Department of Psychology

Children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience processes in South Africa

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Abstract

The family is the primary and most critical support and developmental system for children however, family challenges often prevent positive support and developmental assistance. Some families are able to manage their challenges well while others are not as well-equipped. Research on family functioning and family resilience in South Africa is increasing, however the focus is often only on adult family members. In light of this, the current study sought to explore children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience processes in South Africa. In this study, resilience was defined as the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten its function, viability, or development. The study is important as it provides an account of children's standpoint concerning issues of both their family, perceptions of families in general, and their view of their families' resilience. The Walsh Family Resilience Theory was used as the theoretical framework and the three dimensions, family belief systems, family organisation processes, and family communication patterns were the main family resilience processes explored in the study. Ultimately, nine participants were recruited through convenience sampling from a primary school in Pretoria. Participants were between the ages of 14-16 years. Owing to the sensitive nature of the issues that might have risen, and the diversity of the children's experiences in their families, the researcher conducted individual, one-on-one interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was utilised, and the data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis. The researcher sought ethics approval from all necessary university bodies as well as the Gauteng Education Department. Informed consent was obtained from the parents and/or guardians of children and assent from the children themselves. The study adhered to all ethics guidelines including, informed consent, beneficence, non-maleficence, confidentiality, and anonymity. Two thematic categories were found. Under the two categories there were themes and subthemes that represent how children in the study perceived and experienced their family life and family resilience. The thematic categories were children's understanding of a family and children's perception of family resilience processes. The depth of the knowledge obtained in this study reiterates the importance to listen and involve children in decision making of interventions or any other processes that involve them.

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation titled *Children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience processes in South Africa* is my own work. I declare that it has not been previously submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Placidia Muchaneta Shoko (Shumba)

August 2022

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

Children in every country, and in every culture, occupy a central place in society and the future of a culture rests upon them (Idang, 2015; Igwilo & Ogbo, 2019). Children are important for the survival of a society and essentially, without children there will not be a tomorrow for human race. As such, families and homes are central to positive child outcomes, as they provide children with the initial instincts, guidance and support regarding socialisation, physical and psychological development (Spencer, 2017). In addition, parents transmit norms and values, rules and standards, ways of thinking and acting as well as how to interpret social relationships and societal structures (Buehler, 2020; Igwilo & Ogbo, 2019). In other words, children must be guided well in their development in alignment to their cultural and societal context.

Children's earliest experiences have a significant influence on their future development (Spencer, 2017). Given the many changes happening in societies such as globalisation, transformation of families, migrations and shifts in employment patterns, children are found to be more vulnerable to the gruesome consequences of these changes, more than adults, as this compromises the future of stable societies (Lieberman & Bucio, 2018; Sandstrom & Huerta, 2013; Thompson, 2012). This is especially important in countries which experience compounded structural, historical, and socioeconomic challenges. South African families, particularly those in low-socioeconomic communities, often experience compounded challenges, especially with regard to inadequate healthcare, poverty (i.e., food insecurity, poor nutrition, and hygiene), inadequate infrastructure (lack of safe water, housing and environmental pollution) and inadequate access to social services (Roman et al., 2016). These conditions may place children at risk of unhealthy behaviours and poor developmental outcomes which often strains the family and society (Botha et al., 2018; Greeff & Lawrence, 2012; Khan et al., 2016; Roman et al., 2016). These negative effects threaten the future of children and the future of the South African society (Isaacs et al., 2019).

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Not all families necessarily face negative outcomes in adverse conditions, and their ability to withstand and overcome the perils they face is a fundamental attribute of the family resilience perspective (Walsh, 2012). The family unit has been regarded as both a protective and risk factor for children (Masten, 2018). According to Walsh (2003), for resilience to occur, risk must be present, however, the resilience framework emphasises the family's capability to bounce back, heal and foster growth. The family resilience framework furthers our understanding of family functioning during adversity (Walsh, 2016). The family unit has therefore become a priority for the South African Department of Social Development, whose *White Paper on Families* sees the family in need of greater efforts from practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in order to strengthen this unit of society (White paper on Family, 2021)[1]. According to Macleod et al. (2019), South African policymakers tend to place families at the centre of intervention efforts, yet the interventions are often developed only with adult input.

It is an assumed common misconception that children lack the capacity to make informed contributions to decision making (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017). Consequently, the right for children to participate in the research and policies which involve them remains contingent on adults who, in one way or another, hold powerful positions such as legal guardians of children, administrative or political decision-makers (Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017; Macleod et al., 2019). Most research has been conducted 'covertly' by observing the children from a distance (Christensen & James, 2017; Einarsdóttir, 2007; Markowska-Manista, 2018; Ofosu-Kus, 2017). The Convention on the rights of children[2] (United Nations, 1989; Verhellen, 2000), articulates that children should not be treated as either helpless objects of charity or a property of their parents, but rather be seem like individual members of the human family with age-appropriate rights and responsibilities (UNICEF, 2022). The experience of child participation and listening to the child has demonstrated a

[1] The South African White paper on Family will be referenced as *White Paper*, throughout the document.

