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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

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Phase 3: Full text papers were received and blind-reviewed according to a set of criteria.

Phase 4: Authors of those papers selected were notified that their papers (with or without amendments) were added to the final programme of the Conference.

Phase 5: Papers were reformatted to PDF and published digitally in the permanent Conference Website (<http://www.zaw3.co.za>).

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A study about the use of Facebook for social encouragement among citizens within a community on the Cape Flats

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Abstract

Web 2.0 services are continuing to serve the online communities by enhancing interactions and communication among these communities. From MySpace and now Facebook, the online communities are able to communicate effectively and efficiently. The world is getting smaller because a friend is just a click away on the internet. Web 2.0 services have created a virtual world that brings people closer through the formation of networks. Web 2.0 services have addressed several shortcomings that traditionally were difficult such as time constraints, geographical borders and communication costs. This paper explores the use of Facebook among people from a community affected with gangsterism and drugs. According to Maslow's theories of human needs, social needs are said to influence human behaviour (Nieman & Bennett, 2006). This paper investigated the use of Facebook to enhance effective communication and interaction among ex-gang members, ex-drug addicts and other community members. The purpose is to prevent the growth and spread of gangsterism and the use of drugs among South African communities. Ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts were interviewed. The findings show that interviewees are using Facebook for motivation, encouragement, learning and empowerment purposes in order to fight gangsterism and drug abuse.

Keywords

Web 2.0, Facebook, gangsterism, ex-drug addicts, drug abuse

1. Introduction

According to Kofman (2006), the size of the world continues to decrease into a small virtual world where communication and interaction amongst people is a click away on the internet. The growth of social networking sites (SNS) has led into effective means of communication and interactions among people. This transcends the barriers of traditional means of communications such as geographical boundaries, time and cost.

Facebook is one of the social networking sites that are expanding at a fast rate, with more than 30 million users (Lawson, 2007). Facebook has revolutionized the way communication takes place within communities; from education institutions to business organisations. Facebook is continuing to reach out to people as a means of daily communications and interactions within societies (Buice et al, 2007).

Gangsterism and drug abuse is among the problems that escalate the level of crime within communities in the Western Cape. The objective of this study was to investigate the roles that Facebook can play to prevent the spread and growth of gangsterism and the use of drugs. According to Ellison et al (2007), people prefer interacting with people they know; therefore ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts can play important roles to reach out into communities and Facebook can be used to strengthen the social link among themselves and community members. It is the richness of information that ex-gang members and ex-drugs addicts acquired through experience that could discourage and prevent youth from falling into joining gangs and consequently using drugs. This study shows that Facebook can bring together people who are socially separated and could be used as a source of information and as a means for dissemination of information among people within such communities.

Gangsterism and drug abuse is a social disorder caused by dissatisfaction of a social capital of a human being. Prevention of gangsterism and drugs is therefore a social matter and can be achieved by community efforts as opposed to individual efforts. According to Buice et al (2007), Facebook can provide a stable source of reliable and valid information that brings people together, with common interest to fight the problem at hand. With communication and networking capabilities that Facebook has offered within education institutions, the research shows that it could possibly provide support for a social revolution against gangsterism and drug abuse.

The Impact Team is a community initiative empowerment group established by the Impact Direct Ministries based in Athlone, Cape Town. Most of the members of the Impact Team were gang members and drug addicts. Having recovered from gangsterism and drug problems, the Impact Team members are now on the forefront to fight gangsterism and drug abuse. Among others, the Impact team members are using Facebook as a tool to fight gangsterism and drug abuse within cape flats communities.

2. General situation of gangsterism and drugs abuse in South Africa

Despite the efforts of government to combat crime, gangsterism remains to be a big problem within South African communities, where the youth resorts to activities such as drug abuse, killing, robbery, rape etc (Standing, 2005). According to Standing (2005) the number of gangs on the Cape Flats is more than 130 totalling a few hundred thousand gang members accounted for. Some of these gangs such as the Americans, the Hard Livings, the sexy Boys, the Junky Funky Kids and the Mongrels, were reported by Standing (2005) to be powerful, influential, dominant and prevailing. The youth are the target population vulnerable to gangsterism and drug abuse. In the Cape Flats alone gangs caused about 70 percent of crime; burglaries, car hijacking, muggings, kidnapping and killings according to Standing (2005). Hennop (2000) also reported that gangs are responsible for robberies and theft of weapons from police stations; weapons that are used to support drug and gang wars in communities.

