the researcher is investigating. However, Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) point out that it is sometimes quite difficult to find persons who are willing to talk about taboo topics such as spouse abuse or childhood sexual experience. Some people believe that discussing such personal information outside of the family and/or ethnic community is in some way betraying their heritage (Raja, 1998). As Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) and Williams (1992) report, until recently, most studies on sensitive family issues were primarily descriptive studies of a few cases. For example, Meiselman (1978) reviewed studies of overt incest. Of the 36 studies that were conducted before 1970, 86% examined fewer than 25 cases, 64% fewer than 15 cases, 53% fewer than 10 cases, and 44% fewer than 5 cases. More than half of these studies involved fewer than 10 cases.

Kilpatrick (1987) also reviewed 34 studies reported between 1934 and 1986 in an attempt to account for long-range differential outcomes of childhood sexual experiences. Of these studies, 44% examined fewer than 50 cases (compared with the 53% in the Meiselman study) and 62% examined fewer than 100 cases. Of the nine studies published since 1981, all but two have used more than 100 cases. However, using such populations tends to create bias and limits the generalizability to other populations (Lequerica, 1995; Stevenson, Gay and Josar, 1995).

Brewer (1993) conducted a study on policing in Northern Ireland looking at sensitivity as a problem in the field research. Several problems were identified which affected the validity of the results in this study. Amongst others Brewer points to the problem of selecting subjects. To conduct that research Brewer had to obtain permission from the chief constable. The permission of the chief constable raised doubts among respondents about the purpose of the researcher's questions over and above those that naturally arise from the political situation. In this research Brewer mentions that participants were worried about whether their personal security would be compromised and expressed concern over the intentions of the police management. This had the potential for severely restricting the research, because 'gatekeepers' frequently impose explicit conditions on the way in which research may be conducted as well as on how the findings may be disseminated.

Dingwall (1980) called the approach by Brewer a 'hierarchy of consent'. Even though it can be assumed that the superiors have the right to permit subordinates to be studied, this does not, however, ensure that the subordinates will be cooperative. As Brewer (1990) and others (Hudgins and Vacca, 1985; Lee, 1993; Renzetti and Lee, 1993) have discovered, people in a research situation may intentionally undermine the research through obfuscation and deception.

In developing a community sample of gay men, Martin and Dean (1993) assumed that given the stigma attached to homosexuality and the increasing rate of antigay harassment and violence, only a very select type of gay men would be willing to state their sexual preference or describe their sexual behaviour during a brief screening interview conducted either by phone or in person. In fact, it is difficult to evaluate the representativeness of any sample of gay men since stigmatization prevents the establishment of a valid sampling frame for this population (Martin and Dean, 1990; Cole, Kemeny, and Taylor, 1997). Thus developing a sampling frame based on responses to screening questions would very likely include only gay men who were the most confident and "out" about their sexual preference (p.85).

Martin and Dean (1993) used several recruitment sources in combination with snowball sampling. They adopted and employed a combination of

- recruitment from diverse sources and
- personal referral into the sample by those individuals recruited through these sources.

The rationale for using this combination of methods was that recruitment from a variety of sources would help to ensure a broad cross section of respondents, while personal referrals provided by the numerous individuals recruited through these different sources would give them a more diverse sample.

Other researchers (Lee & Renzetti, 1993; Renzetti and Lee, 1993 and Shin and Abell, 1999) indicate that snowball sampling has commonly been used in researching sensitive topics. However, Lee and Renzetti state that while qualitative researchers have begun to develop a more critical assessment of the limitations of this method, survey researchers

have become more open to using similar network sampling methods to locate rare or elusive populations (Sudman and Kalton, 1986; Sudman et al., 1988). Martin and Dean's (1993) primary concern about the snowball sampling procedure with regard to selection bias was that respondents would influence friends' willingness to participate. They built the snowball referral procedure into every interview conducted, and interview men up to five generations removed from respondents in generation zero. Their work suggests that even in the absence of external validating criteria, it is possible to go a long way despite imperfect circumstances.

Martin and Dean (1993) indicate that the results of their study show that men drawn through non probability sampling methods can be seen quite similar, as a group, to those drawn from a defined sampling frame of gay organization members but taken together, the total group closely resembles two independent samples selected through probability sampling strategies. They conclude that sample selection using conventional probability techniques should be the method of choice when conducting quantitative epidemiological research.

Sudman and Kalton (1986) warned against the use of a range of alternative sampling procedures for special populations, and point out that it should be carefully considered before resorting to ad hoc convenience samples, especially if one wishes to generalize to the total special population.

However, Lee & Renzetti (1993) suggest the following strategies that can be used, singly or in combination for sampling populations that are rare and/or deviant in some way:

- the use of lists;
- multipurpose surveys;
- house-hold surveys procedures;
- the location of locals within which sample members congregate as sites for the recruitment of respondents;
- the use of networking or "snowballing" strategies,
- advertising for respondents;
- obtaining study participants in return of a service of some kind.

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According to Sudman and Kalton (1986) the use of special sampling techniques can lead to substantial and quantifiable savings of time and money. Martin and Dean (1993) add that the use of certain types of nonprobability samples does not preclude the estimate of population parameters. Progress is being made toward accurate estimates of biases (Sudman and Kalton, 1986) associated with various alternative sampling approaches, and it is likely that statistical refinement will develop.

2.3.1.2. Data collection

According to (Armer, 1973) data collection designs methods should be tailored for the specific research problem and specific cultures being investigated. Since every method has limitations and weaknesses, the most appropriate strategy is generally one employing a combination of methods and data types that counter balance each other's limitations.

There are extensive cultural variations in the suitability and difficulty of methods. For example interview questions with structured response alternatives may be considered "too brutal" in one culture and quite appropriate in another (Armer, 1973: 67). Questioning and answering are ways of speaking that are grounded in and depends on culturally shared and often-tacit assumptions about how to express and understand beliefs, experiences, feelings, and intentions. Although interview questions used in this example are complex and offer the opportunity for interviewers to vary widely in what they emphasize, the argument is intended to be more generally applicable. Ambiguity and complexity are omnipresent in all situations and types of discourse. 'Simple' questions are as open and sensitive, as are complex ones.

In his foreword to Briggs's (1987) review, Cicourel states that the most ubiquitous aspect of social science research is its reliance on talking to people about their experience, attitudes, opinions, complains, feelings and emotions, and beliefs. There is by now a huge literature on the problems of obtaining information from informants, respondents, and subjects.

According to Renzetti and Lee (1993) field research using participant observation, depth interviewing and the like has often seemed like an ideal way of studying sensitive

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topics.   The researcher who uses such methods relies on sustained or intensive interactions with those studied as a way of establishing trustful relations between researchers and the researched. In these circumstances, it is assumed; barriers to the researcher's presence are eventually removed to reveal the hidden, the deviant, or the tabooed.

Several data collection strategies that have seemed like an ideal way of studying sensitive topics will be discussed below: -

2.3.1.2.1. Interviewing

According to Brenner and colleagues an interview is taken as 'any interaction in which two or more people are brought into direct contract in order for at least one party to learn something from the other' (1985a: 3). The interviewer must leave it entirely to the respondent to provide answers to questions (Brenner, Brown and Canter, 1985). To Brenner intensive interviewing means quite literally to develop a view of something between (inter) people. If viewing means perceiving, then the term 'interview' refers to 'the act of perceiving as conducted … between two separate people' (1985a: 148).

According to Hutchingson, qualitative researchers commonly use interviews. In the hands of the qualitative researcher, the interview takes on a shape of its own (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981; Hutchingson, 1990; Bogdan and Biklen, 1998;). Interviews may be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques (Bogdan and Bicklen, 1992; Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). In all of these situations the interview is used to gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world. According to Jacob (1987), the goal in interviews is to have the participants talk about things of interest to them and to cover matters of importance to the researcher in a way that allows the participants to use their own concepts and terms.

Whatever kind of interview is used in a research programme, the ultimate purpose of the data collection must be to obtain valid information from those questions. As Dijkstra et al. (1985; 1985) put it; there is only one objective of survey interviewing: to obtain from the respondents valid answers in response to questions put to them.

Interviews, generally regarded as a traditional method of gathering information (Bale, 1990; McMillan, 1992), are believed to have the largest return (Hochstim, 1967). That is, ideally, informants should answer questions truthfully, while also meeting with precision the particular requirements for information posed by the various questions used. Interviewing technique must meet, ideally, two requirements: it must not bias the accounting process, and it must ensure a social effective interaction that helps the informant to report adequately.

However, qualitative researchers do not believe that by standardizing procedures they will get more valid answers. They believe that the very wording of the question will evoke different responses. Bogdan and Biklen go on to say that qualitative researchers attempt to seek out their own subjective states and their effects on data, but they never believe they are completely successful. All researchers are affected by observers' bias. Questions and questionnaires for example, reflect the interests of those who construct them, as do experimental studies. Qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take into account their own biases as a method of dealing with them (Florio-Ruane, 1987; Fetterman, 1988; Clark, 1990). As Patton (1990) reports, critics of qualitative inquiry have charged that the approach is too subjective, in large part because the researcher is the instrument of both data collection and data interpretation, and because a qualitative strategy includes having personal contact with and getting close to the people and situation under study.

Where the topic of research is a sensitive one, Lee (1993) points out that presenting it to respondents may not be easy. He points out that telling another about those aspects of one's self, which are in some way intimate, or personally discrediting is a difficult business. According to Briggs (1987) interviewers are particularly sensitive to the social and political implications of providing the desired information, because the interview process brings the referential or cognitive function of language to the fore.

Lee writes further that interviewing problems are particularly acute in societies (or groups) that are divided into antagonistic factions, especially if interviews can be identified with one of the factions, or if interview questions happen to be on a divisive issue. It becomes less so where privacy and anonymity are guaranteed and when

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disclosure takes place in non-censorious atmosphere. Researchers have developed the implications of this in sharply divergent ways.

One of the problems identified with interviewing is that of interviewer effects. According to Lee (1993) interviewers have an effect on the propensity of respondents to disclose sensitive information. Sykes and Hoinville (1985) point out that it is possible to advance two contradictory hypotheses concerning how the physical presence of an interviewer might affect reporting on sensitive topics: on one hand it can be argued that when an interviewer is not present respondents are less likely to feel threatened by questions about sensitive topics. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the presence of an interviewer encourages respondents to feel relaxed and therefore more forthcoming. Respondents are more likely to reveal themselves and grow emotionally when they perceive the environment as safe (Okundaye, Gray and Gray, 1999).

However, several methods of obtaining information from respondents can be used with minimal problems. Lee (1993) mentions two such methods of administering questions on surveys that he regards as the main ones: face-to-face using an interviewer, telephone interviewing where the interviewer is heard but not seen. According to him, there is little evidence that in general terms any one method should be preferred over the others.

Bradburn and Sudman (1979) found that varying the mode of administration of a questionnaire in itself had no consistent effect on the results obtained. Similar patterns emerge from much of the work that has focused on telephone interviewing versus other methods (Cannel, 1985; Sykes and Hoinville, 1985). Sykes and Hoinville found few differences in the distribution of responses to a range of sensitive questions whether the interview was carried out face-to-face or by telephone. In subsequent work Sykes and Collins (1988) have pointed to a consistent tendency for telephone interviews to yield a pattern of greater disclosure.

Bradburn and Sudman (1979) experimented by comparing survey responses against official records. They found that under-reporting of socially undesirable behaviour, also regarded as a major source of error in reports of sensitive behaviours (Jobe et al. 1997)

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occurred whichever method of questioning was used. However, face-to-face interviewing tended to depress reports of socially undesirable behaviour more than did telephone interviews. Bradburn (1983) also later report that there is no clearly superior method that yields better results for all types of question. Lee (1993) concludes from these studies that there is a need for a more sophisticated understanding of the conditions under which one method of eliciting sensitive data is more useful than the other.

In what would now be called a 'meta-analysis' Sudman and Bradburn (1974) undertook a systematic review of a very large number of studies that have looked at response effects. They conclude that in many instances interviewer effects do not exist or are small compared with other kinds of effect. Darrow and his colleagues (1986) and Warren (1988) studied the sex of interviewer, place of interview, and response of homosexual men to sensitive questions. They concluded that sex of interviewer and place of interview seemed to have little influence on the answers obtained.

There are however many ways in which interviewer effects can affect the validity of the responses they receive. Several researchers indicate that interviewer gender does affect the threat respondents perceive from questions (Johnson and Delamater, 1976; Axinn, 1991) and, as Axinn puts it, because of important differences in role men and women occupy in developing countries. Lee (1993) also points to interviewer effects of two kinds in relation to sensitive topics that he regards as important:

- the social characteristics of the interviewers themselves might have a biasing effect on results, and
- the expectations interviewers have about the interview itself.

In so far as interviewer effects due to the social characteristics of the interviewer are less marked than has sometimes been thought, there remains the question of how far interviewer expectations about the difficulty of particular kinds of questions may affect responses (Moser and Kalton, 1971; Bradburn and Sudman, 1979; Jobe et al., 1997). Darrow et al. (1986) points out that when socially sensitive information is sought, the manner in which the data are collected could seriously distort research findings.

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Singer and colleagues (1983) report that interviewers' expectations of response rates influence the response rate to the surveys. They have also found that such effects are much more powerful, at least so far as overall cooperation to the survey is concerned, than to the interview itself. However, according to Sudman et al. (1977), these expectations have, at most, very small effects.

More reports indicate that interviewer gender does indeed affect responses to some sensitive questions, with male interviewers generally gathering under-reports (Catania et al., 1990; Darrow et al., 1986; Padfield and Procter, 1996 and Ravat, 1999). Much of this is centred on what Warren calls the 'focal gender myth of field research':

> It is almost a truism of interview research, for example, that in most situations women will be able to achieve more 'rapport' with respondents because of their less threatening quality, and better communication skills (1988: 44).

For many years this claim justified mainly male sociologist writing on the basis of interview material gleaned by often-anonymous female interviewers. However, the myth proved to have a sting in its tale when taken up in more recent feminist discussion of research methods (Oakley, 1981; McKee and O'Brien, 1983; Asamoah, 1996). Rather than feminine 'rapport' being a convenient and taken for granted feature of interviewing, the much stronger claim was advanced that the interviewer's gender mattered and that male and female researchers would generate different kinds of 'knowledge' (Padfield and Procter, 1996; Dykema, Lepwoski and Blix, 1997).

Several researchers investigated the social exchange process in self-disclosure. The studies demonstrated that subjects showed a desire to disclose to same-sex people who had showed a desire to disclose to them; and that levels of self-disclosure became increasingly more alike between people as they interacted over time (Ravat, 1999).

Aquilino and LoSciuto (1990) and Aquilino (1994) studied interview mode effects in drug use surveys. They found that in surveys concerned with sensitive or embarrassing topics, the impact of social desirability on responses to sensitive questions may vary by mode of interview, and that mode interview effects themselves vary among racial and ethnic groups.

2.3.1.2.2.   In-depth interviewing

The study of sensitive issues conducted through the in-depth interview has implications for the power of both the researcher and the respondent. Brannen (1988) has noted that since respondents provide the researcher with information, which is extremely personal, they are vulnerable to exploitation. Gender, according to her, is also a factor. Women's situations make them 'easy interview targets' and she notes that trust is likely to be particularly readily established between women researchers and women respondents.

Lee (1993) points out that many researchers have epistemological and ethical objections to the use of survey research on topics especially of a sensitive kind. In these circumstances, a preference has been voiced for the use of unstructured or in-depth interviewing: it has an equal, if not prior, historical claim to consideration. As Jansen and Davis (1998) put it, the unstructured nature of the conversation allows the researcher to adjust the phrasing of questions to fit each interviewee's language ability and gives freedom to focus on topics that interested the participants.

In a recent review, Brannen (1988) has discussed a range of issues which arise when qualitative interviewing is used to research topics which are highly personal, threatening, or confidential. Such interviews, according to Brannen, are distinguished by a number of features that make them problematic by being stressful for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Respondents are easily identified by themselves and others close to them because data are unique and personal. Identification carries with it the risk of sanctions or stigma from various sources. Respondents are likely to find confronting and telling their stories a stressful experience. This is a problem for researchers as well as for respondents. Protection is therefore required both with respect to the confidences disclosed and the emotions that may be aroused and expressed. Brannen suggests that there are four sets of contingencies that surround the exploration of sensitive topics by means of qualitative interviewing. These are:

- approaching the topic;
- dealing with the contradictions, complexities and emotions inherent in the interview situation;
- the operation of power and control in the interview situation; and
- the conditions under which the interviewing takes place.

The context of the interview, and the way the interviewer handles the interaction with the respondent all can influence the amount and types of errors in survey estimates. Fowler Jr. and Mangione, (1990) and Mishler, (1986) state that in their studies, they have come to believe that one of the most important things an interviewer can do to carry out a standardized interview is to train the respondent. Fowler Jr. and Mangione suggest two ways of doing this:

- providing an introductory briefing at the beginning of the interview, and
- explaining specific features of a standardized interview as the issues arise during the course of the interview or a combination of the two.

Edwards (1993) points out that researchers need to recognize that their own sex, race and class, and other social characteristics, in interaction with the interviewee's own social characteristics and experiences, can increase or lessen the sensitivity of their research topics. This, as shows Edwards, may happen in unexpected ways, with respondents assigning social characteristics to the researcher, or giving a particular weighting to certain of them, that are not necessarily congruent with researcher's own perceptions of those characteristics. They are influenced by the interviewee's own experiences and understandings, as are their assumptions about the research.

After interviewing women about marital rape, Kennedy-Bergen (1992) concludes that the application of feminist principles to the interview method is an excellent way to conduct research on sensitive issues. He goes on to say that because feminist principles require researchers to scrutinize their methods more carefully, they (researchers) can avoid many ethical dilemmas, such as exploitation and deception that historically have plagued social scientists.

In the same vein, Brannen (1988) argues that situations in which women conduct fieldwork on women, maximize the possibilities for disclosure because to some extent, they share the position of powerlessness.

Punch (1998) points out that there is no single uniform prospective in feminism on such topics as researcher-interviewee relationships and self-disclosure. Rather, there is

openness to different possible meanings of these things in different research situations. According to Punch, feminist-based interview research has modified social sciences concepts, and created important new ways of seeing the world:

> By listening to women speak; understanding women's membership in particular social systems, and establishing the distribution of phenomenon accessible only through sensitive interviewing, feminist researchers have uncovered previously neglected or misunderstood worlds of experience (1998: 179).

Renzetti and Lee (1993) came out in support of Kennedy-Bergen, stating that when both researcher and researched are women, the commonalities of experience that result from their sex helps to overcome problems experienced when sensitive issues are dealt with. Edwards' research, however, indicates that race, in particular, may be a more powerful placement factor than sex and that self-disclosure may not be sufficient to remedy the distrust that minority respondents may feel towards a white researcher.

The overall findings of Catania et al. (1996) on the effects of interviewer gender, interviewer-choice, and item wording on responses to questions concerning sexual behaviour argue for matching respondents and interviewers on gender over opposite gender interviewers or allowing respondents to select their interviewer's gender. The intent of his studies on interviews is to find ways to standardize the stimulus or perhaps a better term, to neutralize it, and to ascertain respondents' 'true' opinions and to minimize possible distortion and biases in responses that may result from question or interviewer variables that interfere with respondents' abilities or wishes to express their 'real' or 'true' views. Other difficulties with verbal responses are the possible distortions in data transformation and/or the lack of conceptual or theoretical schemes to aid interpretations.

Despite the investigator's effort to prepare adequate questioning approaches, it can happen that the content of questions adversely affects the information's motivation to answer truthfully, that is, to provide an accurate and complete account of an issue. This applies in particular to questions involving "prestige, social gain, personal circumstances", and inviting informants "to maintain self-esteem, to be perceived by the interviewer as a person who does not violate important social norms in thought or act and to present an image of consistency and worthiness.

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The field worker may, for example, have to place her or himself in special circumstances in order to be able to broach lewd or sensitive areas with impunity. Communication is likewise impeded in certain cases by the proximity of would-be eavesdropper.

Burton and Blair (1991) point out that respondents may distort their answers for reasons of social presentation. Dijkstra and Van der Zouwen (1982: 3), refer to this as the general problem of 'response effects,' and note that the central concern of interview research is with 'distortions' because of the effects of improper variables, i.e. variables other than the respondent's opinion, etc. that the researcher is interested in.

Subjects respond to the researcher not simply as an 'objective' scientist but as a person with personal qualities and views, and their behaviour toward the investigator resembles their behaviour with others in their own words. These comments suggest the complexities and the range of implications for research practice, including preconditions for research such as informed-consent procedures, of the rather modest shift from interviewer roles to informant - reporter roles (Mishler, 1986).

While we may doubt the validity of what we are told about those whom we know intimately, we have little opportunity to dispute contentions about those who are socially distant. Social knowledge is shaped by an "imperative to triviality", a need to reduce the strange and the problematic to the level of inconsequentiality and the taken for granted (Rock, 1973: 28).

On studying members of the congress in the US, the author's concern was how frank the members of the W. Congress should realize that a researcher is not like a newspaper reporter. Pridham (1987) reports that when interviewing the elite of political parties, there are other factors conditioning the nature of responses quite apart from the individual abilities and willingness of respondents. A party's ideological position may affect the reaction to a research programme, aspects of 'national culture' may colour the success of one's inquires although this is a difficult question about which to generalize.

The main methodological conclusion to be drawn from the experience of elite interviewing in (Italy) is that, whereas the questionnaire was essential for providing a

general direction and a specific reference framework, the actual handling of the interviews usually depended on various unpredictables of which the most salient was personal rapport. It was important that the respondent was clearly aware of the level of political and intellectual sophistication being aimed at (Pridham, 1987).

According to Medhurst and Moyser (1987), there is always the possibility of interviewees accidentally or deliberately holding the enquirer at bay with streams of possibly irrelevant or purely anecdotal material. The respondent may require the interviewer to repeat a question, or may give inadequate information. When such problems arise, the interviewer must try to deal with them in a way that enhances the likelihood that in the end, adequate answers will be accomplished.

However, when the respondent firmly refuses to consider the question Brenner (1985a) suggests that the interviewer must accept the refusal. This is of course, because the respondent has not only the right to refuse, but it is also impossible to force the respondent to answer.

Dijkstra, Van der Veen, and Van der Zouwen (1985) argue that even though there are numerous problems of survey interviewing we cannot do without it: this procedure often constitutes the only access to the information we wish to obtain, given the usual cost and time constraints. Dijkstra and colleagues further report that respondents interviewed in the socio-emotional style provided more personal information than respondents interviewed in the formal style. Then respondents might have recruited vis-à-vis the general style of the interviewer, or the respondent might have acted considering only the one immediately preceding action of the interviewer.

Patton (1986) points out that the purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind, but rather to access the perspective of the person being interviewed. We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer (Phillips et al., 1997).

Regardless of which interview strategy is used - the informed, controversial interviews, the interview guide approach, or standardised open-ended interviews - the wording of questions will affect the nature and quality of responses received.

2.3.1.2.3. Diaries

Several researchers have made use of diary methods in researching sensitive topics. According to Midanik (1988), diary methods for obtaining sensitive information involve the respondent reporting his or her behaviour usually on a daily basis over some period of time (usually the minimum is one week and the maximum is one month). Diaries provide an appropriate data collection method where one wants to measure activities over time, the frequency or salience of which makes really difficult (Lee, 1993). Coxon (1988) and his colleague have made use of diary methods in a study of changes in the sexual behaviour of gay and bisexual men under the impact of AIDS/HIV. Coxon argues that reports of sexual behaviour based on pre-coded questionnaires and clinical data are unreliable. This, Coxon argues further, is because accurate recall is difficult, reported frequencies are often an artefact of the pre-coding procedures, and it is not clear what meanings terms such as 'sexual partner' have to respondents. For these reasons, according to Coxon, diary methods should be more reliable than retrospective accounts provided they are kept on a regular day-to-day basis.

Zimmerman and Weider (1982) developed what they call the diary-diary interview method in a study of the counterculture as part of an ethnographic research strategy they refer to as 'tracking'. They agree that within given settings participants may contain within them a number of diverse aspects. According to them, ethnographers face the problem of keeping track of the diversity of roles and activities in ways that avoid reactivity, the ethical problems that arise from covert research, and their inability to be everywhere at once. In a similar vein Lee (1993) points out that there may be reactivity effects, but argue that people, through keeping a diary, may become aware of their behaviour, and in consequence change it.

Waterton and Duffy (1984) in their computer interviewing in self-report alcohol consumption data study, report that if the diary method is used correctly, it should eliminate (or at least substantially reduce) any underreporting due to memory problems

although it is seldom adopted. Waterton and Duffy mention that it is widely accepted that all surveys that require respondents to keep logbooks of their consumer behaviour, suffer from the phenomenon of panel conditioning. The very fact of making respondents aware of their habits by monitoring them may precipitate a change in those habits. The greater demands that the diary method places on respondents may be reflected in high refusal rates, and, as Midanik (1982) reports, it is an intrusive procedure that may influence the very behaviour it is purporting to measure.

However, despite problems with this method it would seem that diaries have a role in the study of sensitive topics. Zimmerman and Weider (1982), report that informants, in their diaries, reported on daily activities, the relationship they had to other people who were involved, described the location, timing and duration of their activities, and the logistic involved in carrying out the activities. Detailed questions were then prepared on the basis of the diaries and used as the basis for depth interviews with informant. Zimmerman & Wierder argue that by using the diary-diary interview method, they were able to detect stable and recurrent patterns of culturally sanctioned social organization in the counter cultural world they were studying which would have been difficult to answer by other means.

2.3.1.2.4. Archives/Documentation

According to Brewer, (1993) some researchers use data archives in recalling the time period in which events and their reactions occurred. The use of archives may be problematic, due to selective and biased entry of such sensitive information in the archives that is often untestable. For these reasons, the accuracy of conclusions drawn from archival information is often questionable.

2.3.1.2.5. The use of research assistants

Brewer (1990), in his study of policing in Northern Ireland, used research assistants while he remained away from it. Most policemen and women periodically sought reassurance from the researcher about the purpose of the research, what was being written down about them, who would have access to the material, and what the researcher's politics and allegiances were. Trust has to be continually negotiated during fieldwork. It is not an agreement that is reached once and ends there. No researcher, irrespective of their sex, can ever be totally sure that respondents are being truthful. However, Brewer argues that his research compensated for this. Contact in the field

was made over a period of 12 months, making it difficult for respondents to sustain untruths and false marks. He had to write up the notes second-hand. It is however, impossible to know how much of the research assistant's experiences in the field were lost when writing up the notes second hand even though data mostly comprise accounts and verbatim records of spontaneous conversations in natural situations.

2.3.1.2.6. Randomized response method

The random response technique was introduced by Warner (1965) as an aid in estimating population proportions of sensitive behaviours or attitudes. According to Midanik (1988), the randomized response technique requires that each respondent be shown two questions, one that relates to a sensitive issue and the other a question that is considered 'non-sensitive'. Based on a rule derived from probability theory, the respondent answers only one of the questions. The interviewer records only the respondent's answer and does not know which of the two questions were answered. However, Midanik explains further, because the researcher knows the probability with which each question was answered, this information can be used to estimate the responses to the sensitive item.

The randomized response method, that, according to Warner, attempts to decrease the bias arising from falsified responses by allowing confidentiality to be maintained, utilizes indeterminate questions (i.e. the question answered by respondent is unknown to the researcher) and thus maintains the anonymity of the responses (Linden and Weiss, 1994, Warner, 1965). In other words, not even the interviewer knows what question the respondent is actually answering; the interviewer merely records the responses to a random question. According to Linden and Weiss, when anonymity is feasible, and made credible for respondents, random responding seems to have little practical value. Based on the various stochastic relations between the questions and the observed responses, it is possible to obtain estimates of the parameters in the aggregate. However, Linden and Weiss (1994) point out that the random response method does not offer broad applicability, nor is it particularly convenient. They warn that the use of a randomizing device that one must be trained to use seems awkward and possibly confusing and unintentional use of this device could result in inaccurate answers. Tracy and Fox (1981) also point out that although the randomized technique reduces some of the major methodological limitations inherent in traditional measurement approaches,

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they are however not recommended for all survey efforts and no one form is universally preferable. Warner (1965) also points out that where validation data were available, randomized response produced estimation errors of anywhere between 5 and 35 per cent.

Other studies have also cast doubt on particular variants of the method (Waterton and Duffy, 1984) or on its applicability in particular kinds of situations. They report that a small pilot study of additive randomized response conducted in 1982 showed that, although respondents were able to understand the confidentiality guaranteed by the method, they were not able to use the rather complicated conversion tables correctly by themselves.

Even among those who were found in favor of the method (Bradburn and Sudman, 1979; Tracy and Fox, 1981 Lee, 1993), there is general agreement that the technique does not provide a panacea, and that, in particular, if it is to work the method requires careful piloting.

While there has been considered interest in the use of randomized response, there have been relatively few back pages validation studies (Umesh and Peterson, 1991), a major difficulty is in finding independent valid estimates of the sensitive behaviour under consideration. A number of studies have shown that RRt (the randomized response technique) reduces the under-reporting of behaviour judged to be 'sensitive' in some way (Goodstadt et al., 1978; Bradburn and Sudman, 1979; Boruch and Cecil, 1979).

Despite considerable discussion in the sociological literature concerning the privacy of the research subjects, very little attention has been afforded randomized response. This is a data-collection technique that is specifically designed for reducing response bias arising from respondent concern over revealing sensitive information and for protecting respondents while promoting honest responses (Tracy and Fox, 1981; Martin and Newman, 1988; Linden and Weiss, 1994).

2.3.1.2.7. The nominative technique

Lee (1993) points out that the nominative techniques is a recently developed and promising alternative to the use of the randomized response question as a means of

obtaining reliable estimates of behaviour likely to be under-reported in response to direct questioning. It is a technique in which a person nominated by anonymous respondent interviews another face-to-face; no names are used in the collection of this information.

Firken's (1974) suggestion that a technique using information supplied about nominated others could be extended to the exploration of sensitive topics has been taken up by some writers (Bradburn and Sudman, 1979). Bradburn and Sudman used a version of the nominative technique to examine levels of drinking behaviour and marijuana use. They found that the method led to increased levels of reporting, even for respondents who felt uneasy about the question. They concluded that the results of their experiment were 'encouraging enough to make further testing of this procedure desirable' (1979, 150).

Fishburne (1980) after carrying out a study of the use of the method for obtaining reliable estimates of heroic abuse, found the following advantages of the nominative technique in relation to threatening topics:

- The anonymity of both respondents and nominees is maintained since information is gathered buy the unidentified other. Interviewer and interviewee reluctance to deal with the sensitive topic and the level of under-reporting should be reduced.

- The technique produces a larger sample size by allowing individuals to be enumerated at a larger proportion of households. This results in lower sampling error than could be obtained using direct report.

- The nominative technique potentially yields a more complete coverage of the population of interest since it may be possible for those frequently missed by household surveys to be enumerated in the shadow sample.

Lee (1993) also mentions a further possible advantage that the researcher is not required to hold information on individuals which is potentially incriminating, and which might be subject to legal seizure.

However, Fishburne, (1980) points out that the nominative technique is of little utility in the investigation of essentially private activities like sexual behaviour where the amount of knowledge available to others may be severely circumscribed. Nor is it useful where the population of interest contains a large proportion of social isolates. Lee (1993) also adds that because of the possibility of multiple counting inherent in the procedure, the nominative technique cannot be made to work in the absence of reliable data on respondents' relational involvement to be used for weighting purposes. Lee further points out that there is no guarantee that respondents will accept the informant role, nor is it clear how far there may be systematic tendencies to over- or under- report the activities of others.

2.3.1.2.8. Micro aggregation techniques

Micro aggregation techniques were originally designed to protect the confidentiality of sensitive data held in archives (Feige and Watt, 1970). It is also possible to use micro aggregation strategies on respondent rather than archival sensitive data (Lee, 1993), while Borach and Cecil (1979) suggest that members of a sample may be aggregated into a set of clusters. Members of each cluster are then requested to forward to one of their members anonymous questionnaires. The recipient of the questionnaires then averages to the research replies and forwards the average to the researcher. The researcher therefore at no point has access to this data. However, Lee (1993) further points out that there are problems of security co-operation with this method.

2.3.1.2.9. Validating self-reports

Lee (1993) writes that for many surveys, particularly those dealing with deviant activities, (sensitive issues) the results of other surveys often provide the only source of validation data. Having developed a new survey-based technique for studying heroine abuse, for example, Fishburne (1980) could only validate her survey results based on the nominative technique against existing self-report studies. Comparing the results of one survey with those of another, she said, has the merit of being convenient.

Despite recommendations by researchers (Midanite, 1982; Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, 1983) comparable surveys in sensitive research have experienced problems. Lee (1993), for example, observes that survey non-comparability may also be a feature of repeat surveys where the same questionnaire is administered to the same sample at two

different time periods. The procedures involved are tedious and expensive, in many cases where the interest is in sensitive issues. The necessary data are simply not available.

As Bethlehem (1999) puts it, it is difficult to compare response rates of different surveys due to the problems associated with non-response. Bethlehem further points out that for each of the surveys one has to study its non-response trend over the years. Surveys vary considerably in their quality. As a result, there is no reason to suppose that the data from one survey are any more valid than those of another (Bateson, 1984). Martin (1983) notes further that even quite minor change in survey instruments, sampling definitions, interviewer training, and coding and classification procedure can all produce non-comparability even in ostensibly similar surveys. Midanik, (1982) concludes by saying that most researchers choose not to validate their results by comparing them with data from other sources. She stressed the finding that whether an individual gives accurate information about a sensitive issue is based on many factors: the interview situation, the respondent him/herself, how the specific information is elicited, and the context of the interview. Midanik further suggests that future research should focus on the interaction of these four factors otherwise the whole research area would be locked in into an unproductive (and quite possibly false) set of circumstances which assumes that these factors are similar for everyone.

Lee (1993) also points out that another way of assessing validity from within the interview itself is to ask about the same topic several times over. Not surprisingly, as Sudman and Bradburn (1982) point out, this carries the risk of irritating respondents answering sensitive questions. Where questions with a high level of threat are used on a questionnaire, a more useful tactic, according to Sudman and his colleague, is to discover at the end of the interview how respondents perceived the threat posed by particular questions.

2.3.1.2.10. Focus groups

Focus groups, as used in the past primarily for market research, are now being used as data collection tools for certain phases of social research. Bowser and Sieber (1993) used focus groups at various stages in their Aids Prevention Research. They indicate that this simple and straightforward step can provide a 'grounding' of one's theories

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and hypotheses in the reality of the subjects and help craft the methodology to the social context of prospective subjects. They further indicate that this method would produce a higher participation rate than in the case with 'nongrounded' research.

According to Hoppe, Wells, Morrison, Gillmore, and Wilsdon (1995), very little information exists about using this technique to discuss sensitive topics. However, Hoppe et al. (1995) warn that focus group data are not readily generalizable because focus group methodology uses only a small number of respondents who are not generally selected through scientific sampling. They further indicate that disagreement exists among researchers about the efficacy of focus groups for eliciting responses about sensitive topics. They further suggest warming up to sensitive topics with introductions, general comments (e.g. remarks about current events), and nonthreatening questions, introducing the more sensitive ones once the group seems at ease.

IMPROVING METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Several suggestions are given for encouraging frank reporting by respondents, some of which are the following:

*   Open questions
Although closed questions on surveys offer a number of advantages in terms of reliability and ease of processing, Sudman & Bradburn (1982) give a number of reasons for using open questions when asking about threatening topics, and, according to Punch (1998), these open questions give little room for variation in response. Pre-coded responses must be organized into logical ordering with the highest and lowest frequencies at each of the list. All respondents receive the same questions in the same order, delivered in a standardized manner (Punch, 1998; 1994). Since respondents tend to avoid the extreme response categories on a pre-coded list, those who indulge heavily in an activity may under-report. Pre-coded lists may encourage under-reporting because the response categories have to be closed somewhere, and in some cases this may miss respondents with very extreme responses, Coxon (1986; 1988) has also pointed out that pre-coded responses or frequency behaviour often have an implicit logarithmic distribution which encourages under-reporting.

*   Long questions

When one is dealing with a topic which is threatening, Sudman and Bradburn, (1982) points out that there is some benefit to using long rather than short questions. However, Sudman and Bradburn accept that short questions are better when asking about attitudes, but argue that their research and that of others suggest that long questions should be preferred when one is asking questions about behaviour because

- longer questions can be used to provide the respondent with memory cues;

- longer questions take more time for the interviewer to read out, giving the respondent more time to think, and the longer one has to think, in general, the more one will recall.

- there is a tendency for the length of a reply to be related to the length of the question which elicited it. In taking longer to answer respondents may cue themselves into remembering additional information.

Sudman and Bradburn found that long questions reduce under-reporting of the frequency of behaviour reporting in response to questions on threatening topics. In a similar vein, Brannen (1988) points out that sensitive topics of enquiry cannot readily be investigated through the means of single direct questions, at least at the start of the interview. Respondents' accounts of sensitive topics, such as marital difficulties, are frequently full of ambiguities and contradictions and are shrouded in emotionality. These form an integral part of the data set and therefore need to be confronted and taken account of in their interpretation. However, Tanur (1983) points out that continued use of long questions may induce fatigue in the respondent.

*   Using familiar words

Bradburn and Sudman (1979) earlier experimented with the use of 'familiar words' in asking questions that are threatening to the respondent. They discovered that the use of familiar words did not enhance levels of reporting on sensitive topics to a statistically significant degree. Bradburn and Sudman (1979) found that used with long, open-ended questions forms, familiar words did, however, produce a consistent pattern of improvement in levels of report. They suggest, therefore, that it may often be worth using the familiar words strategy with long, open questions where other factors, such as the overall length of the questionnaire, do not militate against its use.

*   Embedding the question

The overall context of a questionnaire has an effect on the extent to which particular questions are likely to be perceived as sensitive (Bradburn and Sudman, 1979). Questions about drinking behaviour, to take their example, which will be less threatening on a survey of consumer habits than on one topic, can be desensitized by embedding them within the questionnaire in a variety of ways. One can, for instance, lead up to a sensitive topic gradually through a series of less threatening questions.

*   Interviews

Brannen (1988) suggests that the topic of the research should be allowed to emerge gradually over the course of the interview. However, she indicates that this approach raises the issue of informed consent. Disclosure of sensitive or confidential information is usually only possible in these situations once trust has been established between the fieldworker and the people being studied. Lee (1993) suggests that where this has been done, consent becomes explicit.

According to Brannen (1988) sensitive topics are difficult to investigate with single questions or pre-coded categories. Laslett and Rapoport (1975) and Lee (1993) argue that interviewing in depth produces more valid information when used in researching sensitive topics. Such interviews provide a means of getting beyond surface appearance and permit greater sensitivity to the meaning contents surrounding informant utterances, particularly so when sensitive topics are studied.

Advocating for an approach they refer to as 'collaborative interview and interactive research, Laslett and Rapoport argue that achieving a sense of collaboration in the interview enhances the quality of research by increasing internal validity. Lee (1993) concludes that, this approach, which Laslett and Rapoport see as being particularly appropriate for studying the private and intimate aspects of family life, depends on 'being responsive to, rather than seeking to avoid, respondent reactions to the interview situation.

This research method as presented by Laslett & Rapoport (1975) is not suitable for one-person research. Repeated interviews are carried out with several members of the same

family; specially trained interviewers are used, with interviews being carried out by more than one person, whose work is monitored.

However, lone researchers may have to develop slightly different strategies, as did Cannon, (1989,1992) in her study of women suffering from breast cancer. Interviewees at each interview were encouraged to discuss the previous interview and their feelings about it, as a way of involving them actively in the production of the data.

Lee (1993) points out that interviewing about sensitive topics can produce substantial levels of distress in the respondents. Lee argues that if the interview can be distressing to the respondent, it can also be distressing to the interviewer. Such levels of distress in both the respondent and the interviewer, Lee suggests, have to be managed during the course of the interview. Stress induced by interviewing respondents in depth about sensitive topics, and ways of dealing with that stress, should never be ignored (Brannen 1988). She further points out that other professionals are able to develop structured ways of dealing with stress and strains of interviewing as best they can.