[2] United Nations Convention on the rights of the children. Article 49 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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wide array of benefits to the family, the community, the school, the state and forms the basis for a democratic society (Aldridge, 2017). Studies have shown how effective children's voice can be if children are given the opportunity to express themselves and their needs (Hoadley et al., 2017; Marshall et al., 2017; Merkel-Holguin et al., 2020; Smith & Peled, 2017). Social policies thus urge policy makers, management and professionals to consider any plan affecting the child's care and welfare from a child's perspective first before implementing the plan (Corona & Derr, 2020; Hoadley et al., 2017; Paige-Smith & Rix, 2011).

Children in this study were defined as any young human being or person below the legal age of majority (18 years of age) and according to Morrow (2011) this age group ought to be seen and treated as crucial members of the family who have an important role in the building and development of the family (Morrow, 2011; 2015). It is therefore valuable to investigate children as family members and social actors separate from parents and caregivers (Hoadley et al., 2017). Such knowledge furnishes researchers with information of how to communicate and interact with children about their families, how to connect with the children and how best to design family programmes targeted for children (Cunningham, 2020; Marshall et al., 2017). For children, being a member of a family involves more than developing a relationship with other members. Membership involves growing an understanding of the affective relationships among these individuals and an understanding of the particular routines, rules, expectations, prohibitions, and sanctions of the family (Igwilo & Ogbo, 2019).

Speaking to children about their views of their families and family resilience processes provides a unique and privileged place from which to observe and understand family practice and relationships (Aldridge, 2017). Understanding family and family resilience particularly from a child standpoint is important as these conversations provide useful guidelines for supporting parents to meet the challenges of discussing dynamic issues with their children. (Colliver, 2017; Harcourt & Einarsdottir, 2011; Hoadley et al., 2017; Paige-Smith & Rix, 2011). Information on family and family resilience processes also furnish professionals with appropriate approaches to help protect, empower, or strengthen families to successfully rebound from adversity (Henry et al., 2015).

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1.2 Problem Statement

As noted earlier, an adults' evaluation on matters pertaining to the children were viewed as valid and adequate until recently where we see a growing body of the twenty-first century researchers revealing a keen interest in children's own perspective especially with regards to matters that concerns them (Adams et al., 2019; Hoadley et al., 2017; Le Borgne & Tisdall, 2017). Regardless of the growing body of research, children have still not been adequately involved as primary informants particularly in the areas under review. The majority of studies that have been conducted on family and family resilience, particularly in South Africa, have been conducted solely on adults within the family (e.g. Edwards, 2015; Isaacs et al., 2020; Raniga & Mthembu, 2016; Vermeulen & Greeff, 2015), yet children are an integral part of the family. If one is to develop family interventions, write policies and make decisions which include children, then one must consult the children on their perceptions of different aspects of family and family functioning (Drory, 2018; Yoon & Templeton, 2019). It is important to understand children's standpoint in the context of their own lives and treat them and their knowledge as valuable (Fattore et al., 2017). Knowing what is important to them in terms of family processes will be invaluable in the family science literature and developing appropriate interventions. Children have experiences that they have learnt and are able to reproduce these experiences to a researcher in the way they have embodied the practices and experiences (Colliver, 2017; Harcourt et al., 2011).

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1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to explore children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience processes

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. explore children's experiences and understanding of the role of the family and family life
2. explore children's experiences and perspectives of communication, organisational processes, and belief systems within their families

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1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction. Chapter 1 describes the background and rational of the study. The current investigation serves an important contribution to the under researched terrain of children's voice with regards to their perceptions and experiences of their family life and family resilience processes. The chapter also presents the problem statement which triggered the need for this study in a bid to bridge the gap in literature and add knowledge that will furnish researchers with information of how to communicate and interact with children about their families, and how best to design family programmes targeted for children. The chapter concludes with the aims and objectives that will guide the study in addressing the research problem.

Chapter 2: Literature review. Chapter two conceptualises the research problem using relevant literature. The chapter first defines and describes the family institution as a social system. The literature on resilience, both family and child resilience, and its applicability to the South African context is described in this chapter. Chapter two also discusses the two theoretical frameworks employed in the study thus the Walsh Family resilience theoretical framework and the Child standpoint theory. Overall, the chapter gives a conceptual background of all the relevant constructs in exploring children's experiences and perceptions of their family, family life and family resilience.

