



## Influence of personality disorders on the academic performance of grade 12 learners

<sup>1</sup>Thandekile Setloboko

<sup>1</sup>Free State Department of Education, South Africa

<sup>1</sup>Primary author: [thandysetloboko@gmail.com](mailto:thandysetloboko@gmail.com)

**Abstract** – Grade 12 learners in South Africa are under pressure to perform well. In most public schools, they must come early to school and leave late. This pressure might affect their wellbeing if they usually are not cared for. This study explores how the behaviours resulting from personality disorders might affect the performance of grade 12 learners. It adopts a qualitative approach through a phenomenological design. Six participants, three principals, and three SBST members were selected from three secondary schools grades 12, in Phuthaditjhaba, eastern Free State Province, South Africa. The results showed that Behavioural problems caused a lack of discipline at home, a dysfunctional School Based Support Team, paying attention from their peers, and insufficient time to catch up. This study recommends that The School Based Support Team should play its role effectively, especially at the primary school level, to diagnose earlier learners so their profiles can be submitted to secondary schools for more support.

**Keywords:** Personality disorders, Grade 12 learners

To cite this article (APA): Setloboko, T. (2024). Influence of personality disorders on the academic performance of grade 12 learners. *International Journal of Studies in Psychology*, 4(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.38140/ijpspy.v4i1.1029>.

### I. INTRODUCTION

**I**NCLUSIVE Inclusive education aims at ensuring that all children of school-going age who experience barriers to learning, including those who are disabled, can access inclusive, quality, free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with other young people in the communities in which they live. The South African government takes the metric results of the grade 12 learners seriously. Grade 12 is the last in school, and the nation celebrates the results. Learners get a National Senior Certificate (NSC), a high school diploma, and a school-leaving certificate in South Africa. This certificate is commonly known as the matriculation (matric) certificate. Grade 12 learners are required to attend extra classes, and a programme has been set out to help learners improve their results and better understand their scope of work.

However, the Department of Education ensured the development and implementation of educational policies considering the increasing pressures for academic achievement among grade 12 learners. The screening, identification, assessment, and support policy is used in school to help learners who experience barriers to learning. Mental health remains one of the issues that is not discussed well enough in academic performance among grade 12 learners. It is essential to consider several issues that could affect poor academic performance among grade 12 learners at schools. Personality disorders are conditions in which an individual differs significantly from an average person in terms of how they think, perceive, feel, or relate to others (Fariba et al., 2022)

Consequently, there are theoretical grounds for anticipating relationships among relatively stable individual attributes (personality), a factor based on academic performance (learning style), and a more erratic factor (wellbeing). Hence, understanding these links can help

educators and parents understand which learners need more support and in what areas to achieve greater academic performance, in addition to providing information to school policymakers.

Statistics show that in 2022 the national pass rate for grade 12 was 80.1% (Patrick, 2023). As much as this is a good percentage, as it is an increase from the 2021 pass rate, which was 76.4 %, it does not fully explain how the matric class of 2022 originally started with 1 177 089 pupils in Grade 1 in 2011, and there were 775 630 matric pupils in 2022 (Patrick, 2023). This says that about 400,000 learners have been lost in the system. Even after matric, a significant number of learners still do not make it in life due to behavioural problems stirred by personality disorders.

Borderline Personality Disorder is a mental health disorder that influences the way you think and feel about yourself and others, causing problems functioning in everyday life (Gunderson, Herpertz, Skodol, Torgersen, & Zanarini, 2018). It includes self-image issues, difficulty managing emotions and behaviours, and a pattern of unstable relationships (Mayo Clinic, 2024).

According to Emotions Matter (2020), it is difficult for learners with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) to have healthy relationships with other people. They have problems managing stress and anxiety. In most cases, they are very wise, but their symptoms stop them from learning effectively and doing all the normal tasks at school.

Personality disorders influence the academic performance of grade 12 learners because we see that some learners do not reach this grade. Thus, this problem referred to a school that hosted only matriculants from 2009-2022. The research has realised that there are behavioural problems that might result from personality disorders that were not picked up from mainstream schools. Learners only get a chance to apply for concessions and accommodation when they re-do their matric, even though it is believed that SIAS should be implemented early so that the child can be accommodated on time. This shows that there is a gap.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Daniels (2022), throughout their primary school years, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, aggression, substance misuse, behaviours, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorders are the most often reported mental health issues for kids. Early warning signs and symptoms of affect dysregulation (reduced ability to regulate and endure unpleasant emotional states), anxiety, attention deficit disorder, and depression can start to appear in children as early as age five." Early exposure to adversities like violence, abuse, trauma in the home, poverty, and poor nutrition are risk factors, according to the study. Early prevention and promotion are crucial because half of all adult mental health issues have their beginnings before the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 24.

Childhood is the time when personality disorders first appear; most children start school at the age of 6. This is a time when personality disorders appear, and they frequently persist throughout adolescence. According to Fortunato, Tanzilli, Lingiardi, and Speranza (2022), an increasing corpus of research has revealed that personality patterns and unfavourable qualities can be detected in childhood and traced back to the early stages of development. A "rigid and harmful pattern of thinking and behaviours regardless of the situation" is a trait shared by all personality disorders, which come in a variety of forms. As a result, having a personality disorder can make day-to-day activities like engaging in school and forming relationships extremely challenging. To live a healthy life, people with personality disorders have to learn how to be in charge of these behavioural symptoms as soon as possible. This is why personality disorders should be identified early (Daniels, 2022).