This, Brannen points out, they do usually by turning for support to others in the same predicament (See also Smart, 1984, 256-7) something not always possible for the lone researcher (1987).

Repeated interviews, Lee (1993) concludes, have undoubted advantages in terms of the quality of both the data and the relationships which can be established with respondents. However, they may not necessary be needed in a number of circumstances.

Whatever interview strategy is used, termination of individual interviews and of the interview series is important (Lee, 1993). As Laslett and Rapoport put it, 'Both methodological and ethical considerations require that terminal sessions be well managed. (1975, 1974). Laslett and Rapoport argue that concluding interviews should give something back to the respondents. They gave their interview feedback about their analysis.

Informal interviewing is another principal method used in fieldwork during educational research. To do this, educational researchers listen more than they talk and listen with a sympathetic and lively interest. Informal interviewing can vary from casual discussions while participating in an activity, to open-ended interviews, to in-dept discussions with selected individuals called 'key informants'. However, where the tape recorder is used to collect data, the researcher must be sensitive to his environment in order to determine if using a tape recorder or taking notes in the presence of subjects will make them uncomfortable or disrupt their behaviour (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

2.3.1.3. Measurement

Several measuring instruments and techniques have been used in sensitive research. Amongst others, the following will be discussed in this thesis.

- Using questionnaires in sensitive research
- Computer-assisted self-administrative questionnaires
- Designing questions for sensitive topics

2.3.1.3.1. Using questionnaires in sensitive research.

Tourangeau and Smith (1996) report that several key methodological studies have demonstrated that self-administration of sensitive questions increase levels of reporting relative to administration of the same questions by an interviewer. They indicate that respondents are apparently reluctant to admit to an interviewer that they have engaged in illegal or otherwise embarrassing activities. Studies comparing self-administered questionnaires with conventional paper and pencil interviewer administration have shown that self-administration increase reporting of abortions, alcohol consumption and illicit drug use.

However, several researchers of sensitive topics found that using a questionnaire in sensitive research has problems (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994; Fish, 1999). For example, they found that the time it takes for someone to fill in a questionnaire is an important consideration - in general, the longer it takes, the fewer the completed questionnaires are returned. Fish found it difficult to reach her target of questionnaire

respondents because her questionnaire required a considerable investment of time and attention.

While questionnaire surveys in sensitive research, especially if anonymous, are easier for both respondents and researchers, they run the risk of bias from missing data and inconsistent responding. As Erdman, Klein and Greist (1983) report, it is very hard to even estimate the reliability of questionnaires or to know the rates of respondent over – or underreporting.

Self-completed questionnaires have other weaknesses. While questionnaires may provide more privacy because the exchange is silent, Johnston and Walton (1995) report that it is possible for others in the interview space to see the questions or answers, either during or after the interview. The very possibility may be enough to inhibit candid reporting. The questionnaire requires a level of literacy that exceeds the reading and writing skill of many respondents.

Catania, McDermott, and Pollack (1986) report that it is usually assumed that the order or sequence of sensitive questions in the questionnaire affects subjects' responses. Their investigation on sexuality does not confirm this. Their results are consistent with and extend DeLamater and MacCorquodale's (1975) findings, which indicate no apparent order effects in interviews on sexuality. However, they do not rule out order effects within sets of particular items.

Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) point out that there is a need for diversity in measurement instruments and data collection techniques in the study of sensitive issues. They further indicate that most researchers in the 19770s and 1980s used survey designs and gathered data through questionnaires. However, they suggest that when studying sensitive issues, researcher-practitioners must move toward more methodological triangulation, which, as defined by Denzin (1978: 291), is the 'combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon'.

2.3.1.3.2. Computer-assisted self-administration questionnaire

Several studies indicate that computer-assisted self-administration increases respondents' willingness to make potentially embarrassing admissions in surveys

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(Waterton and Duffy, 1984; Johnston and Walton, 1995; Torangeau and Smith, 1996). Across a range of items in this study involving sexual behaviour and drug use, the computer-assisted self-administration generally elicited higher levels of reporting than computer-assisted personal interviewing. However, Torangeau and Smith (1996) report that there are few indications in the literature that by itself computerization of the data collection process may increase the accuracy of the responses given to sensitive question.

Computer-assisted self-interview has a weakness for questions of a sensitive nature: the respondent must be literate enough to read the questions (Johnston and Walton, 1995). MacInterview, developed for use on PowerBook- the Macintosh line of notebook computers from Apple Computer, was the one feature that respondents found difficult to use, because it requires a more complex set of actions –selecting 'record' with the mouse, positioning the microphone, composing a free-form response, selecting 'stop' with the mouse, and then using the keyboard to move to the next question.

One study found fuller reporting of some sensitive topics with computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) than in comparable paper and pencil (P & P) face to face interviews (Baker et al., 1995; Nicholls II et al., 1997). These results have not yet been replicated by other studies. Nicholls II and colleagues conclude that if CAPI encourages reporting on sensitive topics, the effects seem to be small and inconsistent.

Researchers currently believe that computer-assisted self interview (CASI) rather than CAPI, is the most promising technology to elicit responses on sensitive topics (Nicholls II et al., 1997). Nicholls II and colleagues write further that CASI should reduce privacy concerns and minimize social desirability reporting. The respondent reads the questions from the computer screen and enters his or her own answers on the keyboard. An interviewer may bring the computer to the respondent's home or the respondent may be invited to a site equipped with a computer. A field worker is present to assist at the start, but the respondent operates the computer on his/her own (O'Reilly et al., 1994; Nicholls II et al., 1997).

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However, Nicholls II and colleagues conclude that the most effective combination of survey design features to encourage reporting of sensitive behaviour is unresolved and is still under continuing investigation.

Computerization can therefore have several effects on the data that are ultimately collected. The programs are typically designed to prevent errors of administration; as a result, computer assistance sharply reduces the number of responses that are inadvertently skipped and the number of responses that are outside the permitted range or logically inconsistent with the others (Kiesler and Sproull, 1986).

2.3.1.3.3. Designing questions for sensitive topics

Lee, (1993) indicates that in doing sensitive research, one must design the research for maximum validity and minimum offensiveness and must then negotiate with many gatekeepers, for example human subjects ethics review committee, community leaders, and the subjects themselves. According to Lee, the best strategy for protecting the sensitivities of research participants and community members and for avoiding the wrath of zealous opinion leaders is to design ethical and culturally sensitive research; and to interpret findings tactfully and judiciously, with concern for the interests of the research participants, the gatekeepers, and society.

Lee (1993) points out that particular techniques for loading questions usually emerge out of a survey practice rather than from a methodological research. Sudman and Bradburn, with a number of colleagues, have attempted to develop a more systematic framework for asking about sensitive topics on surveys (Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Bradburn, 1983; Sudman and Kalton, 1986; Wanke and Schwarz, 1997). Drawing on their own large-scale methodological pediments, as well as a systematic review of a large number of previous studies, they have examined ways of asking about a range of sensitive behaviour. They have also made a number of suggestions and recommendations for reducing the under-reporting of behaviours normally regarded as threatening or sensitive.

2.3.1.4. Gaining access

Access is a process (Glesne, 1999). It refers to the acquisition of consent to go where one wants to, observe what they want, talk to whomever they want, obtain and read

whatever documents they require, and do all of this for whatever period of time they need to satisfy their research purposes. If the researcher receives full and unqualified consent, then they have obtained total access. If access is qualified somehow, then they must explore the meaning of the qualifications for meeting research expectations. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state that the first problem to face in fieldwork is getting permission to conduct a study. They state further that some researchers circumvent this problem by doing covert research, the collection of data without their subjects' knowledge, however, they advice that the overt approach should be used. The researcher's interests must be known and cooperation of those that are to be studied must be sought.

A perennial problem facing field researchers in sensitive topics is that of gaining access to the research participants (Ayella, 1993; Lee, 1987, 1995; Taylor, 1994, Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Ayella points out that it is an ongoing process and also that formal agreement to access does not always command co-operation from participants, for whom further negotiation might be necessary. The researcher often 'must negotiate a way past gatekeepers who control access, and who may be reluctant, hostile, or dubious about the research' (Lee, 1987: 152) and often 'face careful scrutiny of their background and intentions', (Lee, 1995: 17). Some circumvent this problem by doing covert research, the collection of data without their subjects' knowledge (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). However, Bogdan and Biklen (1998: 74) have used what they called 'cooperative style'. They point out that some researchers have critiqued this approach and called for researchers to be more confrontational and deceptive.

According to Lee (1995), researchers seeking through others to find a point of entry into a setting render themselves vulnerable to investigation. For example, during his research in Mexico, Peritore (1990) encountered a journalist who promised to effect introductions to opposition candidates in the presidential election. While showing interest in the research, the journalist avoided being interviewed himself. Investigations revealed that he in fact worked for the political police.

Granting access carries with it certain risks from the gatekeeper's point of view. The research may expose unflattering or sensitive aspects of the situation, disrupt routine, or give voice to dissident elements (Lee, 1995). In addition, such risks have to be taken

with relatively little information about the background or motives of the researcher and with nothing binding the researcher to protect the gatekeeper's interests. Lee mentions further that it is not unusual for gatekeepers to allow the research to go ahead but only under restrictive conditions that allow them to monitor and control the researcher (Lee, 1993; 1995).

Once the researcher decides on the study they would like to do, they should get permission from those they would like to study which may involve some kind of bureaucratic organizations that may have specific procedures to follow in giving approval to researchers.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) states that even if permission is granted from up high without first checking with those below, it behoves the researcher to meet those lower on the hierarchy to seek their support. The arrival of the researcher on the scene with a research permission slip from the central office is likely to ruffle feathers, unless they do the necessary work first to court their potential subjects. While researchers may get official permission, the subjects may sabotage their study. Getting permission to conduct the study is more than getting an official blessing. It involves laying the groundwork for good rapport with those with whom they will be spending time, so they will accept them and what they are doing. A researcher should help them to feel that they had a hand in allowing the researcher to do the research and will help researchers in their research.

Going through the formal procedures that some bureaucratic systems require can be a long, frustrating process. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) suggest, many school districts have committees to review proposals, teachers' unions may have to review it as well. Because getting permission can take time, it is smart to begin negotiating well in advance of your projected starting period.

One of the problems that contributes towards difficulty of gaining access in social science research, especially when dealing with sensitive areas like sex and income is that of confidentiality (Rainwater and Pittman, 1967; Sieber and Stanley, 1988; Campanelli, Dielman and Shope, 1987; Coxon et al., 1993). According to Coxon and colleagues, it is difficult to convince the subject that the information they will give is

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safe. Where confidentiality is stressed, there is more reason to conclude that data are valid (Campanelli et al. (1987).

Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) improves the efficiency of data collection, however, the sampling frame of the electronic survey is restricted to members of organizations and populations who have access to computers and to people who feel comfortable using them (Kiesler and Sproull, 1986).

2.3.1.5. Data analysis

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), data analyses is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other materials that the researcher accumulate to increase their own understanding of those materials and to enable them to present what they have discovered to others (see also Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Wolcott, 1994; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Glesne, 1999). Analysis involves working with data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others.

While there are many different computer programs available for analyzing qualitative data and better software being designed which include the Nudist, Ethnograph, HylperQual, Qualpro and Atlas.ti, there are however, problems related to analysis of data. For example, according to Erdman et al. (1983), questionnaire surveys run the risk of bias from missing data and inconsistent responding. They indicate further that it is very hard to even estimate the reliability of questionnaires or to know the rates of respondent over- or underreporting. Catania et al. (1996), in their study on Interviewer and Question Effects on sex items report that their study was unable to verify bias in item responses directly. Although substantial evidence was available from which to infer the direction of the bias, the magnitude of the bias remained uncertain without objective indicators (Catania et al.; 1990; Catania et al.; 1996). Kilpatrick and Lockhart (1991) in their study on Sensitive family issues, indicate that the social desirability of the information being collected affects the accuracy of data. For example, spouse battering is socially unacceptable behaviour and, therefore, may be embarrassing for a respondent to discuss. Consequently, a respondent may minimize the incident ("a few

small slaps") or exaggerate it ("a brutal beating"). Reliability of information is also affected by the researcher's dependence on data from retrospective studies.

According to Kilpatrick and Lockhart, researchers rarely conduct any post facto statistical analysis, such as specification and elaboration that might provide a statistically controlled approximation of data collected. However, Tracy and Fox (1981), in their study of The Validity of Randomized Response for sensitive Measurements found that the randomized response technique reduces some response bias; it is far less susceptible to systematic response bias than is the other methods which are vulnerable to systematic approach.

2.3.2.   Technical problems. (Technique and practice)

Technical problems are problems of technique and practice. Brewer (1993) points out that the major technical problem in all ethnographic field work is that of engendering the trust of respondents, especially with sensitive topics where the researcher's presentation into the field takes longer and once successful, continually needs to be reinforced by intensive contact. This time factor also creates a technical problem. It is impossible to know how much of the research assistant's experiences in the field were lost when writing up the notes.

Sufficient rapport is established over time for a majority of respondents to talk quite openly about what are highly sensitive and controversial topics. For this reason data comprise accounts and verbatim records of spontaneous conversations in natural situations.

It is impossible to know the extent to which this knowledge (knowing who you are when you come to do interviews) has a reactive affect in the field.

Brewer (1993) mentions other problems in data collection where the topic is a sensitive one. These are:

- The problem of how to ask questions on topics researcher anticipated would be sensitive. Sensitive and controversial topics often occur naturally in conversation, or can be introduced in what appears a casual manner, because the social context encourages this.

- Another technical problem of great significance during data collection is that of recording data. The ethnographer's conventional note pad can be obtrusive, yet, when the time in the field extends t a full eight-hour shift, it is impossible to do without this aid. It is again impossible to know the reactive effects of this obtrusive form of recording data.

2.3.3. Ethical problems.

A code of ethics is generally "concerned with aspirations as well as avoidances; it represents our desire and attempt to respect the rights of others, fulfil obligations, avoid harm and augment benefits to those we interact with" (Cassell and Jacobs, 1987: 2; Smith, 1990; Smith and Thompson, 1991). Ethics or the study of morality has to do with what is good, bad, right, or wrong in a moral sense (Thiroux, 1974). According to Thiroux, it is, however, often difficult to draw a direct connection between behaving in a socially acceptable manner and being moral. Ethical principles include, but not limited to informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, harm to subjects, and privacy.

According to Brewer (1990) ethical problems describe the moral dilemma raised by research. Being ethical in the conduct of sensitive research also means being culturally sensitive in the way one designs the research and interacts with research participants, community members, gatekeepers, and the relevant others (Ayella, 1993; Sieber, 1993; Glesne, 1999). Cultural sensitivity is used here to refer to the understanding and approaches that enable one to gain access to individuals in a given culture or subculture, to learn about their actual life-styles (beliefs, habits, needs, fears, risks), and to communicate in ways that the individuals understand, believe, regard as relevant to themselves, and are likely to act upon. According to Thiroux (1974), it may at times be necessary to violate the 'manners' of a particular society in order to act morally or to bring to light a moral problem.

Moral philosophers have always been critical of the notion that our standard must be the rules of the culture we live in (Thiroux, 1974; Lancy, 1993; Hodge and McNally, 1998). To this notion, Thiroux mentions that the moral philosophers raise a number of objections though they do not all stress the same ones. One objection is that the actual

rules of a society are never very precise. Another objection is that prevailing rules are generally literal, negative, and conservative, not affirmative, constructive, creative, or adaptable to new situations. The other objection is that moral rules seem to vary from culture to culture.

Having agreed on one ground or another that the standard of right and wrong cannot be simply the prevailing set of moral rules, moral philosophers have offered a variety of alternative standards. According to Thiroux (1974) and Frankena, (1973), two major theories emerge in the history of ethics: the consequentialist (teleological) and the nonconsequentialist (deontological) theories. Consequentialist theories say that the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory, etc., is the nonmoral value that is brought into being; and nonconsequetialist theories assert that there are, at least, other considerations which may make an action or rule right or obligatory besides the goodness or badness of its consequences – certain features of the act itself other than the value it brings existence.

There are two major consequentialists ethical theories, these are ethical egoism and utilitarianism. They both agree that human beings ought to behave in ways which will bring about good consequences. They differ, however, in that they disagree on who should benefit from these consequences. The ethical egoist essentially says that human beings ought to act in their own self-interest, whereas utilitarians essentially say that human beings ought to act in the interest of all concerned (Thiroux, 1974).

According to Thiroux, (1974) and Frankena (1973) utilitarianism is generally found in two main forms: act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism essentially says that everyone should perform that act which will bring about the greatest good over bad for everyone affected by the act. Its advocates do not believe in setting up moral rules for action because they feel that each situation is different and each person is different. Each individual, then, must assess the situation he or she is involved in and try to figure out which act would bring about the greatest amount of good consequences with the least amount of bad consequences, not just for himself or herself, as in egoism, but for everyone involved in the situation. However, rule utilitarianism says that everyone should always follow that rule or those rules which will bring about the greatest good for all concerned. Rule utilitarian try, from experience and careful

reasoning, to set up a series of rules which, when followed, would yield the greatest good for all humanity (Thiroux, 1974; Frankena, 1973). To the rule utilitarian's way of thinking, "it is foolish and dangerous to leave moral actions up to individuals without giving them some guidance and without trying to establish some sort of stability and moral order to society" (Thiroux, 1974: 44). As Frankena (1973) puts it, these rules are valid independently of whether or not they promote the good. Rule utilitarianism seems to be a more moral approach than merely trying to attain the greatest good for the greatest number.

Nonconsequetialist theories are based on something other than the consequences of a person's actions. Acts or people are to be judged moral or immoral regardless of the consequences of actions (Thiroux, 1974). Nonconsequetialist theories fall into two categories, act and rule nonconsequentialism. Act noncosequentialists assume that there are no general moral rules or theories at all but only particular actions, situations, and people about which we can generalize. What a person decides in a particular situation, since he or she cannot use any rules or standards, is based on what he or she believes or feels (intuits) to be the right action to take. Individuals must decide what they feel is the right thing to do, and then do it (Thiroux, 1974). Rule nonconsequentialists believe that there are or can be rules which are the only basis for morality and that consequences do not matter – following the rules, which are right moral commands , is what is moral, not what happens because one follows the rules.

According to Lee and Renzetti (1990), where sensitive topics are involved, utilitarianism can lead to a lessened rather than to a heightened ethical awareness, while deontological theories may be too restrictive. Utilitarianism determines the social worth of individuals in a society, so that those people who are "worth" more to society, such as professional people, are given more benefits (for instance, medical) than those who are not. In other words, "the greatest good for all concerned" can often be interpreted as "the greatest good for the majority," with possible immoral consequences to any individual in the minority (Thiroux, 1974:50). Macintyre (1982) argued that one difficulty with a utilitarian approach to ethical decision making is that there is no consensus among social scientists about what counts as a benefit. Nonconsequentialist theories clearly state the do's and don'ts. Consequently, "a system which operates on

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such rigid absolutes as does nonconsequentialism closes the door on further discussion of moral quandaries" (Thiroux, 1974:70).

Frankena (1973) indicated that a utilitarian theory says that the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory, etc. is the nonmoral value that is brought into being. Thus, an act is right if and only if it or the rule under which it falls produces, will probably produce, or is intended to produce at least as great a balance of good or evil as any available alternative; an act is wrong if and only if it does not do so.

Johnson (1986) reported that he encountered considerable resistance to his presence from the female elementary school teachers he was observing because these women typically had their professionalism and authority undercut by their male colleagues and supervisors. As Johnson reported it, the teachers needed to determine whether he, as a man, could be trusted.

Ethics and politics, intertwined in sensitive research, are about the manifold of interests and feelings - one's own and those of others- that must be recognized, understood, and taken into consideration to achieve optimally good results (Sieber, 1993).

Punch (1994: 85), who focuses on 'the political perils and ethical pitfalls of actually carrying out research', describes political issues new researchers must attend to, and argues that 'fieldwork is not a soft option but represents a demanding craft that involves coping with multiple negotiations and dealing with a wide range of ethical dilemmas'.

Eisner (1991), who focuses on educational research, claims that there is unanimous agreement among researchers and evaluators that their work and behaviour should be ethical. Ethics permeates all aspects of our lives. For example, honesty is essential to research quality as well as to our everyday dealings with others (Soltis, 1990). Eisner claims further that that there is unanimous agreement that educational researchers should avoid unethical behaviour and that doing good is better than doing harm. Eisner goes on to say that virtually all researchers agree that deception is bad and that honesty is good. Researchers prefer a virtuous relationship with others, even those they study, and the idea of deceiving others violates personal moral code.

In value-free social science, field related ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles. Ethics is emotionally charged and surrounded with evocative and hidden meanings. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998), two issues dominate traditional official guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and protection of subjects from harm. These guidelines attempt to insure that: subjects enter research projects voluntarily, understanding the nature of the study and the dangers and obligations that are involved; and that subjects are not exposed to risks that are greater than the gains they might derive. These issues will hold for any research that is sensitive in nature and these are the views that will be respected throughout this thesis.

Criteria for a research design involve not only selection of information-rich informants and efficient research strategies, but also adherence to research ethics. When a researcher studies those topics that are sensitive for example, profound ethical dilemmas arise: "When one decides to attempt to enter their world and to study it, the field worker arrives at a true moral, ethical, and legal existential crisis" (Soloway and Walters, 1977: 161). Most researchers devise roles that elicit cooperation, trust, openness, and acceptance. When people adjust their priorities and routines to help a researcher or even tolerate a researcher's presence, they are giving of themselves (McMillan and Schumarcher, 1993). A researcher is indebted to these persons.

Following is the discussion on the potential ethical dilemmas as adopted by several researchers conducting fieldwork in and the codes of ethics:

2.3.3.1. Informed consent as a dialogue.

In obtaining permission to enter the field, most researchers give assurances of confidentiality and anonymity and describe the intended use of the data. According to Smith (1990), many researchers view informed consent as a dialogue - each new participant in the study is informed of the purpose and is assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Glesne (1999) states that the appropriateness of informed consent, particularly written consent forms, however, is a debated issue that accompanies discussions of codes of ethics by qualitative inquirers. According to Glesne, through informed consent, potential study participants are made aware

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(1) that participation is voluntary,

(2) of aspects of the research that might affect their well-being, and

(3) that they may freely choose to stop participation at any point in the study.

Informing participants is done in a manner to encourage free choice of participation. Because researchers seek to establish trusting relationships, they need to plan how to handle the dialogue.

Consistent with its commitment to individual autonomy, social science insists that research subjects have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments in which they are involved (Christians, 2000). Christians mentions further that subjects must agree voluntarily to participate - that is, without physical or psychological coercion. In addition, their agreement must be based on full and open information. Subjects should be told of the researcher's interests and should give permission to proceed (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). Bogdan and Biklen further indicate that the researcher must get a written consent. Researchers should neither lie to subjects nor record conversations on hidden mechanical devices. A sense of comfort is important so that people will be more likely to reveal to researchers what they really think (Eisner, 1991). Educational researchers who convey to teachers a sincere interest in their opinions and ideas are likely to elicit a great deal of information that individuals may not even know they are providing. As Punch (1994) observes, the codes of ethics should serve as a guideline prior to fieldwork, but not intrude on full participation.

2.3.3.2. Anonymity

According to McMillan and Schumacher (1993), there is in general, a strong feeling among field workers that settings and participants should not be identifiable in print. Researchers have a dual responsibility - protection of the participants' confidences from other actors in the setting whose private information might enable them to identify them and protection of the informants from the general reading public.

However, the law does not protect a researcher if the government compels them to disclose matters of confidence. The report, the field notes, and the researcher can be subpoenaed. For example, one researcher had almost completed fieldwork when a school lawyer requested that he be an expert witness in a school desegregation case. The researcher initiated the 'ethical principle of dialogue' (Smith, 1990: 271) in presenting the dilemma to several school officials for mutual problem solving. Finally,

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a top official said the school lawyer would not call the researcher as a witness because it violated the commitments of confidentiality made to the staff, teachers, and administrators of the school.

2.3.3.3. Privacy and confidentiality

Codes of ethics insist on safeguards to protect people's identities and those of the research locations. Confidentiality in qualitative research must be assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. Professional etiquette uniformly concurs that no one deserves harm or embarrassment as a result of insensitive research practices (Eisner, 1991; Christians, 2000).

According to Soltis (1990), education is a moral enterprise. Soltis writes that certain sorts of ethical issues are therefore more likely to arise in educational than in other settings. Soltis writes further that there may be typical, repeated sets of qualitative research circumstances that give rise to research-specific ethical dilemmas regarding such things as deception, the propriety of intervention, possible harm to participants, contract obligations, informed consent, and even social rights and wrongs. Some of these are more general and no doubt occur across many research settings.

2.3.3.4. Deception and empowerment

Most researchers view deception as violating informed consent and privacy (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993; Bulmer, 1982; Glesne, 1999). However, some well-known ethnographers have posed as hobos, vagrants, and even army recruits to collect data without informing the participants (Punch, 1986). These researchers claim that no harm to the informants resulted from the research. Even informed persons who cooperate may feel a sense of betrayal when they read the findings in print. Other researchers suggest that field workers negotiate with the participants so that they understand the power that they have in the research process. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), no researcher deceives their subjects solely for the purpose of deception. Rather, it is solely done in the belief that the data will be more valid and reliable; that the subjects will be more natural and honest if they do not know the researcher is doing a research project. Babbie and Mouton indicate further that if the people being studied know they are being studied, they might modify their behaviour in a variety of ways. Punch (1986)

also notes that if ethical problems do arise in the fieldwork, mutual problem solving by the researcher and participants can usually lead to alternatives.

In emphasizing informed consent, social science codes of ethics uniformly oppose deception (Christians, 2000). Even paternalistic arguments of children in elementary schools are no longer credible. Christians argues further that the ongoing expose' of deceptive practices since Stanley Milgram's experiments have given this moral principle special status - deliberate misrepresentation is forbidden. The straightforward application of this principle suggests that qualitative researchers design different experiments free of active deception. However, given that the search for knowledge is obligatory and deception is codified as morally unacceptable, in some situations both criteria cannot be satisfied. Christians concludes that the standard resolution for this dilemma is to permit a modicum of deception when there are explicit utilitarian reasons for doing so. Opposition to deception in the codes is de facto redefined in these terms: If 'the knowledge to be gained from deceptive experiments' is clearly valuable to society, it is 'only a minor defect that persons must be deceived in the process' (Soble, 1978, 40).

2.3.3.5. Harm, caring, and fairness

Although physical harm to informants seldom occurs in research, some persons can experience personal humiliation and loss of interpersonal trust (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993). Some researchers (Cassell, 1982) believe in the principle of persons being treated as ends themselves rather than as means to an end- justifying the possible harm to an individual because it may help others. A sense of caring and fairness has to enter into the researcher's thinking and actions. Soltis summarizes this in the following manner:

> What could be more human than the moral sphere? What purpose could be more worthy than to include in our educational research a concern for the good and the rights of those we investigate and the society of which they and we are a part? (1990: 248).

Professional and research ethics for many researchers are intimately related to personal morality. Researchers need to identify potential ethical dilemmas and resolve them; open discussions and negotiation usually promote 'fairness' to the persons and to the research inquiry.

2.3.4.   Contextual problems

Contextual problems are those that arise from the social, political, and economic environment within which the research takes place and are directly associated with sensitive research (Brewer, 1993).   In his study of the police, Brewer found that problems of context and security are integrally linked: In studying the police in Northern Ireland, problems of personal security are a direct consequence of the context within which the research occurs.

The reason why contextual and personal security problems have been distinguished is because the two types of problems do not necessarily go together. Brewer points out that problems of personal security can be quite real and paramount without there being any serious contextual problems, and vice versa. For example, an ethnographic study of a sensitive topic, such as organized crime in the United States, might cause one or two problems of personal security for the researcher but the social and political context of the research adds few special problems.

Tourangeau and Smith (1996) mention that nonresponse bias is another potential threat to accurate results, which may arise through the inability of interviewers to deal with interviews or through the refusal of interviewees to participate in the surveys (Waterton and Duffy, 1984). Members of the sample may refuse to take part in the survey at all, or they may decline to answer specific questions (Punch, 1998; Tourangeau and Smith, 1996). Either way, the very persons with the most sensitive information to report may be the least likely to report it.

2.3.5.   Personal security (Legal problems)

Personal security refers to researchers' physical safety (Brewer, 1993). Danger arises from everyday life activities required in the research and is quite incidental to the topic and geographic location of the research itself. Although not restricted to sensitive research, they are however more severe when dealing with sensitive topics. Personal security problems become a prominent feature of the research design and fieldwork, having to be continually borne in mind by the research rather than just contemplated as a vague possibility or a theoretical truism once fieldwork is completed. While only problems of context and security are directly associated with sensitive research they have ramifications for, and complicate, the more general types of problems.

In recent years, researchers have increasingly had to deal with attempts by the courts to compel researchers to disclose data deemed relevant to the illusion process. Lee (1993) as a result, mentions that the robust techniques for preserving confidentially are dispensable to research on sensitive topics.

As Lee (1993) points out, legal intervention in the research process has largely been a problem for researchers in the US. Subpoenas have been served there on researchers in a number of disciplines. Lee refers to a researcher, Popkins, who was required by a grand jury to reveal the sources of confidential documents relating to the Vietnam war were being leaked. Popkins refused and was briefly imprisoned (Lee, 1993). Other cases where researchers have been called to testify involve allegations of police brutality (Van Maanen, 1983), juvenile crime drug abuse (Yablonskyi, 1965) and murder. Researchers, who worked with populations facing high risk from disclosure for example, drug dealers, were most likely to find the grant of confidentiality useful.

Lee (1993) points out that when the law intervenes in the research process, the researcher is relatively powerless. Strict constraints on personal and collective behaviour naturally discourages research on sensitive topics (Deyo, 1987). The consequences of legal interview are often personally devastating, draining resources and disrupting research. In similar vein Lee and Renzetti (1993) write that personal security impinges on all research; they are most forceful in the case of sensitive topics.

While research participants should, in general, expect their rights to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality to be protected, maintaining confidentiality of research data is especially important where informants and respondents are being asked to reveal intimate or incriminating information (Lee, 1993). Recently, AIDS researchers have begun to be concerned about public health reporting laws and the power of courts to subpoena research data (Melton and Gray, 1988).

The legal system both regulates research and intervenes in the research process. For example, the Data Inspection Board in Sweden has required researchers to remove questions judged to be sensitive from questionnaires (Flaherty, 1979; Janson, 1979), while researchers in the US have charged that government regulations and censorship

have increased the difficulty of understanding research on deviance or controversial topics (Sieber, 1993). Lee (1993) confirms this legal influence on validity in sensitive research. He points out that there have been a number of suggestions that legal regulations lead to research of a sensitive nature being inhibited or sanitized.

2.4. RESEARCH DESIGNS WHICH AFFECT SENSITIVE RESEARCH.

There are several types of research that affect sensitive research and also influence results. These are discussed below:

2.4.1. The use of investigative or covert research.

Another approach to sensitive research, which is based on the appreciative stance, involves 'investigative research' or the use of 'conflict methodologies' or covert research (Douglas, 1976; Galliher, 1973). According to Lee (1993), research is covert when research participants are not aware that they are being studied. Participants are not threatened by the research and do not change their behaviour even though to outside eyes it might be regarded as deviant. A primary justification for covert research is that it avoids problems of reactivity.

Fielding (1993) however, is critical of this kind of research, for he sees the danger in that the researcher may become manipulative and deceitful with information or that scepticism may turn into cynicism that prevents informants' accounts from being taken seriously by the researcher

Naturalistic research, especially in the study of deviance, requires first hand contact with those studied, and a commitment to an 'appreciative' understanding of how those studies define their situation (Matza, 1969; Henslin, 1972). Such contact is not won easily. The successful management of fieldwork depends not only on what the researcher says or does, but also upon the presence of such a marginal member in their midst (Pollener and Emerson, 1983).

There are various ethical problems related to this covert data collection method. For example, Bulmer (1982) points out that covert study violate important ethical principles, in particular, they negate the principle of informed consent since research participants in convert studies cannot refuse their involvement. Convert research may involve deception, and frequently cannot be carried by those being studied. Lee (1993)

also argues that research using convert methods has longer-term undesirable consequences. According to him, such studies may encourage cynicism among social scientists in relation to the rights of research participants, while the wider public may come to distrust researchers (Erikson, 1968).

Raising questions about the ethical standing of covert research, Lee (1993) points out that ethical absolutionists hold that the difficulties with regard to the ethical standing of convert data collection totally compromise covert methods of research. Such methods, Lee further argues, cannot be used ethically. Reynolds (1982) on the other end writes out that the absolution position potentially restricts research to the topics that would be regarded as inoffensive.

Lee (1993) further argues that in the study of sensitive topics the practical difficulties involved may vitiate the apparent advantages of covert research. Self-conscious about the need to maintain 'cover' may interfere with the data collection process (Wepper, 1976). The covert researcher may be unable to ask probing questions in the way that an overt researcher might. In fact even quite simple questions might be difficult to ask if they concern matters an insider would be expected to know about. Researchers may unwittingly give off cues that alert those being studied to the possibility that they are being fooled (Lee, 1993). Particularly in organizations, it may be difficult for a covert researcher to move around without inviting suspicion.

According to Lee, some researchers have taken three broad positions in relation to the ethics of covert research; the absolutists, pragmatic and sceptical. The pragmatic position accepts the need to protect the rights of the research participants and the obligation not to harm them, but sets these considerations against the need to obtain scientific knowledge. Lee reluctantly concludes that covert research may be regarded as an acceptable method where the study is not a trivial one and there is no other way for the necessary data to be obtained. The sceptical position accepts that, far from being used reluctantly, there are in fact positive justifications for covert study.

2.4.2. Collaborative research

According to Lee (1993), some writers have argued that sensitive research is powerfully shaped by the structured inequalities in society. Consequently, the attention

of researchers has been directed and channelled away from the powerful, whose interests are threatened by open serenity, and towards the powerless, which must bear the burden of social inquiry. While conflict methodologies should be adopted to study the powerful, sensitive researchers should work in a collaborative way with the powerless to serve their interests. As Blauner and Wellman (1982) note, it is not unknown for residence in some ghetto areas of the US to complain wryly that they have put dozens of students through graduate school.

In the 1980s with the onset of Aids, an inevitable fatal disease with long period of latency, and transmitted though 'sensitive and secretive' activities including sexual behaviour and intravenous drug use, Aids researchers had to seek participation for their studies from members of marginalized, stigmatised and vulnerable groups. Researchers have turned to community consultation. Such consultations, as Lee (1993) states, increase procedural justice by giving potential research participants a degree of control over their involvement in research.

Minority communities feel that there is nothing in the research situation for them, since researchers come, take what they can, get out of a community and they, or the results of their research, are never seen again (Lee, 1993). Such concerns have produced calls for collaborative or participatory research style (Blauner and Wellman, 1982; Vargus, 1971; Kelman, 1972; Ben - Tovin et. al., 1986). Researchers work closely with community activists and attempt to facilitate indigenous social action programs by supplying data and results which could make significant contributions to the effectiveness of efforts (Lee, 1993).

However, the approach seems to depend on the existence of a clear and functioning community structure, putting it open to attack from opposing ends of the spectrum. Walsh (1972) argues that accepting the local community's definition of what should be researched tends to produce theoretical research in which crucial variables are inevitably overlooked. Goudy and Richards (1973) have also been sceptical of the collaborative research. While they agree that researchers may have exploited those they study by ignoring their social needs, they argue that sociologists have also been insensitive to the political needs of those in disadvantaged communities.

2.5. CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Researchers have made several attempts to define sensitive topics or research. Most literature indicates that sensitive research is that research which potentially poses a substantial threat to those who are or have been involved in it. It is threatening in that it is intrusive in some way to those being studied as it delves into their personal experience. The threat also affects the researcher, as they may be legally responsible in the case where the respondent feels the breach of confidentiality has been violated. The level of threat would increase if the level of intrusion broadens significantly, and this would increase the response effects regardless of the survey technique or question wording used.

Lee's (1993) definition of sensitive research is quite inclusive. It refers to the threats or risk to those involved in the study and the problems encountered in collection, keeping and dissemination of research data.

My preliminary literature review has identified a number of research areas that interviewees or respondents regard as sensitive. It is not however enough simply to identify these areas, it is essential that the issue of sensitivity in research be placed within a context of the exploration of research methodology that would attempt in getting honest responses from those involved in research projects that involve sensitive topics. It is crucial to consider the fact that issues of validity are acute given that the dissemination of invalid results and recommendations might lead to policy decisions that are not credible and potentially harmful (Lee, 1993).

Research into some deeply personal experience threatens those studied through the level of emotional stress they produce. Where research is about deviance and social control, respondents fear being identified, stigmatised or incriminated in some way. Research has also been described as sensitive where it impinges on the vested interests of powerful persons – where it threatens the interests or security of those being studied or where it deals with things sacred to the respondents.

Various issues that give a clear understanding of sensitivity and its effects in research have been reviewed. Research investigating deviant activities, areas of life that are conflictual, and members of the family and children, are regarded as having a sensitive

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nature. Such research has tended to inhibit adequate conceptualization and measurement.

There are several methodological problems encountered with regard to sensitive research. Researchers have experienced technical, ethical, social and personal problems when dealing with sensitive questions. Sampling the appropriate population is difficult in sensitive research because potential participants have greater need to hide their involvement although this may vary from community to community and from culture to culture. Using inappropriate populations in sensitive research creates bias and limits the generalizability to other populations. Several sampling procedures, for example, snowballing, using focus groups, and random response technique reduce response bias arising from respondent concern over revealing sensitive information. There is some progress towards accurate estimates of biases associated with various alternative sampling approaches.

Problems with regard to measuring instruments have also been experienced. Although questionnaires have widely been used, they run the risk of bias from missing data and inconsistent responding. It is also difficult to even estimate the reliability of questionnaires or to determine whether respondents are over- or underreporting. Computers are being widely used and, although they have weaknesses, they are reportedly found to increase respondents' willingness to make embarrassing admissions surveys. Computer-assisted self-interview (CASI) is reported to be the most promising technology to elicit responses on sensitive topics.

Gaining access to the research participants is a perennial problem facing field researchers. The main problem that contributes towards difficulty of gaining access in sensitive research is that of confidentiality. It is difficult to convince the subjects to the extent that they feel comfortable in taking part in the research.

Several data collection strategies that seem like an ideal way of studying sensitive topics were also reviewed. Although interviews are widely used, interviewer effects have an effect on the propensity of respondents to disclose sensitive information. The interviewer must try to deal with such problems in a way that in the end ensures access to information required. Most researchers suggest that investigators cannot do without interviewing.

Social desirability of the information being collected and the method of collecting sensitive data can affect the accuracy of the answers that are obtained, and this may generate flawed conclusions. However some researchers argue that reliable and valid data can still be obtained from sensitive research studies if frank reporting by respondents is encouraged.

Sensitivity also affect educational researchers who find it difficult to obtain credible information from school principals who experience distress that affect their responses to sensitive questions in education. A review of sensitivity in education will be given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3.

REVIEW: CONDITIONS OF DURESS IN EDUCATION

In this part of the thesis, a number of cases where conditions of adversity and duress exist in educational management and affect the conditions under which school principals have to manage their schools will be reviewed and their impact on the responses of principals to research questions assessed. Sensitive issues, which seem to threaten the school principals in their responses to research question about their job situation, will also be studied.

Issues regarded as sensitive vary because individual people's perceptions of situations differ, sometimes greatly, and it is thus inappropriate to categorize certain situations as sensitive or source of adverse conditions in school management. However, some aspects of managerial work have been identified as common potential sources of adversity and duress in school management.

3.1.   CONDITIONS OF ADVERSITY AND DURESS UNDER WHICH SCHOOL
        PRINCIPALS WORK.

Many schools in South Africa are in adverse environments. They are often characterized by low staff morale, poor resources and facilities, mismanagement, social problems such as gangsterism and substance abuse, and disillusioned learners (De Jong, 2000). De Jong states further that it is not surprising that the greater challenge that faces the education reform process in South Africa after the apartheid regime is the restoration of a culture of learning, teaching and services. The collapse of the culture of learning and teaching was most pronounced in secondary schools where attendance was sporadic, the principal had given up attending to problems of the school, teachers lost their desire to teach and there were tensions between rival organizations and between elements of the school community.