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Chapter 3: Method. This chapter provides a description and rationale of the methodology employed in the study. The chapter reports in detail the research design used, how participants were selected, the sampling method and research context. The chapter also explains the data collection procedure from obtaining permission, the pilot study to the data collection. Furthermore, the chapter explains how thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006). Chapter three also describes in detail challenges and the measures which were taken throughout the research process to ensure that data saturation was reached, ethical considerations were adhered to, and reflexivity and trustworthiness was obtained.

Chapter 4: Findings. In accordance with the thematic analysis guidelines, this chapter reports the findings that were yielded from the interviews. The chapter presents the themes that were generated through the researcher's active engagement with the data.

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Chapter 5: Discussion. This chapter is a discussion of the prominent findings outlined in the previous chapter (chapter 4) and how these results resonate with the aims and objectives of the study. Additionally, the chapter provides a synopsis of the difference and similarities of the findings compared to previous studies outlined in the literature review (chapter 2). The chapter also discusses how the theoretical frameworks align and are in possible contrast with the results obtained.

Chapter 6: Conclusion. The final chapter summarises findings of the study, the practical and theoretical implications of the study, the limitations that might have compromised the findings of the study and future recommendations for future studies similar to the present study.

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Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

It is axiomatic that family is a crucial social structure important for the development of a child. This is evidenced by research on children and family studies (Baxter et al., 2011; Kim, 2002; Reay, 2018). Davilla and Pearson (1994) have argued for integrating children's life experiences with the family discourse, with particular focus on how they enter the family and are transformed by the multiple and contradictory practices of everyday life. Such an analysis can be best narrated by the children themselves. The available literature on children's perceptions of their family and family functioning is however sparse, particularly in the South African context, as most studies have focused on parenting processes and individual resilience (Masten & Barnes, 2018). A study by Louw (2018), which investigated adolescents' perception of family resilience in an absentee-father family, is the only other study that sought to highlight children's perceptions of family and family resilience in the South African context. Louw (2018) also acknowledged this substantial gap in literature and recommended future studies pay particular attention to children's perspectives of the family and family resilience.

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There is some literature on children within the family and a fair portion of literature on children's views when it comes to issues pertaining to their wellbeing (see Adams et al., 2019; Pannilage, 2017). There is, however, a gap in the family and family resilience literature which account for the child's voice pertaining to their understanding of the family system to which they belong. This is partly as a result of the previous assumed misconception that by excluding children, caregivers are protecting the children and that primary caregivers have intimate knowledge of their children and knows better what is best for them (Pope et al., 2017). This literature review chapter will start by defining the concepts of family and family resilience and then children and family studies providing an account of how the family system impacts the child. Research that has been done with children as participants will also be illustrated. The final segment of the literature review summarises the theoretical frameworks that were employed in the study.

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2.2 Defining the Family

In a child's drawing of their family, their picture usually consists of two adults (male and female) to represent father figure and mother figure, and them in the middle projecting a gesture of unity and dependency which is a fundamental principle of the family's existence and functioning (Habenicht et al., 1990; Mrunal, 2018; Stein, 2013) Defining the term 'family', however, is complex (Amoateng, 2015), and goes beyond the simple interpretation of the child's drawing. The United Nations supports this complexity by suggesting that the term family should always be interpreted as broadly as possible, in accordance with appropriate local usage (United Nations (UN), 2001). This is important because the concept and policies governing the family vary in different communities. It has become the government's responsibility to report how the concept and scope of the family is constructed or defined in their own society and legal system residence (White Paper on Families, 2021; UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), 1990). This task is, however, difficult in a multicultural, multiracial, and modernised societies like South Africa (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Hall & Mokomane, 2018).

Defining the family within a South African context is challenging and this challenge is often reported from a socio-historical standpoint. During apartheid, South African families were seen only as the 'white', nuclear family (Roman et al., 2016). The bigotry of apartheid, family policies and capitalism, saw most 'black' families being forced into becoming migrant workers, leaving families behind to go work in different locales (Manderson & Block, 2016; Patel, 2005; Rabe, 2017a). To date, South Africa is only growing in family diversity and has experienced myriad changes in opinions on matters regarding the family structures (Rabe, 2017a). The legal recognition of lesbian gay bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ+) community and same-sex marriage changes (which also further complicates the definition of family) attest to such family dynamic changes (Murphy, 2015; Rabe, 2017a; 2017b).

The *White Paper* defines family "as a societal group that is related by blood (kinship), adoption, foster care or the ties of marriage (civil, customary or religious), civil union or cohabitation, and go beyond a particular physical residence (White Paper on Families, 2021, p10). Similarly, Scott (2014) also defined family as "a social group of people related to one another by ties of blood, sexual mating, legal ties, or other relationships but collectively share

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a sense of unity, interact with one another, and share similar characteristics" (p.238). This is a particularly comprehensive definition.