### *Types of Personality Disorders*

It is not easy to control behavioural symptoms if you do not know what could be wrong. It is better to find the source of the problem. There are ten different types of personality disorders listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). Zimmerman (2023) further states that, in general, personality disorders are ways of thinking that last long. Many believe that genetic codes and surroundings cause them. They might decrease with age, but certain qualities can continue. Clinical diagnosis is used. Psychosocial therapies and, in rare cases, pharmacological therapies are used in treatment. Personality traits describe relatively stable habits of thinking, perceiving, behaving, and relating throughout time.

### *Types of Personality Disorders*

"DSM-5 groups the ten types of personality disorders into 3 clusters (A, B, and C) based on similar characteristics. However, the clinical usefulness of these clusters has not been established.

*Cluster A* is characterized by appearing odd or eccentric. It includes the following personality disorders with their distinguishing features: Paranoid: Mistrust and suspicion, Schizoid: Disinterest in others, Schizotypal: Eccentric ideas and behaviours. *Cluster B* is characterized by appearing dramatic, emotional, or erratic. It includes the following personality disorders with distinguishing features: Antisocial, Social irresponsibility, disregard for others, deceitfulness, and manipulation of others for personal gain. Borderline: Inner emptiness, unstable relationships, and emotional dysregulation. Histrionic: Attention seeking and excessive emotionality. Narcissistic: Self-grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy. *Cluster C* is characterised by appearing anxious or fearful. It includes the following personality disorders with distinguishing features: Avoidant: Avoidance of interpersonal contact due to rejection sensitivity. Dependent: Submissiveness and a need to be taken care of. Obsessive-compulsive: Perfectionism, rigidity, and stubbornness.

### *Disorder associated with learning: borderline personality disorder.*

A borderline Personality disorder is one Disorder that is highly associated with poor learner performance. When someone is not aware of the symptoms of borderline personality disorder, a learner can be labelled as dramatic or even troublesome. Educators need to understand personality disorders as well.

Johnston (2021) explained that learners with Borderline Personality

Disorder (BPD) may find it challenging to succeed in school since the disease increases the likelihood that a person would struggle to stick to life plans and goals. A BPD Learner may start school every year with the best intentions, only to cease attending or completing the assigned work before the year ends. People with BPD could be as perplexed by their failure to finish the school term as their friends and relatives. The student's family members might describe them as intelligent, capable, and eager for the start of their studies. The pupil was performing well in class and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the subject, they might add. We must realise that learners with BPD are not necessarily stupid, they are well capable, some even more than their peers, but they have behavioural problems. These problems force them out of the system. If this is picked up, diagnosed, and treated early, we can increase the output, which is the grade 12 results. According to Zimmerman (2023), early childhood stress may have a role in the emergence of borderline personality disorder. Patients with borderline personality disorder frequently have a history of neglect, abuse as a kid, separation from caretakers, and parent loss.

A heritable component of borderline personality disorder is evident, and certain persons may have a hereditary propensity to develop pathologic reactions to ambient life pressures. The prevalence of borderline personality disorder in first-degree relatives is five times higher than in the general population. Although not all patients with borderline personality disorder exhibit these disturbances, they may also play a role in the development of BPD.

Test-taking, group projects, and class presentations, as well as lunch and recess, instructor expectations, interactions with teachers and classmates, and delinquency and truancy, are typical areas of concern for a kid with a BPD diagnosis. These difficulties are frequently brought on by the student's emotional sensitivity and regulatory problems, problems with others and with communication, impulsivity or anxiety, drug side effects, and sleep disorders. Many borderline students may do well in school at first, but eventually, their performance may deteriorate. The learner can abruptly lose interest in learning or grow numb with fear over the prospect of failing. Some kids even feel uncomfortable attending class because they think their peers and teachers do not like them or want them there (Johnston, 2021).

According to Johnston (2021), a person with Borderline Personality Disorder may struggle in school due to a variety of reasons. Together with sadness and anxiety, common BPD symptoms, including a lack of a consistent sense of self, impulsive, self-destructive behaviours, intense, unstable relationships, and fear of abandonment, may all be at play. The sooner a student needs more support is identified, the sooner the school may engage with them using empathy and understanding rather than judgment and punishment.

### *Inclusive education: SBST*

At the school level, there is a school-based support team. Under the Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support Policy (SIAS), the School Based Support Team (SBST) oversees identifying the support requirements of the school, teachers, and students and coordinating the provision of that support. To carry out these duties, the team needs to convene frequently. Every public school must have an SBST that helps with inclusive education. This team helps to identify barriers that learners might have that could affect their learning. On December 19, 2014, Minister Motshekga signed the SIAS. Over ten years, the policy underwent a rigorous field testing and consultation process. It aims to ensure that all school-age children with learning challenges, including those who are disabled, can access inclusive, excellent, free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with other young people in the communities in which they live (DoE, 2021). The SIAS policy is there, and it is meant to help schools identify barriers as early as possible. However, there is still a huge problem with implementing this policy. Many schools still do not know how to support a child with barriers. This is the cause of the decrease in the number of learners in the system. We have seen that learners come in high numbers, but that is not the same number in the basic education system in matric.