It can be confidently assumed that principals experience conditions of adversity in the management of their schools, although the extent of this adversity is not always evident in their responses to questions in research. The experience of adverse working conditions occurs when 'aspects of one's work or life situation are perceived as frustrating, worrying, excessively or insufficiently demanding, or threatening to one's

security, confidence or desired self-image' (Otto, 1986: 36). Factors that produce such conditions of duress and adversity are varied. For example, Blasé (1982) writes of first- and second-order work-related demands or stressors that tend to interfere with the teacher's work. First-order stressors interfere directly with work and include, for example, time, student discipline and workload. Second-order stressors have less direct effect and include factors like low salary and poor incentives (fewer allowance teachers receive as compared to those working in the private sectors).

In the context of this thesis, stress, a result of adverse working conditions, is considered as an unpleasant and unwelcome emotion (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1977; McCormick and Solman, 1992) interfering with the teachers' working conditions (Tuettemann and Punch (1990). Such is the negative effect of stress that for many teachers, it is associated with illness of varying degree (Fletcher and Payne, 1982; Laughlin, 1984; Dworkin et al., 1990). However, Manthei and Gilmore (1994) indicate that different people tend to perceive stressors differently, and therefore their efforts to cope with them, as well as the success they achieve, will also differ. According to Burrage and Stewart (1990), there is sensitivity to the personal and the social costs of stress-related illness and to the correlative impairment in professional efficiency and effectiveness. The literature on professional stress has grown rapidly. Some of the adverse working conditions resulting in teacher stress will be discussed below.

3.1.1. Lack of resources.

There are several investigations commissioned on the state of education in South Africa. The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1993b) - Educational Planning document- , reporting on the state of education in South Africa, indicates, for example, that the rural areas have been seriously discriminated against in terms of finance, buildings and resources for school. Another report on the poor educational conditions in rural areas is found in the NEPI-Framework Report document (1993a), which states that provision of classrooms is lowest in rural areas. These conditions, which are out of the control of the school principals, make it difficult for school principals to manage their schools. A successful school will have sufficient funding and basic resources (De Jong, 2000).

Principals are however required by the authorities of the department of education to deliver good services, for example, to let learners pass at the end of each year. According to Pretorius (2000), Professor Asmal and his officials have adopted a tough approach towards improving the results of the learners in school. Pretorious reports further that they visit schools and teachers and principals found to be in disarray are threatened with charges of misconduct, yet the working conditions in the schools remain very poor.

Another source of adversity in education is the poor conditions of the buildings. As Dunham (1992) reports, unsatisfactory conditions of the school buildings (poor structures) can have a negative effect on teachers working at that school. Such structures also lack facilities like electricity and water resulting in much discomfort to the teachers.

Jencks and colleagues (1972) indicate that school resources did not make much difference, however, Goss (1985), in his study of 79 principals of urban high schools of the Cape Education Department to determine the extent to which stress was prevalent among principals and which aspects of their work were important sources of stress, found that lack of human and material resources causes a lot of management problems for school principals to the extent that they even experience enormous stress. Kutame (1998), who investigated the sources of stress among 227 secondary school teachers in the Northern Province of South Africa, also reports that the highest ranked factor, which is the most stressful for both male and female groups, is the shortage of school buildings and equipment.

Numerous other studies have also confirmed this; Kyriacou, 1987; McCormick and Solman, (1992), studied teachers' attribution of responsibility for occupational stress and satisfaction among 387 New South Wales primary and secondary school teachers; Trendall, (1989), studied stress in teaching and teacher effectiveness from 237 teachers across primary, secondary and special schools in England; and Burrage and Stewart, (1990), who also studied sources of stress in FE in England. While stress has both positive and negative aspects, many researchers appear to need to focus on the negative aspects in order to promote their work (Trendall, 1989; Pierce and Molloy, 1990).

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As De Witt (1987) writes on the burnout syndrome in the teaching profession in South Africa, this is one area of research in education that affects government policy makers and therefore highly conflictual with regard to the collection of data.

Bot et al (2000) have constructed an index of physical resources which maximises the ability to predict matriculation pass rates however, Crouch and Mabogoane (1998) indicate that the availability of physical resources make little difference to the quality of learning outcomes. These findings may be due to the fact that it is not resources per se that makes the difference but how they are utilised by school management.

Investigation into provision of resources in schools affects those holding the positions of authority in government, and such research may harm or build the image of the government or those in power. It is with this in mind that giving information about the acute shortage of resources as is the situation in some schools in South Africa may be so sensitive that it could affect the accuracy of the data.

3.1.2. Adverse occupational demands.

According to Wildy and Louden (2000), the complexity of the principals' work is a common theme of school restructuring literature. Principals are expected to meet competing expectations about priorities, decision-making processes and school outcomes. This complexity is often characterized in terms of the accountability dilemmas principals are confronted with. As Goss (1985) puts it, the school principal is charged with an exceptionally wide variety of responsibilities, including the supervision of teaching programme, staff development, pupil discipline, interaction with parents, community and Departmental officials, the management of facilities and finance (School funds), and public relations work. When such occupational demands exceed the resources or when there is a discrepancy between the principal's capacities, needs and expectations on one hand, and occupational demands and opportunities on the other, distress occurs (Phillips and Lee, 1980; O'Connor, 1990; O'Connor and Clarke, 1990). O'Connor and Clarke (1990), who studied determinants of teacher stress among 238 Australian teachers drawn from primary and secondary schools, found that such frustrations or demands may arise in one or more of four relatively distinct parts of the teacher's occupational role. These are

- the overall time and work-load pressures which arise from sheer amount of work to be completed within a given period of time;

- the daily interaction with students, including student-behaviour problems which might occur while the teacher is completing routine educational and administrative tasks, as well as coping with the individual demands of students' more personal problems;

- the interaction with fellow professionals within the school, including tensions arising from relationships with both the school administration and with other members of staff, and

- the interactions extending outside the school, including relations with the education system and perceptions of negative community attitudes towards teachers individually or teaching professions generally.

These will again be evident as the discussion underneath reveals the adverse conditions under which teachers work. However, one of the most stressful issues in the management of schools is the control of school funds when most principals are found to be having problems. Many principals are charged with embezzlement of school fund (Musetha, 2002; Niemic, 2000), and as a result, end up in court or loosing their jobs.

3.1.3. Lack of discipline

Discipline in schools is fundamental to the smooth running of the learning and teaching process. A successful school has a system of order and discipline which is linked to the school's educational vision, which emphasizes the well-being of the students and school at large, and which is generally unobtrusive, and includes praise and encouragement and not punishment alone (De Jong, 2000).

According to Goss (1985), the principal's responsibility for pupil discipline can weigh heavily depending on the size of the school, the type of community, and the competence of the staff. Pierce and Molloy (1990), who studied relations between school type, occupational stress, role perception and social support among Australian teachers also found that lack of discipline as perceived by both male and female teachers causes a lot of distress for teachers because it disrupts the normal day to day activities in the school (Boyle et al., 1995).

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According to Woodhouse, Hall and Wooster (1985), keeping discipline is a part of the teachers' role, lack of which generates high levels of stress. There are a number of research reports that confirm this finding. Tuettemann and Punch (1992) in their study of the stress levels among 574 West Australian secondary school teachers selected for this study found that 26% of teachers in their sample reported frequent student misbehaviour. Trendall (1989) studied stress in teaching and teacher effectiveness of a sample of 237 teachers across primary, secondary and special schools within one local education authority in Great Britain and found that it is that it is difficult for many teachers to forget children' problems at the end of the school day.

Research done by Borg and Falzon (1991) on stress in teaching in Britain indicates that although being one of the least stressful factors, maintaining class discipline seems to be more stressful to those teachers with the least experience than to those more experienced colleagues. In a study investigating the association between self-reported teacher stress and job satisfaction, absenteeism and intention to leave teaching involving 218 teachers in 16 medium-sized mixed comprehensive schools in England, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979), indicate that teachers suffer a lot of strain as a result of disciplinary problems. The evidence points to heavier demands being made upon principals in discharging their disciplinary function within the school. Goss (1985) studied the extent to which work stress was prevalent among principals of urban high schools of the Cape Education Department in South Africa involving 79 principals and found that serious disciplinary problems, including those involving the possibility of expulsion, tax a principal's resources to the full.

A school principal who may not maintain discipline could be an embarrassment to the department or educational authorities, and such behaviour has been misreported (Bradburn, 1983; Tourangeau and Smith, 1996). The principal, knowing that he has more to loose in terms of reputation, and because of fear of embarrassment and degradation (Melton and Gray, 1988; Sieber, 1993), which is associated with societal stigma (Jansen and Davis, 1998), may find it difficult to give answers without bias. It could be frustrating for principals to admit having disciplinary problems as this weighs heavily on his administrative skills. The school principal is aware that the public expects especially high standards of management from them. As Goss (1985) reports, teachers and pupils, too, hold high expectations of their principals.

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Added to the problems related to discipline is the violence experienced these days. As Gill et al (1998) report, over the last few years there has been several high profile and tragic incidents of violence in schools. Respondents were asked about the frequency of incidents of physical assault and how many of these incidents were reported to the police. Reporting such incidents without bias would be difficult since attackers are not only from within the school and raises questions about the role of schools and teachers in protecting or policing areas adjacent to their premises.

Closely related to discipline is bullying in classroom which is very sensitive to report on. Victims of peer abuse may not be inclined to report attacks to their teacher because they fear reprisal from their aggressors or they blame themselves (Atlas and Pepler, 1998). Twenty-eight percent of victimized primary students reported that they had not told a teacher or a parent about being victimized at school (Ziegler and Pepler, 1993). Smith (1991) referred to bullying as the silent nightmare because there is a code of secrecy where victimized students and witnesses to bullying do not report the act. Yates and Smith (1989) found that only 15 out of 51 students who had been bullied told their teachers or school counsellors about the incident.

3.1.4. Low salary

Among the factors of the teaching profession that have been identified as sources of stress for teachers, poor remuneration is one of the most stressful. Research evidence by Milstein, Golaszewski and Duquette (1984) and McCormick and Solman (1992) who studied teachers' attribution of responsibility for occupational stress and satisfaction in Australia, indicate that perceived low probability of reward leads to manifestation of stress. It is however surprising that some researchers have found that only a small percentage of respondents indicate that low salary is a source of stress in teaching, for example, according to Kyriacou and and Sutcliffe (1978), only 12.8% of the respondents in their study rated inadequate salary as a source of extreme stress. Marais (1992), who studied factors which cause stress in the Orange Free State and Cape Province, found that inadequate salary was the most important stress factor for men, while a working day that never ends and the fact that the teacher does not receive enough reward and acknowledgement for their work constituted the second and third most important stress factors. As Shann (1998) writes, teacher satisfaction is a pivotal

link in the chain of education reform. Teacher satisfaction influences job performance, attrition, and, untimely, student performance.

According to Lee (1993), areas of social life concerned with financial matters are highly conflictual. Research into such matters regarding income, which are highly confidential, threaten those studied through levels of emotional stress they produce. Such research is regarded as invasion of privacy (Lee, 1993, Tourangeau and Smith, 1996).

3.1.5. Disenchantment with school administration

In a study of the sources of stress among secondary school teachers in the Northern Province of South Africa by Kutame (1998), 227 teachers were asked to rate 37 stressors on a five-point scale (from 'no stress' to 'extreme stress', scored 0 to 4). Disenchantment with school administration and staff members was found to be causing adverse educational conditions. It deals with behaviour that could be incriminating to the researcher and the researched (Kadushin, 1997). A recent report by Abouserie (1996) in a study of 414 university academic staff in England identifying sources of stress and consequent stress levels indicates that respondents state that relationships with colleagues were a source of stress in the lives of academic staff. It is inevitable that in any school there will be moments to tension among staff members.

Where there are such tensions in a school, there is also lack of trust. The principal, knowing that any research report could be published, may not report freely on any behaviour that is causing dissatisfaction. As Sieber and Stanley (1993) observe, such studies have implications for both the principal reporting on the behaviour of the head of staff and the staff members.

3.1.6. Staff evaluation

One of the aspects of the principal's work, related to his staff, that is quite frustrating, is his responsibility for evaluating his teachers (Goss, 1985). Principals are especially important in creating an environment that leads to improved instruction and, untimely, student motivation and achievement. Each staff member has a unique perception of what should or should not be done at school (Cochran-Smith and Lytte, 1990; Boyle et al., 1995). Although staff evaluations are carried out by managers in other

organizations, it is suggested that the evaluation of teachers is more complex and demanding because of the subtleties of the teaching-learning interaction, the values-intensive nature of the situation, and the consequent problems inherent in agreeing on objective performance criteria (Gmelch, 1982). As Goss (1985) observes, formal evaluation procedures in the context of a tightly knit group of fellow-professionals may well be more problematical than in the industrial and commercial context in their effect on relationships within the group. Goss argues further and mentions that this is particularly the case when evaluation is perceived as deciding on a person's worth in general rather than indicating their effectiveness in terms of the quality of their work (1985: 49).

Teachers show signs of discomfort if they have to be evaluated by the principals (Goss, 1985) and inspectors (Brimblecombe, Ormston and Shaw, 1995). Such behaviours create a lot of frustration for both the authorities who have to evaluate and those who have to be evaluated. Melton and Gray (1988) refer to this behaviour as a subjection to social stigma. However, Payne and Furnham (1987), who studied the dimensions of occupational stress, reports on data from 444 secondary school teachers in Barbados, West Indies, that there is less willingness on the part of men to admit to worrying about such aspects of their work.

Staff evaluation deals with information that is highly confidential. Sharing such information, principals risk charges of invasion of privacy (Reeser and Wetkin, 1997). It is under conditions like these that principals answer to questions on evaluations of teachers could be biased.

3.1.7. Staffing.

According to Cawood (1976), staffing the school constitutes a major problem for principals in South Africa. This is probably exacerbated by the difficulty of finding teachers of 'scarce' subjects such as mathematics and sciences, and also the problems and frustrations associated with the employment of married female teachers and attempts to retain their services in terms of conditions of service at the time of his study (Goss, 1985). It is perhaps not surprising that the Department of Education has decided to import 'highly trained Cuban educators' who were to 'assist in developing the mathematics, science and technology skills of their South African counterparts'

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(Govender, 2001: 1). The issue of the recruitment of teachers of scarce subjects has created a big debate in South Africa as some argued why foreign teachers where to be imported while local teachers where being forced out of the system. Teacher unions are against the idea of importing these educators. It is perhaps not surprising that in defence, Professor Kader Asmal, the South African Minister of Education since 1999, stated: 'We are not filling South Africa with bearded Cuban teachers with funny moustaches. These will be high level, experienced teacher trainers,' (Govender, 2001: 1). It is under such conditions of intense debate that the issue of finding suitable teachers would impact negatively on school principals who need such teachers and may affect answers they give when asked to give any information in this regard.

According to Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) principals experience difficulty in terminating the services of an unsuitable teacher. They write further that this particular difficulty is one of the most frustrating and emotionally threatening problems in their work. It involves threatening questions of how the principal would deal, for example, with problems of having to terminate someone's services. When this happens, substantial response bias should be expected regardless of survey technique (Blair et al., 1978; Sudman and Bradburn, 1992).

3.1.8. Role conflict

According to Goss (1985), role conflict exists when a person in a particular work role is torn by conflicting work demands or by doing things they do not want to do or do not think are part of the job. McGrath (1976) refers to four different forms of role conflict. The first is the man-in-the-middle situation, where superordinates and subordinates hold conflicting expectations of the focal person's role behaviour, so that satisfying the one automatically means dissatisfying the other. In the second form of role conflict, the role demands contain internally contradictory expectations, for example, love and discipline in the parent's role. In the third form, McGrath writes that role expectations conflict with some attribute of the focal person, for example, trait, preference, value, or moral principle. Finally, there is inter-role conflict, wearing many hats, when certain roles held simultaneously may conflict, for example, the demands of job and family.

According to Goss (1985), a principal is liable to experience all these forms of role conflict. He may find himself under pressure to assist certain subordinates in attaining

their personal goals, which may conflict with his superordinates' requirements for his role. Morphet and colleagues write that

> By virtue of being closest to the teachers, the principal may be placed in a situation of role conflict which can be dysfunctional as well as personally painful, if the teachers expect the principal to express their norms, sentiments, and needs, even when they are not congruent with organizational purposes (1982: 295).

Principals have an impact on teachers, students, and learning (Johnson et al. 2000). Because of the complexity of the relationship, the nature and degree of this effect is not easily measured. It is under such conditions of duress that sensitive information given about subordinates should be biased.

3.1.9. Time demands

Time demands, as a source of stress has come under the spotlight for researchers. Trendall (1989) confirmed an earlier similar finding by Fletcher and Payne (1982) on the levels of reported stressors and strains amongst school teachers in the UK. He employed an interactive model of stress and its relation to teacher effectiveness that was based on questionnaire responses from 327 teachers across primary and secondary schools in Hartfield. Trendall found that time; or rather lack of it is an important source of discomfort for teachers. Cook and Leffingwell (1982) suggest that the perception of lack of time as a stressor is directly proportional to the infringement of school-related work on personal time. For example, the teacher is placed in situation where they are accused of working short, easy hours, but within these hours is facing constant demands and hassle and, as the final bell goes, there are meetings, preparation, report-writing, seeing parents and dealing with pupils' problems.

A reports by Biggs (1988) in Durban, South Africa, indicate that senior teachers are often hard-pressed to find time to carry out their other responsibilities, resulting in frustration, school principals are even be more frustrated by lack of time than senior teachers (Williamson and Campbell, 1987, and Lyons, 1990).

3.1.10. Overcrowding

The number of learners attending lessons in one classroom has an effect on the way in which teachers conduct their lessons. If the class is too large, it affects teachers in that it

is difficult to control and maintain discipline. Individual attention is even unthinkable under such conditions. The supply of classrooms is not the responsibility of teachers. According to Needle et al. (1981), who studied occupational stress, coping and health problems of teachers in Minnesota and Manthei and Solman (1988) in their study on teacher stress in New Zealand, overcrowded classrooms is one of the factors that can lead to teacher frustrations, disillusionment and eventual incapacitation. Coates and Thoresen, (1976), in their review on teacher anxiety, indicate that female teachers are reported to be experiencing more stress as a result of excessive class size as compared to male teachers (Rudd and Wiseman, 1962), although this was not the case in the study done by Borg and Falzon (1989) on stress and job satisfaction in Malta. Female teachers were found to be more satisfied than their male colleagues.

The department of education or government is responsible for providing enough classrooms for all public schools in South Africa. There could be cases where the School's Governing Body goes out to ask for donations for building classes, but it remains the prerogative of the Department of Education to see to it that all schools have enough accommodation. Sometimes overcrowding is caused by lack of teachers: when the department cannot supply the school with teachers to suit the school's enrolment, principals are forced to combine classes resulting in up to 120 learners having to be forced into one classroom (Kutame, 1997; Suransky-Dekker, 1998). Revealing the effects of such conditions, where the department is said to be failing to provide classrooms or teachers is a very sensitive issue, which, according to Lee (1993), poses a threat to the person giving such inflicting information. The potentiality of bias in giving such sensitive information is there (Catania et al., 1986).

3.1.11. Pupil-teacher ratio

This is another area that may have a negative effect on the well-being of the educators. Findings are, however, ambiguous, with Case and Deaton (1999) reporting that lower pupil: teacher ratios have large positive effects on school quality for Africans, as measured by enrolment and school achievement, and Case and Yogo (1999) identifying smaller pupil: teacher ratios as being associated with large and significant returns to education for Africans, as indicated by higher rates of employment and higher earnings. Crouch and Mabogoane (1998), on the other hand, found no significant correlation between these ratios and learning outcomes. This anomaly may be due to the

diminishing effects of pupil: teacher ratios as these have shrunk and become standardised in recent years. Teachers are negatively affected by low learner achievements and this creates stressful conditions under which teachers perform their day-to-day activities.

3.1.12. Teaching many subjects

According to Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978), who studied teacher stress: prevalence, sources and symptoms in Britain, found that teaching too many subjects and or too many periods of actual teaching cause a lot of stress for teachers. For maximum production, teachers have specific subjects they have to specialize in, but teachers often find themselves having to teach subjects they have not specialized in. Fimian (1982) in his review of the causes of stress encountered by teachers in Connecticut reports that teaching subject that they have not trained for leads to stress. However, there have been few studies reporting on teaching subjects an individual is not trained for as being a source of stress (e.g. Okebukola and Jegede, 1989, done in Nigeria and McCormick and Solman, 1992, done in Australia).

Teaching many subjects or a subject one is not trained to teach might be caused by the lack of sufficient supply of teachers by the department. It can also be due to changes in curriculum, where the school might be forced to even change its manpower to suit the needs of the curriculum. That could be difficult as it could mean even replacing teachers with the suitable ones. Teaching too many subjects or those one is not trained for threatens the competency of the teacher. As Lee (1993) puts it, personal experience could be threatening to the image of the teacher. Such threats could bias the information one is required to give.

3.1.13. Communication systems

Another source of discomfort frequently reported in teaching is poor communication with the external environment. Dunham (1980), for example, studied change and stress in the head of department's role in the University of Bath where he obtained information from 92 heads of departments. He found that contact with the world outside the school is beneficial to the teacher and the school itself as it reduces their anxiety and frustration. According to Hayward (1992) and Kutame (1997), rural-based schoolteachers experience problems in making contact with other schools for sporting

and cultural activities and interchange of professional ideas amongst colleagues, due to a lack of adequate systems of communication.

3.1.14. Conflicting information about rationalization and redeployment

Conflicting communication results in a lot of discomfort for teachers, particularly for principals who must implement this policy which is very sensitive because it affects the lives of people. For example, The Department of Education communicates with its structures through circulars. It often happens that some circulars are found to be having wrong or conflicting information. For example, the Department of Education in the Northern Province issued out a Circular Number 4 of 2001 on the 19 January 2001 in which they extended temporary contracts of educators until 2001. It was not long before they issued another one, Number 11, dated 21 February 2001 in which 'the department has reviewed the situation around the handling of temporary educators' and indicated that such educators be retained in order to allow the rationalization and redeployment process to run their course. Given the nature of the redeployment process that has been so stressful to educators, such unstable information has caused a lot of psychological harm to educators. This process was earlier reported to have been completed in December 2000.

Due to the sensitive nature of the process of rationalization and redeployment in which some educators could be forced out of their posts (Departmental Policy directive referenced 12/2/2/3/, dated 29/02/2001 – Implementation of the Mutually Agreed severance package in education – state that excess educators are given the option of accepting a severance package in view of the Department's inability to secure alternative employment), such conflicting circulars are a source of stress to educators. This policy directive was also later withdrawn. Educators must get used to these uncertainties where a circular released today would be withdrawn the following months.

Still with the Department of Education, Circular No. 18 of 2001, dated 28 March 2001: Utilization of accumulated vacation leave, states that 'service delivery obligations require the Department and its employees to render an uninterrupted service to learners', and that 'it is not possible to allow this leave to be taken during term time'. This is again contrary to agreements reached at the Public Service negotiating chamber

through PSCBC Resolution 7 of 2000 in which it was resolved that educators shall take compulsory leave for 10 consecutive days each year which would lapse if not taken. Flow of information from the department is very unreliable.

3.1.15. Community environment

The attitudes members of the community have towards education affects teachers in their day-to-day activities. O'Connor and Clarke (1990), who studied factors associated with stress from a sample of 238 Australian teachers drawn from primary and secondary schools, writes that negative community attitudes towards teachers cause a lot of stress in teachers. This was also confirmed by Pierce and Molloy (1990), in their study on the relations between school type, occupational stress, role perceptions and social support. They indicate that teachers working in government schools find the attitudes of parents and community to be a greater source of stress than do teachers working in non-government schools. Members of the community could have different perceptions to education as compared to those of the teachers. As Goss (1985) reports, relationship with parents sometimes produce difficult situations as is the case with some misunderstandings and complains which may be complicated by fundamental differences in values between the people concerned. Hayward, (1992) in his study on teacher stress in the primary schools in Johannesburg reports that parental pressure can be a threat to current ways of running a school, and a source of conflict, particularly when teachers feel they are loosing control over decision-making rights as professionals.

Closely related to the above source of conditions of adversity in education is the lack of understanding for the work of teachers by members of the community. The interface between the school and the community-at-large brings its pressures in the form of expectations, which teachers may feel to be unrealistic misunderstandings based on misinformation, and changing social and moral norms which conflict with values propagated by the school (Goss, 1985). In some cases pressures are valid and constructive, and in others, pressures merely exert a negative influence. In their report on the sources of dissatisfaction among a group of teachers in Britain, Rudd and Wiseman (1962) state that the public gave education a low esteem, while Dewe (1986), in his investigation into the causes and consequences of teacher stress in New Zealand

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found that people have a low opinion of teachers. Such perceptions about teachers create negative attitudes to teachers who think they are probably looked down upon.

Another potential source of stress for teachers associated with community environment is the multiculturalism in the community and the demands this makes on teachers. According to Hayward (1992), contemporary South African society comprising of a diversity of languages, cultures and religions, makes many different and conflicting demands on the teacher, concerning the inculcation of values and aims in the education systems. Hayward argues that society has changed its attitude towards teachers, and that the parent no longer gives unqualified support to teachers. This argument is supported by McCormick and Solman (1992), who indicate that community lack respect for teachers. There is therefore general agreement that public criticism of teachers by community causes conditions of adversity in education.

As Capel (1987) reports on the incidence of and influence on stress and burnout in teachers employed in British secondary schools, when job-related demands and stresses become excessive, there can be many different possible reactions. Although burnout shows different patterns of change in different individuals, it has been identified as one type of chronic response to the cumulative, long-term negative impact of work stress Capel, 1991). According to some investigators (for example: Folkman, (1984), analyzing personal control and stress and the coping process in New York; Moos, (1985) in New York and Beard, (1990) who studied the strategies for teachers in identifying and overcoming stress in Durban), there is a tendency to selectively ignore the worst aspects of stressful circumstances and to focus instead on some positive aspects of the situation. Burned out teachers, Capel (1991) writes, give significantly less information of their behaviour and that of their students' ideas.

According to Kyriacou (1987), the main source of adverse working conditions in schools varies greatly. Kyriacou points further that it is perhaps the general level of alertness and vigilance required by principals in meeting the potentially threatening variety of demands made upon them that constitutes the essence of why the experience of adverse conditions is so prevalent. Such failure to manage schools may become stressful for a particular principal when they are perceived to constitute a threat to their job (Goss, 1985). The threat may be physiological or psychological. According to Goss,

the greater the anticipated harm, the greater will be the threat and more intense the accompanying emotion and the efforts to adjust. People experiencing threat try to eliminate the danger of harm to themselves, or at least lessen it.

Interpersonal factors are important and often become problematic in schools as they become large organizations in which individuals feel isolated and powerless. According to Trendall (1989) teachers have reported a lack of meaningfulness and self-actualization in school organizations that lack structure, entail daily hassles, and involve senseless rules and meaningless paperwork. Poor leadership and poor management skills have been a recurrent issue (Kearney and Turner, 1987). Such demands, Trendall (1989) writes, lead to increased teacher militancy and this then becomes a self-inflicted cause of tension and frustration. It also provokes social resentment of teachers. Teachers have nowhere to turn for help and support. According to Lazarus (1976), the teachers, in attempt to limiting the actual source of dissatisfaction, may deny that the situation exists, a strategy that may mislead the researcher. This may ease situations temporarily but may reduce the person's ability to cope in the long term.

Being ethical in the conduct of sensitive research also means being culturally sensitive in the way one designs the research and interacts with participants.

3.1.16. A sensitive political environment.

According to Goss (1985) a political environment in which schools function is sensitive. Divisions that exist are reflected in the parent body and the learners. In these circumstances there is a scope for misunderstanding and friction over a variety of matters as diverse as racially-mixed sporting events, the teaching of certain aspects of History, the choice of dramatic productions or debating topics or magazine items and attitudes of certain teachers. It is the principal who bears the brunt of complains and is expected to deal suitably with the problem.

Another dimension to the pressure on the principal arising from political circumstances is the heavy responsibility for doing everything possible to ensure the safety of learners and security of the school. Several South African schools have experienced problems of security that resulted from racial

3.1.17. Unfavourable conditions for promotion

In research done by Dunham (1978) among 92 heads of departments who were taking part in staff development conferences in their own schools taking part in the in-service course at the University of Bath, heads of departments mentioned that their stress arises in part from a sense of frustration at being unable to move upwards from their present position owing to the fact that they have reached the age of 50, which is regarded as unfavourable for promotion. Although they may enjoy their present position Dunham (1978: 46) writes further, they are struck by a sense of being trapped: 'a form of depression'. According to him, there is no answer to this problem.

Poor opportunities for promotion have also been mentioned as a source of stress by a number of South African researchers. For example, Marais (1992) mentions that this is one of the factors responsible for most stress in which members of the group had no say, over which they had no control or for which they were held responsible.

According to Hayward (1992) in his research on the implications of teacher stress in primary schools in Johannesburg reports that the woman in education has an additional problem when seeking promotion posts. He points out that there seem to be glass ceilings, which make it difficult for her to obtain such posts. For example, in 1991, figures for the Transvaal Education Department (TED) indicate that the majority of teachers are women but they do not hold the majority of promotion posts. Reflected in terms of percentages, 14.9% of the teachers on Post Level 1 are men, yet when it comes to principals of schools men occupy 95.16% of the posts.

If a teacher does not receive job satisfaction, his/her mental health as well as his/her teaching effectiveness will be jeopardized. As Campbell (1980), the resulting effect can be a maladjusted teacher. The danger signals of such maladjusted teacher can include depression, excessive strictness or overreaction.

3.1.18. Learner – teacher sexual relations or abuse

Several reports indicate that sexual relations between educators and learners have become prevalent and is one of the main source of conditions adversity for principals in school management. According to the South African Government Communications Report (GCIS, 2002), the Minister of Education reports that from the information

available to his department, sexual abuse in schools is prevalent; it takes various forms and is perpetrated by both learners and staff. It ranges from sexual harassment, touching and verbal degradation to rape and other forms of sexual violence. This abuse takes place in dormitories, in empty classrooms, in hallways and in school toilets. And while all learners may be victims to abuse, girls and disabled learners are particularly vulnerable. It is found in former Model C schools (government schools mainly for the elite who pay higher school fees compared to those in poor communities) as in schools in poor communities.

A report of the Parliamentary Task Group on the Sexual Abuse of Children on 12 June 2002 shows that a 1998 study by the Medical Research Council (MRC) found that school teachers perpetrate 33% of rapes against children under 15 years. The release of these statistics has caused considerable concern among education authorities and members of the public alike. However the Task Group notes that reliable data on the extent of sexual abuse in South African schools is hard to find.

There is however, according to the Government Communications (GCSI) (2002) a tendency by many schools to either fail to acknowledge or play down incidents of sexual abuse for fear of tarnishing the 'reputation' of the school. Sexual abuse between learners and educators has far reaching effects. According to Robinson and Stewart (1996), learners may suffer guilt, shame, doubt, confusion or disruption of home life during or after mistreatment and harassment. According to reports, sexual relationships between learners and teachers create ethical and personal problems and have a negative effect on their career plans (Robinson and Stewart, 1996; GCIS, 2002). The power and authority of the teacher may prove an added attraction or may make the student less likely to resist mistreatment or advances. Teachers can open or close doors to learners' careers through grades, recommendations and referrals.

The GCIS report further indicates that due to problems regarding reporting of these cases, the department of education still has to focus on increased reporting by both the public and by victims of abuse, and has even set up a national toll free line to support the reporting process. The GCIS report states further:

> Although reliable data on the extent of sexual abuse in schools is hard to find, there is
> compelling evidence to indicate that both the nature and levels of abuse require immediate and

urgent action from all of us. And while there is no way in which we can measure whether there is an increase in the phenomenon or not, what is clearly on the increase is the recognition that our country now has laws in place, which serve to protect the rights and dignity of women and children. It is these mechanisms that in turn create the space for the victims of abuse to report these matters to the relevant authorities both within the school and outside of the school (2002:2-3)

3.1.19. Teacher absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism is regarded as one of the sources of conditions of adversity and duress in school management. According to Budeli (1997), teachers often absent themselves from school, which contributes to poor motivational spirit among learners.

3.1.20. Implementation of departmental policies

Implementing departmental policy is regarded as one of the sources of adverse conditions in school management. The Department of Education Circular No. 18 of 2001, dated 28 March 2001: Utilization of accumulated vacation leave, states that 'service delivery obligations require the Department and its employees to render an uninterrupted service to learners', and that 'it is not possible to allow this leave to be taken during term time'. This is in contrary to agreements reached at the Public Service negotiating chamber through PSCBC Resolution 7 of 2000 in which it was resolved that educators shall take compulsory leave for 10 consecutive days each year which would lapse if not taken. Flow of information from the department is very unreliable and causes undue problems for implementers.

3.2. SUMMARY

From this review, one can conclude that stress is a cause for concern in terms of the well being of teachers and its effects on the education of children in the schools. Many school principals in South Africa, particularly in rural areas, work under extremely stressful conditions due to various reasons, for example, situations that are dominated by a lack of resources and facilities that are essential for an effective teaching and learning environment. Other reasons include the fact that some areas are still underdeveloped, resulting in parents making little or no contribution towards the education of their children. Principals work with fewer teachers who are faced with overcrowded classes. Many principals also work in areas where there are acute

transport problems – most learners and teachers walk or travel long distances to and from school (Kutame, 1998).

Where there are such problems, researchers often find it difficult to produce valid and reliable research on matters related to the sound management of the schools by principals. According to Sieber and Stanley in Lee (1993), such research on conditions of duress, which delve into deeply personal experience, addresses some of society's most pressing issues and policy questions.

CHAPTER 4.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I discuss the relationship between the problems under discussion, the evidence this requires towards a solution and the conclusion I hope to reach. Each of these items is discussed separately by way of outlining the design and methodology followed during fieldwork.

Operationalisation was done, measuring instruments described, sample designed, data collection described and the methods of analysis of data explained.

Through this investigation, I attempted to

- inquire into and critically assess research methodologies on sensitive topics with specific reference to educational research;

- empirically study a select number of cases where conditions of adversity and duress exist and assess their impact on the responses of principals to research questions;

- argue the need to establish a more appropriate research methodology for such research projects; and

- to develop an appropriate research methodology for projects in schools where principals work within conditions of adversity.

The empirical research for this study included two components. Firstly, interviews, carried out in secondary schools in the Limpopo Province. The purpose of doing interviews was to collect information on the sources of the conditions of duress and adversity in school management, and to use this information to develop a questionnaire that adequately captured the experiences of principals in school management in secondary school principals in the Limpopo Province of South Africa.

Secondly, the questionnaires were distributed to circuit offices were they were collected by the principals for completion. The questionnaires were constructed out of data and items from studies conducted in education and sensitive research was used to identify

the methods of enquiry principals think would give them more privacy making it easier for them to give information about those aspects of their job they regard as sensitive.

4.1.   Background to the choice of design.

According to Babbie et al. (2001) the choice of a research design largely depends on:

- The aim of the study
- The focus of the study
- The unit of analysis
- The time dimension.

4.1.1. The aim of the study.

This study aimed to determine issues in school management which are sensitive to provide information on. There are issues in school management which are sensitive. It is difficult for researchers to use an appropriate methodology to determine the sensitivity of the issues. According to Babbie et al. (2001), 'a large proportion of social research is conducted to explore a topic, or to provide a basic familiarity with that topic. This approach is typical when a researcher examines a new interest when the subject of study itself is relatively new' (2001:79).

4.1.2. The focus of the study

The focus of research depends on the type of social phenomenon being studied. This study focuses on perceptions of principals towards issues in school management. Principals indicate those issues they regard as sensitive to provide information on.

4.1.3. The unit of analysis

According to Babbie et al. (2001), the unit of analysis is the object, phenomena, entity, process or situation being under study. In this study, data were collected on issues regarded as sensitive in school management. The unit of analysis is the individual school principal.

4.1.4. The time dimension

4.1.5. This study can be described as a cross sectional study. According to Babbie et al. (2001), 'many research projects are designed to study some phenomenon by taking a cross section of it at one time and analyzing that cross section carefully'.

The data collection and analysis for the primary research design was done in 2001 and 2002.

4.2.   STAGE 1 (The interview stage)

4.2.1. Method of inquiry

In the interview stage, an attempt is made to identify sensitive issues in school management on which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers and the reasons why they think the issues are sensitive.

4.2.1.1. Hypotheses

The basic contention was that the principals of secondary schools in the Limpopo Province who experience conditions of adversity and duress in the management of their schools would not give honest answers to sensitive research questions.

For the purposes of this study, the conditions of adversity and duress were to be regarded as sensitive and thereby making it difficult for principals to provide honest answers to researchers.

The key variable of this study is identification of the extent to which principals regard conditions of duress as sensitive and the reason why they regard such conditions as sensitive.

It was decided to target this sensitive research at secondary school principals because they

- have several years of teaching experience behind them;
- carry very demanding teaching and administrative loads;
- and hold direct responsibility over pupils, teachers, equipment, organisational, extra-mural and curricular matters.

The central aims of this investigation were as follows:

- To discover the major conditions of duress and adversity which are regarded as sensitive in school management; and

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- To establish the degree of sensitivity of those conditions of adversity and duress in school management.

4.2.1.2. Instrument used

A School Management Sensitive Issues Interview Schedule (S.M.S.I.I.S.) was designed and constructed in such a way as to optimally guide me to obtain data providing answers to the research questions. Items used in the construction of the interview schedule were identified in the literature review on sensitive research and the conditions of adversity in school management.

Conditions of adversity in education as identified in Chapter 3 were used as an organizing framework to compile the interview schedule of nine aspects of the principal's work that they regard as sensitive to provide information to researchers. Some of the nine items were based on items used in the surveys of Goss, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, Kutame, and Trendall (Refer to Chapter 3). Others were based on the writer's personal experience and that of principals with whom discussions were held.

The nine items are as follows:

- School policy (drawing the school policy, safe keeping of the school policy and giving sensitive information contained in the policy document to researchers).
- School finance (keeping the school finance, giving sensitive information about financial issues to researchers, and giving researchers access to financial documents).
- School discipline (sensitive disciplinary information recorded, giving researchers access to learner and educator disciplinary action records, giving researchers information about disciplinary action for learners and educators)
- Working conditions (working conditions that are regarded as sensitive to discuss with researchers, and giving access to working conditions regarded as sensitive).
- Teacher absenteeism (number of educators absent from work, discussing educator reasons for being absent from work with researchers).
- Administrative duties (discussing administrative duties that are regarded as sensitive with researchers, and disclosing information kept about sensitive issues in administration).

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- Developmental appraisal system (keeping sensitive information about developmental appraisal, and disclosing information about sensitive information in developmental appraisal).

- Social relations/ staff relations (problems among educators regarded as sensitive, discussing sensitive information about educator-relations with researchers, discussing educator-learner relationship with researchers, disclosing sensitive educator social relations information to researchers).

- Whole school evaluation (educators found guilty of misconduct, and discussing information about educators found guilty of misconduct to researchers).

The instrument identified conditions of duress and adversity in school management that principals regard as sensitive to provide information to researchers and why they think the condition is sensitive, thereby making it difficult for them to provide information on.

4.2.1.3. Sample design and sampling methods

The population or target group for the survey was all the Limpopo Province Education Department secondary school principals. The principals of secondary schools in five out of seven regions were included in the population; however, the principals of the special and combined schools were excluded because of the differences between these schools and the secondary schools.

A total of twelve secondary school principals selected participated in this stage of the research. The sampling strategy was purposeful, sample size small, in line with the statistical rules for optimal sample size, and what several researchers considered to be appropriate (MacMillan and Schumacher, 1993; Bogdan and Biklen, 1998; and Babbie and Mouton, 2001). This was intended to produce a heterogeneous set of principals and thus a wide range of management problems attributed to the effective or ineffective schools and how these could be communicated with researchers. MacMillan and Schumacher (1993) indicate that purposeful samples can range from an n=1 to n=40 or more. This was done in order to obtain information-rich cases.