The source of income for gangs is largely from drugs such as cannabis, mandrax, dagga, cocaine, heroin and tik (Parry et al, 2004). The use of mandrax is most evident in the Western Cape where it is associated with gangsterism culture in communities such as the Cape Flats (Parry et al, 2004). The use of cannabis, mandrax and heroin continue to be high across South African communities. The demand for treatments for cannabis and mandrax was reported higher among persons under the age of 20 years (Parry et al, 2005). This increase of gang activity and drug abuse leaves a window of opportunity for communities and organisations to combat these social ills.

3. Facebook as a communication tool

Since its establishment in 2004, Facebook has grown with about 30 million users (Lawson, 2007). A tool that was established merely to serve students in higher education institution has now expanded to cover both the public and the corporate world. Many businesses are using Facebook to market and advertise their businesses (Lawson, 2007). The advertising potential is unlimited because business organisations can advertise and reach out the online communities all over the world and at any time of the day. Advertisement for businesses is the primary source of income for social networking websites (Buice et al, 2007). According to Frauenheim (2007), social networking tools such as Facebook could benefit the organization as a channel for unofficial but vital information in order to improve communication and collaboration among employees.

Referring to education, Facebook has been used in schools to form discussion groups among students and faculty staff. According to Mathews (2006), McMaster University students paid more attention to information posted on Facebook than that posted via the University emailing system. These students also showed more openness and willingness to share information about each other, individual projects and group projects. Also Facebook was found effective in dissemination of information to new students at McMaster University, where librarians posted information concerning the university life in attempt to address questions from first year students. Mathews (2006) reported that students from Georgia Institutes of Technology showed immediate and quick responses to information posted via Facebook, compared to responses for information via the campus emails.

Green (2005) mentioned that Facebook can facilitate healthy real-life relationships among people. Furthermore Ellison et al (2007) reported that Facebook usage was found to improve the psychological well-being and thus uplifted self-esteem among individuals experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction. This emanates from encouraging comments posted by the online communities on personal profiles and pictures. Buice et al (2007) also mentioned that social networking tools such as Facebook could help people stay in touch with one another much easier, due to the greater conveniences afforded by the Internet technology.

Comparing a number of off-line and on-line friends, Ellison et al (2007) reported that while some Facebook users would browser for new friends; people they never met before, mostly Facebook users are engaged in meeting people whom they already knew or had prior off-line communications. For instance, students search for and prefer to connect with ex-students and ex-lecturers while employees browse for their company colleagues. This thus suggests that it is easy for an ex-gang member to communicate with a gang member whom they knew each other before as opposed to just another person. This is because the majority use Facebook primarily to restore, enhance, maintain and solidify existed offline relationships (Ellison et al, 2007).

4. Research methodology

According to Welman et al (2005), unstructured interviews offer a greater wealth of information than other methods of collecting data. Welman et al (2005) further mentioned that unstructured interviews are usually used in explorative research because of their qualitative nature.

During the research the Impact Team, a community initiative empowerment group for ex-drug addicts and ex-gang members, established by the Impact Direct Ministries, was the population

under this case study. A group of 12 members of The Impact Team were interviewed. Mostly the “what” and “why” types of questions were prepared and used in order to understand experiences of the Impact Team members before, during and after their involvement with gang and drug related activities. Semi-structured questions were prepared and interviews took place during their computer literacy classes at the Cape Town campus of Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The interviews were carried out on a one on one and face to face approach.