There are SBSTs in different schools, but they are not fully functional. According to research, SBSTs can be effective if relevant support is offered.

The functionality of the SBST ensures that learners are well taken care of from a very young age. It is very important to ensure that the SBST functions as this will help detect behavioural problems much earlier. When the SBST picks up an issue, it could easily be referred to the DBST, which helps find ways to support the learner. Matriculants never rest, so ensuring they are well cared for is vital. Sometimes, the schools only worry about the learners' performance and do not take care of their mental health.

#### **Stigmatisation of Personality Disorders**

Sheehan, Nieweglowski, and Corrigan (2018) stated that evidence suggests that personality disorders may be stigmatized even more than other psychiatric diagnoses, with public responses to personality disorders frequently including both dread and dissatisfaction. Symptoms are perceived as manipulations or denials of aid due to the assumption that people with personality disorders should be able to demonstrate control over their behaviours. In contrast to being ill, this can make people appear tough and disruptive. Compared to those with other psychiatric diseases, people who are regarded as having personality disorders elicit less sympathy from the general population and are less likely to be thought to require professional assistance. Personality disorders are less well understood by the general population than other mental conditions. This means that it is not easy for parents, learners, and even teachers to speak and accept Personality Disorders. Learners with these disorders are reduced to learners with behavioural problems, and they receive punishment because of what is perceived as bad behaviours. People need to be informed and properly educated about Personality Disorders. There is a huge gap in the education system regarding Personality Disorders.

### **III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Background of the theory**

##### *Behavioural Perspective*

According to behaviourists, genetics or intrinsic preferences do not dictate personality qualities. They believe that stimuli and outcomes encountered outside the organism form a person's personality. In other words, people consistently behave depending on prior information (Griggs, & Jackson, 2017). According to Skinner's theory, we exhibit persistent behavioural patterns because we tend to react a certain way. In other words, we acquire specific behaviours. The behaviours that result in positive outcomes are increased, and the ones that result in bad outcomes are decreased. Freud's idea that personality is fixed in childhood was rejected by Skinner. What we have seen influences how we will act in the future.

It can be overwhelming to consider every interaction with the outside world. So, let's focus on two ways we might be taught to act in a certain manner. These kinds of conditioning, under behaviourism, ultimately mould our personalities and all our subsequent decisions.

#### **Different forms of conditioning**

Psychologists have divided behaviourism into two distinct processes: classical and operant conditioning. In the field of behaviourism, there are two key figures that you ought to be familiar with because they represent the two distinct forms of conditioning. According to the traditional theory of classical conditioning, behaviours are learned by connecting a neutral stimulus with a positive stimulus, such as when Pavlov's dogs heard a bell (neutral stimulus) and expected food (positive stimulus). The trained action is referred to as a conditioned reaction (Spielman, Dumper, Jenkins, Lacombe, Lovett, & Perlmutter, 2021).

##### *Conditional operation*

Operant conditioning is the second kind of conditioning. This kind of procedure can aid in making better behavioural predictions about people. Opportunistic training moulds behaviours by employing

rewards and penalties rather than two unconnected cues. The individual may anticipate the response they will receive from a particular activity and can adjust their behaviours to acquire the desired response.

Skinner is the name of the man that many people identify with operant conditioning. One of the most well-known psychologists in the world today, along with Freud, is BF Skinner.

##### *Freud and Skinner (Psychoanalysis vs. Behaviourism)*

Although Freud and Skinner did not always agree on everything, their theories help us understand why people make decisions. According to Freud, the unconscious mind is always looking for pleasure and trying to avoid pain in any manner. Humans frequently link pleasure and punishment when we receive incentives. Skinner thought employing various incentives and punishments could alter a person's behaviours (Gordan & Krishanan, 2014). According to these personality perspectives, people are different. It can be efficiently dealt with if behaviours are identified early.

### **IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study explores the influence of personality disorder on the academic performance of grade 12 learners at a South African rural school.

### **V. METHODS**

#### **Research approach and design**

This study used a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach analyses words, which allows the researcher to understand participants' feelings, experiences, ideas, and actions (Sutton & Austin, 2015). It is essential to understand the participant's feelings about the issue of personality disorders. According to Cypress (2015), any type of study that yields conclusions not reached by statistical analysis or other quantification methods is called qualitative research. It employs a naturalistic methodology to comprehend phenomena in people's lives, narratives, and behaviours concerning health, organisational performance, social movements, or interpersonal relationships. While McLeod (2001) elaborates on this strategy and claims that it is tough and challenging to understand the human world scientifically, we can uncover the truth that will guide us toward answers. And by listening to a person exposed to that world, we can get the answers. Dealing with Personality disorders is an issue of health. This approach will assist in understanding exactly how participants feel concerning their lives and those directly affected by these behaviours. Teachers at any school observe all their learners and how they behave. So, teachers are in an excellent position to make a researcher understand how learners behave, especially those underperforming.

This study employed a phenomenological research design. It understands experience from the participant's point of view.