To achieve this the principals were chosen according to the following schema: two principals, both males, were chosen from the Mutale District, both from schools regarded as effective due to their outstanding track record of performance in matric results over a period of two years; two male principals were chosen from Thohoyandou District, both from schools regarded as average in terms of effectiveness due to their average results in matric over a period of two years; two female principals were chosen from Dzanani District, chosen because they were the only two female principals available of the only three female principals in the district; two were selected from the Vuwani District, selected due to their ineffectiveness due to matric results that were regarded as poor over a period of two years; and from each of the following districts, only one was chosen to take part in the interviews: Bushbuckridge, Tzaneen, Bopedi-Bapedi and Pietersburg West. These were chosen by chance since all principals who were at the Tzaneen Grade 12 Marking Centre and came from different districts were requested to take part in the interview. They were selected after a short introductory interview in which the interviewee also introduced himself, giving also a background of the school where he came from. After establishing the suitability of the candidate in the study, an appointment was set up for further interview. The purpose of this selection is to obtain a diverse representation of principals from the different situations and areas, which may have affected their working situation.

4.2.1.4. Data- collection methods and fieldwork practice

I asked for permission from the regional directors to conduct research in the secondary schools. I would have liked to get permission from the provincial office, but as Bogdan and Biklen (1998) remarked, going through the formal procedures that some bureaucratic systems require in giving approval to researchers can be a long, frustrating process. The region informed the district managers who in turn informed their circuit managers.

I visited each of the twelve principals personally after they were informed by their circuit managers that I would go and conduct a study in their schools. I introduced myself to the principal, showing them the letter I had from the Regional Senior Manager (see Appendix A). Even though some principals were aware that I would visit them for the purpose of the research, they were not willing to grant me an interview. Such actions can be confirmed by an observation by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) that

while researchers may get official permission to conduct the study, the subjects may sabotage their study. I then invited them to participate in the research and explained the purpose of the survey and what it would entail. After the introductions, I made appointment for interview with the principal at the time and place that would suit them best. Aware of the observation by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Weiss (1994) that the researcher must be sensitive to their environment in order to determine if using a tape recorder will make them uncomfortable or disrupt their behaviour, I informed them that I would like to use a tape recorder to record the interview.

Before beginning with the interview, each respondent was given the following confidentiality guarantee verbally: "The answers to questions I ask will be kept strictly confidential. No names are ever connected with the survey and the interview is completely anonymous." I further asked them if they would be willing to be tape-recorded. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest, this was done to encourage a good response as well as elicit responses that could be regarded as genuine. As used in this study, confidentiality of information refers to information that is legally privileged; that the employer or researcher cannot disclose without contravening a prohibition imposed on the employer or researcher by any law or order of any court; that, if disclosed may cause substantial harm to an employer or employee, the researcher or the researched; that is private relating to an employer or employee, the researcher or the researched; unless that employee or the researched consent to the disclosure of that information. Further re-assurance was provided by indicating that everything possible would be done to refraining from mentioning any names during the interview recording. All respondents requested allowed me to tape record the interview.

Arrangements were made in regard to the best way to proceed without causing undue disruption to the school, the marking process or the principal and their family members and where the interview was conducted with a minimum of distractions. Four principals chose to be interviewed in their school offices, four chose to be interviewed in their homes, and two of those at the marking centre chose to be interviewed in their rooms and two in one of the classrooms at the marking centre.

Eight interviews were conducted through the medium of Tshivenda and the other four in English. Open-ended questions as per interview schedule (see Appendix B) were

asked and all responses were tape-recorded. Where respondents gave inappropriate answers, probing for answers that were regarded as sufficiently informative for analytic purpose was done (Babie and Mouton, 2001). Approximately forty-five minutes were spent for each interview, and a few which exceeded were due to minor disruption when someone gained entrance into the room during the interview. It was only possible to have one interview a day either because of distance from one interviewee to the other or the manner in which the interviewees were available for the interview.

Principals were given the meaning of sensitivity at the beginning of the interview. The definition of sensitivity given to respondents at the beginning of the interview was a particularly important consideration. The principals needed to be clear about what sensitive issues they were being asked to comment on.

Interviews were conducted from the first week of November 2001 to the end of the first week of December 2001.

4.2.1.5. Data- capturing and data-editing

Each of the tape recording of the interviews conducted through the medium of Tshivenda was listened to, translated into English and transcribed in typed form for further analysis. Transcripts were read and re-read listening again to the tape-recordings to check if there had been any omission of data or if there had been any conceptual equivalence. Translation and transcription began soon after the interviews in December 2001. All data captured were coded through the ATLAS.ti.

4.2.1.6. Analysis

The transcripts were subjected to an analysis with ATLAS.ti. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), ATLAS.ti is probably the best package in the world right now for analysis of qualitative data. It has a variety of excellent features that aid the researcher in data analysis process. ATLAS.ti replaced manual labours of the researcher and enables researchers to be creative with qualitative data in ways not imagined possible before (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). ATLAS.ti is able to code data in various ways, allow researchers to create memos and make notes about their theory throughout their data while analysing.

Through ATLAS.ti free and open codes were created, and where codes belong together in some way or another, they are organised into families. These meaning units were used as a basis on which to translate the qualitative assessment of the patterns of meaning units into categories. Networks are created in order to present the data visually as a more user-friendly output form.

4.2.1.7. Sources of error

The main sources of error associated with this study were response effects caused by fear of possible suspicion of the intended result of the recommendations of such a research during the time when the department of education is rationalising teachers. Some respondents had fears as to why I was having an interview with them on issues they regard as sensitive on school management. Some respondents expressed fears before the start of the interview that it was studies like these that had no intention to improve the situation at schools but to get teachers out of the system.

Interviewer bias could have also affected the responses due to limited probing as a result of acquaintance with some respondents. A possible bias could have been the fact that since some of the interviewees were known to me since we are working in the same province, their attitude could have been different as observed with those I was not acquainted with.

The fact that some interviews were done at the marking centre could have an effect on their responses. Two out of the four done at the marking centre were conducted after a marking session when perhaps they were tired after a long day although they indicated that it would be the best time for them.

The quality of data during analysis may have been affected by the selection of codes and bias in interpreting the interpreted texts since some word equivalence during translation from Tshivenda into English may have not been accurate, however, this could not have affected data to a large extent.

4.3. STAGE II (Questionnaire)

The second stage of this survey consisted of questionnaires sent to principals for completion.

4.3.1. Method of inquiry

Following is the research design and methodology followed during the second stage of the survey.

4.3.1.1. Hypothesis

The research hypothesis is as defined above in 4.2.1.1. as this is the second part of the same study as indicated above.

4.3.1.2. Measurement

The questionnaire was constructed following a literature review of the studies on sensitive research and from interviews held with the principals in which conditions of adversity and duress in school management were identified. The instrument measured four characteristics of the principals that were chosen as variables, namely gender, age, length of teaching experience and length of experience as a principal.

The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section requested biographical information regarding gender, age, length of teaching experience, and length of experience as principal. The format of this section consisted of multiple –choice divisions, respondents being asked to make a tick on the appropriate block.

The second section consists of sensitive issues in school management, that is, a list of the sources of the conditions of duress and adversity in school management and how the principals, given the choice between methods of enquiry, would prefer to give answers to questions relating those sources. The principals were requested to rate the sources of the conditions of duress on a five-point Likert-type scale to indicate the general threat associated with disclosing information in regard to situations indicated as extremely sensitive, very sensitive, moderately sensitive, sensitive, and not at all sensitive. They responded to the questions by indicating how sensitive each of the aspects is to them by ticking on the appropriate box. They further indicated why they think each of the aspects is sensitive, thereby making it difficult for them to provide information on, by ticking only one reason they consider the most appropriate for sensitivity from those indicated as intrusion of privacy, fear of legal sanction, threat to my work, confidential and violation of rights. Respondents were also given the option of specifying other options in the case where none of those given apply.

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A consultant and trainer in the management and analysis of quantitative data assessed the questionnaire. One problem that had to be addressed in designing the questionnaire was how to operationalize the concept of sensitive research in education. The questionnaire was thereafter pilot tested with five principals, who were also requested to give their comments on the clarity of the items before the final version was administered. A copy of the final version of the questionnaire appears as Appendix B.

The sensitive interview questions called for an honest revelation of feelings and reactions and could be regarded by the principals as potentially threatening. As Kyriacou (1980) pointed out, ego-defensive processes lead to the under-reporting, which imply personal failure.

4.3.1.3. Sample design and sampling methods

A total of 180 secondary school principals in the Limpopo Province (formerly known as the Northern Province) were selected from 286 principals in the Northern Region to take part in the survey. The Northern Region, one of the largest in the Limpopo Province, consists of six areas and twenty seven circuit offices, covering the whole area that was formerly known as Venda and parts of Gazankulu and Lebowa.

Principals were selected from both the urban and the rural community secondary schools excluding special and combined schools. Some principals who took part in the interviews also completed the questionnaire. Principals in schools with very low learner enrolment were excluded. During interviews, principals selected and who were from schools with a lower learner enrolment were indicating experiencing fewer problems in their schools. Fewer conditions of duress and adversity existed in the management of their schools. I therefore considered only those schools with higher learner enrolment for inclusion in the survey where I would expect, as observed from interviews, principals to experience conditions of duress and adversity.

4.3.1.4. Data collection methods and field practice

The procedure as used to access interviewees was also used to access the questionnaire respondents. Questionnaires were distributed to the principal through the circuit offices. Principals visit their circuit offices on a regular basis to collect circulars and other learning materials that are supplied to the schools. A control list with names of schools

in the study was given with the questionnaires to identify the principals who did not bring back the questionnaire for further follow up. Principals were selected by chance without considering any criteria and in some cases all schools in the circuit were chosen.

A letter was attached to the questionnaire explaining the purpose of the survey, confidentiality procedures, the voluntary nature of participation and requesting the principal to return the completed questionnaires in an envelope provided to the circuit office on their next visit. I collected them after two weeks from the day on which I left them there. A few subjects who failed to comply with this deadline were willing to return the completed questionnaires to the circuit manager at a slightly later date or even post them; one hundred and sixty three questionnaires were returned. Three could not be included due to the number of missing items and ten were returned after capturing and analysis and could no longer be added to those already analysed, with the result that only one hundred and fifty were considered for analysis. This accounted for 83.3% of those distributed. (Data were collected during May and June 2002).

The questionnaires covered several aspects of the principal's work environment. For the purposes of this thesis, only those parts of the questionnaire relating to sensitivity in school management will be described in detail.

4.3.1.5. Data capturing and data editing

Data was entered into data editor loaded with an SPSS file. Although I had taken considerable care in entering the data from the study, with the help of the data analysis expert, we checked for errors that might have occurred during capture. Two approaches to error checking were used so that errors that occurred during capture are corrected: examining the data set directly using the case summaries approach and running the procedure, frequency, which produced a summary table of values for each variable. One approach could have been used but we used two to double-check the errors.

4.3.1.6. Data analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS 11 for Windows to examine the association between sensitive issues in school management on which principals have

difficulty in providing information to researchers as reported by principals and the following factors:

- Gender;
- Age of the respondent;
- Age of respondent recoded;
- Length of teaching experience;
- Length of experience as principal; and
- Length of experience as principal recoded.

The following SPSS procedures were used to develop a description of the characteristics of the respondents: FREQUENCIES, CROSSTABS, MEANS, and GRAPHS. Bivariate analyses were conducted to test for statistical significance of the association between the variables using the following procedures: the chi-square test and the independent-samples T test.

Factor analysis was done to discover patterns among variations in values of the variables. This was done through the generation of artificial factors that correlate highly with several of the real variables and that are independent of one another.

4.3.1.7. Sources of error

Matrix question format was used in the questionnaire constructed. It is possible that some respondents may have developed a pattern of, say, identifying the issues as extremely sensitive in sets of statements that indicated a particular orientation (for example; those that began with "disclosing"). In an attempt to reduce this error, the statements are short and clear and do no appear in chronological order.

While every care has been exercised for all questions to be understood by all respondents in the same context, it is possible that ambiguity in questions may not have been completely eradicated. It was applied to more than five cultural and language group respondents. However, the questionnaire was pilot tested before it was applied to the respondents. It was pre-tested to five respondents from two language and cultural groups. The questions were even discussed with the respondents who took part in the

pilot and thereafter, a questionnaire expert assessed it in order to reduce any ambiguities in the questions.

Despite the limitations indicated above, the data collected was of a high quality, considering the fact that everything possible was done to reduce the possible errors during interview and in the questionnaire. I assume that

- the questionnaire included the major sources of the conditions of duress and adversity in school management which make it difficult for principals to give information to researchers;
- the questionnaire included the major reasons why respondents think the aspect is sensitive to discuss with researchers;
- the respondents understood the definition of 'sensitive issues' presented in the S.M.S.I.Q.;
- the respondents made thoughtful and careful responses to the questions during interview and of items in the S.M.S.I.Q.;
- the five-point response scale in the S.M.S.I.Q. was understood and used with an acceptable degree of consistency by the responding principals;
- the anonymity afforded to the respondents enabled them to make honest and genuine responses in the S.M.S.I.Q.

CHAPTER 5: QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the results obtained from the analysis of questionnaires completed by principals from secondary schools. The demographic profile and the main trends and patterns in the data are presented.

5.1. DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT

The most important demographic characteristics of the principals who completed questionnaires are addressed in this section. Analyses were done to determine which demographic variables correlate best with their responses to those matters most sensitive in school management. The following variables were included in the analysis.

- Gender
- Age
- Length of teaching experience
- Length of experience as a principal.

5.1.1. Gender

Table 5.1 presents the gender distribution of questionnaire respondents – school principals. The majority of the respondents were men with less than 11% of the sample being women. These findings are consistent with the national situation where the 1991 figures show that although the majority of teachers in this country are women, they do not hold the majority of promotion posts: there were more male than female principals (Hayward, 1992).

Table 5.1. Frequency Table: Gender (raw percentages)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	134	89.3	89.3	89.3
	Female	16	10.7	10.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

5.1.2. Age

Table 5.2 shows the distribution of the age of principals who completed questionnaires. Very few principals in the sample are younger than 40, the majority being between 41-50 years of age. It is understandable that there are fewer younger principals because a

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prerequisite for the post of principal is at least seven years' teaching experience (Western Cape Education List of Vacancies Volume 3: No 3/98). Principals tend get promoted to some external departmental posts as they become more experienced. It is also possible that some principals opt for early retirement before 60, as there are few principals older than 61 in this sample. The results show that principals are predominantly between 40 and 60 years of age.

Table 5.2. Frequency Table

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30 Years or younger	1	0.7	0.7	0.7
	31-40 years	12	8.0	8.0	8.7
	41-50 years	86	57.3	57.3	66.0
	51-60 years	48	32.0	32.0	98.0
	61 years or older	3	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

5.1.3. Age recoded

I have recoded the 'age' category in order to avoid having too many empty cells during cross tabulation. Table 5.3 presents the frequency distribution of recoded age of principals.

Table 5.3. Frequency Table: Age recoded (raw percentages)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	40 years or younger	13	8.7	8.7	8.7
	41-50 years	86	57.3	57.3	66.0
	Older than 50	51	34.0	34.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

The distribution of the recoded age categories is shown in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1. Recoded age category
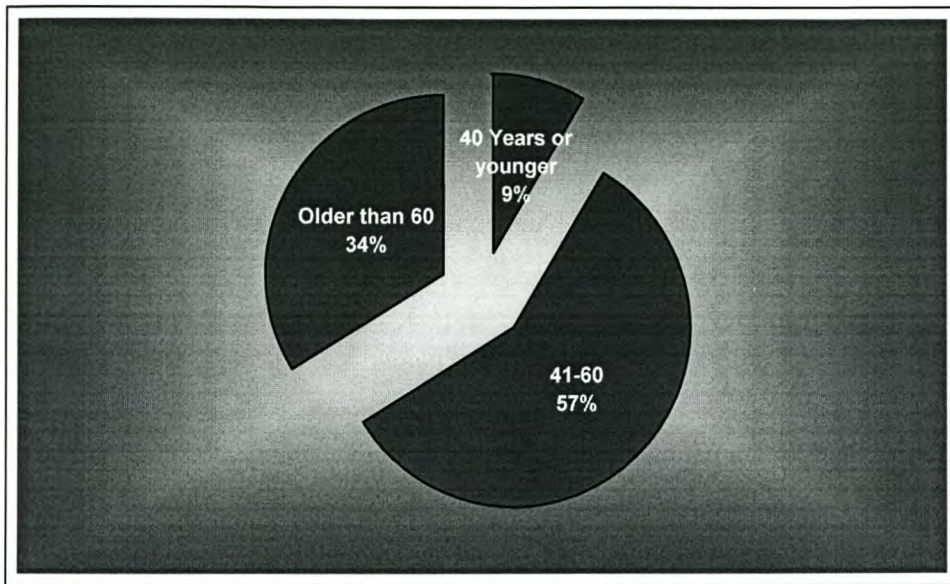
5.1.4. Length of teaching experience

Table 5.4 presents the data on the length of teaching experience of the principals. More than three quarters of the principals have taught for more than sixteen years. Only one had taught for less than six years. As mentioned earlier, a possible explanation for this is that one of the requirements of the post of principal is that one must have had some experience (WCED: Vol.3: seven to nine years) as a teacher.

Table 5.4. Frequency Table: Length of teaching experience (raw percentages)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-5 years	1	.7	.7	.7
	6-10 years	3	2.0	2.0	2.7
	11-15 years	14	9.3	9.3	12.0
	More than 15 years	132	88.0	88.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

5.1.5. Length of experience as principals

The distribution of principals according to their years of experience as principals is shown in Table 5.5. The majority of principals fall into one of two categories, having either between 11 and 15 years experience, or more than sixteen years of experience (31% and 27% respectively).

Table 5.5. Frequency Table: Length of experience as principal (raw percentages)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than one year	8	5.3	5.3	5.3
	1-5 years	30	20.0	20.0	25.3
	6-10 years	24	16.0	16.0	41.3
	11-15 years	47	31.3	31.3	72.7
	More than 16 years	41	27.3	27.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

To summarise then, the demographic profile of principals who completed questionnaires is as follows:

- More than three quarters of the principals are male.

- More than three quarters of the principals have had many years of teaching experience as teachers.

- More that half of the principals have had extensive (eleven or more years') experience as principals.

The overall picture that has emerged is of a relatively homogenous sample. This is perhaps due not only to the small size of the sample, but perhaps also reflects the de facto situation in the country where most high school principals are male and will have had a reasonable number of years teaching experience. It does imply, however, that the possibilities of cross-tabulations are limited. In fact, our subsequent analyses have revealed no meaningful differences in responses when cross-tabulating responses with gender and experience as teachers.

5.2.   ISSUES OF SENSITIVITY

Section 2 of the School Management Sensitive Issues Questionnaire (SMSIQ), posed the following question: "Indicate how sensitive each of the aspects is to you by ticking in the box that best describes your experiences". The sensitivity of items was measured on a five-point scale, ranging from "Extremely sensitive" to "Not at all sensitive". Respondents had to indicate how sensitive each of the aspects is by ticking in the box that best describes their experiences.

Table 5.6 presents the distribution of responses – in descending order according to how sensitive the respondents rated an issue - to sensitivity issues in school management.

Table 5.6: Rank order of sensitivity issues in school management (raw percentages)

	Sensitivity issue	Extremely sensitive	Very sensitive	Moderately sensitive	Slightly sensitive	Not at all sensitive
1.	Educator/s with AIDS	58	17	5	5	15
2.	Learner/s with AIDS	57	16	7	4	15
3.	Exercise of corporal punishment	56	15	4	7	18
4.	Disclosing educators' personal problems	55	31	7	4	3
5.	Sexual abuse among fellow educators	42	27	9	3	18
6.	Backbiting among educators	39	26	20	11	5
7.	Disclosing information about educator's salary issues	36	35	12	8	9
8.	Records of educators found guilty of misconduct	36	32	11	8	13
9.	Lack of text and prescribed books	36	23	9	3	28
10.	Records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct	34	36	11	6	13
11.	Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners	32	32	7	7	22
12.	Late delivery of stationery, text and prescribed books	32	23	14	9	22
13.	Discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners	26	28	21	8	17
14.	Learner drug use	22	35	9	14	20
15.	Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation	21	36	17	15	11
16.	Influence on labour unions	20	19	26	17	19
17.	Code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies	17	28	23	10	22
18.	Educators arriving late for school	16	20	17	24	23
19.	Educator reasons for being absent	16	31	22	23	8
20.	Educators absence records	15	23	25	19	18
21.	Disclosing information about lazy teachers	15	31	19	15	19
22.	Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators	15	26	29	11	20
23.	Handling school's financial affairs	14	31	22	11	21
24.	Making learner performance records available to researchers	14	13	20	14	39
25.	Disclosing financial documents (receipt/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts)	13	28	15	7	38
26.	Conflicts among educators	13	28	20	22	17
27.	Lack of discipline among educators	12	31	19	21	17
28.	Record of disciplinary action for learners	11	26	30	12	21
29.	Reasons for learner absenteeism	9	11	24	21	36
30.	Record of learner's disciplinary problems	9	25	31	19	16
31.	Coping with problems caused by educators	8	26	37	16	13
32.	Disclosing the sources of income	7	17	21	17	38
33.	Religious matters policy	6	10	17	17	50

The results show that the principals indicated that they regarded the majority of issues in school management are regarded as being very sensitive (that is either *extremely* or *very sensitive* on the scale above). Out of the thirty-three items listed no item has a

percentage of more than fifty percent for the 'not at all sensitive' category. Only one item was rated by more than thirty-nine percent of the respondents as 'not at all sensitive' – viz. religious matters policy.

Half of the respondents indicated that religious matters policy are sensitive to some degree while the other half indicate that this issue is 'not at all sensitive'. Further analysis showed a significant age effect with more than half (56%) of the principals who are older than 50 years of age regard this issue as 'not at all sensitive'. This can clearly be seen in through Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Religious matters policy.
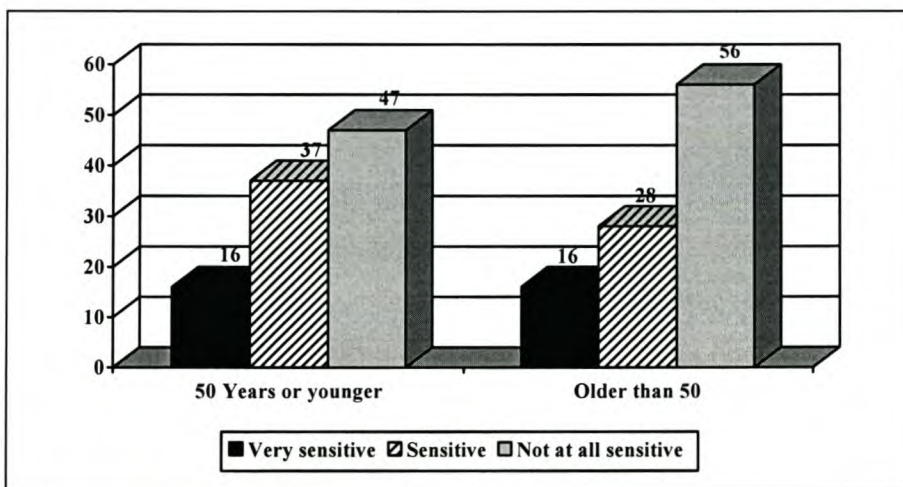
AIDS: The responses in Table 5.6 show that AIDS was rated the most sensitive issue. The AIDS virus is killing more and more teachers and learners in schools in South Africa. This is according to figures released by the Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Divisions (Heard) at the University of Natal (Walters, 2003). Aids-related issues in this questionnaire were rated 'very sensitive'. More than half the principals regard providing information about educators and learners with AIDS as an 'extremely sensitive' issue. As the law prohibits discussions about someone who has been positively identified as having an infection of the HIV/AIDS virus (National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 (6) (6.1) and (6.5)), such issues are understandably considered sensitive by principals, particularly if those concerned have not yet revealed their status. According to these sections, unauthorised disclosure of HIV/AIDS-related information could give rise to legal liability. The inclusion of a chapter about AIDS policy at

schools in the National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 is further indication of the sensitivity with which this issue is being handled at higher management levels of schools.

Corporal punishment. The other moral issue rated as 'extremely sensitive' by more than half of the respondents is the exercise of corporal punishment (see item 3 in rank order above). Principals agree that corporal punishment is morally wrong and therefore reporting on it is also sensitive (see item 3). It is interesting to see that it is the principals who are older than forty years of age who regard this issue as very sensitive. In spite of strong opposition to the application of corporal punishment by human rights activists and the law, anecdotal evidence suggests that it is still being exercised at schools. Principals find it difficult to ensure that educators refrain from applying it. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (10) prohibits corporal punishment at a school to a learner even if it is done in the exercise of religious beliefs or culture, as it would be to allow the practise of the religion or culture in the manner which is inconsistent with the Bill of Rights. There are some religious or cultural groups who still argue for its application. For example, the Court was approached in the Christian Education SA v Minister of Education (1999 (4) SA 1092 (SE)) to declare section 10 unconstitutional and invalid to the extent that it is applicable to independent schools. The Court concluded that the administration of corporal punishment at school constitutes a violation of sections 10 and 12 (1) (c), (d) and (e) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. The legislature did no more than give effect to the provisions of section 28 (1) (d) of the Constitution. This case was referred to the Constitutional Court (Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education 2000 (4) SA 757 (CC)), which ruled that Section 10 gives effect to the spirit and letter of the Constitution and that corporal punishment is appropriately prohibited by this provision. The application of corporal punishment imposed upon a learner may result in civil claims for damages. See Dawling v Diocesian College $ Others 1993 (3) SA 847 © and Hiltonion Society v Crafton 1952 (3) SA (A).

Young principals are probably more "liberal" and may regard legal prohibition as a way of merely reducing its application, not totally prohibiting the practice. However, those who are found guilty of applying corporal punishment are liable on conviction to a sentence which could be imposed for assault. These results are consistent with reports

of educators who are loosing their jobs because they have been found guilty of applying corporal punishment (Musetha, 2002). Given the debates about corporal punishment as stated above it is understandable that principals should rate corporal punishment as a sensitive issue in school management. The overall impression is that moral issues are sensitive and that getting information about such issues could thus also be difficult.

Personal problems of educators. The majority of principals seem to regard issues relating to the personal integrity of their colleagues or educators as being sensitive. More than half of the principals agree that 'disclosing educators' personal problems' is an extremely sensitive issue in school management. While there seem to be no rules or regulations controlling the disclosure of personal information that could have influenced the principals in their rating the sensitivity of this issue, principals clearly feel uncomfortable in disclosing the personal problems educators are experiencing. As educators are not required to reveal their personal problems to their principals, these are problems will have probably been discussed with the principal in confidence. For this reason principals would find discussing this issue as extremely sensitive.

Sexual abuse. The other issue regarded as very sensitive, which is related to personal integrity of colleagues, is that of 'sexual abuse among fellow educators' (see item 5 in Table 5.6). Sexual matters are generally perceived to be sensitive, and when they involve educators, (it is regarded as a serious misconduct if an educator is found guilty of sexual abuse on other employee; Section 17 (1) (b) of Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998) and where there may be unpleasant repercussions for the educator and the school, one would expect it to be a sensitive issue for principals to talk about. It is also an issue that may be subject to litigation and thus discretion would be required from that consideration as well.

Another issue that has a bearing on personal integrity is that of 'backbiting among educators', which is rated as very sensitive. Ninety-five percent of the principals rate this issue as being sensitive to some degree, suggesting that this issue is an extremely sensitive (see item 6).

Issues that are regarded as not being very sensitive are mostly related to learners or the school: disclosing the sources of income (item 32), coping with problems caused by

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educators (item 31), records of learner's disciplinary problems (item 30) and reasons for learner absenteeism (item 29). There is probably nothing that prohibits principals from discussing these issues, nor do they perhaps fear any consequences as a result of discussing any of these issues.

The rank order of sensitive issues in school management will be discussed below.

5.2.1. Ranking of recoded sensitive issues

The ratings of sensitive issues were recoded into three categories to determine their rank order. The categories of 'extremely 'and 'very sensitive' were collapsed to a single category, 'very sensitive, the categories 'moderately' and 'slightly' 'to 'sensitive', and the third category remains 'not at all sensitive'. Table 5.7 presents the results in ranked order according to raw percentages.

Table 5.7: Sensitivity issues in school management (row percentages)

	Sensitivity issue	Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive
1.	Disclosing educators' personal problems	86	12	3
2.	Educator/s with AIDS	75	9	15
3.	Learner/s with AIDS	73	11	15
4.	Exercise of corporal punishment	71	11	18
5.	Disclosing information about educator's salary issues	71	20	9
6.	Sexual abuse among fellow educators	70	12	18
7.	Records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct	70	17	13
8.	Records of educators found guilty of misconduct	69	19	13
9.	Backbiting among educators	64	30	5
10.	Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners	64	15	22
11.	Lack of text and prescribed books	59	13	28
12.	Learner drug use	57	23	20
13.	Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation	57	32	11
14.	Late delivery of stationery, text and prescribed books	55	24	22
15.	Discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners	54	29	17
16.	Educator reasons for being absent	47	45	8
17.	Disclosing information about lazy teachers	46	35	19
18.	Code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies	45	33	22
19.	Handling school's financial affairs	45	33	21
20.	Lack of discipline among educators	43	40	17
21.	Disclosing financial documents (receipt/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts)	41	21	38
22.	Conflicts among educators	41	42	17
23.	Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance	40	40	20

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	Sensitivity issue	Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive
	indicators			
24.	Influence on labour unions	39	43	19
25.	Educators absence records	38	44	18
26.	Record of disciplinary action for learners	37	42	21
27.	Educators arriving late for school	36	41	23
28.	Coping with problems caused by educators	34	53	13
29.	Record of learner's disciplinary problems	33	50	16
30.	Making learner performance records available to researchers	27	34	39
31.	Disclosing the sources of income	24	38	38
32.	Reasons for learner absenteeism	20	44	36
33.	Religious matters policy	16	34	50

Principals regard the majority of the items as very sensitive; for example, the percentage rating of the items 1 to 20 as extremely sensitive ranges range from 43% to 86%. Twelve issues are regarded as sensitive and only one as not sensitive by 50% of the principals. It is notable that while 41% of the principals regard disclosing financial documents (receipts/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts) as very sensitive, 38% indicate that the issue as not at all sensitive. (This issue would imply that those dealing with money need to be transparent and that the disclosure of financial reports is considered acceptable).

The twenty issues rated as being more sensitive than not, can be grouped into five broad categories of issues. These are issues relating to

- Personal problems of educators (disclosing educators' personal problems; disclosing information about educator's salary issues; and backbiting among educators);

- Controversial or highly contested issues (educator/s with AIDS, learner/s with AIDS; exercise of corporal punishment; code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies);

- Sexual matters (sexual abuse among fellow educators; record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners; and discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners);

- Disciplinary procedures (records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct; records of educators found guilty of misconduct; involvement in

serious educator disciplinary situation; educator reasons for being absent; and lack of discipline among educators);

- Possible negative consequences (lack of text and prescribed books; learner drug use; late delivery of stationery, text and prescribed books; disclosing information about lazy teachers (teachers who fail to meet the required performance standards as agreed upon by the parties to the Education Labour Relations Council); and handling school's financial affairs).

The most highly ranked issue is 'disclosing educators' personal problems', followed by educators with AIDS and learners with AIDS. With regard to these items, it is interesting to note that personal issues of educators are regarded as being more sensitive than those of learners. In addition, studies have consistently shown that discussing personal information is problematic due to ethical considerations (Soltis, 1990).

AIDS is a pandemic. It is not surprising that principals should regard this issue as most sensitive because people who suffer from AIDS are commonly thought of as having got it through multiple sexual relations or intravenous drug use (Lee, 1993). This is however not the case because there are many ways in which people can get AIDS, for example, by getting infected blood into the bloodstream; and from mother to child, either before and during birth or during breast feeding. However, educators and learners may not like being associated with people who acquired AIDS through sensitive and secretive activities including sexual behaviour and drug use. The findings that there are ethical dilemmas in AIDS research are consistent with reports by Melton and Gray (1988) that research on AIDS presents a stark example of the dilemmas involved in balancing individual rights and social welfare in conducting psychosocial research: significant legal threats to confidentiality are matched inadequately by legal means of protecting privacy.

There is also one financial issue that is related to morality, which is regarded as very sensitive; and that is 'disclosing information about educators' salary issues'. Only 9% indicated that the issue is not at all sensitive. There is an interesting correlation with principals' years of experience with those having more experience generally rating this as being a more sensitive issue (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. Disclosing information about educators' salary issues.
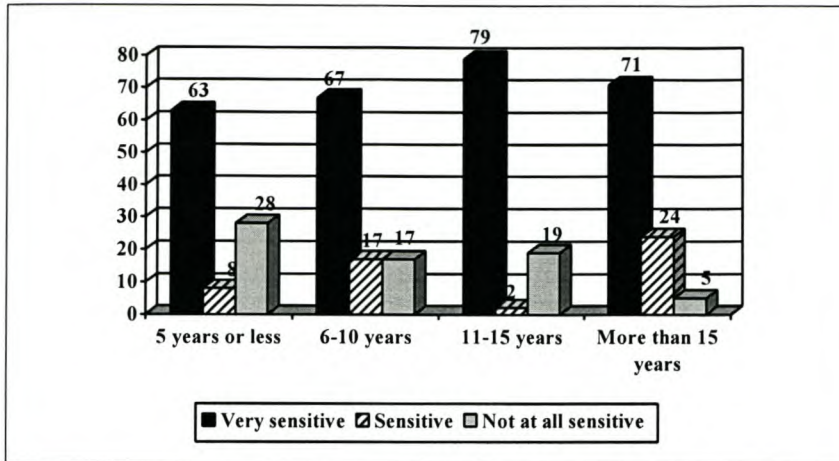
In contrast, financial issues related to the school as opposed to individual teachers, are not regarded as very sensitive. This can clearly be seen in Figure 5.4, which shows how principals of different age groups rate the item disclosing sources of income.

Figure 5.4: Sensitivity ratings of disclosing sources of income (school) and age of principals
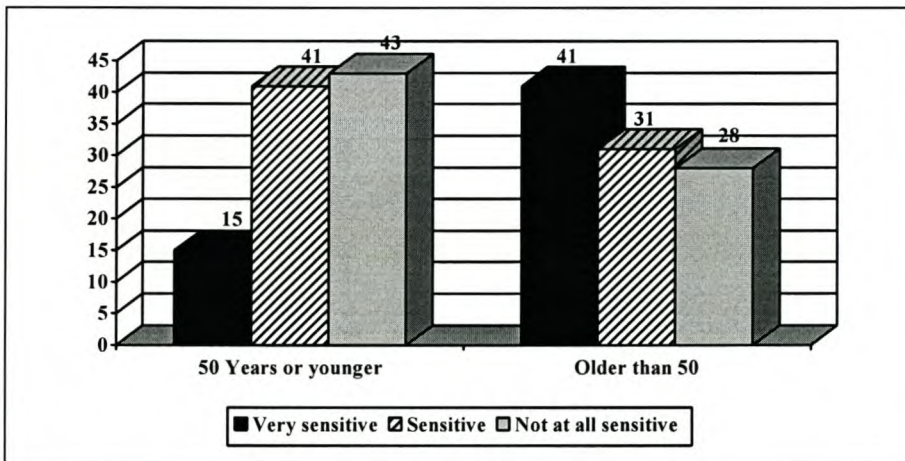
Younger principals tend to regard the issue as not very sensitive. Unlike the issue of salaries discussed above, source of income does not seem to pose a problem for educator morality.

Another issue that is regarded as very sensitive by all principals, regardless of their years of experience as principals, is the 'record of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct'. There are significant differences in the rating of this item by the principals of different years of experience as principals (Chi-Square = 14.336, p <

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0.05, Cramer's V = 0.309). This is summarised in Figure 5.5. So, the more experienced principals rated this issue to be more sensitive.

Figure 5.5: Ratings for sensitivity regarding recording disciplinary procedure for educators charged with misconduct by years of experience as a principal.
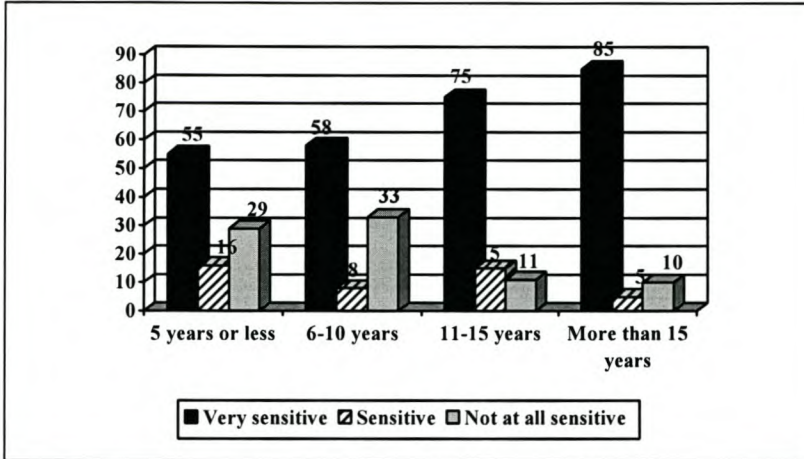
Cross-tabulations reveal significant differences for the principals of different ages in their rating of this item (Chi-Square = 7.106; p< 0.05; Cramer's V = 0.218). This might provide evidence that principals tend to view moral issues as being more sensitive as they grow older. This can be clearly presented through Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6. Age of principals and their ratings of sensitivity for the issue of recording of disciplinary procedure for educators charged with misconduct.

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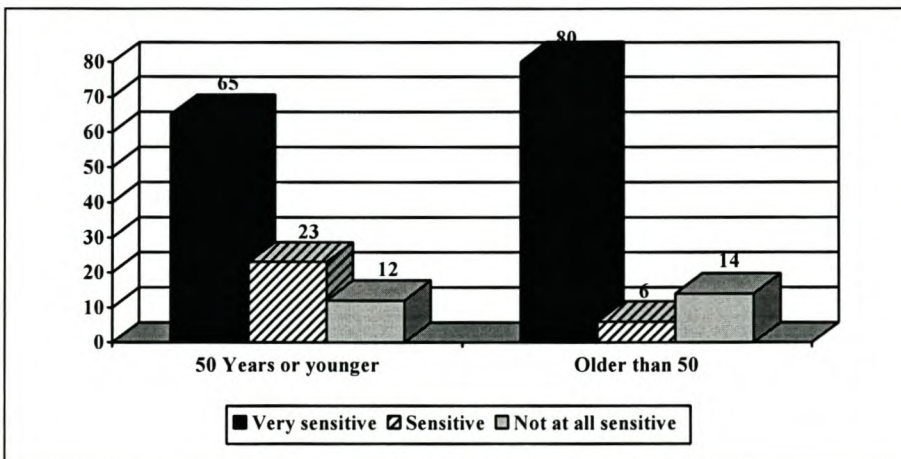
This becomes more evident when one compares the inexperienced teachers (5 years or less) with the experienced principals (more than 15 years). While only 55% of the 38 less-experienced respondents regard the issue as sensitive, 85% of the 41 more-experienced respondents regard the issue as sensitive. This pattern can also be observed in Figure 5.7, where "involvement in serious disciplinary situation" was cross tabulated with the years of experience of principals.