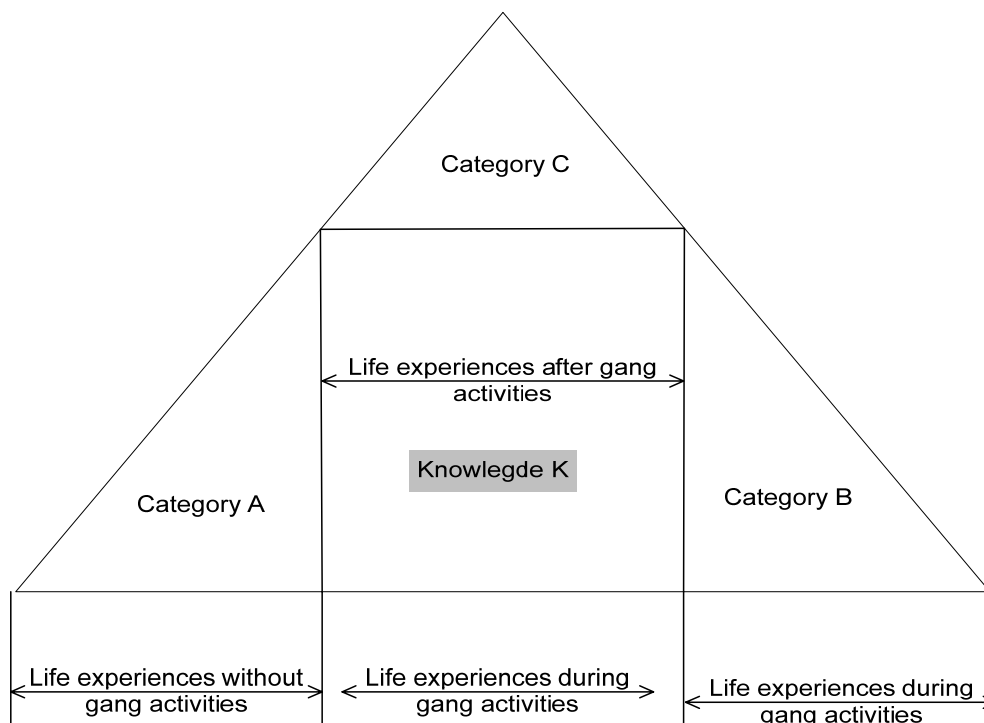
5. Categories of people in the population under study

According to Bellinger et al (2004), the accumulation of information results into knowledge which with experiences and more understanding it becomes wisdom. Therefore while data is the backbone of information; knowledge and wisdom are determined by understanding and experiences to exposure to information about an event (Bellinger et al, 2004). Experiences involve physical, mental and emotional participation in an event.

Figure 1 shows the categories of people in the Cape Flats communities according to gangsterism and drug addiction experiences. Firstly, category A is comprised of gang-free and drug-free individuals. These people have never been involved in gangsterism and drug abuse. They observe and preserve what is considered as customs, traditions, and moral values as passed by their forefathers. Their moral values include education for youth where young people in the community are encouraged to attend schools and pursue careers. They play important roles to prepare the youth for the future.

Individuals in category A are normally highly motivated, with high self-esteem, actively participate in community activities and have trust in other community members. Also they have healthy positive communication and interaction with the community hence they approach community challenges in a positive manner; they are optimistic (Ellison et al, 2007). Despite the pressure and urge to participate in gang and drug related activities, they resisted and continued to keep their moral values. These are people who never participated in gang and drug related activities. Majority of this group are elders. This could be attributed by the fact that their level of life wisdom is higher enough to understand the consequences related with gangsterism. With that life wisdom, these community members chose to hold on to their community moral values. Their experiences hence knowledge and wisdom about gangsterism are limited to observation of events, written literatures and hear say sources of information and not physical participation in gangsterism and the related activities.

Figure 1: Categories of people according to experiences with gangsterism and drug addiction



Secondly, category B includes individuals who are involved with gang and drug activities. Social characteristics of people in this category B is opposite to that of category A. Such people have low self-esteem, are uninspired with life and can hardly participate in community activities because of distrust in other community members. In order to uplift their social well being, they would engage themselves in using toxic substances such as alcohol and drugs. They will resort to formation of gangs so that they collaborate in assembling necessary resources (money, alcohol and drugs etc) in order to satisfy their social needs. These people could not resist the persuasion of gangsterism as such they committed their lives to serving their gangs; by undertaking activities such as drug abuse, theft, robbery and killings in order to defend their respective gang (Standing, 2005). Serious drug side effects are vivid in this category, where the majority (young people) are reported to suffer from drug related symptoms (Parry et al, 2004). These are people whom this study would like to help and rescue from gangsterism. While they have experiences as active gang members, their wisdom about gangsterism is limited.

The third and last group is category C. This very interesting group is comprised of people who initially were in category A then move to category B then move back to category A. Therefore before they were not gang members then became recruited in gangsterism and for a long time actively participated as gang members and drug activities. Thereafter, they stopped participating in gang and drug related activities and are currently fighting against these social ills. For a long time, they had been using drugs and committing gang-related crimes. However, they made decisions to leave gangsterism and drug abuse. A typical example of this category is members of the Impact Team who were interviewed during this study. Because they shared life experiences in both category A and category B, they have rich physical, mental and emotional experiences as far as gangsterism and drug abuse is concerned. What distinguish individuals in category C is the value of information they have, richness of knowledge they possess and the wisdom they can provide as far as gangsterism and drug abuse is concerned. In this study it is referred as “knowledge K” (figure 1). This knowledge can be used to effect individuals who are

still in category B; active gang members. Figure 1 shows that the differences between category A, category B and category C is denoted by knowledge K. This means therefore that it is this knowledge K that makes the difference between who accepts gangsterism and who refuses to accept gangsterism and the related gang-activities. Members of the community, who gained and allowed knowledge 'K' to be part of their wisdom, realised the consequences of gangsterism and the use of drugs within the communities. As such they took a decision to stop gangsterism. These are the individuals who were interviewed during this study and are now called ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts because gangsterism and drugs to them is the past. These are some of the members of the Impact Team.