As the family has been defined in numerous ways by researchers and practitioners what remains constant is the idea of a group of people (two or more), who share a connection, are accountable for the wellbeing of the unit as well as the individuals involved (Isaacs et al., 2019). Given the complex situatedness of South Africa, where a combination of political, social, epidemiological, and economic factors significantly moulds family existence (Goldberg, 2013; Roman et al., 2016), it is imperative that when relating to South African families, one considers more than the nuclear family of only biological parents (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Roman et al., 2016). Rather, it is important to incorporate third-generation families, lone-parent families, stepfamilies, cohabiting couples, caregivers and/or guardians who may be non-biological and non-legal as well as gay and lesbian couples with or without children, (Isaacs et al., 2017b; Roman et al., 2016). In the same vein, the current study adopts a similar definition when referring to or defining family throughout this paper.

2.3 Critical family factors in supporting children's development in South Africa

According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological system, a family is the closest system with the greatest impact on a child's interpretation of the environment around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1986;2018). The importance of family to an individual cannot be over emphasised as it contributes immensely to one's personality and their standpoint of the world around them. The family as a primary agent of social integration and of behaviour can be described in terms of its *structure* and *functions* (Law, 2013; McCarthy & Edwards, 2010).

Family structure pertains to the different forms of family compositions which range from being married, remarried, cohabiting, single parents, heterosexual and homosexual, child headed, three generations and skip generation families (Assari et al., 2017; Patterson, 2002; Sharma, 2013). In South Africa, the dismantlement of family structure as a result of the historical aftermath of the apartheid regime among other diverse changes has contributed to the difficulty in defining the term family (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Savahl et al., 2015). The *White Paper* attest that political and socio-economic factors have eroded the family structure in South Africa and reiterate that no single definition of family can fully comprehend the different multiple types of families in South Africa (White Paper on

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Families, 2021). The *White paper* categorised different types of families into 14 different groups or structures. The most common types were three-generation, absent-spouse, single parent, child-headed and siblings' families (DSD, 2008)[3].

Family functioning refers to the operations of the family and pertains to the pattern of relationship between members of the family and their ability to fulfil important obligations to each other individually and to the society as a collective unit (Botha et al., 2018; Slezackova & Sobotkova, 2017; Zaharia, 2019; Walsh, 2020). It is the family's responsibility to provide basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter for each member and although some families may not be financially supportive, it remains the family's responsibility to support members socially, emotionally, and economically (Zaharia, 2019). The primary function of the family is also considered to be family formation and membership thus rearing children and preparing them to be productive members of the society (Patterson, 2002; Zaharia, 2019). The family unit also fulfils an important role in child development and socialisation and in protection of its vulnerable members, thus the ability of a family to withstand adversity rests upon the family functioning processes (Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 2016).

Current statistics on the so-called structures of South African families provides an insight and evidence of contributing factors to the diverse and unconventional form of the family institutions in South Africa. Although disconcerting, it is not surprising, as indicated by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2019) in the mid-2019 report that only 30% of SA children live with both parents. Some of the contributing factors as identified by the *White paper* include but are not limited to the following: Firstly, the significant increase in the rate of teenage pregnancy in South Africa, most of which are unplanned, contributes to the three-generation and absent-spouse types of families (White Paper on Families, 2021). According to Stats SA (2018) 39.4% of births recorded in 2018 were from mothers between the ages 10-14 years and 62,7% of those births did not contain information on the father. Secondly, the long-term effects of South African migrant labour and poor socio-economic resources notwithstanding, the absent-spouse and single parent types of families can be attributed to the high non-marital pregnancies and high divorce rates. Stats SA (2021) recorded 129 597

[3] DSD- Department of Social Development of South Africa

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civil marriages and 2 789 customary marriages in 2019 (total of 132 386 registered marriages); and 23 710 divorces were granted in 2019 which affected 22 084 children aged 18 years and younger through the divorces that took place (Stats SA, 2021). This also explains the 63% of SA children reported to be growing up in households with mostly one female adult (Stats SA, 2021). Thirdly, the HIV and Aids pandemic also contributes to the demise of the family structure in SA as there was an estimation of 7,97 million people living with HIV (PLWHIV) in 2019 (Spencer et al., 2019), with a 19.07% of the population of PLWHIV aged between 15-49. Furthermore, in 2019, 23.4% of the deaths in South Africa were HIV related (Stats, 2019), leading to an increase in child-headed and siblings' families. Lastly, socioeconomic, and political issues such as poverty and migration has resulted in provinces like the Eastern Cape and Gauteng to experience the largest number of outflow of migrants resulting in single-headed, child-headed or third generation family structures (Manderson & Block, 2016; Stats SA 2019). According to Shung-King et al. (2019), in 2018, the South African child gauge recorded 19.7 million children living in South Africa and of these 14% of the children were orphans who had lost one or both parents, 20% of the children did not live with either of their biological parents and 0.3% of the children, which equates to about 55,000 children lived in child-only households. Given that the issues of child-headed households are a societal problem (Mturi, 2012; Newlin et al., 2016; Pillay, 2016) the number of children living in child-headed households is concerning as the majority of these children are living in poverty (Hall & Mokomane, 2018). Although it is legal to start working at the age of 15, about 4% of children in child-headed households are under six years of age (Shung-King et al., 2019).