Figure 5.7: Sensitivity ratings of "Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation" and years of experience as a principal.
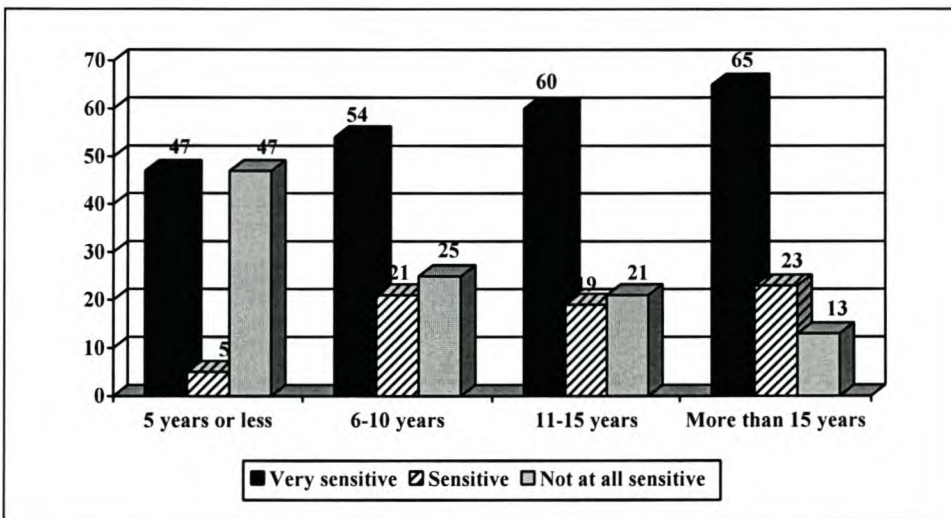
As principals become more experienced, the more likely they regard issues relating to educator discipline as more sensitive. One could further speculate that

- experience has taught them it is difficult to deal with issues related to educator discipline;

- the more experienced they become, the less they want to involve themselves in disciplinary issues;

- younger teachers still think that they are "revolutionary" and can easily change things;

- the majority of teachers who are appearing in these disciplinary hearings are young.

It is again evident that principals regard issues that affect poor educator morality as very sensitive. Principals probably regard the issue of poor educator morality as sensitive because of the consequences it could have on them and even on the learners – educators, who act in *loco parentis*, should be role models for learners. Any charge of misconduct could harm the professional image of the educator. In agreement with this

speculation, the South African Council for Educators (1999) indicates that the educators should act in a proper and becoming way such that their behaviour does not bring the teaching profession into disrepute. Any charge of misconduct could also harm the professional image of the educator.

Principals regard 'involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation' as very sensitive. However, those principals with an experience of five years or less are divided on the sensitivity of the issue: slightly more than half regard the issue as sensitive, while 47% regard the issue as not at all sensitive (Chi-Square = 15.153, p< 0.05, Cramer's V = 0.226). These results are shown in Figure 5.5. Educators are expected to be models and examples of learners they teach. Besides, the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 Section 18 requires that educators conduct themselves in a proper manner so that they are in a position to discipline the learners. Serious disciplinary situations would clearly raise questions about the character of the educators. Only 11% of the principals regard this issue as not sensitive at all, which is an indication of how sensitive this issue is. This is further indication that principals are keen to protect the image of educators as professional and worthy of emulation despite their poor discipline.

Not surprisingly, as discussed above, sexual issues, particularly those relating to abuse of children are regarded as being very sensitive. Principals regard keeping records or recording instances of sexual abuse between educators and learners as sensitive.

Figure 5.8: Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners and the age of the principals
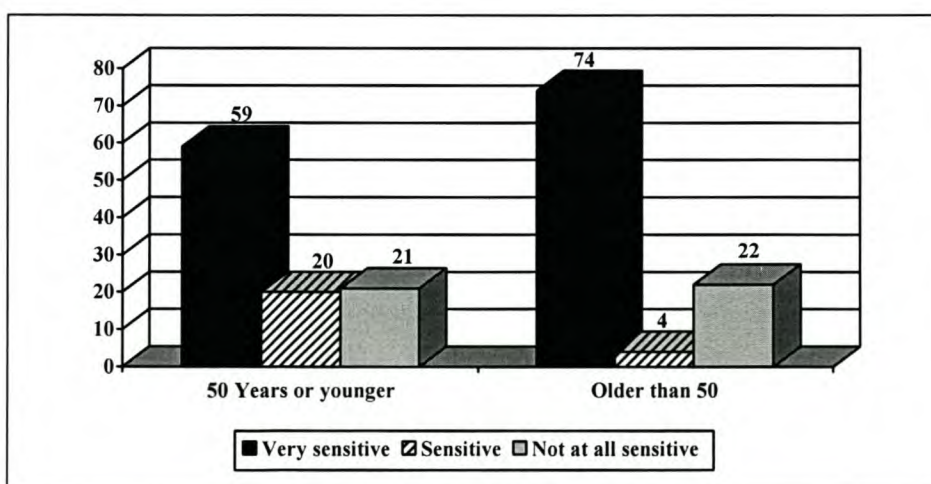
It is interesting to note that the cross-tabulation of the ratings for this issue with the age of the principals reveals that as principals become older, they regard the issue as increasingly more sensitive (Chi-Square = 6.896; p< 0.05; Cramers V = 0.216). This can be seen in Figure 5.8 above.

Another moral issue related to this is the code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies. Cross tabulations reveal significant differences for the principals above and below 50 years of age in their rating of this item (Chi-Square = 7.841; p< 0.05; Cramer's V = 0.229). This is presented in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9: Code of conduct regarding learner pregnancy
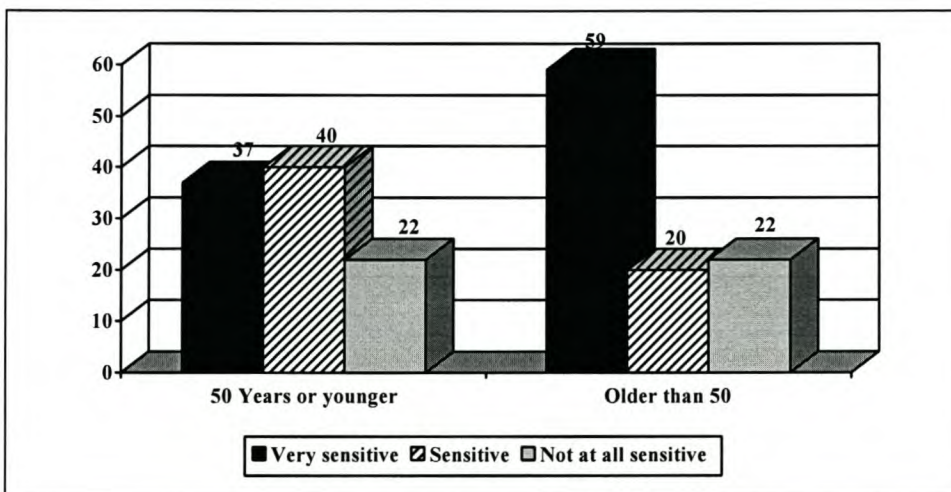
Among the twenty issues rated as 'very sensitive', there are two more issues, not related to educator morality. These are: lack of text- and prescribed books and the late delivery of stationery, text- and prescribed books. It is the responsibility of the department of education to see to it that these are supplied without delay and that every learner receives enough books. While the government is required by law (South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 (34) (1)) to supply these books and stationery, there is however, a condition that a private company should supply these items, on the basis of having won a tender. This creates a situation where the government, the tender board and the supplier apportion blame to another party for either shortages or lack of supplies.

This potentially has several possible consequences.

- Learners may perform poorly in examinations when they learn and write without the required text books.

- Principals may be blamed for poor results at their schools by parents and school authorities.

- The image of the school may suffer adversely because of poor examination results.

As indicated in above in this section, issues not perceived to be linked to educator morality are generally regarded as less sensitive. Most of these issues are learner related. It is also interesting to note that 'educators arriving late for school', which is related to professionalism, is also regarded as less sensitive. Educators' arriving late for school is considered an offence, but apparently a less serious one. Consequently revealing this information to a researcher would therefore not hold serious consequences for either the educator concerned or the principal who supplies the information.

5.2.2. Ratings of sensitivity and reasons for sensitivity.

Respondents were asked to provide reasons why they regard aspects of school management as sensitive, and why it is consequently difficult to make this public to researchers. Respondents were given five possible reasons from which they needed to choose one only. They were also given the option of providing their own reason if they felt one of the five provided was not accurate. Table 5.8 below summarises the results, indicating the modal percentages of the sensitive issues and the reasons provided for their sensitivity (in bold).

The modal percentages indicate that principals are clear in their minds about the reasons for sensitivity for 22 of the 33 issues. There is one item for which an ambiguous indication of its sensitivity was given, namely, religious matters policy. Half the respondents regard the issue as sensitive while the other half regards the issue as not at all sensitive. The reason principals provided for this is that they feel it is a violation of (constitutional) rights (Act 108 of 1996). The constitution of this country allows individuals to belong to the religion of their choice and consequently learners or educators should not be forced to follow the particular religious policies of a given school.

Table 5.8. Recoded sensitivity and reasons for sensitivity (raw percentages)

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Handling school's financial affairs	**45**	33	21	1	26	16	**45**	7	5
2.	Disclosing the sources of income	24	**38**	**38**	19	11	10	**47**	7	7
3.	Disclosing financial documents (receipt/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts)	**41**	21	38	7	15	19	**44**	8	7
4.	Religious matters policy	16	34	**50**	13	3	5	15	**59**	6
5.	Code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies	**45**	33	22	13	18	7	11	**47**	4
6.	Reasons for learner absenteeism	20	**44**	36	12	6	12	27	**39**	4
7.	Learner drug use	**57**	23	20	9	16	22	19	**33**	2
8.	Record of learner's disciplinary problems	33	**50**	16	8	20	14	**38**	16	4
9.	Record of disciplinary action for learners	37	**42**	21	9	24	13	**29**	21	4
10.	Exercise of corporal punishment	**71**	11	18	0	**44**	18	2	33	3
11.	Disclosing educators' personal problems	**86**	12	3	**35**	12	3	26	24	1
12.	Backbiting among educators	**64**	30	5	19	**22**	15	**22**	20	4
13.	Sexual abuse among fellow educators	**70**	12	18	21	25	12	11	**28**	3
14.	Discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners	**54**	29	17	17	21	12	21	**22**	7
15.	Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners	**64**	15	22	16	**29**	7	**29**	17	2
16.	Disclosing information about educator's	**71**	20	9	34	7	1	**50**	8	7

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
	salary issues									
17.	Educators arriving late for school	36	**41**	23	8	11	**32**	26	17	6
18.	Educators absence records	38	**44**	18	4	9	24	**50**	8	5
19.	Educator reasons for being absent	**47**	45	8	19	3	13	**46**	17	2
20.	Disclosing information about lazy teachers	**46**	35	19	10	16	21	**36**	13	4
21.	Coping with problems caused by educators	34	**53**	13	5	14	33	**36**	9	4
22.	Lack of discipline among educators	**43**	40	17	4	17	**37**	22	15	6
23.	Conflicts among educators	41	**42**	17	11	18	22	**25**	21	3
24.	Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation	**57**	32	11	6	**32**	17	24	16	4
25.	Records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct	**70**	17	13	10	24	11	**35**	17	4
26.	Records of educators found guilty of misconduct	**69**	19	13	10	23	9	**41**	13	3
27.	Making learner performance records available to researchers	27	34	**39**	13	9	11	**40**	15	13
28.	Influence on labour unions	39	**43**	19	5	18	20	21	**33**	4
29.	Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators	**40**	**40**	20	14	4	13	**53**	10	5
30.	Lack of text and prescribed books	**59**	13	28	2	6	**47**	15	22	10
31.	Late delivery of stationery, text and prescribed books	**55**	24	22	3	11	**45**	10	23	9
32.	Learner/s with AIDS	**73**	11	15	**34**	3	2	24	32	4
33.	Educator/s with AIDS	**75**	9	15	**37**	5	2	20	33	3

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Table 5.9 presents a summary of issues where a single reason why the issue is sensitive has been identified, and where more than one reason was selected for explaining the sensitivity of the issue. These issues are discussed in-depth in the following sections 5.2.1. to 5.2.6. below.

Table 5.9. Summary: Agreement between issues of sensitivity and reasons of sensitivity

	Agreement	'Very sensitive' or 'sensitive' issues items	'Not at all sensitive' issues	Neither 'sensitive' nor 'not at all sensitive'(i.e. very sensitive)
Reasons for sensitivity	Single reason was selected	1; 2; 3; 5; 6; 7; 8; 10; 16; 18; 19; 20; 22; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31.	0	4
	Multiple reasons were selected for the sensitivity of the issue.	9; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 17; 21; 23; 32; 33.	0	0

The figures in the columns headed 'sensitive issues items', 'not sensitive' and 'neither sensitive nor not at all sensitive' represent the items in Table 5.8. There are 22 items for which a single reason for their sensitivity was selected. There are 11 items in which there are several reasons selected for the issue being considered as 'not at all sensitive'. There was only one item for which it is not clear whether it is sensitive or not, but the majority of the respondents selected the same reason for this, namely 'violation of rights' which may offer some explanation for this disparity in rating.

In the following section the distribution of sensitive issues and the reasons selected for the sensitivity of each issue is discussed.

5.2.2.1.   Confidentiality as a reason for sensitivity.

Fourteen out of the thirty-three items are regarded as sensitive because they deal with confidential matters (See discussion in Chapter 2 for what is meant by 'confidential'). Table 5.10 presents an analysis of the ratings of these issues (modal percentages are in

bold). The table shows that principals agree in ten out of fourteen issues that they are sensitive because of their confidential nature. What is common with issues regarded as sensitive due to their confidential nature is that

- they are finance related (Disclosing information about educator's salary issues; Handling school's financial affairs; Disclosing financial documents (receipt/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts); Disclosing the sources of income);
- they deal with disciplinary issues (Records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct; Records of educators found guilty of misconduct; Educator reasons for being absent; Record of learner's disciplinary problems; Record of disciplinary action for learners;
- they deal with educator performance (Disclosing information about lazy teachers; Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators; Educators absence records;
- they deal with educator behaviour (Backbiting among educators; Coping with problems caused by educators; Conflicts among educators);
- they deal with sexual matters (Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners;

Principals agree that disclosing information about educator's salary issues is sensitive (91%) because of it is confidential (50%) in nature. Salary issues are personal and thus confidential. Salary issues are personal and thus confidential. An educator's salary scale may not be confidential, but the educator's personal salary package is considered confidential. This is possibly the issue principals find sensitive.

Table 5.10. Issues rated on sensitivity due to confidentiality

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Disclosing information about educator's salary issues	71	20	9	34	7	1	50	8	7
2.	Records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct	70	17	13	10	24	11	35	17	4
3.	Records of educators found guilty of misconduct	69	19	13	10	23	9	41	13	3
4.	Educator reasons for being absent	47	45	8	19	3	13	46	17	2
5.	Disclosing information about lazy teachers	46	35	19	10	16	21	36	13	4
6.	Handling school's financial affairs	45	33	21	1	26	16	45	7	5
7.	Disclosing financial documents (receipt/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts)	41	21	38	7	15	19	44	8	7
8.	Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators	40	40	20	14	4	13	53	10	5
9.	Disclosing the sources of income	24	38	38	19	11	10	47	7	7
10.	Record of learner's disciplinary problems	33	50	16	8	20	14	38	16	4
11.	Record of disciplinary action for learners	37	42	21	9	24	13	29	21	4
12.	Educators absence records	38	44	18	4	9	24	50	8	5
13.	Coping with problems caused by educators	34	53	13	5	14	33	36	9	4
14.	Conflicts among educators	41	42	17	11	18	22	25	21	3

Seventy eight percent of respondents indicated that handling schools' financial affairs is sensitive. Forty five percent indicated that the issue is sensitive because of its confidential nature; school financial documents may not be accessible to researchers or other people without consent of the School Governing Body or departmental officials. Given the financial situations at schools where more and more principals are being charged for misappropriating school funds, it is understandable that principals regard this issue as a sensitive one. It is therefore reasonable that principals should want to keep this information confidential.

Principals agree that disclosing financial documents (receipts/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts) is sensitive because they are confidential. Receipts, chequebooks, and expenditure receipts are the most important documents when doing

financial auditing, which must be done at least once every year (SASA 84 of 1996 (43)). It is possible that this is due to possible consequences in case these records cannot be produced when they are needed. Principals may be charged and fined or even fired if these documents are not in order (Employment of Educators Act 7 of 1998 (18)). Forty four percent of the principals interviewed regard the issues as sensitive because it is confidential. It is surprising that this should be regarded as confidential since it is common knowledge that the main source of income for schools is school funds, government allocations and, to a degree, from donations.

It is also interesting to note that principals agree that information kept in records, for both educators and learners, is regarded as sensitive because it is confidential. Access to these records is limited due to the personal nature of information contained in these records.

It is also surprising that 79% respondents regard records of disciplinary action for learners is sensitive. Three different reasons were given for this: fear of legal sanction, confidentiality and violation of rights. This can be attributed to the cultural and religious beliefs as opposed to legislative laws protecting children that have sparked off debate on how learners should be disciplined as discussed about in item 3 above. Related to this is the record of learner's disciplinary problems, which is also regarded as sensitive due to its confidential nature. We are living in a world where people are made aware of their rights through the print and electronic media, which are accessible even to the children. Some learning areas like Life Orientation and Human and Social Sciences in schools also teach learners about their rights. They are aware that information about their character may not be revealed without their consent. Principals would therefore regard dealing with issues related to revealing information about learners to a third person as a sensitive issue.

Respondents indicate that discussing records of disciplinary procedure for educators charged with misconduct are sensitive because according to the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, such information is confidential in the sense that it may only be given to Union Representatives only on request if they want to make references during a hearing. It is reasonable that principals should regard these records as confidential because evidence leading to a charge of misconduct could lead to severe

consequences for the individuals concerned. Teachers are regularly charged for various types of misconduct (these are discussed in the Chapter 6). According to the Employment of Educators Act Number 76 of 1998, an educator found guilty of such misconduct is discharged from duty. Disclosure of such information could also result in personal difficulties between the educator and the principal and, in extreme cases, may end up in court (SACE, 1999).

Related to this issue (item 2) are discussing records of educators found guilty of misconduct (item 3). Respondents regard these records as sensitive because of their confidential nature. These are kept in a safe place where access is limited. The records contain information related to educator behaviour that could have an adverse affect on the good relations between the staff of the school. It is therefore sensitive to reveal such records of evidence of an educator charged for misconduct in cases related to, for example, sexual abuse.

Principals indicate that educator absence records are sensitive because they are confidential. However, a time register is usually placed where everyone has access to it (in order to record their hours of work), and it is thus not generally considered to be a confidential document as it is already freely available for others to read. Closely related to this is 'educator reasons for being absent'. Principals also regard this issue as sensitive because of confidentiality, probably confidential in the sense that reasons educators give for being absent may be personal. These are given in confidence, as a result of the good working of relations that may have been established between the educator and the principal. It would be viewed an act of betrayal if such information is given to another person without the educator's consent.

It is surprising that 94% of respondents regard discussing backbiting among educators as a sensitive issue. Different reasons for its sensitivity were selected. The responses regarding sensitivity "backbiting among educators" are almost evenly distributed across all five possible reasons. Talking about other people behind their back is generally regarded as hurtful in most cultures. There is no known legislative rule that controls this type of behaviour, and respondents give their experience guided by moral values of humanity. Backbiting affects both people involved and is degrading.

Disclosing information about lazy teachers is regarded as sensitive because it is confidential in nature. It is probably reasonable that principals should not give out information regarding lazy teachers for fear of possible negative consequences. Some of these are:

- Educators may be charged of incapacity – not able to carry out duties to the expected standard - and, if extreme, may end up losing their jobs (Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 (2) (5,b).

- It is possible that educators may hold a grudge against principals if they found out that their laziness had been made public.

- Educators may take legal action against such principals for defamation of character.

- Such revelations may undermine the educators' authority in the class situation.

Principals agree that discussing developmental appraisal performance indicators is sensitive because they are regarded as confidential. Educators whose performance is good may not object to details of their performance being revealed, as excellence is what most people strive for. However those who have been rated badly would obviously not like their inability to perform in class to be made public. Developmental Appraisal System (DAS) is seen by the Department of Education as a tool for improving educator performance (Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, Manual for Developmental Appraisal, 1998). However, many educators are not aware that this is meant to improve their performance. According to the DAS Manual, opponents of appraisal say

> Appraisal is used as part of the system to control and punish teachers. Really, the teachers should not be blamed for the problems that exist. The department of Education should fix the system before taking action against teachers (1998: 32)

Respondents did not agree on the reasons for sensitivity on issues related to problems caused by educators. The majority of principals regard 'coping with problems caused by educators' as very sensitive, but have selected various reasons for sensitivity. Thirty three percent indicate that providing such information may threaten their job while 36% indicated that the problems should be treated as confidential. Causing problems at school may be regarded as instances of misconduct that may result in the educator or the principal facing disciplinary action. The educator would have brought the education department into disrepute, which is clearly undesirable. The effects of the problems

caused by educators may be devastating and far-reaching; they may affect the stability of the school and are thus seen in a very serious light, requiring sensitive handling.

Conflicts among educators are closely related to this issue. It may be a sign of lack of discipline in the school if educators are fighting. Poor discipline in the school usually contributes towards poor learning conditions, and eventually poor results. It is also possible that while some principals regard conflicts among educators as an issue related to the school discipline, others regard it as a personal issue among educators that falls outside of their area of authority. However, there is a law regarding action against teachers who cause problems among themselves or other people even outside the school area (Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, Section 18 (q) and (r). Educators are expected to behave professionally, in ways which will bring about good human relations in the whole school set up.

5.2.2.2. Violation of the rights of the individual

Seven out of thirty three items are regarded as sensitive because respondents think providing information about those aspects would be a violation of the rights of individuals. These are presented in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11. Recoded sensitivity and violation of rights.

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Sexual abuse among fellow educators	**70**	12	18	21	25	12	11	**28**	3
2.	Learner drug use	**57**	23	20	9	16	22	19	**33**	2
3.	Discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners	**54**	29	17	17	21	12	21	**22**	7
4.	Code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies	**45**	33	22	13	18	7	11	**47**	4
5.	Religious matters policy	16	34	**50**	13	3	5	15	**59**	6
6.	Reasons for learner absenteeism	20	**44**	36	12	6	12	27	**39**	4

		Sensitivity				Reason for sensitivity					
	Sensitivity issue	Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive		Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
7.	Influence on labour unions	39	43	19		5	18	20	21	33	4

These findings are in agreement with educational law on learner pregnancies (SASA, 1999) policies. Since the democratisation of this country, many new laws regarding human rights have been put in place. Learners may not be discriminated against on the basis that they are pregnant (Section 18 of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998). This has, however, provoked a debate on why pregnant learners, who are regarded as sick people by some cultures, for example, according to the Venda culture, and pregnancy issues are not to be discussed with children and anyone who is at school. It is regarded as morally wrong for any child to be at school with other children who are not supposed to talk or even know anything about pregnancy. Such pregnant children should not, according to this culture, be allowed to attend school.

Given that the majority of respondents are men, who are older than 40, it is understandable from this moral and cultural point of view that this issue is regarded as sensitive as, according to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990, this would be violation of rights of the child. It is considered bad manners for example, in Venda culture for a woman to be pregnant and still perform some activities like attending school, which is not acceptable to the African Charter. Some rules are set up to protect the rights of the minority – the learners who fall pregnant while still attending school.

Further, there are reportedly many problems that principals encounter if a learner is pregnant (SABC 2002:1; Levin, 2000:1.). Some principals are even tempted to ignore the law which allows learners to attend school while pregnant, and expel them from school (SABC 2002:1). This sparks off opposition from the educational authorities because the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 states that pregnant learners may not be expelled from school. This is an indication that this issue is sensitive and that principals are faced with a problem where learners have rights whereas the situation may put the principals in an awkward situation.

While principals agree that sexually related issues are sensitive, they do not however fully agree on the reasons for this sensitivity. Reasons chosen are almost evenly spread in violation of rights, intrusion of privacy, and fear of legal sanction. However, slightly more principals (28%) regard sexual abuse among fellow educators as sensitive because they believe that discussing this issue with researchers would be a violation of the rights of the individuals concerned. The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 (17) (1) (b) regard sexual abuse among fellow educators as a serious misconduct and would dismiss an educator if he or she is found guilty of committing an act of sexual assault on another employee. There should not have been ambiguities in selecting reasons why this issue is sensitive because of the clarity of this law which prohibits sexual abuse in the work place. It is possible that principals who have had an unfortunate experience when reporting abuse might be reluctant to become involved a second time.

It is surprising that 83% of the principals should regard discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners as sensitive and give various reasons for sensitivity of this issue. According to the Training for Educators on Multi-Disciplinary Management for Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation, 2002, issued by the Institute for Child and Youth Development in the University of the Western Cape, the reporting process does not always happen smoothly. The document reports that the usual response when schools suspect that one of the members of staff is an abuser, especially if that person is a long-time employee, is to deny or even ignore the abuse. It is therefore reasonable that principals should regard this issue as sensitive. An amendment to the Employment of Educators Act of 1998 was introduced in November 2000 to deal with abuse of learners by educators. The amendment makes it clear that if an educator is found guilty of having sexual relationship with a learner at his /her school, whether with or without the consent of such a learner, the educator will be dismissed. In addition to this, The South African Council for Educators Act was enacted in 2000 to ensure that an educator who abuses a learner is de-registered as an educator and may not be appointed by any person, including private providers.

According to the University of The Western Cape document referred to earlier above, this kind of legislative commitment to routing out this abhorrent practice is hard to find anywhere else in the world. From the WCED HIV/AIDS life skills programme, where learners are under 18 years of age, educators will also be criminally liable for statutory

rape. Given the situation as described above, it is reasonable that principals should regard this issue of learner sexual abuse by educators as very sensitive.

Principals also agree that learner drug abuse is sensitive because they think providing information about these issues would be a violation of individual rights. Learner-drug use has become common in the schools and is rising in an alarming proportion (Gordon, 2002). Drug use outside school is a crime, and it has to be dealt with severely inside the school (Dunford). While Rastafarians, whose lifestyle may include the smoking of ganja (marijuana/dagga) (The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), call for the use of such drugs to be legalized against the law, it is clearly understandable why principals should regard this issue as sensitive. The presence of Rastafarian children in a school may result in the school having to deal with problems related to the smoking of similar drugs as indicated above. The use of drugs by learners is one of the issues that could affect discipline in schools; hence the increase from the Department of Education of the head of the Provincial Department' powers to suspend drug dealing learners (SASA, 1999).

Principals regard the influence of labour unions as sensitive because of violation of rights of individual. Since the acknowledgement of the human rights movements in South Africa, unionism has become the buzzword. Any opposition to unionism from any quarter is met with an even stronger opposition from the unionists. The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 give educators the right to belong to any union of their choice and even makes provision for them to attend union activities, even though some of these activities may disrupt normal school activities. This makes a principal's task very stressful as he is both responsible to maintain order in the school, see that normal learning activities can take place but also respect the rights of individuals who are union members and want to take part in union activities. It is possible that some union activities result in leave without pay, which is quite stressful to some principals to talk about. Based on these arguments, it is understandable that principals should find this issue sensitive.

Reasons for learner absenteeism are rated as sensitive because discussing this issue with researchers would be a violation of the rights of individuals. Revealing information about learner absenteeism may be considered an abuse of the right of

individual, if one considers the fact that reasons for being absent are often personal. Disclosing such personal information about learners may create legal problems for principals.

5.2.2.3.   Threat to work

Four out of thirty three items are reported as sensitive because discussing the issue with researchers may pose a threat to the working situation of the principals. These are presented in Table 5.12, which shows that the principals seemed worried about the late delivery or lack of stationery and books by the department. It is understandable that principals should regard this issue (item 2) as sensitive; since, according to the South African Schools Act Number 84 of 1996 (34) (1), it is the it is the government's responsibility to fund public schools in order to ensure the proper exercise of the rights of learners to education. They find talking about non-delivery or a shortage of learning materials sensitive as they are supposed to recognise the employer as a partner in education and therefore prohibited from discussing official matters with unauthorised persons (SACE, 1999).

The results indicate that principals discussing the issue of educators arriving late for school sensitive because doing so may pose a threat to their employment. The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 requires educators to be at work for at least seven hours. The late arrival of educators may result in a charge of misconduct.

Table 5.12. Recoded ratings of sensitivity issues that are related to 'threat to work'

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Lack of text and prescribed books	59	13	28	2	6	47	15	22	10
2.	Late delivery of stationery, text and prescribed books	55	24	22	3	11	45	10	23	9
3.	Lack of discipline among educators	43	40	17	4	17	37	22	15	6
4.	Educators arriving late	36	41	23	8	11	32	26	17	6

		Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
Sensitivity issue		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
	for school									

It is possible that principals find it sensitive because they are aware of the disciplinary action that may be taken against educators who comes late to school which may negatively affect his career. However, it may also be seen as an indication of poor management on their part if they fail to report this type of conduct by educators as part of their responsibility required by the Further Education and Training Act 98 of 1998 (13).

There is thus agreement among the principals surveyed that discussing 'lack of discipline among educators' with researchers is sensitive as it may pose a threat to their work. Section 18 (1) (q) of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1996 prohibits improper, disgraceful or unacceptable conduct of educators. If an educator is found guilty of such conduct, he or she may even be dismissed (Subsection (3). Discussing issues that may affect the personal reputation of educators are thus generally regarded as sensitive by principals. Principals tend to protect the personality of the educator, probably for fear of possible retaliation in some way by the educator concerned, and if not reported to the education authorities, it could be regarded as breach of professional ethics by the principal who is managing the institution.

5.2.2.4.   Fear of legal sanction

It is also worth noting that more than half of the respondents regard issues related to discipline as very sensitive because they fear legal sanction (Table 5.13). These issues concern the poor conduct of educators that puts the principals into disrepute with the department of education. These results indicate that there seems to be a relationship between the fear of legal sanction and the confidentiality of certain information. In agreement with Melton and Gray (1988), whether because of researchers' ignorance of the statute, their negligence, or administrative denials, most socially sensitive studies remain uncovered by certificates of confidentiality. Thus, although researchers should

seek protection of confidentiality in advance, subpoenas are likely to arise in the absence of a certificate of confidentiality.

Table 5.13. Recoded ratings of sensitivity and the reason 'fear of legal sanction'

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Exercise of corporal punishment	71	11	18	0	44	18	2	33	3
2.	Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation	57	32	11	6	32	17	24	16	4

Principals regard exercising corporal punishment as sensitive because they fear legal sanction. As indicated earlier, corporal punishment was declared a criminal offence in terms of Section 10 of SASA, and its transgression would therefore have legal implications. When some institutions wanted to declare this section unconstitutional, the Department of Education defended their case and constitution in the constitutional court successfully. It is reasonable that principals should regard this issue (item 1) as sensitive for fear legal sanction. Further references on this issue being sensitive will be given during discussion of interview data in the next chapter.

5.2.2.5. Intrusion of privacy

Table 5.14 shows that 97% of the principals in the sample regard disclosing educators' personal problems as a sensitive issue in school management. It is however surprising that there is no clear consensus on the reason for sensitivity of this issue.

Table 5.14. Recoded ratings of sensitivity and the reason 'intrusion of privacy'

	Sensitivity issue	Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
		Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Disclosing educator's personal problems	86	12	3	35	12	3	26	24	1
2.	Educator/s with AIDS	75	9	15	37	5	2	20	33	3
3.	Learner/s with AIDS	73	11	15	34	3	2	24	32	4

The principals tend to regard the three issues in the Table 5.14 above as sensitive because they are of an intensely personal nature and to discuss them with a researcher could be considered an intrusion of the individuals' privacy. Some tend to regard it as sensitive because it is confidential in nature, while others think that it would be a violation of rights. Both reasons are sufficient to indicate that principals would be sensitive about discussing educators' or learners' personal problems they may have knowledge of.

The sample of principals regarded AIDS-related issues as very sensitive but provided several different reasons for this. The responses are almost evenly distributed among three reasons for sensitivity – 'intrusion of privacy', 'confidentiality' and 'violation of rights'. These results are in agreement with findings from other studies which indicate that there are ethical dilemmas in AIDS research involved in balancing individual rights and social welfare (Melton and Gray, 1988). All three reasons thus indicate that principals tend to regard these issues as sensitive because of they appear to be personal issues and to discuss them with a researcher would infringe on someone's rights or privacy, whether it is legislated against or not.

There are laws regarding AIDS-related issues that pertain to the behaviour of people towards those infected with the disease (National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996, Section 6). They agree that the issues is very sensitive but do not agree that the sensitivity is due to the same reason.

5.2.2.6. Issues of sensitivity with equal responses of reasons for sensitivity.

There were items where respondents could not select a single dominant reason for their sensitivity. Principals did not agree on the reasons for sensitivity of those issues. These are listed in Table 5.15 below.

Table 5.15. Issues of sensitivity with no single reason for sensitivity identified.

		Sensitivity			Reason for sensitivity					
	Sensitivity issue	Very sensitive	Sensitive	Not at all sensitive	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other
1.	Backbiting among educators	**64**	30	5	19	**22**	15	**22**	20	4
2.	Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners	**64**	15	22	16	**29**	7	**29**	17	2

Seventy nine percent respondents indicate that record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners is sensitive but they could not indicate a common reason as for its sensitivity. No single reason stands out why the issue is regarded as sensitive. Respondents are divided between fear of legal sanction and confidentiality (29% each) as a reason for its sensitivity, and also between intrusion of privacy and violation of rights (16% and 17% respectively). Cases regarding educators charged for abusing learners sexually are reportedly increasing (further discussion and references on this issue will be presented with interview data in Chapter 6.2.3.). However, one could speculate that principals selected many reasons why the issue is sensitive:

- There is a lack of clarity on the evidence presented regarding this type of abuse and the ongoing debate about credibility of evidence presented.
- There is confusion amongst some in our school communities about what is socially acceptable, unacceptable and criminal both in relation to abuse and sexual harassment.
- There is no common understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment.
- Many cases of educators abusing learners sexually are difficult to prove (UWC, 2002).

- Many schools have poor and ineffective management systems and lack basic rules and regulations that are understood and adhered to by all, and which are applied consistently. This invariably makes it impossible to apply sanctions even when they are called for (UWC, 2002).

- Principals want to protect learners from further traumatic experiences during abuse and hence, not disclose details.

- Educators have been known to further complicate these cases by bribing parents to falsely testify in their favour about the relationship between the educator and the learner.

- Educators found guilty of sexual abuse of learners are discharged from duty (Section 17 of Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, and principals therefore seem unwilling to report these cases that may end with the dismissal of the educator.

Principals could not select a single reason why they regard backbiting among educators as sensitive. The responses are almost evenly distributed in all the five provided reasons for sensitivity. This is an indication that it is difficult to tell why it is sensitive. It is not a good thing to talk ill about people in their absence. It is a good thing to tell that people are wrong in their presence.

5.3.   DIMENSIONS UNDERLYING ISSUES OF SENSITIVITY.

The 33 items on sensitivity were subjected to a principal component analysis (PCA) in order to identify the underlying dimensions or components. A PCA with a varimax rotation was performed. If the latent root criterion (eigen values greater than 1) is taken as stopping criterion, altogether 8 components are extracted, explaining about 70% of the variance in the item responses. The rotated component matrix, however, appears somewhat difficult to interpret, with some components only having one or two items that load significantly.

If *a priori* criteria of 7 and 6 components are specified, then the percentage of explained variance drops to 67% and 64%, respectively. When 7 components are extracted, the rotation however fails to converge. A 6-component solution gives a better configuration

of items for the first two components, although the remaining four still seem difficult to interpret. The results of the 6-component solution is summarised in Table 5.16.

In Table 5.16 component loadings of 0.45 and higher were considered significant. This is based on a guideline by Hair et al. (1998:112), which takes into account the sample size. In our analyses, component loadings of 0.50 will be used. Inspection of Table 5.16 shows that the 8 items with loadings greater than 0.50 on component one basically concern moral issues. Hence, I labelled this component as "Sensitivity about moral issues". Component 2, also comprising 8 items with loadings greater than 0.50, largely illuminates issues concerning discipline. I labelled this component as "Sensitivity about disciplinary issues". Analysis of Components 3 to 6 did not yield any meaningful results and as a result has been left out.

I subsequently created two indices, based on components 1 and 2 respectively. To do so, I first performed an internal consistency reliability analysis on the items that comprise each component. This yielded an Alpha coefficient of 0.88 for Component 1 (Sensitivity about moral issues) and a coefficient of 0.87 for Component 2 (Sensitivity about disciplinary issues). Next, I summed the item scores for the eight items that load on each component to create the two indices. Because "extremely sensitive" was originally scored as 1 and "not at all sensitive" as 5 for any item, a higher score on each index indicates a less sensitive rating for that issue. The index scores range from 8 (extremely sensitive) to 40 (not sensitive at all).

Hence, I compared the mean morality and disciplinary index scores for the two age groups, as well as for principals with various lengths of experiences as principal. A t-test for independent groups was performed in the case of age, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for the comparison with length of experience as independent variable. The results are summarised in Tables 5.17 and 5.18 respectively.

Table 5.16. Results of the 6-component solution.

Item	6 Components					
	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6
Learner(s) with AIDS	0.860					
Educator(s) with AIDS	0.854					
Sexual abuse among fellow-educators	0.732					
Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners	0.709					
Records of disciplinary procedures on educators charged with misconduct	0.704					
Records of educators found guilty of misconduct	0.694					
Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation	0.605					
Conflicts among educators	0.564					
Educator reasons for being absent		0.789				
Disclosing information about lazy teachers		0.706				
Record of learner's disciplinary problems		0.691				
Educators arriving late for school		0.637				
Educators absence records		0.609				
Lack of discipline among educators		0.574				
Coping with problems caused by educators		0.545				
Reasons for learner absenteeism		0.517				
Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators		0.490				
Disclosing financial documents			0.726			
Handling school's financial affairs			0.725			
Disclosing sources of income			0.683			
Record of disciplinary action for learners			0.658			
Code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies			0.572			
Religious matters policy			0.505			
Learner drug use			0.487			
Late delivery of stationery, text and prescribed books				0.862		
Lack of text and prescribed books				0.844		
Influence on labour unions				0.627		
Disclosing educator's personal problems					0.772	
Exercise of corporal punishment					0.713	
Disclosing information about educator's salary issues					0.621	
Backbiting among educators					0.464	
Making learner performance records available to researchers						0.572
Total variance explained	63.634					

Table 5.17: Comparison: Morality and disciplinary index scores for two age groups.

Comparison		N	Mean	Std Dev	Statistics
Morality index	**50 or younger**	97	19.45	8.26	t = 0.658
	Older than 50	47	18.47	8.79	p = 0.512
Disciplinary index	**50 or younger**	95	24.26	7.92	t = -0.996
	Older than 50	49	25.49	6.48	p = 0.322

From the table above, one can see that there is no significant difference between the two age categories as far as their mean scores on both the morality and disciplinary index are concerned (p > 0.05). Thus one cannot conclude that principals who are 50 years or younger rated moral issues as being more sensitive than those principals who are older than 50 years or that principals who are older than 50 rate disciplinary issues as being more sensitive than principals who are 50 years or younger. On average, there are higher mean scores on the disciplinary index than on the morality index. This is visually displayed in Figure 5.10 below.

Figure 5.10: Morality and disciplinary issues for the two age groups.
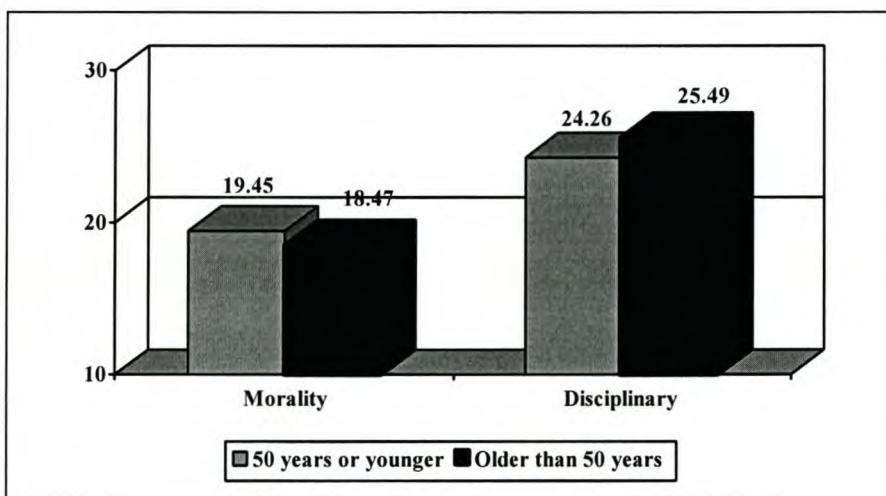
For both the morality and disciplinary indices, significant differences were found with regard to the length of experience as principal. Specifically, principals with fewer years of experience seem to be significantly less inclined to regard the issues as sensitive (mean = 21.86), as compared with principals with more than 15 years of experience as principals (mean = 16.95). There appear to be a gradual decline in the importance of these issues as their years of experience increase, which is quite evident in Figure 5.10.