This research therefore acknowledges the fact that it is the so called ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts who have that knowledge 'K'. This knowledge 'K' can be understood only by tapping into the minds of ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts. It is this knowledge emanating from experiences before, during and after gangsterism life that can be used to impact gang members and drug addicts in order to change them back to category A.

In order to re-gain their social well-being, to remain encouraged, uplifted, determined and focused to positively encounter community challenges, these people have established healthy means of communication and interactions. While using offline approach to organize meeting and provided counselling to drug addicts and gang members, they use Facebook to keep themselves motivated as a group. These individuals from the Impact Team are using Facebook to encourage each other not to revert back to gangsterism but move forward with goal to reach out to the drug addicts and gang members. These are people who are using their previous experiences (knowledge K) to fighting gangsterism and the use of drugs in Cape Flats communities.

6. Findings and recommendations

The main social fulfilment about using Facebook was the affordance to keep in contact with new and old friends and fellow members of the Impact Team network. During the interviews, it was realised that ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts use Facebook to strengthen their knowledge K among themselves and the community at large. Most of them reported to have been using the "text message" and the "chat" facilities of Facebook frequently. However, a few mentioned about writing on their friends' walls. The status update on the personal profile, which allows Facebook users to say what their current situation/status, receives much attention according to the interviewees. Impact team members use this status update feature as a flag to determine the present social condition of their fellow members as well as others who are part of their social network. They would then communicate among each other in order to uplift individuals with low self-esteem.

Before using Facebook for social purposes, some of the Impact Team members mentioned to have been using MXIT; a cell phone enabled social networking feature. When they heard about Facebook for the first time, they equated it to MXIT. As such they prejudged that Facebook had no meaning because little was achieved via MXIT. However, after attending computer and Internet literacy classes, they engaged in exploring Facebook. The immediate feedback from friends coupled with encouragement messages, struck most of them. It is this spirit of encouragement and hope among themselves and the community that keeps their self-esteem high. One interviewee mentioned of "Facebook capable of bringing hope to hopelessness".

Most of the interviewees mentioned about participating in the drug abuse and gangsterism counselling. They mentioned the fact that having suffered the consequences of gangsterism

and the drug abuse, they have willingness to reach out the youth and share their experiences. They mentioned that Facebook can be a useful tool in reaching out to young people who might get caught up in the world of drugs and gangs. Nevertheless, they mentioned the fact that the high rate of Internet and computer illiteracy could be the impeding factor for success. They however suggested that if computer training can be available for community members, Facebook would go a long way in reaching out to communities. Without prior training, some interviewee mentioned about community members who would fear to touch a computer because of not knowing how to use it. In order to reach out such people basic computer training is essential. This stresses the fact that dissemination of information about internet and computer literacy could play big roles in bringing the communities in touch with the online communities that could support the citizens.

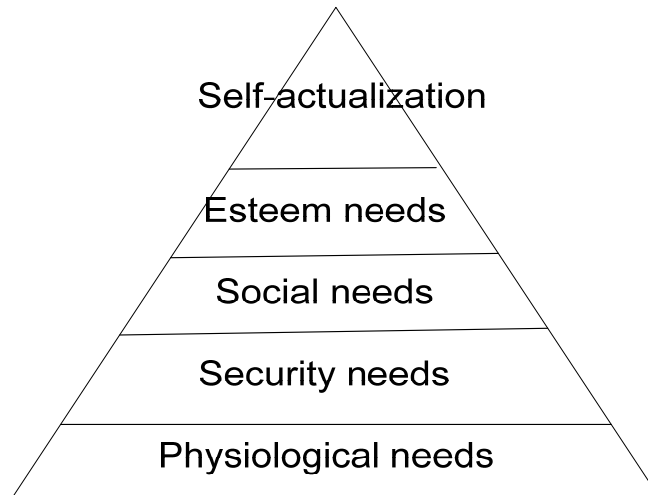
The interviewees have views that religion and church services have great roles to play in the fight against gangsterism and drug abuse. Most of them mentioned that the turning point for them to stopping gangsterism and drug activities originates from messages of hope from church services. They therefore share and disseminate messages of hope among themselves and others connected to them using Facebook. Some interviewees mentioned of using Facebook after hearing and noticing that their friends use Facebook. The interviewees further mentioned about the fact that Facebook offers a cheaper platform to express their opinions. This proved not only useful but also important to affect individuals facing difficult social moments.