The statistics mentioned above does not only affect the structure of the family but exacerbates tension on family functioning and has detrimental effects particularly to the children (Goldberg, 2013; Holborn, & Eddy, 2011; Roman et al., 2016). This is an especially important consideration in view of the South African family and how it functions. Family functioning is affected by external and internal factors which consequently affect the child's functioning, well-being, and development. Most disadvantaged communities are characterised by low education levels and high rates of unemployment, excessive crime, and violence, gangsterism and substance abuse which impacts the family and children immensely (Savahl et al., 2015). Such reality has ignited studies to measure how well families are doing in the post-apartheid era (Roman et al., 2016), how families can be healed (Holborn & Eddy,

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2011) and also an investigation on and investment in policies that can be put in place to assist families (Isaacs et al., 2018; Rabe 2017a; 2017b; 2017c).

The next section of this literature review explains an important concept of family resilience, beginning with the origins of resilience science in children to the definitions of resilience and family resilience, and then ending with an account of resilience in the South African context, given the challenges South African families may face(Isaacs et al., 2018). Studies that have been done in the family resilience area in South Africa are also presented.

2.4 Family Resilience

2.4.1 Origins of Resilience Science in Children

The grassroots of resilience science are in child psychiatry and developmental psychology (Henderson & Denny, 2015). In child psychiatry, the intrigue was brought forth based on Freud's early longstanding assumptions that early negative detrimental experiences give rise to adult psychopathology and these initial ideas provided a powerful foundation and empirical model for resilience research (Masten & Barnes, 2018). The conceptualisation of child resilience was motivated by studies of children who experienced overwhelming childhood trauma as a result of wars, political violence, and other early experiences which left the children traumatised and vulnerable (Masten, 2014; Vernon, 2004). Most of these studies were by researchers who had experiences of World War 2 (WW2) who were now interested in determining children's experiences because of the war and how best to assist the children (Garmezy,1971; Masten, 2014; Werner, 2000). In conjunction with the above, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) was then formed in 1946 in an endeavour to provide relief and help children recover from aftermaths of wars, disasters and any other catastrophes that can threaten the child's livelihood (Mingst, 2020).

Initial studies on resilience typically focused on risk factors leading to psychopathologies, with a focus of examining effects of various childhood traumas on later development, and variables that correlated with later dysfunctional behaviour (Masten, 2018). Garmezy (1971), during his experiment with individuals with schizophrenia, discovered a remarkable positive adjustment and competence in children whose parents had schizophrenia and did not present with schizophrenia themselves. Garmezy (1971) called for the shift of

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focus from studying risk factors but to lean on understanding the force that drove children to survive and adapt (Vernon, 2004). Research in child resilience evolved as researchers continued to discover different variations on high-risk children, who even after experiencing the most gruesome experiences (incarceration in concentration camps, rape, parental separation, sexual and physical abuse, war, natural disaster traumas), survived and lived 'normal' lives (Masten, 2014; Richardson, 2002; Vernon, 2004; Werner & Smith, 1982). Antony and Cohler (1987) in their book later described these children as "the invulnerable child". Attention was then placed on protective factors rather than risk factors focusing on children doing well so as to comprehend the recovery process and help other children not coping or recovering well (Maholmes, 2014).

2.4.2 The evolution of resilience research

As a result of shifts and new discoveries through research and studies of children facing adversity, four waves of resilience research have emerged, and we are currently in the fourth wave. As postulated by Sapienza and Masten (2011), each wave furthered a more complex but integrative definition of resilience. It is important to note that there were no clear-cut periods of each wave as researcher from all over the world embarked on individual studies and progressions (Wright et al., 2013).

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The first wave focused on the question "Who is resilient?" This question was descriptive, concerned only about the qualities of resilience (Richardson, 2002). It is important to note that early research focused on children on an individual level and children who were able to develop constructively regardless of the destructive childhood exposed to them, who became known as "the invulnerable child" (Anthony & Cohler, 1987). The belief then was that people had inherent, inner fortitude and qualities that helped them survive (Wright et al., 2013). The question, hence, was on what made a difference and against a background of risk, how could resilience and positive adaptation be measured (Sapienza & Masten, 2011; Wright et al., 2013). During this wave and through to the second wave, the focus shifted from looking at risk factors that lead to psychosocial problems to the strengths that helped people *overcome* the risk. Resilience then was defined simply in terms of achievement and accomplishments of adversaries through the strengths of the individual

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which included intrapersonal and interpersonal skills like self-concept, self-efficacy, confidence, and optimism (Kim & Yoo, 2010).