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Following is the morality and disciplinary index for the length of experience as principal groups.

Table 5.18.: Comparison of the morality and disciplinary index for the length of experience groups.

Comparison		N	Mean	Std Dev	Statistics
Morality index	5 years or less	37	21.86	9.80	F = 2.351
	6-10 years	24	19.67	8.65	p = 0.075
	11-15 years	45	18.44	7.13	
	> 15 years	38	16.95	7.76	
Disciplinary index	5 years or less	36	23.39	8.84	F = 1.239
	6-10 years	23	27.13	5.72	p = 0.298
	11-15 years	46	24.30	7.26	
	> 15 years	39	24.87	7.12	

A gradual decline is not evident for the disciplinary index is not evident for the disciplinary. Here, the explicit difference primarily lies within the less experience categories (5 years or less: mean = 23.39 compared to 6-10 years: mean = 27.13). principals with 6 to 10 years of experience as principals regard disciplinary issues more sensitive than the other experience groups as it is most evident in the Bar Chart 5.27 that follows.

Figure 5.11: Morality and disciplinary index for the length of experience as principals groups.
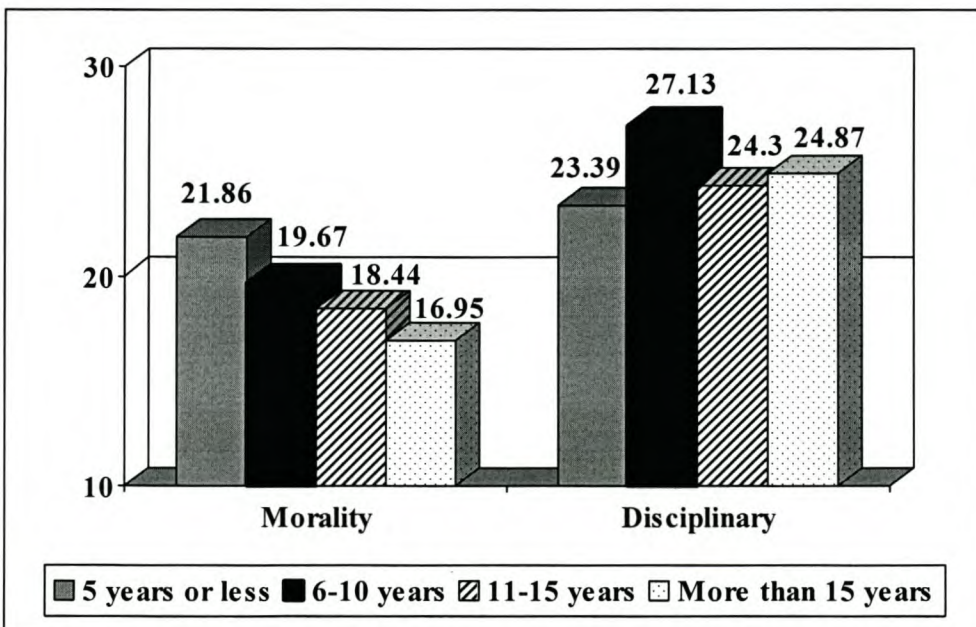
Multiple comparison procedures (Bonferroni and Scheffe) tests were performed in order to determine which categories of the independent variable (length of experience as principal) are responsible for the differences in the dependent variables (the morality and disciplinary indices). None of these procedures, however, resulted in any significant results. But an inspection of the differences in mean scores is permissible as the overall difference, as measured by the F-test, is significant.

5.4.   SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PATTERNS AND FINDINGS

The results revealed several patterns regarding the sensitive issues in school management. The results indicated that items that relate to moral issues are the most sensitive issues in school management. The following patterns have been identified:

- Issues about Learners with AIDS and Educators with AIDS are regarded as sensitive because disclosing such information would be intrusive;

- Sexual abuse cases among educators and learners (the most sensitive moral issue in school management) are reported to be sensitive because principals indicate that if they discuss such information they fear legal sanction;

- Principals indicate that providing information about sexual abuse among fellow-educators would violate the rights of individuals; and

- Records of disciplinary procedures for educators charged with misconduct are regarded as confidential.

The other pattern identified is the one where principals indicate that disciplinary issues are sensitive. These were considered the most sensitive:

- Records of learners' disciplinary problems;

- Lack of discipline among educators;

- Coping with problems caused by educators;

- Educators' reasons for being absent.

The latter was considered the most sensitive of the four.

A third cluster of sensitive issues that emerges is financial issues. Although disclosing information about aspects of finance is regarded as sensitive, handling school's financial issues was regarded as being sensitive particularly by principals who have had more than 15 years experience as principals. Administrative sensitive items were some

of the patterns that could easily be identified. Of the administrative activities, the following were the most prevalent:

- The late delivery of text and prescribed books;
- The lack of text and prescribed books. (This was regarded as the most sensitive issue in school management.)

Several issues about working conditions in school management were reported to be sensitive, however, the following are were rated most often:

- Drawing up a code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies is regarded as sensitive because principals indicate that they are afraid of violating the learners' rights to have access to learning even while pregnant;
- Policies regarding charge of misconduct for educators;
- Educator's salary issues and educator reasons for being absent are regarded as sensitive because they are said to be confidential.

Of these, code of conduct for learner pregnancies was reported as the most sensitive issue.

These results suggest that there are issues that are sensitive in school management and that it may be difficult for researchers to get honest responses because of the threat these issues pose for both respondents and researchers.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF INTERVIEW RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the results of the interviews conducted with secondary school principals in the Limpopo Province. I discuss the main trends and patterns in the data with reference to the research questions, highlight significant trends in both data and the literature review in Chapters 2 and 3. I end the chapter by drawing the discussion together interpreting the main findings. Results of both the interviews and the questionnaires will be discussed simultaneously. Both are discussed according to the major categories, giving notable findings and indicating any literature relevant to these findings. Overall results will thereafter be discussed looking at the similarities and differences between interview and questionnaire results. The last section will explore the methods found to be most helpful in the identification of the sensitive issues in school management.

6.1.   DEMOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Twelve secondary school principals (two female and ten male) were interviewed. There were a relatively small number of female principals (only two out of twelve respondents) interviewed, and therefore their results would be presented together. Two principals were between the ages 31 to 40 years old; four were between 41 to 50, and six between 51 and 60. Of the twelve principals, one had between 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, ten had between 11 to 15 years of teaching experience, and only one had more than sixteen years of teaching experience. Only one had 1 to 5 years of experience as a principal, another one 6 to 10 years of experience as principal and ten had 11 to 15 years of experience.

6.2.   ISSUES OF SENSITIVITY

The results were analysed using ATLAS.ti (already described in Chapter 4). Data was displayed and analysed using networks. Networks are created when importing nodes (codes, memos, and quotations) into an editor that allows me to work with a type of a graphic representation of my data. Networks are visual images of data in relation to each other presenting data in the context of its inter-relationships - networks illustrate the relationships or links between different parts of data. My results are presented such that firstly, I will give an introduction to each of the networks, after which, I describe

the network as obtained from the quotes from interviews, and lastly, emphasize notable trends in the data with the help of the quotations.

I will present the analysis of the raw data along the following lines: firstly, the major themes of issues of sensitivity in school management, then the sub-categories within each of these, and lastly, minor categories within each of the sub-categories. These three foci, i.e. the major themes of issues of sensitivity in school management, the sub-categories within these and the minor categories within the sub-categories are meant as different levels of analysis. For example, a sensitive issues network entitled "Major themes of sensitive issues in school management" (see Network 1) differentiates into six sub-categories: religious policies, corporal punishment, learner pregnancies, cell phone problems, accessibility, and non-sensitivity. The node with the most quotes or codes differentiates into eight reasons of non-sensitivity.

In the networks that follow, symbols have been used to show the kind of relationship that exists between the issues indicated by the arrows and each refers to the following:

MO:	resulting in
R:	is associated with
G:	is part of
N:	is cause of
A:	contradicts
O:	is a
P:	is property of

Where numbers or symbols appear in the quotations, they refer to the following:

P1	=	Primary document 1.
Txt	=	Text file
1:12	=	Primary document 1, 12th quote.
3-0	=	Three text passages are connected to a code but no other codes are yet linked to this code.
167-173	=	Lines 167 to 173.
{12-9}	=	12 text passages are connected to a code, and 9 codes are linked to this code.
Super	=	A big code.

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Before discussing the results of this study, three points must be made regarding the interpretation of data analysed in terms of biographical sub-groups.

First, the biographical characteristics of principals are not mutually independent; for example, the majority of principals interviewed and those who answered the questionnaire are male.

Secondly, the sample is drawn from a population of principals in schools situated in sparsely populated areas where few principals come from the area in which the school is situated. The sample might include disproportionate numbers of exceptionally satisfied or exceptionally stressed principals.

Thirdly, older principals differ in being not only older but of a different generation as far as their expectations, attitudes and values go. For example, regarding the legitimacy of corporal punishment in maintaining learner discipline, compared with younger principals, older principals tended to argue that it must be maintained as it is the only way in which learners can be disciplined. This may reflect either the effects of age 'per se', or the effects of being of a different generation.

Such considerations indicate that although the present study may allow notable patterns to be identified, the explanation of such patterns may require further investigation.

6.3. MAJOR ISSUES OF SENSITIVITY

The analysis of data obtained through the interviews revealed eight major themes of issues of sensitivity in school management on which secondary school principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers: these are sensitive issues in

     (1) the school policy (learning-teaching situation),

     (2) working conditions

     (3) code of conduct for learners,

     (4) learner and educator discipline,

     (5) administrative activities,

     (6) school financial issues,

     (7) developmental appraisal, and

(8) moral or social relations issues. These are clearly illustrated by the following network:

Network 1: Major themes of sensitive issues in school management.
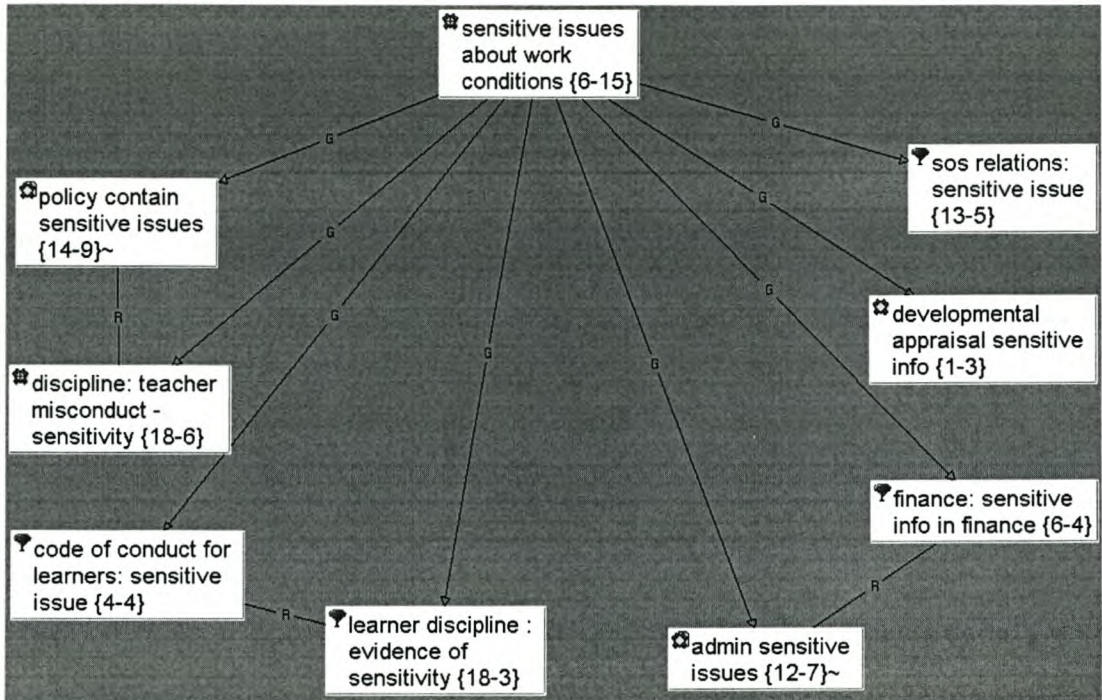
Following is a comprehensive discussion of the themes of issues of sensitivity in school management principals find difficult to discuss with researchers. The discussion is based on the major and sub-themes themes identified.

6.3.1. School policy – The learning teaching situation

Interview results have revealed five issues in school administration (illustrated in Network 2 below), which are included in the school policy that principals regard as sensitive to provide information on, these are: the department not paying temporary educators' salaries, supervising educators, solving problems created by educators, dealing with educators who are not able to keep a secret, and lack of resources and facilities.

Of these, lack of facilities and resources were reported as being the most sensitive. Principals indicated that these issues are sensitive to discuss because of the threat they pose to their work. Principals also mentioned that their schools had not been evenly

supplied with resources and facilities during the apartheid era, as a result, they are afraid to discuss such disparities, and, that creates a lot of discomfort for them.

Network 2: School policy: Sensitive issues.
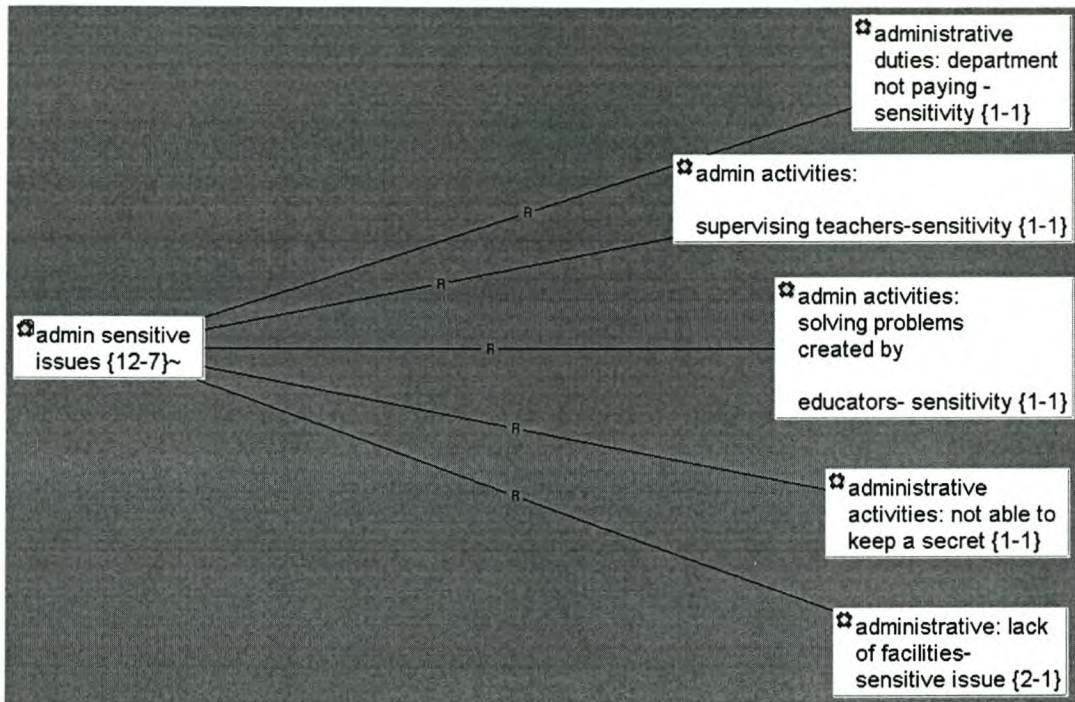
The following remarks, which illustrate why lack of facilities is regarded as sensitive, were given by some of the principals interviewed:

P 9: INTERVIEW 4.txt - 9:17 (214:222) (Super)

I think if we were to be provided with the necessary and enough resources, as one condition I think it would go far much better because I could draw a line between you know.. between the school that is dominated by black educators at certain instances and a school that is dominated by whites, you find that where whites are working there are air conditioners and most of the things are there, but where we are working there are no facilities.

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:43 (212:227) (Super)

Another problem I would say is ehh….ehh…learners learning materials. I think learners have enough learning materials, and another thing, which is a financial issue, the teacher may feel it could have been better if they had for an example, an overhead projector. It would be of assistance in a large class. He can easily write down a test and screen it on the projector, but, due to lack of this, he has to go and write it on the board, you see, teaching facilities are a source of stress for us. They create some discomfort on the part of the educator. I think the issue of accommodation affects also furniture. You find that finance does not allow us to buy furniture, for example we had budgeted to buy furniture this year but after making a few quotations we

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realize we would not make it, and that it is easier to repair than to buy. The ones that you see around that look like new have all been repaired here, we called the carpenter here.

Both questionnaire and interview findings are consistent with the results reported by other researchers who found a positive association between lack of resources and conditions of adversity in school management (Tuettemann and Punch, 1992; Kutame, 1997). The department of education is responsible for providing learner materials to the schools (SASA, 1996); however, delays and great shortages that are regularly reported in schools result in malfunctioning of those schools, especially where parents are not able to supplement. The extent of these delays and shortages was evident in the questionnaire results; principals found it sensitive to report on shortage of stationary and text books for fear of loosing their jobs. Principals discussing official matters with unauthorized persons could bring the department of education into disrepute (SACE, 1999). These findings are in agreement with Liazos (1972) and Lee (1993) that provision of information which could have negative effects is regarded as having a sensitive character because the principals fear being identified, stigmatised, or incriminated in some way by their employer. Principals report that educators are forced to teach under difficult circumstances where learners do not have textbooks and other learning materials. These reports confirm the 1996 report findings by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) which indicate that at nearly three quarters of the schools in the Northern Province, no materials were provided, no equipment were supplied and nearly all schools had no media collection.

Principals also reported as sensitive, information regarding lack of physical resources and poor infrastructure (shortage of school buildings and equipment, media collections and media equipment). This is in agreement with the report of the statistics of the Northern Province School/College Register of Needs Survey (1996) that indicates that five out of six regions experienced shortage of classrooms where the pupil-classroom ratio is 56:1 instead of 35:1. The following quotations illustrate this point:

P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:30 (295:296) (Super)
The ones that I regard as sensitive are those of admission and accommodation.

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:18 (191:192) (Super)
I wonder whether I will be right to say lack of accommodation.

Shortage of school buildings leads to excessive class size, which is identified as a source of stress for principals. These are the classes that have been found to be excessively large with regard to the number of learners due to either lack of classrooms or lack of educators, causing undue stress on the educators and principals.

These findings are in agreement with the results reported by Manthei and Solman (1998) who have examined the negative outcomes of stress due to excessive class size. The department of education or, simply put, the government, allocate classrooms to the schools, and educators according to curricular needs of that school. Discussing about excessive class size, shortage of classrooms or lack of educators, is seen as criticism against the government, which, principals regard as beyond their jurisdiction. The following interesting remarks, which illustrates this point, were made by some of the principals during interview:

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:42 (191:203) (Super)
> I wonder whether I will be right to say lack of accommodation. It is very difficult to work properly when classes are congested. Educators complain that as class teachers they find it difficult to know the learners. Subject teachers also find it difficult to check whether all the learners are present or not because they are too many. Another thing is the workload of the educator in the subject concerned, due to shortage of educators, is of a poor quality, the educator cannot give sufficient work, because learners are too many in one class and when one compiles a classification, it creates problems, it is difficult to equate the learners in the class with the number of periods per lesson. So I think accommodation is a sensitive problem, learner's accommodation and educator's accommodation.

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:56 (291:294) (Super)
> Classes, furniture, it is not doing anything. Every day learners fight over desks or chairs because they are not enough. Yes. The other one is disregard by the department of class accommodation. For the past many years the government is doing nothing to this effect

A number of responses indicate that principals are afraid of giving information about some school's management issues. Principals fear being victimized by the department of education for divulging information regarding failure by the department to carry out their responsibilities for learning to run smoothly. They regard such a disclosure a threat to their work. This also means that principals may give inaccurate information to researchers about such failure by the department, which may affect the validity of the

study. Many principals mention that they find it difficult to discuss such issues with whoever is in need of such information. The following remarks by some principals illustrate why they fear giving information about failure by the department to provide for the smooth running of education:

P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:32 (306:307) (Super)
Fear of persecution by the department for letting out information without permission.

P 7: INTERVIEW 12.txt - 7:23 (355:356) (Super)
It is something that one must keep confidential.

The results are in agreement with a report by Tuettemann and Punch (1992) who have examined the ameliorating effects of control over the work environment, and found that poor working conditions have unpleasant affects on teachers. The report is also in agreement with what has been found by Needle et al. (1981) that overcrowded classrooms is one of the factors that can lead to teacher frustration, disillusionment and eventual incapacitation. The department is constantly under criticism for failing to provide learning materials to schools. It is sensitive for principals to discuss issues that negatively affect both their employer and their colleagues, because such disclosure of information is threatening to their work situation. Section 18 (u) and (y) of the Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 as amended in 2001 puts a restriction to such kind of information disclosure. Such transgressions are harmful to the employer-employee relationships as they may end in the dismissal of the offender as laid down in Section 18(3) of the above act.

The following remark made by one of the principals interviewed will illustrate the points made above:

P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:52 (298:309) (Super)
Because when you have to tell the truth, you may find yourself in conflict with the department. The department may take you to task why you have given out such information.

More than half of the principals who regard the issues mentioned above as sensitive to provide information on indicated that doing so poses a threat to their work. This finding is in agreement with the results reported by Tourangeau and Smith (1996) that

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potentially embarrassing information is misreported. The department of education would like to keep this information confidential because of the negative impact it would have on its image. In agreement with the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 as amended by Labour Relations Act 127 of 1998, Chapter 1, 7b (iv), which deals with the Protection of employers' rights, it is reasonable that principals should find discussing such issues with the researchers sensitive. It is stated in this section that no person (in this case, educator/principal) may prejudice an employer by disclosing information that the employer is lawfully entitled. Principals fear loosing their job should they be found guilty of this offence. These results have a negative impact on researchers.

However, there are some principals who do not regard the issues mentioned above as sensitive. These findings are in agreement with a finding by Melton and colleagues, (1988) that sensitivity is highly situational. What has become sensitive to some principals is not what others consider to be sensitive when interviewed. The following remarks by some of the interviewees illustrate this point:

> P 9: INTERVIEW 4.txt - 9:23 (230:238) (Super)
>
> No. I don't think that it could be difficult, you see when it comes to conditions of service, aahh..I think anybody would just talk freely, because it is then when one is going to mention this and that, this and that, what he hates. For instance when you talk about that issue of salary increment, it is also one condition of service no one would be afraid to voice that one out. So when it comes to conditions of service I don't think …I will as a person be afraid to talk to any researcher about that.

> P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:41 (310:319) (Super)
>
> But I don't feel that this is something that I have to keep as a secret because it is a source of stress for me. I must just vomit this (tell everything/ not hide anything). As I am discussing this with the researcher I know that the researcher is not going to do anything with this information. The researcher will only get information about the problems the school is experiencing. I don't think that the researcher's report will be submitted to the department to alert the department of what is happening at this school. I don't think it is that sensitive.

The results furnish considerable evidence that principals find providing researchers with information about some school administrative issues as being sensitive. While some principals do not regard salary issues as sensitive, questionnaire results indicate that others find these issues very sensitive because they are confidential.

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6.3.2. School's financial issues

Overall, principals regard financial issues as sensitive. Slightly over half of the older principals (50 years or older) who completed the questionnaire regard handling school's financial issues a very sensitive issue. The item was ranked nineteenth out of thirty-three sensitive items in the questionnaire. Principals interviewed also regard school's financial issues as sensitive to discuss with the researchers because they are confidential. The following network shows the general responses of principals with regard to issues in finances that they regard as sensitive. Network 3 shows how financial issues regarded as sensitive are related.

Network 3: Financial sensitive issues
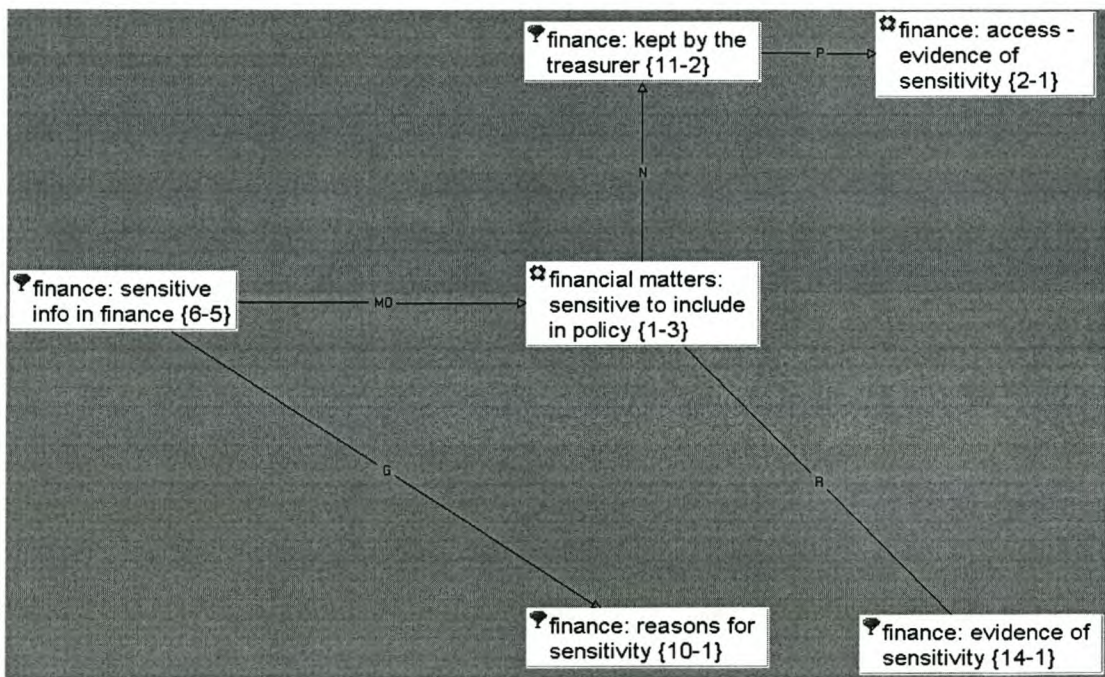
Notable from the above network is that fourteen quotations from twelve respondents indicate that school finance contain sensitive issues to include in the school policy. Such information, because of its sensitivity and confidentiality, is kept by the treasurer who has control over the books and receipts to ensure their safety. The quotations indicating that school finance contains sensitive issues are given below.

> P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:9 (92:93) (Super)
>
> No, I don't show the educators, unless if he is my assistant, and he wants to refer to them, otherwise I don't publish them.

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P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:9 (101:101) (Super)

These documents are kept in the safe

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:10 (104:108) (Super)

We are afraid that if they get lost, we shall have lost important records that we would not be able to replace, and, there could be suspicion that there could be some irregularities in the finance, so we feel money is the sensitive issue and its records must be kept very safe.

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:11 (121:126) (Super)

I think the problem that we may experience is that of suspicion, that either the principal is misusing school funds –that's why some information is being hidden – parents are always suspicious that school fund is being misused and once there could be some missing documents, such suspicions could be strengthened.

P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:6 (111:114) (Super)

Nnn...no. that one, no, unless if they are asking for a financial statement, where they perhaps want to refer to something they are not clear about. The other one who has access to this file is the treasurer of the SGB. Any time
he can have access.

P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:15 (125:128) (Super)

I think it is important that the SGB should know this, because they might think that we are disclosing information to people who will end up having passed such information to people who are not supposed to know it.

P11: INTERVIEW 7.txt - 11:10 (88:94) (Super)

I will have to get their permission, because finances are their responsibility. so if I have to supply any information on finances, it must be with the ….. I must discuss it with the SGB. This is what I regard as sensitive information because such discussions could lead to serious problems with the parents and perhaps even the department.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:11 (122:122) (Super)

I can't because of its sensitivity

The Network above also shows that there are ten quotations, which are given below, that refer to reasons why principals regard financial issues as sensitive.

P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:10 (96:98) (Super)

For security reasons and that they should not get lost, because the finance officer is held responsible and I am held accountable.

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P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:11 (110:113) (Super)

Besides, some may even hide these documents or throw them away knowing that they contain sensitive information which if lost may put you into trouble.

P 9: INTERVIEW 4.txt - 9:6 (86:89) (Super)

Not necessarily sensitive, except that ehh..ehh..if they ask the finance officer to have access to them, then the person in charge would know that people would not fiddle with this record and ultimately you find that it is missing.

P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:14 (106:107) (Super)

They may like to please some learners whereas they know that someone's salary issues are confidential.

P11: INTERVIEW 7.txt - 11:9 (79:82) (Super)

It is quite a large amount and a lot of unions think that the ex-_Model C schools have an advantage because they have got money to an extent that they employ more teachers.

P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:12 (169:173) (Super)

So, if you disclose another information, yet the other schools are not disclosing those other information, you may sometimes one way or another lending other people in a mess, because the way school fund are being used is not the same.

P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:9 (68:71) (Super)

Because I won't be having an idea as to where these documents will lend? It would be risky. It is possible that you might find such information having been released by the media.

Results indicate that principals treat financial issues sensitively. The school authorities, after a financial report meeting, recollect financial statements given to parents during the report, because they think they are very confidential. These findings are in agreement with the literature, which contend that financial issues are a source of adversity in school management (Hayward, 1993; Kearney and Turner, 1987; Kutame, 1997; Niemic, 2000). These results further confirm the questionnaire results which found that 62% of the respondents indicated that they find disclosing information about financial documents such as receipts, audit reports and cheque books as sensitive. The following remark by one of the interviewees illustrates the fear that principals have about financial issues:

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P 7: INTERVIEW 12.txt - 7:28 (120:135) (Super)

Same applies to the budget, we prepare copies and give them, and request them to give these copies back immediately at the end of the meeting. We do this for security reasons............ So the same applies if someone comes and requests for finance books and I just say these are the moneys we have collected and this is how we use them, and is possible that that person can devise means of getting that money from us. That is one of the reasons why we may be hesitant to give such information to the researchers. It is only when we are sure that this information is needed for research purpose and will not be used for any other thing that we can give this information.

Principals further indicated that poor leadership and poor management skills have become a recurrent issue in schools financial management, that more and more problems are being experienced in the handling of finances. These results suggest that principals regard these issues as sensitive because they fear being charged for mismanagement of funds. These findings are consistent with a report that principals embezzle school funds and are charged for misconduct (Niemic, 2000). The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998, Section 18(1), (b) stipulates that mismanagement of school funds is misconduct that may result in the dismissal of the educator. It is possible that such a stipulation by the act could paint a very sensitive picture of school finance, resulting in principals handling these issues strictly confidentially.

The interviews showed that the sensitive nature of school finance result in the financial record books being kept under maximum security. Access to such information is limited, permission must be granted by the School Governing Body (SGB) or the circuit manager as the information is regarded as highly valuable and confidential. The following interesting remarks by some of the interviewees illustrate this point:

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:10 (104:108) (Super)

We are afraid that if they get lost, we shall have lost important records that we would not be able to replace, and, there is a suspicion that there could be some irregularities in the finance, so we feel money is a sensitive issue and its records must be kept very safe.

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:11 (121:126) (Super)

I think the problem that we may experience is that of suspicion, that either the principal is misusing school funds – that's why some information is being hidden – parents are always suspicious that school fund is being misused and once there could be some missing documents,

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such suspicions could be strengthened.

> P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:11 (110:113) (Super)
>
> Besides some may even hide these documents or throw them away knowing that they contain sensitive information which if lost may put you into trouble.

The remarks above further indicate that there is real concern among principals when dealing with financial issues. This is not surprising considering the statistics from the Labour Division in the Northern Region of the Limpopo Province, which shows the number of principals who are being charged for misconduct as a result of mismanagement of school funds. The statistics reveals that during the period 2000 to 2002 six principals in this region have been charged with the misappropriation of school funds and three have already been dismissed from their jobs. In addition, several newspaper reports, although not based on scientific research, have also highlighted the issues regarding educator misconduct as far as school finance is concerned (e.g. Musetha, 2002; Niemic, 2000). The following remarks by some of the principals interviewed, further illustrate why principals regard financial issues as sensitive to discuss with researchers:

> P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:9 (68:71) (Super)
>
> Because I won't be having an idea as to where these documents will lend? It would be risky. It is possible that you might find such information having been released by the media.

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:11 (153:157) (Super)
>
> But first of all because finance is a sensitive thing, we have got to know who is this person, what does he want to know about this, why..and if there are no problems, I don't think ……he may have.

> P 7: INTERVIEW 12.txt - 7:9 (122:124) (Super)
>
> I feel financial issues are very sensitive, like I indicated that we give parents financial statements, we give them, but immediately after the meeting we collect these statements. We do this for security reasons. Even with researchers, I think we may do it (give information to researchers), but after devising a mechanism, for security reasons.

There were differences between principals in reporting about sensitivity in school finance. Some principals indicate that although financial issues are sensitive, they can however; provide information to researchers after getting permission. Asking for

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permission could be an indication that they believe that what they are dealing with is something that should be handled with caution. These findings are in agreement with the result of a study by Brannen (1988), which has examined some of these response correlates of principals to sensitive questions and found that it is difficult to provide information on sensitive issues. Respondents fear being identified because school's financial data are unique, confidential and very sensitive. The School Governing Body (SGB) is accountable for all school financial issues as they are the ones who will report on anything regarding finance. This is how some principals, who regard school finance as a sensitive issue, remarked during interview:

> P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:8 (58:63) (Super)
> I think in that regard I will have to get permission first from the SGB, even perhaps just getting information from the circuit manager, information as to how sensitive it is to give such information to researchers. With that information, I may then decide whether to give the researcher what he needs or not.

> P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:12 (126:130) (Super)
> Yes, I would consult the SGB first before I let him/her have access to these documents, especially the chairperson or the secretary, who are signatories at the bank, and as managers of these funds that there is someone who wants to do research and would like to look into our books.

The results suggest that when principals feel threatened, they are not willing to reveal information. The evidence above is consistent with the findings by some researchers who examined factors influencing responses to sensitive questions (Lee, 1993, Tourangeau and Smith, 1996) that the level of reporting is poor when respondents feel threatened. The results of this study showed that there is a relationship between sensitivity of information and the level of reporting financial issues: the more sensitive information is to be the principals, the more principals feel threatened. Issues that are regarded as highly confidential are either never reported or only reported through permission. Where principals give information about school finance, it is difficult to detect if the respondents are over or underreporting. This is an indication of a need of a method through which all information regarding school finance could be revealed to researchers.

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6.3.3. Social relations

A set of interesting findings emerged when the responses of the sensitive issues in both the interview and the questionnaire results regarding social relations (moral issues) were analysed.

Questionnaire results revealed several moral issues that principals regard as sensitive in school management. A look at the rank order of frequencies (Table 5.6) reveals several moral issues that principals regard as sensitive. The majority of these are sexual matters. Interview data also revealed similar results (for example, see items 1, 2, 3, 5, 11). The finding supports the findings by several researchers that issues of morality are potentially embarrassing and are misreported because of their highly sensitive nature (for example, Kilpatrick and Lockhart, 1991; Tourangeau and Smith, 1996, Wildenhaus, 1996). The network below illustrates moral issues that principals regard as sensitive.

Network 4. Sensitivity: Social relations.
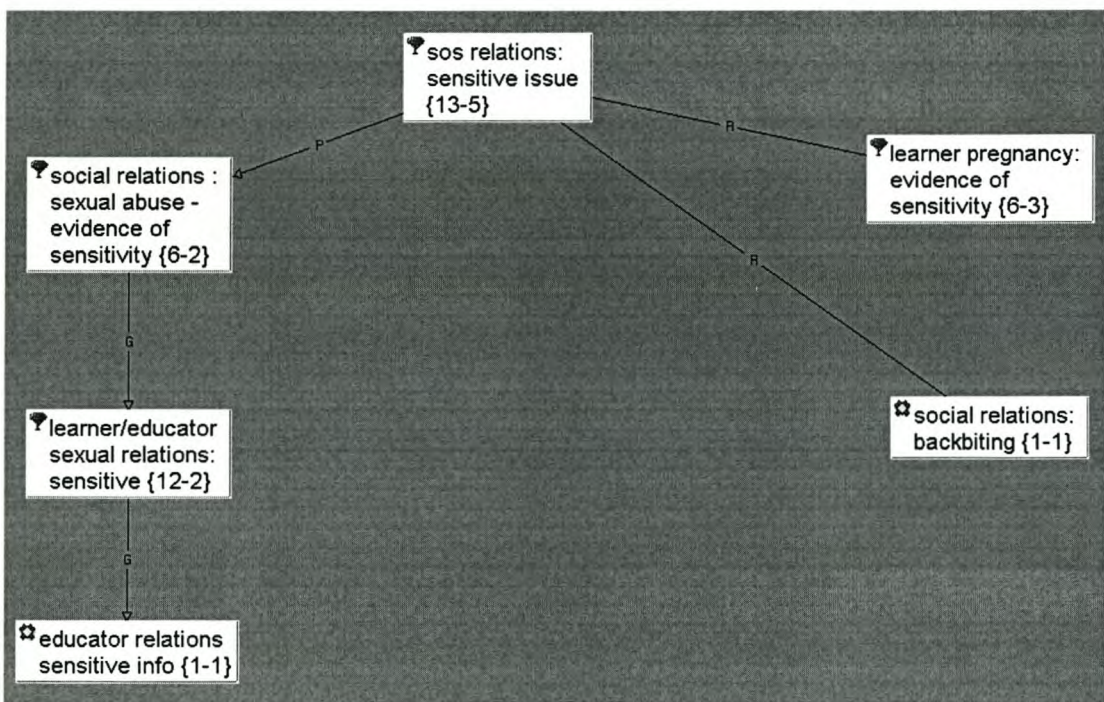
Questionnaire results indicated that principals regard sexual relations between educators and learners as one of the most sensitive issues in school management due to fears of legal sanction. These results are consistent with recent research findings on

sexual abuse in schools that contend that some educators fall in love with learners they teach and have sexual relations with them (Kutame, 1997; MRC, 1998; GCIS, 2002). Principals report that such information, in which most of the alleged offenders are young teachers who have just entered the profession, is very sensitive to report on. These results further support the findings of a recent study which shows that reliable data on the extent of such sexual abuse in the schools is hard to find (GCIS, 2002) This study (GCSI) is not limited to 'dysfunctional' schools but cuts across society. Male educators, who tend to be either older professionals who abuse power and prestige or younger teachers who underestimate their influence on learners, fall in love with female learners they are teaching and have sexual relations with them.

The Network 4 above shows that there are several quotations from interviews that illustrate that sexual relations between learners and educators are prevalent in schools and that due to fear of legal sanction, principals regard such issues as sensitive:

P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:44 (344:356) (Super)

I think what could be sensitive to discuss about social relations is the sexual relationships among educators themselves, and secondly among educators and learners. I think such relationships destroys the morale of the staff and the relationship among staff members, because they end up with very poor discipline, and whenever you want to say something, you can no longer say it with a strong voice, sometimes you say things with reservations because you know that there is so and so who is involved in these things. You always avoid to say what would seem a challenge to some of the members of staff. So I think that that breaks that morale and good staff relations. That is the one I regard as the most sensitive.

P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:45 (409:410) (Super)

I regard it as sensitive because it is too personal and private and may land you in court.

P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:31 (373:374) (Super)

It is happening in schools but fortunately I have never had a case like that, otherwise I would be telling you that I have recorded that in the log book.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:48 (360:364) (Super)

It is sensitive because it may result in parents no longer entrusting their children with us. They may no longer send their children to our school if such information is leaked. It is information that de-markets the school. It puts down the school to its lowest level.

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P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:15 (237:242) (Super)

If you look at things like serious cases of misconduct, there are educators who, in matters regarding sexual abuse, when as a school principal you make follow ups, they think they are being victimized. They no longer think that they are the ones who committed the misconduct.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:46 (347:351) (Super)

What makes this more sensitive is that individuals who are victims of such love affairs with school kids, no matter how much you try to talk to them, in my case, I must tell you, I have tried and failed. There is nothing that I can do to stop them

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:47 (339:345) (Super)

Perhaps another thing that I regard as sensitive is that of teachers falling in love with school kids. This is a sensitive issue because learners end up believing that all teachers are the same. They don't know exactly who play that kind of game and who does not. They think that all do it. That erodes the respect teachers are supposed to have. All teachers are seen to be the same.