One interviewee mentioned about a young lady who had marital problems due to drug abuse and resorted to cutting her body in order to feel better. Without this painful habit of cutting her body to bleed, this lady would be so depressed and the other option she considered was committing suicide. However, having communicated with some of the Impact team members sharing messages of hope and counsel, she received social encouragement using Facebook as a medium. This intervention has led to the lady going for counselling and it all came about one of the team relating to her status update, which was a cry for help, on Facebook.

Following the fact that the interviewees had been involved with gang-related activities and drugs, the information they have and the experiences (knowledge K) they share are rich enough to bring impact and encouragement among individuals still battling with the tides of gangsterism and drugs. However, the audience of Facebook is limited to Internet availability and computer know how within the community. With the emergence of mobile technologies and the use of Facebook and other social networking tools on mobile phones does lend itself to a larger target group especially in communities where computers and internet access are barriers.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (figure 2), social needs are among the essential human needs that should be satisfied in order to avoid the spirit of low-self esteem (Nieman & Bennett,2006). During this research, it was found that the motives for people to join gangs and be involved in using drugs, is a desire to fulfil their missing social needs and esteem needs. Facebook has justified to having the capability of being a medium for encouraging messages and testimonies. The interviewees hope to expand and continue to use Facebook to encourage one another and others in order to bring about what they call a "social revolution" within their communities.

Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Nieman & Bennett, 2006)

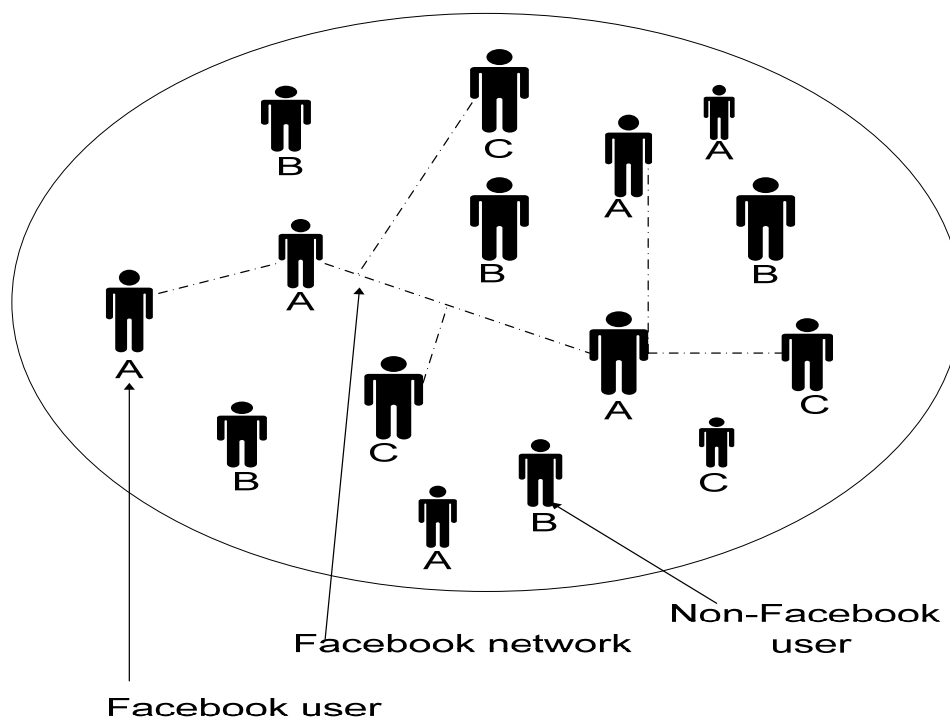


Most importantly, the Impact Team reported that Facebook plays a big role in keeping the group united and updated with how they are dealing with issues. They also use it as a means of supporting one another. These people believe that unity is essential if they have to succeed in reaching out to their communities. In order to strengthen the communication bond among group members and that no member is left behind, the Impact Team use Facebook as a medium of communication. This not only strengthens the social interactions among themselves but it keeps all members motivated and uplifted while discouraging members from reverting back to drugs and gangsterism.