#### **Research paradigm**

This study adopted an interpretivism paradigm since it attempts to view the social environment from the participant's perspective and consider their world vision (Edwards & Skinners, 2009). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), an interpretive approach depends on both the participant's and the researcher's perception of reality for the researcher to determine the significance and importance of a specific action or to make it understandable and transparent to others what this specific action means. Others must deduce and comprehend it. People create their reality when they interact with their surroundings.

#### **Data collection technique**

This study employed semi-structured interviews to collect data. Questions and responses will be audiotaped, and the interviewee will take notes. In interviews, it is easy for the interviewer to get immediate access to participants. I can ask for clarity of response(s) which is not clear. I can also observe body language. According to Gill et al. (2008), it is essential to ask questions that will both be able to address the goals and objectives of the research and are likely to yield as much

information about the studied phenomenon as feasible while preparing an interview schedule.

Gill et al. (2008) Further stated that many important questions form part of the semi-structured interviews to help map out the aspects that will be covered. They also allow the interviewer or interviewee to add on their point so they can fully explain their response. It takes off limitations. So, semi-structured interviews will work very well in this case as we want to save time and get to the point. The questions will be structured so that the interview flows, allowing the interviewee to cover aspects not covered in the interview questions. This means the questions will be open-ended, allowing the interviewees to express themselves. I will ensure I structure the interview questions so there are no leading questions, making the interview biased.

Using open-ended questions makes it challenging to create consistency with those answering. Therefore, it is even more important that the interviewer maintains objectivity and does not influence the interviewee's reply. Open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews help define the matter of the research while also giving the interviewer and the person being interviewed the chance to go deeper into some subjects. The person conducting the interview can evoke certain issues to help the interviewee think about the topic more if they are having trouble answering a question or only responding briefly. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer can compel the subject to comment on their first response or follow a predetermined path (Fox, 2009).

### Participants

Sampling involves selecting units of analysis (people, groups, artifacts, setting) to maximize the researcher's ability to answer research questions. Acharya et al. (2013) State that non-probability samples are those in which it is unclear how likely a subject will be chosen, which causes bias in the selection of the research. Convenience sampling or purposive sampling is the most typical sampling technique. The instance is selected based on the investigator's comfort. The respondents are frequently chosen because they are in the proper location and time. Most frequently, convenience sampling is employed. in clinical studies.

The study recruits those who meet the inclusion criteria. This was advantageous as they are frequently utilised, and cheaper, and there was no requirement for a comprehensive inventory of all the populace components.

For the sampling procedure, this study selected three principals and three SBST members from three secondary schools in grade 12 in Phuthaditjhaba, eastern Free State Province, South Africa. In all these schools, some learners have progressed to grade 12. Most learners who are progressing often struggle in their studies. Principals will be part of the interviews as they are the supervisors. The teachers in the SBST committee will help paint a clear picture of what kind of support is given to struggling learners.

I will also be able to check whether teachers know learners who might be struggling in their studies due to personality disorders. Teachers can ask if they have realized any bad behaviours from certain learners who might have problems. This way, the most influential people in this topic will be represented.

### Data analysis

#### Narrative analysis

According to Limpaecher (2023), researchers use narrative analysis to understand better how research participants generate stories and narratives based on their experiences. As a result, narrative analysis entails a second level of interpretation. The research subjects begin by telling stories about their own lives. The researcher then deconstructs the narrative.

The use of narratives in narrative research might be taken from journals, letters, dialogues, autobiographies, in-depth interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, or other forms of narrative qualitative research.

Limpaecher (2023) continues to describe the process of narrative data analysis:

#### Capturing narrative data

Although it is human nature to construct stories and narratives when analysing one's own life, some data-gathering techniques are better suited to elucidating the sense of self-narrative that your study participants have.

#### Transcribing narrative data

There are two layers of interpretation in narrative analysis. Researchers should actively interpret the interviewee's self-narrative. Thus, verbatim transcription of narrative interviews is essential for narrative analysis, and it is crucial to record pauses, filler words, and errant utterances like "um."

Coding narrative data can be done in a variety of ways. Deductive coding, where you begin with a list of codes, and inductive coding, where you do not, are two examples.

The researcher used both inductive and deductive methods to code my data.

Combining inductive and deductive reasoning might be beneficial, as in other qualitative analysis techniques. The first step in narrative analysis is to code the narrative blocks in your transcripts inductively. Use a framework for story structure to code deductively within those narrative chunks. The researcher will then write a report.

#### Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance will be obtained from the University of the Free State. There is no physical harm that can get to the participants. The interviews will be conducted at the school, guaranteeing learner and teacher safety. The participants will be made aware of the study's sensitivity. Some might not be comfortable with sharing their personality disorders or their struggles with behavioural problems that they might be having. There might be a chance for invasion of privacy as learners would be asked about their own experiences and family backgrounds, even their performance at school, which they might find uncomfortable. There is no deception in this study.

Participants will be made aware that participation is voluntary. The study was transparent, and participants knew their roles and how the results would be used. The participants will be anonymous.

## VI. RESULTS

### Participants' profiles

There were six participants from three secondary schools in Phuthaditjhaba. This study used the pseudonyms for all schools: School A, School B, and School C. It also gave the following pseudonyms to the participants: Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 4, Participant 5 and Participant 6. Table 4.1 has the profiles of the participants. Four participants were grade 12 teachers. Two are not teaching grade 12. The remaining two teachers are members of the SBST committee. Therefore, any reports on behavioural problems that learners might portray are reported to them.