The results reveal that principals fail to report cases of sexual abuse that occur in the schools where they are working. These findings are consistent with the results of a recent study which indicates that an investigation by the Department of Education in South Africa, as well as studies by others outside the formal education system, reveal that the responsiveness of schools and the system as a whole to report cases of sexual abuse between educators and learners is very poor (GCIS, 2002). Incidences of sexual relations between educators and learners are so sensitive that the Department of Education has set up a toll free number through which people may report these cases of abuse by teachers and remain anonymous.

Sensitivity of issues may be related to the frightening findings of the GCIS report that monitoring by the Education Labour Relations Councils of cases reported between 1999 and 2001 shows that while only 145 cases of abuse of learners by teachers were reported, sixty-five of these led to dismissal and 66 are still outstanding. This means that of the cases already resolved, 82% led to dismissal. Cases reported are few but frightening. It is therefore reasonable that principals should find reporting about these issues sensitive.

The results indicate that it is important to consider fully the potential challenges and obstacles researchers might face in researching sensitive topics. The following

responses of some of the principals interviewed confirm the findings by other researchers (for example Goldstein, 2000) that researchers may experience deep methodological difficulties linked to the ethical heart of social research of getting credible information.

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:39 (387:390) (Super)
>
> Where can one get permission to discuss such a sensitive issue? There is nowhere I can get any permission to discuss sexual relations between an educator and a learner. Even those involved would in no way like this information to be known.

> P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:29 (247:249) (Super)
>
> The one that I regard as sensitive is that of a love affair between a member of staff and a learner. That is sensitive, so sensitive that I may in no way disclose it to anyone.

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:25 (367:371) (Super)
>
> Yes, just like if I find that ehh…there was an affair within the teachers and the students, as soon as I find it,I call the teacher, I call them alone, and I must just deal with that situation confidentially until the teacher ehhh ….get rid of the girl.

The results are consistent with other reports (UWC, 2002; GCSI, 2002) that there is gross underreporting of incidents of sexual abuse between educators and learners by the principals. According to these reports, for decades society has condoned and in some cases even encouraged relationships between educators and learners. Cases of these 'inappropriate' relations between learners and educators are therefore fairly common and are never reported as abuse, unless something goes wrong with the relationship (UWC, 2002). It is equally difficult for principals to discuss these incidents with researchers. Although principals gave reasons for sensitivity of sexual related issues during interview, they did not, however, agree on these as revealed by the questionnaire data. The reasons why they find it difficult to discuss these issues with researchers are therefore varied (UWC, 2002, GCSI, 2002). These could be due to

- lack of credible information about such love affairs (many learners find it difficult to speak out of fear of the stigma that may be attached to them or because the educator power relations often intimidates learners into silence);

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- failure by principals to provide or play down incidents of sexual abuse for fear of tarnishing the 'reputation' of their schools, creating uncertainties whether such incidents do occur or not;

- feelings of the respondent – some people would prefer not to get involved in matters that are controversial (UWC, 2002);

- its confidential nature: learners or educators may not want personal information to be revealed, therefore, principals would want to preserve this confidentiality in order to protect these participants from embarrassment or other harm (Melton and Gray, 1988);

- sensitive presentation with the desire to help may actually turn the teacher or school councillor from the enemy to an ally; (UWC, 2002); and

- fear of legal sanction by those involved in the affairs.

These findings are consistent with the results of another study that examined the ethical problems in studying a politically sensitive and deviant community (Rainwater and Pittman, 1967b) that the simplest problem of confidentiality is that of protecting the identity of individual. Once having given the promise of confidentiality, there is an obligation not to reveal any information possessed which could identify an individual or connect them with what they have told the interviewers. There is concern about what information should be available, and to whom. The following interesting illustrations for this point have been made by some of the interviewees in this study:

P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:30 (363:368) (Super)
The only thing that can be sensitive is when educators are having love relationships with learners, when male educators fall in love with female learners. That is the one that I regard as very sensitive because he can defend himself. He may deny and tell you that you have defamed his character and may even end up suing you.

P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:26 (351:353) (Super)
These are issues that may even end up in the court of law if the teacher decides to sue you, so I cant discuss this with anyone.

P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:47 (425:426) (Super)
I regard such information as very sensitive because it affects an individual and these days they land you in court.

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P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:45 (367:384) (Super)

No, I think its quite sensitive and personal, and even in the sense that …lets take for example the learner – teacher sexual relationship, you may not have concrete facts to convince anyone because if you had those facts, it would be proper to reprimand that educator, and he insists, then it could be a case. But one does not have those facts, sometimes you get it as hearsay because those are issues that teachers on their own would not publicly talk about, they would only whisper about it, and as principal, I sometimes get this information after it has gone past. When it is still prevailing, they would never say it. Like you will find that if the educator is in love with a learner, ehh…some educators fear that this educator can leak the examination questions. You will just be surprised that this teacher is insisting that his paper should not be seen by any educator, knowing that there is educator so and so who are involved with learner so and so and would probably leak the paper, you see, so that is information that you cannot freely discuss with the researcher, otherwise the teacher may take you to court.

Protecting confidentiality can involve serious legal problems. There are reports of instances where research studies have come to contain information that was subpoenaed in legal proceedings, and there are known cases where researchers have gone to jail rather than reveal information disclosed by their subjects (Kvale, (1996).

Results reveal that principals find it sensitive to provide information to researchers about educators found guilty of involvement into sexual relations with learners they teach and dismissed. This is consistent with the results of other studies that have examined the revealing of sensitive information and field instructors (Reeser and Wetkin, 1997; Zakutansky and Sirles, 1993) that information which entails personal problems is sensitive. In particular, these results support the reports by researchers who found that research on "deviant" activities is sensitive thereby making it difficult to get reliable information (Lee, 1993; Liazos, 1972). A conflict exists between the ethical demand for confidentiality and the basic principles of scientific research such as inter-subjective control and the possibility of reproducing the findings by other scientists.

Sexual relations between educators and learners may have other negative consequences in school administration, for example, the relations may contribute towards poor discipline. Interview results confirm this. There is a positive association between negative reactions of teachers when their colleagues fall in love with learners they teach and problems experienced with maintenance of discipline (e.g. Dunham, 1978; Kutame, 1997). The basis of an educator's duty of care lies inter alia in his common law role of

in loco parentis (UWC, 2002). In terms of this, the educator should contribute to an environment of safety and an atmosphere where the learner can feel free to receive effective education. To the utilitarian's way of thinking, if these relationships were freely allowed, then learner's lives would be in danger constantly, of abuse, and there would be no moral systems or cultures. These rules would therefore help human beings to respect the rights of their fellow educators and learners and bring some stability and order into a social system which would otherwise be in constant state of chaotic upheaval (Thiroux, 1974). Having love relationships with learners they teach destroys that parental relationship, and leads to collapse in school discipline.

The following remark by one of the principals interviewed illustrates why principals regard these relationships as sensitive. A parent, who brought her daughter to the school after she slept with one of the educators of that school and had sexual relations with her the previous night; demanded to see the alleged educator from the school principal who found it difficult to control the situation.

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:28 (401:410) (Super)
>
> So I had to call a teacher. 'Sir, you are wanted outside', and after a very short time I heard a great noise outside, noise, noise, noise….when I came out….. 'what is wrong are you not aware that the children are learning'. Then she said no, 'I am bringing this girl to him, he slept with this girl yesterday, and now this girl is now his wife. He made this girl to be his wife. I am giving this girl to him'. So you see it is very much sensitive you really don't know where to touch and where to stop you know, you end up being confused.

Cases similar to the one illustrated above are prevalent in primary and secondary schools (GCSI, 2002). In another case, where educators were involved in sexual relations with the learners they teach, a member of the community came to the school in pursuance to this case. Following is the remark made by the principal of that school during the interview:

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:21 (308:314) (Super)
>
> Ja, I remember one day somebody came with a knobkerrie , he was a sort of inyanga and people are saying that whenever you can beat somebody with that ehh…. With that knobkerrie, you ultimately run mad. Ja, we….we really worked that day to stop the old man doing that, and one day, just before school out, another police man came with his girlfriend who was said to be in love with one of the teachers. He nearly shot that teacher.

The results indicate that it is reasonable that principals should regard these relationships as sensitive. While the principals regard these learner-educator sexual relations as sensitive, there is a tendency by many schools to either fail to acknowledge or play down such incidents of sexual abuse for fear of the stigma that may be attached to them and protecting the possible unpleasant repercussions the report would have on the educator concerned. These findings are in agreement with the literature that indicates that research is sensitive because of the guilt, shame and embarrassment associated with the societal stigma (Jansen and Davis, 1998). For example, in the illustration above, it is a case that has to be dealt with tactfully to avoid embarrassment. The irate girl's mother was ventilating her anger by shouting in front of the learners and educators so that everyone knew what one of the educators at that school had done. If such a case is not handled tactfully, it may result in the disruption of the whole school. The policeman could have also shot the educator in front of the learners causing traumatic experiences to the learners. These findings are consistent with reports that principals fail to provide information on these issues due to fear of tarnishing the 'reputation' of their schools (GCIS, 2002).

The results suggest that there are problems that researchers experience in getting credible data for their studies. It is possible for example; that the constructive effect of the research may outweigh the damage to the reputations of the people we study. If one describes in full and honest detail behaviour that the public will regard as immoral, degraded and deviant, it would affect the people we hope to study. These findings are in agreement with results of other studies that have examined some of these response correlates of sensitive research (Lee, 1993; Lee and Renzetti, 1993; Renzetti and Lee, 1993).

The results further suggest that data collected about sensitive issues may not be valid and reliable because of the possible threats related to the release of such information. Principals who work in an environment that they perceive as threatening, are less likely to report accurately on the events as they unfold in their schools. What probably scares educators is the manner in which the department of education handles cases of learner abuse by educators. The department of education is acting strictly on educators found guilty of having sexual relations with learners they teach. The Employment of Educators Act 76 of 1998 Section 17, subsection 1 (c), states that an educator must be

dismissed if he or she is found guilty of having sexual relationship with a learner of the school where he or she is employed. Educators are being charged and dismissed from their jobs for cases of misconduct involving learner sexual relationships. These results confirm the utilitarian's way of thinking, that it is dangerous to leave moral actions up to individuals without giving them some guidance and without trying to establish some sort of stability and moral order to society (Thiroux, 1974). For example, in a recent newspaper article, although not based on scientific research, Govender (2002) reports that eight teachers from Gauteng, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal were 'given the boot' by the national education department after being found guilty of having sexual relationships with teenage pupils.

Statistics from the labour division in the Northern Region (3) of the Limpopo Province reveals that during 2000 to 2002 period, the education labour unit dealing with cases about educator misconduct has handled fourteen (14) cases of sexual relationship between the educators and the learners they teach, and twelve of the educators, including a principal, charged for this type of misconduct, have already been discharged from duty while the cases of the other two are still pending. The submission by the Department of Education to Task Group on Sexual Abuse in Schools reports that the 1998 Medical Research Council study on the Rape of girls in South Africa, recently published in their Report, claims that teachers commit a shocking 33% of incidents of rapes against children. The results suggest that cases of learner abuse by educators may be on the increase. As principals find it difficult to speak out for fear of the stigma that may be attached to their schools, it is possible that educators take advantage of this and abuse cases increase with little notice.

However, the results reveal that while most principals do not discuss such relationships with researchers due to their sensitive nature, there are some principals who may do so but under strict conditions. The results confirm the utilitarian's view that in assessing the situation, the utilitarian must decide for this particular situation they are in at the moment whether or not it is right to tell the truth. In act utilitarianism, there can be no absolute rules against discussing such relationships with researchers, because every situation is different and all people are different. Therefore, all of those issues which may, in general, be considered immoral would be considered moral or immoral by the act utilitarian in relation to whether they would or would not benefit them in the

situation they find themselves in. This is illustrated by the following remarks made by some of the principals interviewed:

> P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:24 (343:344) (Super)
> No, it is too sensitive to be discussed with researchers, unless if it is a departmental official.

> P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:37 (375:378) (Super)
> It is even difficult to record such relationships. But now, with these new laws it is going to be easy because we will be able to refer such cases to the disciplinary enquiry. It will be easy because we will have somewhere to refer to.

Sexual abuse among fellow educators is regarded as a very sensitive issue: 82% of questionnaire respondents indicated that this issue is sensitive. Interview results confirm this finding. Sexual abuse in the workplace is regarded as serious misconduct by law. An educator must be dismissed if he or she is found guilty of sexual abuse on other educator (Employment of Educators Act 76, 1998). Educators are required to act as role models of the learners they teach, act professionally and to respect their fellow educators. The results confirm these rigid deontological views that are contained in the code of conduct for educators which require them to promote gender equality and refrain from sexual harassment (SACE, 1999). The following remarks about these relationships were made by some of the principals interviewed:

> P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:34 (331:339) (Super)
> Sometimes you find a love relationship between that male and the female educator. You find that they are both divorcees. And they start staying together. Now, as a school principal you must just pretend you don't know that they are staying together. You wait until they inform you officially if at all it will happen. Now you find that at times they do not come to school regularly and you start complaining about absenteeism of one of the two or both, you cannot even say you stay with so and so, that's why you don't come to school; you cannot tell them because you have not been told.

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:44 (344:356) (Super)
> I think what could be sensitive to discuss about social relations is the sexual relationships among educators themselves, and secondly among educators and learners. I think such relationships destroy the morale of the staff and the relationship among staff members, because they end up with very poor discipline, and whenever you want to say something, you can no longer say it with a strong voice, sometimes you say things with reservations because you know that there is

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so and so who is involved in these things. You always avoid to say what would seem a challenge to some of the members of staff. So I think that that breaks that morale and good staff relations. That is the one I regard as the most important

P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:26 (351:353) (Super)

These are issues that may even end up in the court of law if the teacher decides to sue you, so I cant discuss this with anyone.

Although questionnaire results reveal that principals did not agree on the reasons for sensitivity of this issue, interview results show that principals regard matters of sexual abuse among educators as sensitive because of confidentiality. This difference in response confirms the claim by Morrison and Galloway (1995) that the interviewee can resist, sidestep, or ignore questions put by an interviewer, but the face-to-face call for a response has an immediacy that creates pressure, and evasion is rarely complete. These issues are intimate and the potential for harm is greater and it is intimacy which raises some of the sharpest ethical questions (Measor and Sikes (1992). Following are remarks from interviews to illustrate this point:

P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:25 (347:349) (Super)

I can't discuss such information because in fact it has nothing to do with the school work and would require high level of confidentiality.

P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:4 (79:83) (Super)

No. There is no need. If the researcher has an approval letter from the authorities to do research, there is no need to try and find out whether indeed the researcher has permission or not. But if there is no approval, it is problematic because we may seem to be divulging departmental information.

The questionnaire results indicated that code of conduct regarding learner pregnancy is a sensitive issue. Interview results confirm this finding. Principals perceived learner pregnancy as a very sensitive moral issue in school management. The Employment of educators Act 76 of 1998 18 (k) prevents educators from discriminating against learners on the basis of pregnancy. It is their Constitutional right to be treated like any other learner in the school. However, pregnancy can have complications that may need urgent medical attention. Some schools are situated in rural areas where it can be difficult for principals to cope with such emergencies due to lack of clinics or maternity hospitals.

The findings are in agreement with reports (Le Vin, 2000; SABC News Website htt://www.sabcnews.com, 2002) that the fear principals have of including the policy of dealing with learner pregnancy in the school policy are as a result of the complications that may arise during the period of pregnancy. Principals are supposed to include a policy on learner pregnancy in the school policy as it appears in the act, but are reluctant to do so as it would mean they should follow the policy. On being charged why he had expelled a learner for being pregnant at a school where 30 learners have fallen pregnant in a three year period, this is what the principal had to say (SABC):

> The dynamics on the ground are that learners are adamant about having these ladies in school. This has been influenced by the number of miscarriages in this school. We've had the girls having to clean up after those miscarriages (2002: 1).

The following interesting remarks made by some of the principals interviewed further illustrate these fears;

> P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:38 (37:49) (Super)
> Yes. It is a problem because although I understand that the constitution states that learners who are pregnant should still attend lessons if they are at school, but we see the danger when this pregnant girl has to give birth. As educators we are not trained as midwives to deliver babies. We find it difficult to cope with a sensitive issue like that, which may even result in death if not handled carefully. Once we realize that the learner is highly expectant, we do not feel free. We are even afraid that some may even give birth in the toilet and throw the baby away, or give birth in front of the other learners, some of whom are very young. That is problematic to include in the school policy as to how one can go about if the situation is like this.

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:39 (46:52) (Super)
> Ja. It is very much sensitive to deal with. Even now, it remains sensitive, because as far as I am concerned, pregnancy…..a pregnant girl need not come to school. She is supposed to stay at home. But according to the law, you must let that child to come to school. And you find that sometimes its rather difficult, to control people who are pregnant especially if they are still delinquent.

These results are consistent with reports obtained from the Internet search about learner pregnancy complications that principals are sensitive about. According to Le Vin in a letter to 'The Teacher', a newspaper for teachers, a teacher expressed her view about learner pregnancy complications in the following manner:

It seems cool to young girls to be pregnant because no teacher will ask them to leave school and go home. I wonder what will happen should a pregnant learner, who is exercising her rights, decides to turn the classroom into a maternity ward. We teachers are not midwives, we aren't even offered first-aid courses -- should we improvise in the event of a learner giving birth? (2000:7).

The view above has also been expressed by some of the principals I interviewed, who go to the extreme in trying to deal with the issues related to learner pregnancy. This is how some of the interviewees responded:

P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:40 (57:68) (Super)
Ja, because..ehhh…lets say sometimes a child will give birth at school, we are not nurses, .ehh..we cannot ..ehh…take care of the situation. So we shall be needing the 3rd person, and to get the 3rd person, it would amount us for some hours to come, and then ..ehh.. a poor soul may be dying. That's why it is so sensitive. It must be treated with the greatest …ehh.. ehh… I don't know what to call it……care……Or else let me just say ….what do I do. In my school, if a child is pregnant, I call the parent. So, if the parent allows to come to school every day to look after their child, I take that one as ehhh..anything……, I am comfortable with that.

P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:6 (52:53) (Super)
It is sensitive because we are failing to find a way that could be effective when dealing with a pregnant learner.

However, there are some principals who, while they regard the issues of learner pregnancy as sensitive, indicate that they may provide information to researchers but conditionally.

P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:5 (58:59) (Super)
I can discuss, I won't have any problem, although again it will depend on the personality of the researcher.

The questionnaire data indicated that principals perceive discussing the topic of educator/s with AIDS with researchers, which is second in the rank order of frequencies ranging from 'sensitive' to 'not sensitive' as a sensitive issue. Discussing learner/s with AIDS is third in the rank order. These findings confirm the results of some researchers who found discussing about issues related to AIDS as sensitive (Kadushin, 1997; Melton and Gray; 1988; and Sieber, 1993). Such a discussion is a violation of a zone of

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privacy and a threat to personal dignity, which may result in substantial direct harm – it is likely to engender distress of those being studied and result in legal sanctions of researchers. The results also confirm what is in the South African School's Act (SASA, 1996), which regards discussion of educators or learners with AIDS as confidential. It is therefore reasonable that principals should regard this issue as extremely sensitive since violation of this act could place their jobs at risk: disclosure of HIV/AIDS-related information may lead to a charge of misconduct.

The questionnaire data also showed that 94% of the principals who completed questionnaires regard backbiting between members of staff as a very sensitive issue in school management. These results are in agreement with the results of another study which contends that backbiting by members of staff causes unnecessary divisions causing undue stress to the school principal (Kutame, 1977). The following remarks from interviews illustrate that backbiting among educators is a sensitive issue:

> P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:49 (321:324) (Super)
> What I regard as very sensitive is backbiting among staff members. This affects teachers because you find they are no longer in speaking terms.

> P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:50 (326:333) (Super)
> It affects the whole school atmosphere, because you will find that teachers are no longer in speaking terms. Supposing a teacher needs something from the other teacher in the staff, he or she cannot get that information; or, supposing a teacher has been given the responsibility of photocopying for example, those with whom he or she is not in good speaking terms may not have access to the facility. It is sensitive because it even spills over to the learners and the parents. That is the one that I regard as very sensitive because he or she may deny or defend him or herself. He or she may deny and tell you that you have defamed his character and may even end up suing you.

The results reveal that respondents interviewed perceive 'educator misconduct' as a very sensitive moral issue on which they have difficulty in providing information to researchers. These findings are in agreement with the report by Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) about the effective principal, which indicates that dealing with issues related to educator misconduct is most frustrating and emotionally threatening in the principal's work. The fears principals have can be related to the incapacity code and procedures for educators whose moral behaviour has degenerated. For example,

statistics supplied by the labour division in the Northern Region (3) of the Limpopo Province reveal that during 2000 and 2002, (Case Register, 2003) the education labour unit dealing with cases about educator misconduct has handled 33 cases of educator misconduct, and 28 of the educators involved in these cases have either been warned, fined or dismissed from duty while the other six cases are still pending. The following remark illustrates this point:

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:61 (344:363) (Super)
>
> Yes….a charge of misconduct. That is very sensitive and not an easy thing to deal with. By the time one arrives at that stage, one would have experienced a lot of stress because it is something that one has no alternative but to do.
>
> X: Why do you think it is stressful and a sensitive issue?
>
> Y: It is because in the first place you are sympathetic towards another fellow human being. To punish another fellow human being is not an easy thing. By the time you punish him/her, you will have suffered psychological torture. Secondly, looking at the possible results, which may not be pleasant, makes one experience a lot of stress. One also experiences fear of personal safety, because once this person is charged, with charges ranging from emotion, suspension or even expulsion, you look at your own safety since you gave evidence leading to that conclusion. People we are leaving with nowadays care less about the law of the country because it also seems to be ineffective. To them killing someone is not an issue. At the same time you experience stress because you look at your own family, so you wouldn't like it to suffer. It stresses you who has to monitor these things.

The results further reveal that there are several other issues related to educator misconduct that are regarded as sensitive by principals, for example, making available to researchers a record of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct. Principals with more years of experience as principals differ significantly with those having fewer years of experience as principals in their rating of this issue. Principals who are more experienced (more than 15 years experience as principals) rate this issue as sensitive to very sensitive, probably due to the problems they have encountered during their years of service. Principals indicate that they perceive such records as confidential because they indicate that they do not know where the information given to the researcher will end. The record of a charge of misconduct is personal, and therefore

- the educator may like to keep it secret for fear of tarnishing his or her name;
- the principal is afraid of being convicted of disclosing confidential information (Labour Relations Act, 1995);

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- Some fear that the records may be used as conclusive evidence against them in the court of law should the offended want to take legal steps.

These findings are consistent with a report by Lee (1993) in his study about the problems in field research that wrong doing uncovered by research might bring with it the possibility of discovery, and, sanction would result. The following remark by one of the principals interviewed further illustrates this point:

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:25 (287:291) (Super)
> Ehh… I think it is sensitive in the sense that ehh…one has to be very sure of the steps that you are taking, and one must know that there are people who would be checking whether the correct procedures have been followed in disciplining this educator.

The other moral issue related to educator misconduct reported to be sensitive to report on is that of educators found guilty of misconduct. The survey results reveal that principals regard discussing about educators found guilty of misconduct with researchers very sensitive. Educators found guilty may be fined, warned or discharged depending on the nature of the offence (Employment of Educators Act 76, 1998). The findings are in agreement with the observation by Goss (1985) that those serious disciplinary problems, including those involving the possibility of expulsion, tax a principal's resources to the full. Principals find it very difficult to discuss matters regarding educators charge with misconduct because it is an offence for any person to disclose information which that person acquired while performing any power or duty (Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997). There could be other reasons why they find it sensitive to discuss this issue as illustrated in the following remark by one of the principals interviewed:

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:37 (367:372) (Super)
> No, I think it's quite sensitive and personal, and even in the sense that …lets take for example the learner – teacher sexual relationship, you may not have concrete facts to convince anyone because if you had those facts, it would be proper to reprimand that educator, and if he insists, then it could be a case.

The evidence above points to what Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1979) referred to as the heavier demands made on the principals in discharging their disciplinary function

within the school. Principals are required to safeguard the integrity of the school and the department of education and also to make sure that the employment relationship between the educator and the department of education is maintained. Principals probably find this issue sensitive because of the possible actions taken against the offenders; examples of these have been discussed earlier.

Disclosing the personal problems of educators has been identified as the most sensitive issue in school management about which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers. This is consistent with the results reported by Tourangeau and Smith (1996) who found a positive association between reporting sensitive issues and intrusive behaviour. Research is sensitive if it intrudes into private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience. Principals indicate that personal problems are private personal information unless the educator consents to the disclosure of that information (Labour Relations Act, 1995). Disclosure of such information is an offence, it may even lead to sanction of those who are conducting the research. Most principals regard this issue as sensitive because they fear legal sanction. The following remarks from interviews illustrate this point:

> P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:42 (259:266) (Super)
> You see, what you cannot discuss with researchers is when you are experiencing problems which you regard as sensitive. For example, maybe what I cannot disclose to the researcher is when the educator was absent because he had a fight with his wife. That is sensitive because if the educator can learn that such information has been disclosed to the researcher, he may say you have exposed his secrets, and these days they boast of suing people.

> P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:25 (269:271) (Super)
> Those that affect the privacy of the teacher but if they are issues that affect the educator's job, that I don't have a problem with.

These issues of morality, regarded as highly confidential, are sensitive and make principals to be reactive when answering research questions on those issues. These findings are in agreement with the results of the study by Tourangeau and Smith (1996), who have examined the impact of asking sensitive questions while collecting data. These findings indicate that there are issues in school management that are highly sensitive to provide information on and that data collected would therefore not be of a high quality.

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6.3.4. Working conditions

Both interview and questionnaire results identified some aspects of the principal's working conditions that are sensitive. The conditions under which the principals work are, to a large extent, determined by the policies issued by the department of education which they must implement for the smooth running of the education system (Employment of Educators Act 76, 1998).

Network 5 below shows that there are several issues that principals regard as sensitive to discuss with researchers, and these are: influence of educator unions, the many subjects educators teach, remuneration, educators being charged for misconduct, exemption of learners from paying school fees, educators remaining at school for seven hours and implementing departmental policies. Of these, charge of misconduct and influence of educator unions seem to be the most sensitive. The salary issue did not seem to be a very sensitive issue to the principals (only one quotation).

Network 5. Sensitivity in working conditions.
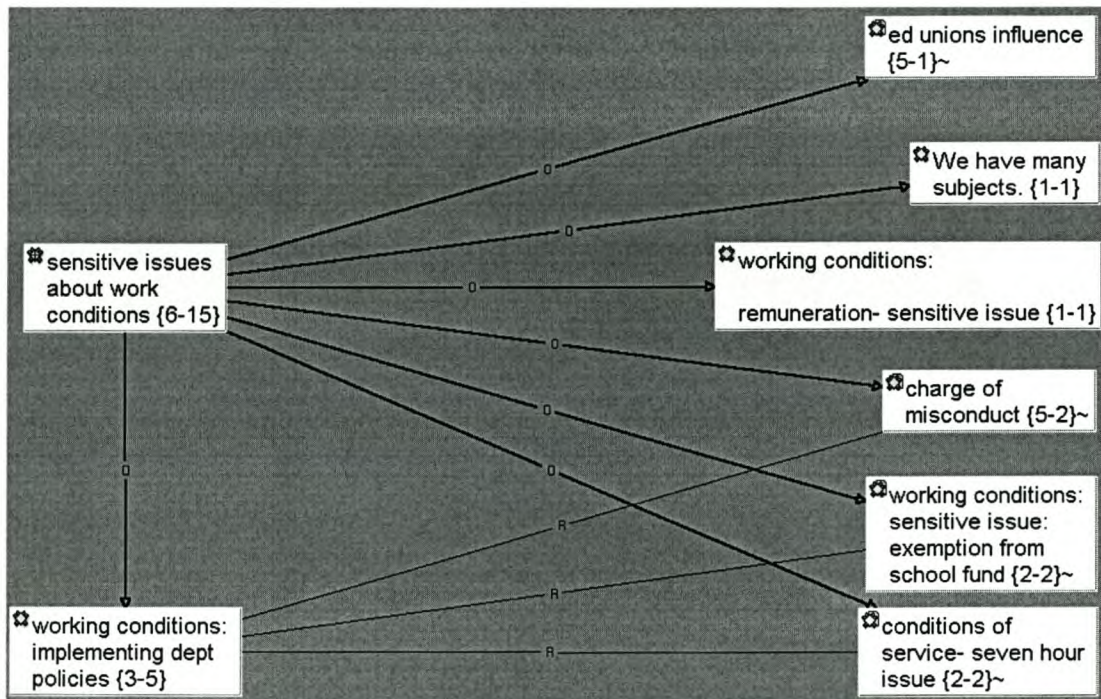
The results indicate that carrying out some departmental policies creates a very stressful working environment for some principals. Principals are expected to carry out some

policies that they regard as sensitive because they may result in the dismissal of the educator.

Principals perceive implementing departmental policies regarding working conditions a sensitive issue. Implementing policy on the charge of misconduct for educators is regarded as a very sensitive issue. These findings are in agreement with the results of other studies which have examined some of these response correlates of sensitive issues (Lee and Renzetti, 1980; Sieber (1993) and found that issues of competency are acute given that the dissemination of invalid conclusions might lead to harmful policy decisions

The following remarks made by some of the principals illustrate that implementing departmental policies is sensitive.

> P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:17 (182:185) (Super)
>
> Implementing policy on serious misconduct by teachers is a sensitive issue, because it puts the principal in a very difficult situation because it may seem as though the principal is chasing teachers away from school.

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:17 (196:202) (Super)
>
> Another thing is when the performance of the educator in the subject concerned is of a poor quality, the educator cannot give sufficient work, because learners are too many in one class and when one compiles a classification, it again creates problems, it is difficult to equate the learners in the class with the number of periods per lesson.

> P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:17 (269:274) (Super)
>
> The government should have left this for local structures or SGB, so that if there is need that some parents be exempted from paying school funds, sit down and agree on what to do without involving us. Now if the department has issued a circular, it's like it has issued a directive. These are very sensitive issues to discuss.

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:28 (274:275) (Super)
>
> One of them is when the department or government says that every child who wants admission should be admitted. The ones that I regard as sensitive are those of admission and accommodation.

P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:1 (226:229) (Super)

The ones that I regard as sensitive are those that…ehh..there are times when the department insists that things be implemented when they are still in a trial stage, you see, it gives us principals problems.

Principals who completed the questionnaires regard disclosing information about educator's salary issues as a very sensitive issue (ranked fifth). However, interview results indicate that principals regard this issue as less sensitive to provide information on. This result is in agreement with the results of another study which indicates that salary issues are not sensitive and do not cause severe stress to principals (Kutame (1997). It is, however, possible that during interviews principals felt ashamed to admit openly that a low salary is a source of stress for educators and would be sensitive to discuss about for fear that it would be assumed that they work with the sole purpose of getting higher salaries. It could also be that principals think that it is so obvious that the issue of salary is sensitive because educators are not satisfied with their salary and therefore did not deem it necessary to mention. The following is a remark by one of the principals who took part in the interviews:

P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:16 (153:154) (Super)

I feel the salary issue is sensitive to discuss with researchers. You will air your views knowing that nothing serious will happen to you, and whenever you talk with anyone, they will also have their views. They may take it that perhaps I worry more about my salary than my work, that's my opinion. I don't know how other people may take it.

Overall, principals interviewed perceived implementing policy on the seven-hour issue as very sensitive. Due to unionizing of teacher associations after the democratization of education in South Africa after the end of the apartheid era, educators were expected to be at school (work) for at least seven hours a day from Monday to Fridays (Labour Relations Act, 1995). Principals perceive implementing this policy as very sensitive because of resistance to comply by educators. They probably regard this issue as sensitive to discuss, as it could be an indication for failure to carry out their responsibilities. Remarks by some of the principals follow:

P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:17 (183:188) (Super)

The first one I can mention is that of time of departure from school by educators. They don't want to observe the seven- hour stay at work for educators. I understand this seven-hour issue

but it is very difficult to convince the educators, especially here at this school where we have transport problems.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:16 (169:171) (Super)

The seven hours issue. Teachers do not like it. It becomes a source of discomfort because normally they want to leave school earlier, so they keep on asking for permission to go.

6.3.5. Absenteeism

Principals with fewer years of experience and those with more than 15 years of experience have reported educator reasons for being absent as a sensitive issue. These results are in agreement with reports about teacher absenteeism that it has become a thorny problem to deal with in schools (Turkington, 2000). Principals experience greater stress over problems associated with educator absenteeism in the school. The records kept in schools indicated that a number of educators were absent from school during the previous two weeks from the day the principals were interviewed. Network 6 below illustrates the issues about educator absenteeism that principals regard as sensitive.

Network 6. Sensitivity: Teacher absenteeism.
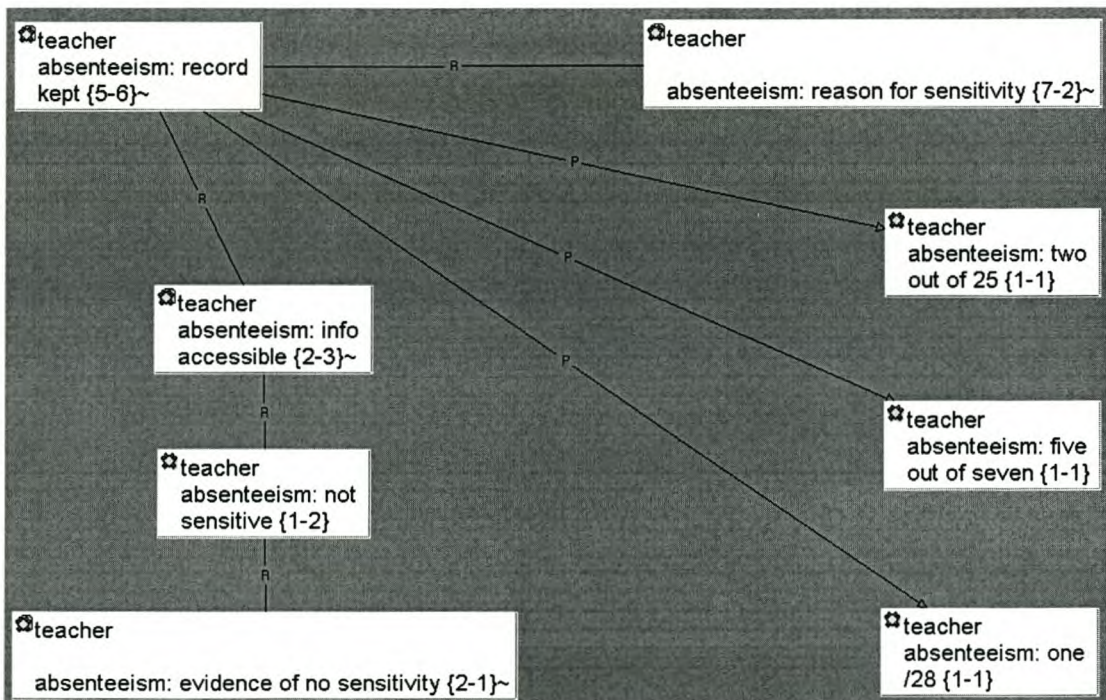
Several reasons why some principals regard absenteeism as sensitive are given. The following remarks illustrate why absenteeism issues are regarded as sensitive:

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P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:33 (317:318) (Super)

Information that is sensitive is when the reason for being absent affects mainly the family affairs of the educator.

P 8: INTERVIEW 3.txt - 8:10 (179:180) (Super)

Ja, it is sensitive. (Leave without pay due to absenteeism). It's gonna hit her and it is serious if you don't feel for her, what can she use to come to school.

P11: INTERVIEW 7.txt - 11:19 (210:213) (Super)

They have got the right to ten days leave; they do have the right to visit the medical doctor; but it seems as if they want to do everything during school hours.

P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:17 (255:259) (Super)

There is information that I regard as sensitive especially to we blacks you find that a teacher comes to you as a principal, telling you all the secrets that I am having a problem like this and this and this, can't I just go.

P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:18 (264:269) (Super)

Yes, because you know, I am afraid, other teachers who are having access to some of the cabinets because in my school we don't have an office, I am sharing one classroom with the teachers, so it is very much difficult for me to keep confidential information because they would just open and read and the information is no longer confidential.

P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:22 (197:200) (Super)

Teachers may complain that their personal information is being disclosed to strangers without their consent. Such information is confidential. I need to keep such information as confidential.

However, there are some principals who indicate that they do not regard educator absenteeism per se as a sensitive issue in school management. There are other aspects about educator absenteeism they regard as sensitive. This is illustrated in the following remarks:

P 9: INTERVIEW 4.txt - 9:11 (142:145) (Super)

That's a problem really. And at times it contributes towards the rate of failure at schools because you find that in a week, you shall have at least two to three teachers who absented themselves.

P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:20 (178:182):(197:200) (Super)

Information about absenteeism without notice, that I regard as sensitive because such leave should be leave without pay, because when one records this, it should be clear that it is different from the others. It needs to be motivated – why it must be granted without pay. Teachers may

complain that their personal information is being disclosed to strangers without their consent. Such information is confidential. I need to keep such information as confidential.

P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:40 (261:279) (Super)

For example, maybe what I cannot disclose to the researcher is when the educator was absent because he had a fight with his wife. That is sensitive because if the educator can learn that such information has been disclosed to the researcher, he may say you have exposed his secrets, and these days they boast of suing people. I am sensitive to that because the teacher may feel betrayed, and that sometimes they may sue you. But presently I don't have such cases where I could feel that such an absenteeism problem with this teacher may not be discussed with any researcher. Otherwise they tell me most of the times why they are absent.

P 7: INTERVIEW 12.txt - 7:20 (305:309) (Super)

Aaahh…no. why, because in the leave register we have given provision that one should give a reason for being absent, but then for fear of sensitivity, we then said it is not good that one should indicate that he/she was doing one, two, three. If it is something private, the teacher should just indicate private.

Although the evidence that educator absenteeism is sensitive to report on is convincing, there are some principals who do not regard the issue as sensitive. The following remarks by some interviewees illustrate this:

P11: INTERVIEW 7.txt - 11:19 (210:213) (Super)

They have got the right to ten days leave; they do have the right to visit the medical doctor; although it seems as if they want to do everything during school hours.

Principals do not seem to regard learner absenteeism as a factor that creates any condition of duress in school management. The results are inconsistent with Fimian's (1982) finding that learner absenteeism is one of the issues in school management that is regarded as stressful. For example, principals report that reasons for learner absenteeism are not issues on which they would have difficulty in providing information to researchers. Reasons for learner absenteeism is ranked second last of thirty three sensitive issues which principals would find difficult to provide information to researchers.

6.3.6. Developmental appraisal.

The questionnaire results indicated that discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators is regarded as a sensitive issue. This is confirmed by interview

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results. Network 7 illustrates how principals regard developmental appraisal as a sensitive issue.