The second wave moved to process questions, asking, and investigating how the resilience qualities discovered in the first wave were acquired (Henry et al., 2015; Richardson, 2002). In this wave the same definition of resilience still applied but studies were more interested in the *process* of resilience. Questions now focused on how the qualities of resilience, or the protective factors worked as resilience was not seen as a single event but rather a process important to understand so as to promote resilience in other children (Masten, 2014).

In the third wave, research questions focused on "if" and "how" resilience could be promoted through interventions. The aim of this wave was to look at the protective factors and processes to develop interventions that could assist in the promotion of resilience in cases where it would not occur naturally (Henry et al., 2015; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).The first two waves pose important questions which to date are still fundamental in the study of resilience, and it is in the third wave that knowledge from these waves began to be transformed into actions to promote resilience ((Masten, 2007; Wright et al., 2013).

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The wave that we are currently in is very complex and goes on to demonstrate how resilience science has expanded into multi-interacting levels that influence individual development (Masten,2007; 2014). In this wave, Sapienza and Masten (2011) define resilience as "the capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development" (p. 268). Masten (2018) reiterates this definition as she advocates for a definition scalable across different system levels and defines resilience as "the capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten the function, viability, or development of the system" (p16). Thus, the capacity of an individual to adapt to challenges and manifest positive adaptations depends on the strength of their social system and their connectedness with other people (Masten & Barnes, 2018). The realm of resilience has moved to include individual, family, community, and socio ecological systems, and as advocated and echoed by Masten and her colleagues, this definition is applicable to many kinds of systems, from genetic, brain and cell level to whole individuals, communities, societies, ecosystems, broad social–ecological systems,

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global and family systems (Masten, 2018; Masten & Barnes, 2018; Sapienza & Masten, 2011, p. 268; Wright et al., 2013). Given the concern of fragmented and challenged families in South Africa, the current study is keen to understand how children understand the family as a functional system as it influences and contribute immensely to their resilience and wellbeing.

2.4.3 Defining family resilience

Froma Walsh, defines family resilience as "the capacity of the family, as a functional system, to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges – emerging strengthened and more resourceful" (Walsh, 2016, p.4). It is the family's ability to cultivate strength in order to positively meet the challenges of life. In this definition, parents or caregivers, have a greater responsibility to safeguard children from overwhelming stressors that can be detrimental to their wellbeing and overall development (Masten, 2018). It is not surprising then, given the South African socio-political history, the diverse culture, and other socioeconomic factors that accompanied the aftermath of apartheid, that most South African families still struggle to cultivate this strength. Most families are still entangled and trapped in settings and locales that not only affect individuals but are detrimental to the uphold of the family structure and function which affects the family's resilience (Roman et al., 2016).

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Family resilience has been explained through studies of family stress and coping theories. It has been highlighted as the process the family engages in, as an effort to balance family demands with family capabilities (Reay, 2019). Success in managing a situation becomes a precedent for future challenges and the foundation of family's norms and values (Patterson, 2002). The shared perception through rituals and routines becomes the family's identity, distinguishing them from other families and such values are transmitted across generations (Patterson,2002; Wolin & Bennett, 1984). According to Reay (2019) routines are repetitive, recognisable patterns and acts adopted by a family that signifies the family's core values and beliefs. Routines provide resilience through the prolonged supportive relationships forged out of the permanent pressure placed on the family hence crucial for the maintenance of family stability and the development of a strong family identity (Reay, 2019).

In addition to strengthening resilience processes, family routines are often used to assess health beliefs and were successfully employed as therapeutic interventions as a means

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for healing and progressing (Denham, 2003). Family routines also play an important role on children's wellbeing. It is important to consider that when children are engaged in modifying family routines, they feel valued and appreciated (Fiese et al., 2006). This will, in turn cause an increase in self-efficacy in the family, increasing chances of problem solving, and also increasing the commitment of children to the family (Fiese et al., 2006; Kiser et al., 2005). The family then uses their own coping behaviour to adjust and adapt to their situations by striking a balance between what the family faces, what the family has, and what the family can do.

2.4.4 Family resilience in the South African context

In 1981, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights declared the family the custodians of morals and traditional values vital and so should be protected by state. Later, the year 1994 was declared the International Year of the Family in which the importance and need for the state to protect the family was reiterated (Law, 2013). The10th anniversary of the Year of the Family was in 2004 and conferences were held to evaluate the progress made in terms of protecting the rights of the family (Law, 2013).