#### School A

This school is a government school, quintile 1. It is situated in Mabilela Village. The school has grades 8 to grade 12. These are learners who come from very disadvantaged homes. The school is quintile 1 and provides learners with meals to eat. Learners in this school are mainly from the same village, even though some come from other surrounding areas and take transport to school. Some learners in this school stay with their grandparents or single-parent homes.

#### School B

School B is also a quintile one. It recently added grade 8 and grade 9. This school was formerly known as one that only had 10-12. This school hosts learners from all over Qwaqwa. Most parents prefer taking their learners to this school as it is a school that is known for its excellent performance. Most learners in this school are from middle-class families where parents work. Some learners are from low-class families. The school provides meals for learners daily, even during extra classes.

#### School C

School C is in the middle of Phuthaditjhaba, meaning that learners

around the town mostly attend this school. This school also has learners who are much more mature than other schools. These learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds; they are not high performers. Some school learners stay with their grandparents, while others are from single-parent households. The school is quintile one and provides food for learners at school. Learners also get to spend quite some time at school due to the compulsory extra classes. Some learners walk about twenty-five kilometers to go to school.

#### **Behavioural problems caused by lack of discipline at home**

##### *Environmental influence at home*

According to Charlesworth, Wood, and Viggjar (2011), environmental elements such as how a person grows up, culture, where one stays, and things that happen in a person's life all play a role in the kind of people we become or our personalities. For example, a youngster raised in a harmonic atmosphere may have a more optimistic or peaceful view and demeanour. A youngster reared in a tumultuous household, on the other hand, maybe more likely to acquire violence or other negative tendencies. Participants viewed the issue of behaviours as a problem from home. They did not know what personality disorders were, and they referred to them as learners who showed problematic behaviours. All participants believe that learners' behaviours are shaped by their origins. This means that if a learner misbehaves in school, that behaviours is directly associated with how the learner has been raised at home. None of the participants believed that a child might have an undiagnosed personality disorder.

##### *Cultural environment*

Culture forms part of the environment. Ahad et al. (2023) stated that cultural perceptions and ideas can contribute to the overall social stigma associated with mental health, resulting in discrimination and social exclusion. Differences in cultural beliefs across cultures can result in various forms of discrimination, aggravating the difficulties faced by people suffering from mental illnesses. Understanding and resolving cultural stigma in psychiatry thus necessitates a holistic strategy that considers the individual, family, healthcare providers, and society levels. Each level provides opportunities for stigma reduction and improved mental health outcomes.

In most black communities, any form of mental issue is stigmatised. Participants mentioned that learners only misbehave because they lack discipline. Learners are normally unaware of what is happening to them and grow up thinking they are misbehaving. Most parents cannot afford to take their children to psychologists for proper diagnoses. This leaves teachers with the job to decide what might be wrong with the learners.

When asked about what the cause of abnormal behaviours in the learners might be, this is what the participants said:

*"Most learners stay with their grandparents; they are ill-disciplined at home, so they bring these behaviours to school. They are used to having their way at home because the grandparents can only do so much in discipline. They think they are above the law"* (Participant 1).

*"Parents are failing to discipline their children. A child is a mirror of their home. Now, these kids come here with their bad manners, and as educators, we are expected to discipline them so that they can have a better future. The fact that we always have at least ten pregnant learners shows the lack of discipline"* (Participant 5).

From those mentioned above, this study shows that learners' behaviours make teachers uncomfortable. They think learners have problems, and ill-discipline could be one of the causes. The borderline personality disorder (BPD) developmental theories showed that harsh, invalidating parenting of a child with poor self-control and heightened negative emotionality frequently results in a coercive cycle of parent-child transactions that increases the risk of BPD symptoms such as emotion dysregulation (Hallquist, Hipwell, & Stepp, 2015). Although parenting styles and child temperament have previously been linked to BPD, little is known about the possible implications of caregiver and child characteristics (Hallquist et al., 2015). This is to say that these learners who are said to be ill-disciplined are made worse by the treatment that they are getting, probably from home and at school. If

teachers could be assisted in ways to help these learners, it could be easier on the learner.

#### **Attention from their peers**

##### *Peer Pressure*

Peer pressure is typically connected with adolescents. Nevertheless, most people want to fit in from a very young age, and peer pressure is also prevalent in primary schools (Bandzeladze & Arutiunov, 2020). Peer pressure has positive influences, such as increasing academic achievement and conforming to safe and healthy behaviours. Peer pressure is usually related to influencing bullying behaviours, consuming alcohol, drug use, and having a negative body image, all of which are damaging to the wellbeing of a kid or young person. Such behaviours can hurt self-esteem and self-worth and alienate oneself from family and friends. From the interview, the participants stated that some learners have behavioural problems because of peer pressure. In this case, it is peer pressure. Some learners seem to condone bad behaviours by giving these learners attention.

Usually, their peers cheer for them whenever they portray bad behaviours. Because these learners see the other learners clapping for them, they go all out in their bad behaviours. This happens to both girls and boys.