7. Discussion of findings

With reference to figure 3 below, Cape Flats communities are comprised of three categories of people; A, B and C. Figure 3 below indicates the interactions among community members (A, B & C). Category A individuals never experienced or actively participated in gangsterism but still suffer the consequences of gangsterism within the communities. Category B is active members of gangs and category C is ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts; individuals with the mentioned knowledge K. The category C comprised of ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts is fundamental for the success of the Impact Direct Ministries' mission and vision regarding the fight against gangsterism and drug addiction. This category is using Facebook as one of the tools for communication and interactions among members. Members are striving to reach out to gang members and drug addicts, convert them by sharing experiences in order to inculcate their knowledge K.

Figure 3: Interactions of categories of people in Cape Flats communities



As indicated in figure 3, there are individuals in each group who are isolated; not connected on Facebook network. These individuals would hardly acquire that knowledge K while those who are on Facebook network are have a good chance of being the Impact Team's audience and can be effected by messages from category A and category C. The research found that most of community members who form group C are willing to co-operate with group A, in order to rescue group B. However this can be done if group B individuals are connected with Facebook. The Impact Team, using Facebook, have managed to bring together ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts and continues to reach out the communities with a view to convert category B to group C. Not only does the Impact Group, converts category B to category C but also continues to encourage category A and category C individuals to remain gang-free and drug-free, via Facebook. If this group succeed to expand its Facebook audience and reach out more people, it stands a good chance to prevent the expansion and growth of gangsterism and the use of drugs among communities. If the Impact Group members can convert gang members within Cape Flats communities to becoming gang-free and drug-free citizens, similar initiatives can be used to combat similar gangsterism problems in other part of South Africa. By investing in the Impact Group ministry, the government of South Africa will be investing in knowledge K, the knowledge that can be used to prevent the growth of gangsterism in South Africa. This is because as already mentioned that people who experienced gangsterism and drug abuse, can bring about necessary changes to affect the communities based on their experiences (knowledge K).

The well being of an individual determines his or her actions towards building the society. Because of daily fluctuations in the level of well being, the Impact Team members are using Facebook to keep themselves motivated to maintain a balanced level of well-being necessary to encourage members to continue participating in combating gangsterism and drug abuse. Facebook thus proves to have the communication value necessary to improve social well being among individuals.

8. Limitation of the study

Following the time constraints, efforts to locate potential and active gang members were not successful. This is due to the fact that active gang members continue to keep their activities as confidential as possible. This thus demanded more time to establish acquaintances with gangs. At the time of research it was rather viewed as dangerous to insist on sudden or abrupt meeting with active gang members. The research however found that active gang members are very loyal to their gangs as such giving information to the public is considered as a betrayal to the group. Active gang members therefore fears to jeopardise their lives by leaking information to the public. However, by using ex-gang members, it could have been possible to meet active gang members. This study therefore advocates that future studies include active gang members in order to acquire more raw experiences from the mind of perpetrators of gangsterism and drug activity. Coupled with knowledge from ex-gang members and drug addicts, this could result into more understanding of that knowledge K, necessary to reverse gangsterism society to gang-free society.

Also due to time constraints only 12 members of the Impact Team were interviewed. This thus suggests that future studies should allow for more in-depth interviews and should attempt to include other ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts outside the Impact Team.

9. Conclusion

Current state of gangsterism and drug abuse within South African communities is threatening. This justifies the limits of the traditional approach to combat gangsterism and drug abuse by using gang-free and drug-free members of the society; counsellors or social workers. The current approach as depicted by the Impact Direct Ministries should be to involve ex-gang members and ex-drug addicts to reach out the communities affected with gangsterism and drug abuse. With their experience, these ex-gang members have greater potentials or chance to tap into the mind of gang members and drug addicts in order to bring about necessary changes. This research referred to this prior gangsterism experience as knowledge K. However, this knowledge K can only be effective if networking tools are available to enhance the transfer of this knowledge among the community members. Again as shown by the research, the Impact Team is currently using Facebook as a network to uplift group members in order to proceed with counter-gangsterism and anti-drug activities. The tool is also being used as a means to reach out to young people as a preventative measure. The traditional approach to fighting against gangsterism and the approach of using technology compliment each other. The fight against gangsterism and drug abuse should not only be offline but also online as the world is more and more moving towards a virtual world (Kofman, 2006) and gives a larger audience that could be impacted.

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