The importance of family is reflected in both academic literature, clinical practice, and governmental policies, however apart from some efforts to support families within existing social programmes, most African countries do not have family policies (Patel et al., 2018). South Africa is one of the few countries in the Global South that have family policies for the direct and indirect benefit of the family (White Paper on Families, 2021; Kelly, 2019). Even so, South African families are still vulnerable to challenges as a result of the immense stresses placed on the family (Isaacs et al., 2018). The vulnerability to breakdown of South African families is exacerbated by the increasing child headed, and female headed households as a result of unwanted pregnancies and death by disease (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Shung-King et al., 2019). Further, the increasing violence and crime, particularly in low socioeconomic communities, inadequate health, inadequate infrastructure, and poor social services due to informal settlements do not make it any easier for the optimum functioning of the South African families (Hendricks et al., 2015; Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Increase in substance abuse particularly by adolescents, as noted earlier, also contributes to immense pressure put on families (Olawole-Isaac et al., 2018). With these factors at the forefront of

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most caregivers' minds, the focus then is on survival and not necessarily the impacts on the future development of a child. As a result, substantial research has been engrossed on family and family resilience studies (Goldberg, 2013; Greeff & Lawrence, 2012; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Isaacs et al., 2017; 2018; Rabe, 2017b; Roman et al., 2016), in an endeavour to provide and support interventions crafted particularly for South African families to enhance optimal functioning of South African families.

2.5 Children's contributions to and position in child and family studies

A child can be defined as any young human being or person below the legal age of majority, and this legal age differs from constitutions, laws, and countries (Morrow, 2011). More recently, particularly in South Africa, several studies have been conducted in an effort to promote children's wellbeing and efforts have been made to study children's subjective wellbeing within their primary environment (e.g., Adams et al., 2018; Casas & González-Carrasco, 2019; Savahl et al., 2019). This section seeks to demonstrate some of the studies that have involved children as participants within the family framework.

Morrow's study can be regarded as among the first prominent studies that sought to investigate children's perspectives on families (Morrow, 1998). The study was qualitative in nature with 183 participants between the ages of 8-14 years from two parts of East Anglia, UK (a rural area and a large town). The aim of the study was to understand the extent to which children's views confirmed the stereotypical images of the family, what children viewed as important characteristics of a family and whether or not the children felt that their views are heard or not, and if they want to be involved in decisions concerning them. Results from this study affirmed the importance of listening to children when making decisions that concerns them. In the qualitative study, although different age groups described family differently (for example, younger children gave more concrete examples and older children were more abstract), the findings showed that children's interpretations of the family were unorthodox. Traditionally, the image of the nuclear family was bound by genetic ties but children in this study had a more pragmatic view of family life placing people readily available to them and around them as more critical than biological ties. This demonstrates how important proximity and responsiveness is to children. The children in the study belonged to different ethnic groups and different societies but both boys and girls agreed that

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family was characterised by love, care, mutual respect, and support. The children in the study also highlighted different views with regards what children's rights should be, being listened to and having a say in decisions (Morrow, 1998).

The research by Morrow (1998), used a number of structured and unstructured qualitative methods which included open-ended group discussions, sentence completion, a task to draw and write about who was important to them and a short questionnaire asking whether or not five, one sentence descriptions of family type (vignettes) counted as family. Morrow's study also had a large number of participants hence the use of group discussions instead of individual in-depth interviews to explore each child's interpretation of his or her own family. Although focus groups help create a safe peer environment for children (Adler et al., 2019), a number of studies (Heary & Hennessy, 2012; Michell,1999) have indicated that children are more forthcoming and vocal about issues concerning personal and family difficulties in personal interviews. There is a dearth of research among South African children with regards to their views on family and family functioning. The current study seeks to gain an in-depth description (through semi-structured interviews) of children's individual perceptions of their families and more unique ideas about their views on family by allowing the children to fully express themselves while telling their own story.

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The notion that children's perception of their wellbeing is subject to their interpretation of the environment around them seem to be irrefutable as evidenced by studies investigating the correlation between social environment and children's subjective well-being (see e.g., Adams et al., 2019; Bronfenbrenner, 2018; González-Carrasco et al., 2019; Grzegorzewska & Farnicka, 2013; Zaslofsky, 2015). Lawler et al. (2018) employed an ecological relationship-based model to examine children's subjective wellbeing. The study examined subjective well-being of 10-12-year-olds in two different rural communities, rural South Korea and rural United States. They found that in both communities' family relationship quality, parent involvement, and school satisfaction predicted subjective well-being. The results were similar to previous findings by Lee and Yoo (2015), who in their study investigated the correlation between family, school and community and children's subjective well-being of a sample of 12,077 children across 14 countries. Findings were that perceptions of school, home and community safety positively correlated with children's subjective well-being.