This is confirmed by what participants said when they were asked if there were learners who showed consistent behavioural problems, and this is how they responded:

*"These are learners who love attention. Whatever bad thing they do is clapped for by their peers, and they love it. They behave badly in class, won't wear school uniforms, and fight to be in front of the line during mealtime"* (Participant 3).

*"We would expect bad behaviour from boys, but unfortunately, even girls are not behaving very well.... the girls who are behaving very well are good, very grounded, but these always talk back in class and even have children. Yoh... it is like they are always angry!"* (Participant 6).

It is quite interesting to see what teachers think of learners who are showing bad behaviours in class, and society always has gender stereotypes. Girls are expected to behave in a certain way. The way we are expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and behave in society is our assigned sex. For instance, girls and women are expected to behave politely, be accommodating, and be caring. Men are typically portrayed as being powerful, aggressive, and courageous.

Every country, ethnic group, and culture has gender role expectations; however, these expectations differ widely. In the same civilisation, they can also evolve (Couprie, Cudeville, & Sofer, 2020).

#### **SBST is not doing enough**

##### **Dysfunctional SBST**

By promoting routine, group problem-solving of areas of concern, and facilitating the provision of support where necessary, SBSTs must help teachers and caregivers in this process. Before additional support from outside the learning site is required, each situation must go through a cycle of intervention and support by the teacher, assisted by the SBST (Policy on Screening, Identification, Assessment, and Support (SIAS): Draft 2014). If the SBST committee is not functional, many things can go wrong. Learners do not get the help and support they need to pass. The SBST is often not functional in many schools. The SIAS policy is there, and it is meant to help schools identify barriers as early as possible. However, there is still a considerable problem with implementing this policy. Many schools still do not know how to support a child with barriers. This is the cause of the decrease in the number of learners in the system. We have seen that learners come in high numbers, but that is not the same number in the basic education system in matric. Learners in grade 12 started in grade R. Personality disorders can be identified early so that a learner can get help sooner. If a learner has behavioural problems that have not been addressed earlier, it is difficult for the learner and teachers to get help.

Teachers or SBST committee members at the high school level are not trained well enough to implement the SIAS policy, which can assist the learner to do better in school. Some learners use defense mechanisms.

According to Nortje (2023), Freud refined his theory by focusing on self-esteem preservation. In particular, he proposed that when a patient's self-esteem and self-image were questioned or endangered, they would rely on specific cognitive or mental procedures to maintain their self-esteem. The client develops defense strategies to preserve their self-esteem. Unconscious defense mechanisms may be used, with the client uninformed knowing they are being used or why. If teachers could see beyond the behaviours, they could see that this learner is using a defense mechanism. The learner might be in pain. One of those defense mechanisms is called regression. Clients exhibit age-inappropriate behaviours in reaction to stress or distress; that is, they regress or go back to an early developmental stage and adopt immature patterns of behaviours and emotions (Costa, 2020; Hentschel et al., 2004).

Because more emotionally mature behaviours and mental processes are more likely to aid in problem-solving and coping, regression is deemed maladaptive. This is where we see a learner always seeking attention and showing child-like behaviours when reprimanded. What is also important to know is that most SBSTs are not trained. There are policies, but their implementation is not taken into consideration. SBST is not given any special time at school, so teachers do not put in too much effort because it takes up their time. Participants commented on the issue of the SBST functionality and said:

*"We do have an SBST committee, but it is not as functional as it should be. These learners failed in primary schools. Problems should have been picked up there"* (Participant 2).

*"SBST committee comprises of teachers who still have to go to class and teach, sometimes the duties are too much."* (Participant 4).

*"I can say it is there, and a little bit functional, because they fill in the SNA 1 and 2 forms where a need arises for the learner to be accommodated in the exam"* (Participant 6).

Some people are chosen to be members of the SBST but are not fully functional. Participant 1 even states that it would have been easier if the SBSTs at the Primary level had screened the child and submitted a learner profile to the next school so that everyone knows how they should deal with each learner who has a problem. Indeed, the government needs to investigate ensuring that SBSTs at all levels are functional so that no child is denied an opportunity to study and complete their matric adequately.

#### **Learners are not given enough time to catch up/ schools are results-orientated**

##### *Lack of inclusivity*

White Paper 6 defines inclusive education and training as changing attitudes, behaviours, teaching methods, curricula, and environments to meet the needs of all learners, increasing the participation of all learners in educational institutions' culture and curriculum, and identifying and removing barriers to learning (DoE, 2001). The Ministry recognizes that the learner population has a wide range of learning needs at any given time. If these are not satisfied, learners may fail to learn successfully or be excluded from the learning system. Different learning demands arise due to various circumstances, such as physical, mental, sensory, neurological, and developmental impairments, psychosocial problems, disparities in intellectual ability, unique life experiences, or socioeconomic disadvantages. Every learner needs to be accommodated in teaching and learning. Once a learner is excluded due to various factors, it affects the child. Teachers would try to deal with the child's behaviours by, for example, taking the child out. This would mean that this child has lost tuition time. This child will not perform very well. The issue of schools only focusing on results is disadvantaging the already disadvantaged learners. This is what the participants said:

*"It is not fair to teachers that they should teach and take care of the wellbeing of these problematic children. What makes it difficult is that the same department that says learners should be taken care of is the same that will be putting so much pressure on the educator regarding the issue of performance."* (Participant 2).