Network 7. Sensitivity: Developmental appraisal.
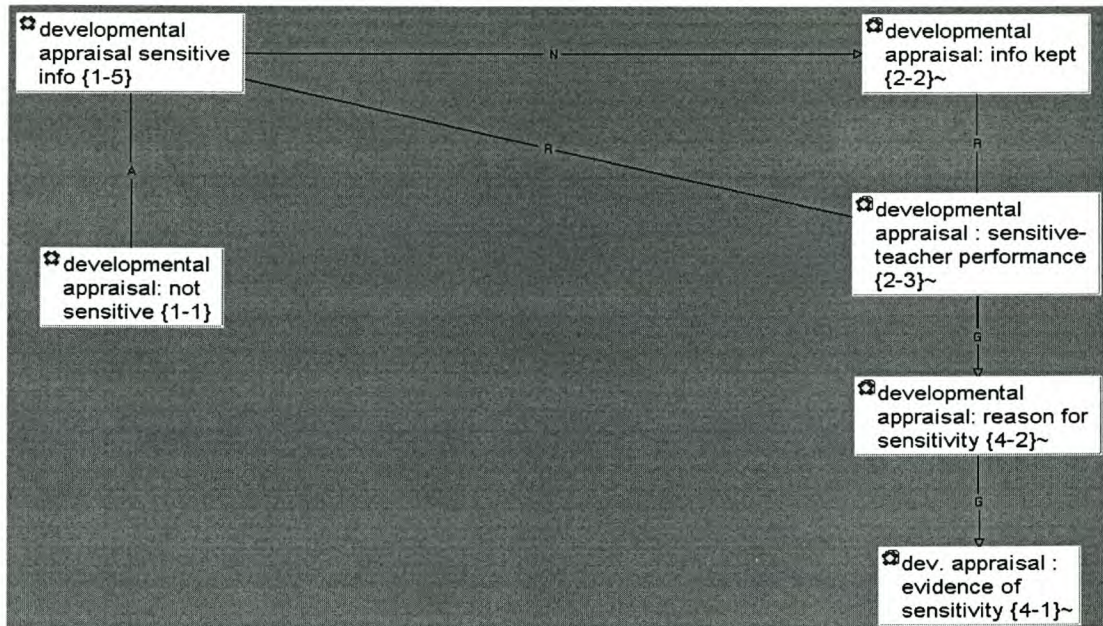
Results reveal that information on the performance of the teachers appraised is sensitive and therefore it is kept safe, and access to such information is limited. These results are in agreement with Sieber (1993) who indicates that issues of competency and validity are acute given that the dissemination of invalid conclusions might lead to harmful policy decisions. Principals indicate that information they keep about developmental appraisal is about educator performance. The data can be given further depth by relating the following comments given by some of the respondents:

> P 6: INTERVIEW 11.txt - 6:21 (322:326) (Super)
>
> Teacher performance.....there are teachers who under perform not because they want to, but because they cannot perform well. Now, it is very sensitive to tell the third person that this teacher is not at all effective. It frustrates the teacher tremendously.

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:52 (390:394) (Super)
>
> It is sensitive because it exposes the teacher if disclosed to other people. It exposes him/her in the first place because if he/she comes to realise that his/her performance is poor, it affects him/her morally.

However, there are principals who indicated that although they regard developmental appraisal as a sensitive issue, they may make the educator's records of developmental appraisal available to researchers. The following remarks made by some interviewees illustrate this:

> P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:31 (305:307) (Super)
>
> Yes, but I would first consult before I give anyone access to that file, for the understanding that some kind of research is being conducted.

> P 5: INTERVIEW 10.txt - 5:31 (327:330) (Super)
>
> I think I would also consult the ..the..the circuit manager, and the district manager to find out just to be sure whether such information could be accessible to researchers, because I don't want that in the end I have overstepped my authorities.

Principals regard developmental appraisal as sensitive probably because up to date, the department of education is finding it difficult to complete its pilot stage. Principals are finding it difficult to implement the system and regard issues related to it difficult to provide information on.

6.3.7. School discipline.

Disciplinary problems have been reported as very sensitive by questionnaire respondents. Four disciplinary issues have been found to be among the twenty issues regarded as most sensitive (see Table 5.6. items 3, 8, 15 and 19). The interview results corroborated the fact that disciplinary issues are indeed sensitive.

Network 8: School disciplinary sensitive issues

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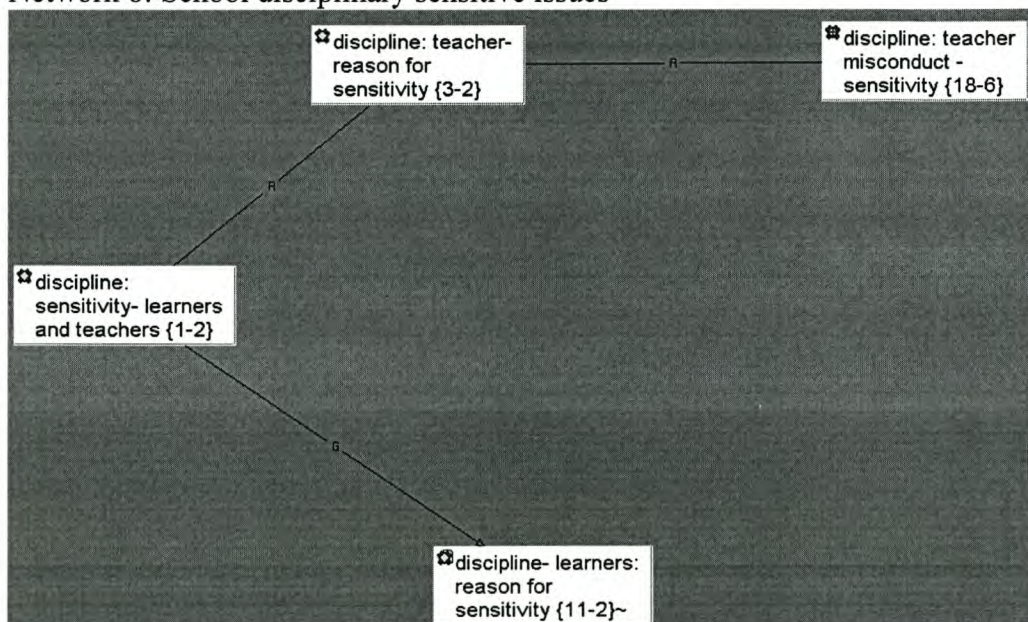
Network 8 gives the sensitive issues patterns from interviews related to school discipline.

The majority of principals indicate that teacher misconduct is the most sensitive issue in school discipline on which they have difficulty in providing information to researchers.

Principals perceived issues in the code of conduct for learners about learner discipline sensitive and therefore difficult to include in the school policy. Guidelines on the code of conduct for learners appear in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. These are subject to different interpretations. The following remarks from interviews illustrate this point:

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:57 (72:77) (Super)
>
> The other thing that I find difficult is to put in place in the code of conduct for learners is the policy that learners should follow. For example, we want to curb late coming to school, we would like all learners to start lessons at the same time. Now one has a problem of this one who comes late, how do we deal with him/her.

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:58 (79:88), (105:108) (Super)
>
> Because there are so many factors. In the past we never had a problem of dealing with such learners, because we would apply corporal punishment. You apply corporal punishment and let the learner to go to the class and continue with the lessons. Now, how do you deal with such a learner? We tried calling a parent, but our learner's parents are not willing to come to school. When you tell the parent about her child who comes to school late, they always react by saying: 'is it the late coming of my child that you are calling me for? Deal with him/her at school'.............So, there are disciplinary problems that when you try to solve by including in the school policy, you find yourselves infringing with the rights of individuals or constitution.

The eighteen quotations from twelve principals illustrating why teacher misconduct is regarded as sensitive have already been presented as major sensitive issues in school management and discussed under moral issues. The principals indicated that if the teachers are being charged for several types of misconduct, it affects the school discipline negatively. These findings are consistent with literature which contends that a teacher is expected to be ethical and in particular to role model ethical behaviour; to behave with honesty and integrity (for example McGill Undergraduate Medical Education on Professionalism, 2002).

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Results from questionnaires revealed that learner disciplinary problems are sensitive. The interview results confirm these findings. These results are related to the reports by other researchers who found that lack of discipline, as perceived by both male and female teachers, is one of a major source of stress in school management (Pierce and Molloy, 1990; Pithers, 1995; and Boyle et.al., 1995). Discipline in school is often regarded as fundamental to the smooth running of the learning and teaching process. Lack of learner discipline disrupts the normal day-to-day activities in the school thereby causing stress to educators. The results, in agreement with literature, suggest that maintaining discipline is an aspect of the educator's role that generates high levels of stress (Woodhouse, Hall and Wooster (1985). The following remarks by some of the principals interviewed illustrate why they regard learner discipline as a sensitive issue:

P 3: INTERVIEW 6.txt - 3:37 (162:169) (Super)
If a learner has committed an offence, I think information about such an offence is confidential. Supposing I give information about such a learner who perhaps has committed an offence to someone, and it somehow reaches the learner that I have done that, I may land into trouble or even land in court. Or if the parents overhear that their child is troublesome, they may think that their child's affairs are never kept secret. It is mainly for the sake of confidentiality.

P11: INTERVIEW 7.txt - 11:14 (169:169) (Super)
You see, this is personal file, sometimes this is confidential.

P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:7 (100:104) (Super)
That's why it is so sensitive. But if you look at this other part only, you find that you have destroyed the future of the child. And if you concentrate on this other part, you find that you are in for it, you as a teacher or as a principal.

P13: INTERVIEW 9.txt - 13:12 (107:108) (Super)
I don't think there is but I feel it may not be good just to disclose such information to anyone.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:13 (136:141) (Super)
Because at times we overstep our authority and do things we are not supposed to. At times you find the punishment does not suit the offence, so, one keeps that information secret because some will say you shouldn't have done it that way. It may act as evidence against you. So, I keep this information secret.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:14 (143:145) (Super)

Perhaps let me further say, I am sometimes afraid that the punishment has not been meted the right way, so, I would like to keep this information secret.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:27 (282:285) (Super)

It is sensitive to discuss such issues with researchers for fear of disclosing such information where learners are sent out of class during a lesson as a way of punishment.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:28 (287:288) (Super)

….because learners are being denied their basic right.

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:29 (293:294) (Super)

Because it affects the confidentiality of some aspects as I have mentioned.

Principals regard some issues related to learner discipline as confidential. 82% of the principals who completed questionnaires indicated that exercise of corporal punishment, ranked fourth, is highly sensitive. Corporal punishment is severely restricted by law and providing information about it is very sensitive (SASA, 1996). Restrictions about corporal punishment may result in a number of problems for principals in their attempt to maintaining discipline. Anyone found guilty of this offence, may be dismissed from their job or convicted in the court of law. Principals interviewed were not very vocal about this issue, however, the following interesting remarks from interviews illustrate why this issue is sensitive:

P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:13 (136:141) (Super)

Because at times we overstep our authority and do things we are not supposed to. At times you find the punishment does not suit the offence, so, one keeps that information secret because some will say you shouldn't have done it that way. It may act as evidence against you. So, I keep this information secret

P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:37 (91:97) (Super)

It is sensitive because people will be tempted to punish children. You find that ehhh.. . lets suppose its your brother's child or a child of somebody whom you know, you cannot let it go like that along without a punishment. You end up inflicting that punishment even if you know it is prohibited and you can't do anything, but you end up doing that for the sake that the child must be well controlled, he must be contained.

Principals perceived the exercise of corporal punishment as a very sensitive issue on which to provide information to researchers. The reason could be that the law prohibits

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corporal punishment, but educators are still inclined to resort to it because they think it is still the only method of maintaining learner discipline. Educators who still apply corporal punishment create management problems for principals who find it difficult reprimand them. However, it is possible that some principals still regard corporal punishment as the only alternative to maintaining learner discipline despite the fact that it is a dismissable offence. The following remarks illustrate the perceptions some principals have about the sensitivity of this issue:

> P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:4 (28:32) (Super)
> Sometimes you find it very difficult especially when it comes to the code of conduct for learners, because isn't it that corporal punishment has been abolished, but still you find that this has affected discipline negatively.

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:6 (81:84) (Super)
> Ja, it is very, very sensitive, because it is difficult to control children, especially black children, without using a sort of ….corporal punishment. It is very much difficult.

> P10: INTERVIEW 5.txt - 10:7 (38:41) (Super)
> It does not make sense that corporal punishment is abolished yet there is nothing that replaces it which is effective, because talking to a learner is waste of time.

> P12: INTERVIEW 8.txt - 12:7 (100:104) (Super)
> That's why it is so sensitive. But if you look at this other part only, you find that you have destroyed the future of the child. And if you concentrate on this other part, you find that you are in for it, you as a teacher or as a principal.

The results suggest that principals may not give credible information about issues related to corporal punishment. They either protect the educators applying corporal punishment or probably lie for fear of possible prosecution by the court of law or education authorities.

6.3.8. Educator unions

Both interview and questionnaire results identified the influence of labour unions on school management as a notable sensitive issue on which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers. An examination of the detailed statistics of frequencies of sensitive issues (Table 5.10) reveals that the influence of labour unions is sensitive because of fear of violation of rights. Principals regard these issues as

sensitive because labour unions lawfully fight for the rights of educators and this prevents unfair labour practice by the principals in their schools. Educators have the right to belong to a labour union of their choice (Labour Relations Act, 1995). However, the results reveal that some principals regard unionism as a threat to their administrative activities. This data can be given further depth by remarks some of the respondents made during the interviews:

> P 1: INTERVIEW NO 1.txt - 1:20 (200:202) (Super)
>
> On the control of educators, the problem that I have now is that teachers are highly influenced by teacher unions. To give an example, one teacher was requested to sign a circular about particular issues. He said he was not going to sign the circular because his union does not allow him to sign. That destroys school discipline. Once one refuses to sign, the others follow suit. On the other hand I am expected to implement the policy.

> P 7: INTERVIEW 12.txt - 7:27 (271:286) (Super)
>
> There is this aspect that teachers should act according to professional etiquettes. Right. But sometimes you find that the teacher has not been able to live according to that. Now, according to the manual of the ELRC, if the teacher has not done this or that, the principal must do 1, 2, 3. But at the same time while you are applying that, like I said there would be forces from the teacher unions, saying that the teacher must have representation and many other issues. You want to apply what the policy requires, but teacher unions will say their teacher has been unfairly treated. As they say that, the person who is said to have not treated the teacher fairly is the principal. Sometimes one may have recorded this. That is why it is sensitive that when researchers come, you cannot say that so and so did this or that because some of these issues are too personal.

Educator unions have nowadays become a force to reckon with; everything that is done in the education department must first be negotiated by the parties to the Education Labour Relations Council (ELRC) to which the educator unions belong. Principals are only represented as educators, although they need representation as principals in the ELRC. It is understandable that principals should regard the issue about educator unions as sensitive.

6.3.9. Religious matters policy

It is noteworthy that religious matters policy is ranked as the least sensitive issue in school management (see Table 5.6). Principals did not agree on the sensitivity of this issue because half of those who responded to the questionnaires indicated that they find

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the issue as sensitive while the other half indicated that the issue is not at all sensitive. Only one of the principals interviewed mentioned that religious matters policy is sensitive to provide information on. While the Bill of Rights grants freedom of religion in this country, the issue is presently being debated as to whether it should form part of the school curriculum or not. The response can also be attributed to the ambiguity of the law regarding religious observance at school which may be conducted at any public school under rules issued by the governing body if such observances are conducted on an equitable basis and attendance at them by learners and members of staff is free and voluntary (SASA, 1996). Following is a remark by the only interviewee who regards this issue as sensitive to provide information on:

> P14: Interview 2.txt - 14:5 (55:58) (Super)
>
> Because most of the things we do are based on Christianity, whereas we should have been open to accommodate every type of religion. Some are forced to accept other people's religions. That is sensitive.

Religious matters may therefore be sensitive in schools where there are learners and educators from different religions which have to be accommodated in the school policy.

6.3.10. CONCLUSIONS

The study has identified a number of variables regarded as sensitive in school management research. The results suggest that revelations can be obtained if respondents believe in the privacy of their answers. The Achilles heel of face-to-face data collection may be in persuading subjects that their responses are truly private. The present evidence shows that direct questioning with a strong guarantee of anonymity is effective in eliciting socially delicate responses.

It is worth noting that after teacher misconduct, the next highly ranked issues of sensitivity are still of a moral nature: financial issues and learner/educator sexual relations. These results of this study suggest that the threats and potential costs of guilt, shame, or embarrassment are serious considerations when one engages in sensitive topic research. These findings are in agreement with results of other studies which have examined some of these response correlates of sensitive topic research (Brzuzy, Ault, and Segal, 1997; Jansen and Davis, 1998). When researchers aim to capture the complexity of sensitive everyday life experiences with the goal of understanding the

perspectives of those who live it, they need to be conscious of these methodological problems with the aim of increasing understanding and giving voice and visibility. The results are therefore worth noting if we consider the fact that the perceived normative threat of a topic influences responses to questions – the perceived threat acts as a gatekeeper to prevent further questions (Bradburn et al. 1978; Everhart, 1975). Principals are also bound by the code of ethics with regard to reporting on information about the moral behaviour of the educator, in agreement with Johnson, J.P., Livingstone, M., Schwartz, R.A., and Slate, J.S. (2000a) and Johnson et al. (2000b).

The results indicated that moral issues are the most sensitive issues in school management on which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers. Of the moral issues identified, sexual abuse between educators and learners and educators or learners with AIDS were regarded as most sensitive.

A higher proportion of principals who are 50 years or younger find disciplinary issues sensitive to provide information on to researchers compared with those who are older that 50. One of the disciplinary issues, "educator's reasons for being absent", was found to be most sensitive, while reasons for learner absenteeism were found to be least sensitive.

Overall, principals perceived the provision of information on financial issues as sensitive. Handling the school's financial documents was perceived to be most sensitive while the disclosure of sources of income was found not be sensitive.

Developmental appraisal issues were perceived to be moderately sensitive, with slightly more than a quarter of the respondents indicating that they find discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators with researchers very sensitive.

Principals perceived religious matters policy as not at all sensitive. Less than a quarter of the principals who regard this issue as sensitive indicate that it is sensitive because it violates the rights of the individual.

The results reveal that researching sensitive issues in school management pose complex methodological problems for researchers. Social science researchers must confront seriously and thoroughly these problems and issues that these topics pose.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. THE CONCEPT OF SENSITIVE RESEARCH

The literature revealed several problems with regard to defining a sensitive topic. The major problem is that the term is often used in the literature as if it were self-explanatory. There are several issues about these topics that make them sensitive relative to other research topics. While the working definition of sensitive research seemed to have covered most aspects of sensitivity with regard to school management – sensitive research topics are those topics that potentially pose a threat in some way to those participating in the research - several distinctive approaches to the definition of sensitive research have been identified.

According to the first approach, sensitive research is defined as studies in which there are potential negative consequences or implications, either directly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research. Sensitive research is regarded as a threat or risk external to a person acting upon him or her and causing him or her to withhold information or dissemination of research data. A major advantage of defining sensitive research in this way is that it is broad in scope, thereby allowing for the inclusion of topics that ordinarily might not be thought of as sensitive; and alerts researchers to their responsibilities to the wider society. However, the weakness of this approach in defining sensitive research is the fact that different people respond differently to the same demand or stimulus (as was evident with religious issues and financial affairs). What some people find exceptionally sensitive others find acceptable or even pleasantly challenging. It focuses on the stimulus as representing sensitivity. It is therefore not as helpful as it may seem to be to focus on the stimulus as representing sensitivity.

Another approach to defining sensitive topics would be to start with the observation that those topics which social scientists generally regard as sensitive are ones that seem to be threatening in some way to those being studied. The definition considers sensitivity in respect of possible consequences, i.e. sensitive topics are threatening because participation in research can have unwelcome consequences: research into them involves potential costs to those participating in the research. While it

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encompasses research that is consequential in any way (as evidenced by results regarding ethical or moral issues), it does not however specify the scope or nature of the kinds of consequences or implications, and therefore, the term 'sensitive' almost seems to become synonymous with controversial.

The other approach defines sensitive research as research that potentially poses a threat to those who are or have been involved in it: it can be threatening to the researcher as well as to the researched. Researchers may be placed in situations in which their personal security is jeopardized, or they may find themselves stigmatized by colleagues for having studied or taken part in a particular topic (e.g. sexual deviance). The definition is quite inclusive in that both the respondents and the researchers are affected by the level of threat or risk caused by the threatening questions that renders problematic the collection, holding and or dissemination of research data.

Research is sensitive when it intrudes into the private sphere or delves into some deeply personal experience or when it deals with things sacred to those being studied. In this approach, people define for themselves what they find sensitive by means of their perceptions of the different elements in a situation and their cognitive appraisal of the degree to which the situation as a whole constitutes a threat. The most important considerations influencing a person's cognitive appraisal of a threat are their perceptions of the nature of the threat, their perceptions of their capabilities and resources for coping with the threat, and their perceptions of the importance to them of coping with the threat as opposed to not coping. Successful coping responses of the sensitive issues inducing a threat change an initial negative cognitive appraisal into a positive one.

Research into some deeply personal experience poses a threat to those studied through the level of emotional stress they produce. Such researches have resulted into several methodological problems and have tended to inhibit adequate measurement affecting the accuracy of the answers that are obtained. Problems with regard to measuring instruments, gaining access, and sampling the appropriate population have also been experienced

7.2.   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Eighty three percent of the population completed the School Management Sensitive Issues Questionnaire and formed the sample.

7.2.1. Main findings

The main findings of this study are presented according to the analytical categories that guided both the collection and analysis of data. These are given in order of ranking.

- Social or moral issues. Issues of morality are often misreported because of their highly sensitive nature. Several moral issues were reported to be most sensitive to discuss with researchers, in particular those personal to the educators. Principals regard discussing these issues with researchers as intrusion of privacy. Of these, disclosing educators' personal problems was identified as the most sensitive moral issue in school management. Other issues were related to sexual abuse. Principals find it difficult to provide information to researchers about educators found guilty of involvement into sexual relations with learners they teach and dismissed, and between educators in the same school; records of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners; and information about learners or educators with AIDS. Information on these issues is regarded as very confidential.

- School financial issues. The overall results reveal that handling school's financial issues is reported to be a very sensitive issue in school management. Slightly over half of the older principals (50 years or more) who completed the questionnaire regard discussing handling school's financial issues as very sensitive and that they would find it difficult to provide information to researchers.

- School disciplinary issues. The majority of principals indicate that disciplinary issues affecting educators and learners are sensitive. Of these, teacher misconduct is the most sensitive, followed by exercise of corporal punishment; records of educators found guilty of misconduct, and educator and learner

absenteeism. Principals regard this issue as sensitive to provide information on because they fear legal sanction.

- <u>Working conditions.</u> Both interview and questionnaire results identified some aspects of the principal's working conditions that are sensitive to discuss. Of these, charge of misconduct and influence of educator unions were reported as the most sensitive. Principals perceive implementation of departmental policies, such as the policy on the charge of misconduct for educators, to be very sensitive issue to discuss. The educators' salaries did not seem to be considered a sensitive issue to the principals.

- <u>Absenteeism.</u> Principals with fewer years of experience as principals and those with more than 15 years of experience as principals have reported educator reasons for being absent as a sensitive issue to discuss. Principals did not report absenteeism per se as a sensitive issue in school management. Principals regard this issue as sensitive because discussing the reasons for being absent would be a violation of the rights of individuals.

- <u>Developmental appraisal</u>. Principals find discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators sensitive to discuss. Information on teacher performance after the teachers has been appraised is sensitive; it affects the educator personally, and therefore access to such information is limited. Principals regard this issue as sensitive because discussing it poses a threat to their work.

- <u>The school policy.</u> The overall results indicate that there are several issues that principals find sensitive to include in the school policy thereby making it difficult for them to provide information on. Of these, lack of facilities which are essential for effective teaching is the most sensitive.

- <u>Educator unions</u>. Statistics of frequencies of sensitive issues reveals that influence of labour unions on educators is a very sensitive issue. Some principals regard unionism as a threat to their administrative activities and therefore regard issues related to labour unions as sensitive to report on. They indicate that they fear violating the rights of educators.

- <u>Religious matters policy.</u> Principals did not agree on the sensitivity of this issue because half of those who responded to the questionnaires indicated that they find the issue sensitive while the other half indicated that the issue is not at all

sensitive. This issue did not seem to pose problems for respondent in providing information to researchers. However, sensitivity of this issue was related to violation of the rights of the individual.

- There were some significant differences revealed between the different groups of principals according to their ages, length of experience as principals and some issues of sensitivity.

- The results did not reveal any significant main effect between the groups of principals according to their age in their sensitivity rating of the item 'learners with AIDS' or 'educators with AIDS', regarded as most sensitive, suggesting that the level of sensitivity between the different age groups was evenly distributed.

Consistent with literature, principals gave the following as the main reasons why they regard issues sensitive, and therefore difficult for them to provide information on: confidentiality, intrusion of privacy, fear of legal sanction and violation of rights. Matters personal to the educator were found to be most sensitive because of their intrusive nature. Educators feel that their personal security is jeopardized. Issues prohibited by law are sensitive because of the threat they pose to the educators' work situation and legal implications.

However, some principals took a utilitarian's position of philosophical ethics and indicated that they do not regard some moral issues – in particular the educator/learner sexual relations and the educator/educator sexual relations – as sensitive because they did not believe it is wrong but because they were worried about the consequences. They would not disclose such information to researchers because they were worried about educators attacking them and even taking them to court. Consequential ethics raise questions of whether there are universal ethical principles.

Contrary to the above, other principals took a deontological position of philosophical ethics – they are not worried about the consequences, they judge an action independently of its consequences. Educator/learner sexual relations break the morale

and good staff relations because they end up with poor discipline. These principals stated confidentiality as reason for not disclosing such sensitive information. To them, moral actions are those that live up to principles such as honesty and respect for the person.

On the basis of a comprehensive analysis of research studies, these results show that there is a relationship between the level of threat and sensitivity. The wide dispersion of interview responses and to each of the S.M.S.I.Q. items confirmed, in keeping with the definition of sensitive topics, the highly individual nature of sensitivity. The threats acting upon principals causing them to withhold information are expressed very clearly in the literature.

The results further confirm the hypotheses that there are sensitive issues in school management in the Limpopo Province of South Africa and that principals find it difficult to provide information regarding those issues that are sensitive. The more sensitive or threatening the topic under examination, the more difficult it is likely for respondents to provide answers to the research questions. While research participants should in general, expect their rights to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality to be protected, maintaining confidentiality of research data is especially important where informants or respondents are being asked to reveal intimate or incriminating information. This research points to how research participants, at least in naturalistic settings, can be threatened and discomforted by research as well as to some of the ways in which they may artfully deal with such threats.

7.2.2. Main conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study enabled the following confirmations to be made about sensitive research as defined in this study:

- Principals of secondary schools in the Northern Region of the Limpopo Province of South Africa reported that there are several sensitive issues in school management on which they have difficulty in providing information to researchers. These sensitive issues identified are reported to be the sources of the conditions of adversity and duress in school management.

- Where there are conditions of adversity in school management, social researchers face a methodological problem of researching sensitive issues. Researchers will find it difficult to get honest answers from respondents who, due to sensitivity of the questions, may be reactive. Researchers may therefore not produce valid and reliable data.

- There is a relationship between the conditions of duress and adversity in school management and the level of reporting of the sources of such conditions. The more threatening the source of the condition of duress in school management, the more likely it is reported as sensitive by principals, and the less likely principals would discuss the issue with researchers.

- Researchers are facing mounting pressure to protect the confidentiality of their data from the growth of field research in applied settings, where there may be greater likelihood of legal intervention.

- A utilitarian consequence position may lead to different decisions such as deception of research subjects – it could justify deception in view of the positive consequences of knowledge and the betterment of the human situation that the research could entail.

- In order to protect participants from embarrassment and other harm and to promote research on sensitive issues regarding educator morality, both individual researchers and education authorities should weigh whether the collection and use of sensitive personal information is justified by the social benefits that might accrue.

- Methodological difficulties inherent in researching sensitive topics in education are serious considerations when one engages in sensitive topic research since ignoring these difficulties may potentially generate flawed conclusions on which both theory and public policy subsequently may be built.

- In considering circumstances under which researchers might be granted access to educator's records, factors which should be considered in deciding whether an intrusion into an individual's privacy is justified are the type of records requested, the information it does or might contain, and the potential for harm in any subsequent non-consensual disclosure. This would help to ensure some means of protecting participants from unnecessary intrusions on privacy.

- Respect for persons also demands that researchers take steps to minimize intrusiveness and preserve confidentiality through methodical means. As the crisis

surrounding the abuse of learners by educators makes clear, and the need for research on issues relating to these sensitive issues increases, privacy is not an absolute right. The public interest may at times outweigh even fundamental individual rights. Psychologists' primary ethical duty is to respect the dignity and worth of the individual and strive for the preservation and protection of fundamental rights. When research may intrude on those rights, even in the name of safety, the greatest care must be taken to ensure that the public has a compelling interest in the research and that no less intrusive means of gathering the necessary information are available.

The assumption that respondents would find it difficult to give sensitive information to researchers was confirmed. The threats or risks acting upon principals causing them to withhold information are expressed very clearly in the literature review and the results. The data suggest that under threatening conditions, principals find it difficult to provide honest answers to questions from researchers.

The finding that principals of different age groups and experience as principals differ in their sensitivity rating of some items indicates that future research might examine the reasons for these differences. Research comprising in-depth case studies of principals would help to pin-point the reasons for these differences and identify the parameters related to the responses of principals of different ages and experience as principals.

Sensitivity can have a major impact on the answers respondents provide to researchers. This study assumes that sensitive research in education affects the research methodology that can be used to obtain reliable data. Ways should be found to reduce errors when researching sensitive issues in school management so that the research should be meaningful. It is worthy of consideration, for investigation of sensitive issues in education, the possibilities that will allow different forms of responses including face-to-face interview through open-ended questions and questionnaires. Interview enables researchers to contextualise responses within a large body of data about the individual and also allows for the possibility of placing responses within the context of interview itself – researchers can take account of the extent to which respondents were expansive or tentative and in which conditions this was so. It is also worth considering the use of a computer-assisted self-interview program designed to increase privacy for

interviews that ask about potentially self-incriminating behaviour. As the technology evolves at lightning speed out of control of researchers, methodological research needs to keep pace helping the field consider the wisdom of utilizing the new capabilities.

However, it may not be possible to completely eliminate response bias or reactivity from sensitive research, but it may be possible to increase the awareness of the ways in which being reactive shape and may hamper research projects. This awareness can lead to the researcher incorporating values that affirm diversity, with the expectation that such attitudes will result in a valid method for conducting surveys of sensitive issues in school management.

The findings of this study reveal that conditions of adversity in education are sensitive thereby making it difficult for researchers to obtain reliable data. These results suggest that revelations can be obtained if respondents believe in the privacy of their answers. Direct questioning with a strong guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality is effective in eliciting socially delicate responses. This implies that the researcher has responsibility for protecting the respondent. Protection is required both with respect to the confidences disclosed and the emotions which may be aroused and expressed.

The findings of this study suggest that the principal's experiences and perceptions have important implications for the department of education in planning for workshops of school principals. It is worthy of consideration that in their workshop programmes they include the training of school principals in matters related to educator morality in an effort to bring some moral order to the learning situation and the society.

The department of education should investigate the extent to which principals report the issues relating to educator moral issues, in particular the educator-learner sexual relations in schools; and the impact these relationships have on the management of the schools and, to a large extent, the department of education as a whole.

The findings of this study further suggest that the principal's experiences and perceptions have important theoretical implications for social research. They could form a starting point for researching sensitive issues in school management. The stories and themes that emerged in this research serve as a platform to explore, recognize and

interpret the problems researchers experience when researching sensitive topics in education. In particular, they contribute to the methodological development of strategies for asking sensitive questions on surveys in school management in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, and may serve to guide researchers embarking on sensitive research, and to sharpen debate about critical issues.

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APPENDIX   A

Northern Province

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NORTHERN REGION

REF: 8\3\1.
ENQ: MAKUYA M.E.

Private Bag X2250
SIBASA
VENDA
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Fax.: 015-962 8039
        015-962 3076
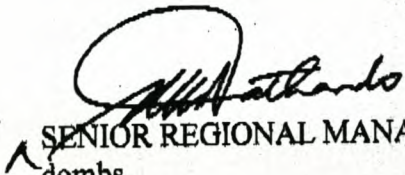
MR. KUTAME A.P.
P.O.BOX 85
SHAYANDIMA
0945

REGIONAL OFFICE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION,
ARTS, CULTURE & SPORTS
REGION 3
2002 -04- 0 5
PRIVATE BAG X 2250
0970 SIBASA
NORTHERN PROVINCE

APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: NORTHERN REGION {3}.

1.   Your letter dated 19 March 2002 has received the Departmental attention.
      The permission is granted to you to collect the data as you requested.

2.   Hoping that your findings will uplift the standard of Education.

SENIOR REGIONAL MANAGER: EDUCATION
dombs

BATHOPELE

PEOPLE FIRST, VANHU EMAHLWENI, VHATHU PHANDA, MENSE EERSTE

APPENDIX B

Interview schedule

The following interview schedule was used.

My name is Philip Kutame studying at the University of Stellenbosch. I am interested in finding out what the best methodology is for collecting information on the sources of distress in school management.

I wish, at the onset, to ensure you that the information you provide me will be treated as confidential. Feel free to answer all questions and if there are questions you do not feel free to answer, please indicate so.

Has any researcher or research organization like the Human Science Research Council, The Joint Education Trust or any University recently conducted research at your school? If yes, what was the topic? Which questions where asked? What were the research findings? Have you seen these results? Were these results published? Did you get a copy?

1. School policy

Some school principals may find it difficult to draw up their school's policy.

- Which problems did you experience when drawing up your school's policy? (drawing up policy about punishing learners who misbehave, dealing with pregnant learners, dealing with examination irregularities, paying of school fund, use of cellular phones by both educators and learners, dealing with harassment, dress code, admission)
- Where do you keep this document?
- If a researcher wants to do research about school policy, which information in your policy would you regard as sensitive?
- Why do you think this information is sensitive?
- Who has access to such sensitive information? Would you first consult with your

staff, management team, School Governing Body or Circuit Manager in order to give anyone such information?

2.   School finance

- What information about your school's finance do you keep?
- Who keeps your school finances? {principal or treasurer, etc)
- Where do you keep information about your school finance? (Is it at a public place or is it regarded as confidential?)
- Which information about your school finance is sensitive? Why do you think this information is sensitive? Who has access to your school finances information? Do you have to get permission first in order to give that information to anyone who requested it? If no one, why?

3.   School discipline

There are reportedly schools that complain about maintaining school discipline.

- Which disciplinary problems do you experience at your school? (Quarreling, stealing, drug use, noisy pupils, impolite and disruptive behaviour, harassment, late coming, dodging lessons).
- What information about disciplinary problems do you keep? (for example, names of learners who were involved in disciplinary cases, and the steps you take against learners who transgressed the school rules and regulations)
- Who has access to this information? (The Learner Representative Council, teachers, circuit managers or parents?)
- What information about disciplinary problems do you regard as sensitive? Would you give such information to any researcher or me if I requested it? If you can give that information, would you first get permission to do so? If not, why?
- How reliable is the information that you keep about disciplinary problems?

4.   Working conditions

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Unlike in the past, educators are now able to negotiate their conditions of service.

- Which conditions of service are sources of discomfort in your job as school manager? (Why do you say each of the conditions mentioned is a source of discomfort to you?) (salary, departmental policy regulations, resources, overcrowding, curriculum change)

- Which of these conditions do you regard as sensitive? Why do you regard them as sensitive?

- What information about conditions of service do you keep? Is this information available to researchers or anyone who requested it? If available, do you have to get permission from somewhere to give such information? If not available, why is it?

4.   Teacher absenteeism

- How many teachers were absent from work during the past ten days?

- Where do you keep information about absent teachers?

- Do you regard the information about teacher absenteeism as sensitive to discuss or give to researchers or anyone who requested it? If so, why do you regard such information to be sensitive?

5.   Administrative duties

Some principals may find some administrative duties a source of discomfort in their day to day activities.

- Which administrative duties do you find a source of discomfort in your position as school principal? (Supervision of work of teachers, filling vacant posts, solving problems caused by teachers) cause discomfort.

- Which of those do you consider to be sensitive to discuss with researchers? Why do you say that information is sensitive?

- What information do you keep about supervision of teachers for example? Who has access to such information?

7.   Developmental appraisal system

- Where do you keep information about the developmental appraisal system of your teachers? Is it available to anyone who requested it or do you have to get permission to give such information? If you have to get permission first, why is it that you have to get permission first?
- What information about appraisal do you regard as sensitive? (Why do you regard such information to be sensitive?}

8.   Social relations/ staff relations

Social relations among staff may affect the school environment negatively or positively.

- What information about social relations' problems among teachers do you regard as sensitive to discuss with researchers or anyone who wants it? (Conflict among staff, bemoaning others, back biting, harassment).
- Why do you regard such information as sensitive?
- Do you keep records of any information regarding social relations' problems among your staff members? If you keep it, who has access to it? If you can give such information, would you first ask for permission to do so?

9.   Whole school evaluation

- How many teachers of your school have been found guilty of misconduct?
- Is the information sensitive to report on? If it is, why?
- Do you keep records of such misconduct?
- Who has access to such information if you keep records?
- Who keeps information about learner performance? Is there information about learner performance that you regard as sensitive to report on? If so, why?

10.   General

- Which other school activities or areas or information do you regard as sensitive to report on? Why do you say it is sensitive to report on?
- Which mechanisms do you apply in coping with the sensitive issues in your school?

APPENDIX C

<div style="text-align: right">

P.O. Box 85

Shayandima

0945

</div>

Dear Principal

I am studying at the University of Stellenbosch. I am interested in finding out what the best methodology for collecting information is on the sources of distress in school management.

I should be most grateful if you would help me with this part of my research project by completing the inventory and return it to your circuit office where I will again collect it.

May I assure you that the survey is anonymous and is designed mainly to obtain an overall statistical picture.

In anticipation, please accept my sincere appreciation for your willingness to assist me.

Yours sincerely

Philip Kutame

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT SENSITIVE ISSUES QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION 1
BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Please supply the following information by making a tick on the appropriate block:

1. Gender:

Male	1
Female	2

2. Age:

30 years or younger	1
31 – 40 years	2
41 – 50 years	3
51 – 60 years	4
61 years or older	5

3. Length of teaching experience:

Less than 1 year	1
1 – 5 years	2
6 – 10 years	3
11 – 15 years	4
More than 16 years	5

4. Length of experience as principal:

Less than 1 year	1
1 – 5 years	2
6 – 10 years	3
11 – 15 years	4
More than 16 years	5

SECTION 2
SENSITIVE ISSUES IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT

Following is a list of some sensitive issues in school management on which principals have difficulty in providing information to researchers.

Indicate (1) HOW sensitive each of the aspects is to you by ticking in the box that best describes your experiences.

Indicate (2) WHY you think the aspect is sensitive, and thereby making it difficult for you to provide information on, by ticking only ONE reason you consider the most appropriate in the relevant box.

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	SENSITIVITY					REASON FOR SENSITIVITY					
	Extremely	Very	Moderately	Slightly	Not at all	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Others (Specify)
1. Handling school's financial affairs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Disclosing the sources of income	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Disclosing financial documents (receipt/cheque books, audit report, expenditure receipts)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Religious matters policy	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
5. Code of conduct for learners regarding learner pregnancies	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
6. Reasons for learner absenteeism	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Learner drug use	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
8. Record of learner's disciplinary problems	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
9. Record of disciplinary action for learners	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
10. Exercise of corporal punishment	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
11. Disclosing educator's personal problems	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
12. Backbiting among educators	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
13. Sexual abuse among fellow educators	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
14. Discussing sexual abuse between educators and learners	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	

	SENSITIVITY					REASON FOR SENSITIVITY					
	Extremely	Very	Moderately	Slightly	Not at all	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other (Specify)
15. Record of sexual abuse cases among educators and learners	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
16. Disclosing information about educator's salary issues	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
17. Educators arriving late for school	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
18. Educators absence records	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
19. Educator reasons for being absent	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
20. Disclosing information about lazy teachers	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
21. Coping with problems caused by educators	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
22. Lack of discipline among educators	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
23. Conflicts among educators	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
24. Involvement in serious educator disciplinary situation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
25. Records of disciplinary procedure on educators charged for misconduct	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
26. Records of educators found guilty of misconduct	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
27. Making learner performance records available to researchers	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
28. Influence on labour unions	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	

	SENSITIVITY					REASON FOR SENSITIVITY					
	Extremely	Very	Moderately	Slightly	Not at all	Intrusion of privacy	Fear of legal sanction	Threat to my work	Confidential	Violations of rights	Other (Specify)
29. Discussing educator's developmental appraisal performance indicators	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
30. Lack of text and prescribed books	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
31. Late delivery of stationary, text and prescribed books	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
32. Learner/s with AIDS	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
33. Educator/s with AIDS	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	

END OF QUESTIONNAIRE
THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND CONTRIBUTION