*"I do not think that the department cares. We as teachers are expected to take care of learners, make sure they have extra mural activities, and when you come*

*back, you are expected to draw up a recovery plan for the hours you were not in class because of the same learners"* (Participant 4).

*"We are always told to follow the ATP and finish the curriculum. It would be better if we had time scheduled to deal with psychosocial issues that learners might have. It is quite difficult because we all want to perform, well the wellbeing and mental stability of a learner is not considered, and teachers are also tired...."* (Participant 5).

It is quite clear that, as schools, we are far from inclusive. Everyone is worried about how the results will make them look. No one stops to think about the one person who matters here: the learner. Inclusive education seeks to include every learner. If not, the learner is excluded from the learning system. Teachers need to be trained in inclusive education to apply it effectively.

#### **Learners with behavioural problems influencing their performance**

##### *Disruptive behaviours vs. Academic performance*

The study's findings will give school personnel a better grasp of how students' misbehaviours affect their academic outcomes. It will provide more insights into disruptive behaviours and the capacity to respond to these behaviours when they occur. Our schools require solutions and activities to deal with disruptive behaviours in the classroom. There should be measures to help will disruptive behaviours, but first, we need to know the real cause of learner's disruptive behaviours. When asked if there was a link between disruptive behaviours and bad performance, this is what they said:

*"Bad behaviour indeed affects performance; these learners will come to school not having done their homework. These learners will leave class to get to the line for food first. It seems they are always hungry, which could be true as they come from disadvantaged backgrounds"* (Participant 1).

*"These learners will sometimes make you very angry, but the truth is that some of them do need help. We want all learners to pass and pass well. We just must understand what is happening with them."* (Participant 4).

Some teachers are frustrated about the learners' behaviours because they take other learners' time. Trying to make the class settle down after a disruptive learner takes time. Some teachers could help the learners, but only if they knew how. It is essential for teachers and all stakeholders to understand what causes personality disorders, how the school can help a learner who has a personality disorder, and why personality disorders affecting learners are not thoroughly discussed and addressed. According to Dancel et al. (2019), student behaviours significantly influence academic attainment because they can impair other pupils' learning ability and learning environment. Numerous behavioural characteristics can affect the learning environment for all children. Simpson (2017) further states that According to the linked study literature, when disruptive behaviours persist in the classroom environment, it becomes challenging for the instructor to redirect or penalize students while providing effective education. Furthermore, prolonged disruptive behaviours frequently lead to decreased academic engagement time, so pupils tend to do poorly on standardized tests.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to understand the influence of personality disorders on the performance of grade 12 learners. This research proposal aimed to inform people that there is more to the grade 12 results. As much as 80.1% of the students have made it in 2022, 19.9% of them are not accounted for and might be struggling with disorders. Personality disorders are natural; if addressed, there could be better results, and many more learners can finish school. Learners who have passed are celebrated, but there is no tracking of the ones who did not make it. This shows the gap in our education system. What happens to learners who failed and were not coping in their 12 years of schooling? Speaking to the teachers showed they also do not know what to do with problematic learners.

The second objective was to help people understand the causes of personality disorders so that those with personality disorders are not treated any way differently. Any psychological problem has been

dismissed, especially in the black communities. The influence of culture on these issues not being addressed is massive. Learners' behaviours are just associated with being naughty and craving attention, only to find that learners are struggling. Teachers did not think these learners might have problems; they just mentioned how they seek attention. The stigma is real.

Lastly, to make the school realise that sometimes it is not that a learner is stupid. The learner might be having learning difficulties caused by the personality disorder. These learners were left behind somewhere. The SBST has not played its role effectively, especially at the primary school level. Teachers feel that if these learners had been diagnosed earlier and their profiles had been submitted to secondary schools, they could have received more support.

These aims and objectives have been met because, when doing this study, it was clear that there is a huge gap in information on why learners behave in certain ways and underperform.

SBST should be functional. All primary and secondary schools need to profile their learners. Learners need to be Screened, Identified, Assessed, and Supported as per the SIAS policy. If learners are identified early, they can get the support they need, improving their results. Some learners need concessions and accommodations, yet they have problems that could have been identified earlier. The department should ensure that all teachers attend training, not just the SBST committees. Every teacher must be trained to screen and identify a learner with a special need for support because all teachers know their learners. Still, if they see a learner with behavioural problems and they just see a naughty learner seeking attention, the learner will not receive any help. Parents also need to be advised about their children. Some parents see different behaviours but do not know who to contact. This suggested that the department and other sister departments work together to ensure schools have psychologists/ social workers/ counsellors qualified to help families deal with learners with problems associated with personality disorders. This platform will help the parents and the learners to find ways to support the learner so that other alternatives are taken in a case where a learner is not coping with normal schooling. Some of these learners might not be good in the normal education system but can be good in skills. As a country, we need many learners to enter and finish the school system. If not, they should be placed in skills programs; in this way, crime and unemployment rates can decrease. The term Personality Disorder is not understood by most people, and this resulted in the researcher having to use terms that would be defined as symptoms of these personality disorders for people to understand. The term was too broad, and most learners are not diagnosed. It was also difficult to conduct interviews, and teachers and principals were very busy with prelims. I have personally learned a lot, even about myself, in this journey. It was interesting to speak to other teachers and hear their frustrations and what needs to be done. I am inspired to pursue my studies and become an Educational Psychologist as I have realised the gap in my District. This study believes that trimming the title in the future will be a good idea, as this one seemed broad and made teachers not fully understand what was expected of them. It is needed for the SBST in my school, which is essential to support learners.

#### REFERENCES

- Acharya, A. S., Prakash, A., Saxena, P., & Nigam, A., (2013). Sampling: Why and how of it. *Indian Journal of Medical Specialties*, 4(2), 330-333. <http://doi.org/10.7713/ijms.2013.0032>
- Ahad, A. A., Sanchez-Gonzalez, M., & Junquera, P. (2023). Understanding and addressing mental health stigma across cultures for improving psychiatric care: A narrative review. *Cureus*. 15(5), e39549. <http://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.39549>
- Bandzeladze, T., & Arutiunov, L. (2020). Peer Pressure and Adolescents' Problem Behaviours. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(1), 31-36. <https://doi.org/10.26500/jarssh-05-2020-0104>
- Charlesworth, L., Wood, J., & Viggari, P. (2011). Middle childhood. In Hutchison, E. D. (ed.) *Dimensions of human behavior* (pp. 175-226). SAGE. [https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/16297\\_Chapter\\_5.pdf](https://us.corwin.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/16297_Chapter_5.pdf)
- Clarke, V., & Braun, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The psychologist*, 26(2), 120-123. Retrieved from <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/21155>
- Couprrie, H., Cudeville, E., & Sofer, C. (2020). Efficiency versus gender roles and stereotypes: an experiment in domestic production. *Exp Econ* 23, 181-211. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10683-019-09612-3>
- Dancel, V. B., Din, J. C., Gabita, P. R., Laurente, J. A. T., Marasigan, L. D., & Austria, M. (2019). The Effects of Students Behavior on the Academic Performance of Students at Bestlink College of the Philippines, Quezon City. *Ascendens Asia Singapore-Bestlink College of the Philippines Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://ojs.aaresearchindex.com/index.php/aasgbcjpmra/article/view/1142>
- Department of Education. (DoE) (2021). *Programmes: SIAS, National Department of Basic Education*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Department of Education. (DoE) (2001). *Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Erin Johnston, L. C. S. W. (2021). *The risks borderline personality disorder poses for college students*, Verywell Mind. Verywell Mind.
- Fariba, K. A., & Gupta, V. (2022). *Personality disorder*. In StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556058>
- Fortunato, A., Tanzilli, A., Lingardi, V., & Speranza, A. M. (2022). Personality disorders in childhood: validity of the coolidge personality and neuropsychological inventory for children. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(7), 4050. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19074050>
- Gordan, M., & Krishanan, I. A. (2014). A review of B. F. Skinner's 'Reinforcement Theory of Motivation. *International journal of research in education methodology*, 5(3), 680-688. <https://doi.org/10.24297/ijrem.v5i3.3892>
- Griggs, R. A., & Jackson, S. L. (2017). Open Introductory Psychology Textbooks: Prose and Qualms. *Teaching of Psychology*, 44(3), 193-202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628317711283>
- Gunderson, J. G., Herpertz, S. C., Skodol, A. E., Torgersen, S., & Zanarini, M. C. (2018). Borderline personality disorder. *Nature reviews disease primers*, 4(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrdp.2018.29>
- Hallquist, M. N., Hipwell, A. E., & Stepp, S. D. (2015). Poor self-control and harsh punishment in childhood prospectively predict borderline personality symptoms in adolescent girls. *Journal of abnormal psychology*, 124(3), 549-564. <https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000058>
- Hallquist, M. N., Hipwell, A. E., & Stepp, S. D. (2015). Poor self-control and harsh punishment in childhood prospectively predict borderline personality symptoms in adolescent girls. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 124(3), 549. <https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000058>
- Nortje, A. (2023) *Defence mechanisms in psychology explained*. Retrieved from <https://positivepsychology.com/defense-mechanisms-in-psychology>
- Sheehan, L., Nieweglowski, K., & Corrigan, P. (2016). The Stigma of Personality Disorders. *Current Psychiatry Reports*, 18(11), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-015-0654-1>
- Simpson, R. (2017). A Case Study of the Perceived Influence of Disruptive Behaviour among Grades 9 and 11 Students on their Academic Performance at a Corporate High School. *Journal of Education*, 5(1), 28-42. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t5051>
- Spielman, R. M., Dumper, K., Jenkins, W., Lacombe, A., Lovett, M., & Perlmutter, M. (2021). *Observational Learning (Modeling)*. Psychology-H5P, BCcampus. Retrieved from <https://opentextbc.ca/h5pppsychology/chapter/observational-learning-modeling>

- Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative Research: Data Collection, Analysis, and Management. *The Canadian journal of hospital pharmacy*, 68(3), 226-231. <https://doi.org/10.4212/cjhp.v68i3.1456>.
- Zimmerman, M. (2023) *Overview of personality disorders-psychiatric disorders*, MSD Manual Professional Edition. MSD Manuals.