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Although studies mentioned above have tried to demonstrate how protective processes acquired at the microsystem level (self, family, community) contribute to resilience, many of these studies do not provide a depth of children's insights to family life per se. In addition, it can be argued that most of these studies were conducted in much better-resourced settings which can be considered alien to challenges faced by most African, low-resourced communities (Betancourt et al, 2011). South Africa falls under this blanket and issues of racial differences and discrimination, multicultural traditions and belief divergences, socioeconomic disparity and gender roles play a significant role in coercing the child's interpretation and understanding of their lives (Adams et al., 2017).When studying children's well-being in South Africa, therefore, it is critical to consider the socio-historical backdrop of apartheid as it significantly contribute to the different socioeconomic statuses with the majority living in disadvantaged poor locale characterised by poor housings, lack of resources, low education opportunities, unemployment and poverty (Savahl et al., 2016).

Savahl et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study with adolescents in impoverished communities in Cape Town, South African and found personal safety and security to be a 'non-negotiable' condition for the wellbeing of the children in the study. In 2018, González-Carrasco and colleagues also investigated children's perspectives and evaluations of safety and their subjective well-being in four different settings. Participating countries were South Africa, Spain, Algeria and Israel and results indicated that children's perceptions of safety were predicted by their different perceptions and evaluations of school, home, and the nearby area. Results from the study indicated that locality plays an important and crucial role in determining children's subjective wellbeing. Interesting to note, was how South African children scored below the mean for perceptions of safety in homes and nearby area, whereas other children from other countries scored above the mean in this regard. This can be attributed to the fact that in South Africa children experience the uppermost rates of inequality and child violence hence exposure to and being victims of violence significantly impacts the child's subjective well-being (Adams et al., 2017; Savahl et al., 2013).

The studies described above illustrate the imperative to investigate children's understanding of the family structure from a child's point of view. These studies demonstrate what children believe is important to them in their own development. As shown in this section, there is a growing impetus to accumulate knowledge for the benefit of implementing

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interventions and policies fit to promote resilience in children and families in South Africa. The next section is a brief discussion of the two theoretical frameworks crucial to the current study.

2.6 Theoretical frameworks: Child Standpoint and Walsh's Family Resilience Theory

The study uses two theoretical frameworks, Child Standpoint and Walsh family resilience framework. The notion that children's rights be held by parents until a certain age has for decades been regarded as the most protective and best condition for a child to develop (Nixon, 2010). Until recently children have been viewed as '*adult in defici',* however the overwhelming evidence from numerous studies in the twentieth and twenty first centuries have prompted a reconstruction of childhood (Fattore et al, 2017; Savahl et al., 2021; Sidorenko, 2015; Young-Bruehl, 2012; Zelizer, 1994). Research has shown that children are active social agents who shape the structures and processes around them and hence have every right to be heard and treated as experts and important informants on their perspectives (Fattore et al., 2016; González-Carrasco et al., 2018; Richter & Smith, 2006).This line of thought has raised questions about how children conceptualise their rights, and in turn has motivated scholars to develop a child standpoint framework (Medina-Minton, 2019).The current study adopted the Child Standpoint framework as the epistemological and methodological frame of the study, in an endeavour to acknowledge and express the importance of speaking to children themselves as evidenced by the results of the current qualitative enquiry. The Child Standpoint framework is crucial for this study as the results obtained have theoretical and practical implications for policy and practice. The Child Standpoint framework is an uncharted territory still growing, nevertheless, the framework is important to this study as it helps illustrate the importance of children's voices to be heard and valued especially in the family context as a child-centred-ethos can benefit family policy developments much needed by the fragile South African families.

The Walsh family resilience framework acknowledges the family's potential to "bounce back", transform and evolve in response to crisis, and/or under prolonged adversity (Walsh, 2016). This framework allows for the exploration of the family's stressor in the context applicable to them and is cognisant of the family's unique set of challenges, including their values, resources, belief systems as well as the structure of the family (Walsh, 2003).

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The family resilience framework is relevant to the current study as the current study seeks to explore children's experiences and perceptions of their family and family resilience among children from low- to middle social economic communities in South Africa. The following sections briefly explains these two frameworks.

2.6.1 Child standpoint theory (CST) as an epistemological and methodological frame

Following the endorsement of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) studying children's subjective well-being has subsequently advanced such that it is now well established in literature that studying children's subjective perceptions, understandings and evaluations of their lives is critical in assessing their overall well-being and quality of life (Casas 2011; Raats et al, 2018). Much emphasis is on children being actively involved in measuring and monitoring their own wellbeing which has led to important insights with regards to the subject matter (Fattore et al ,2009; Raats et al., 2018). There are arguments, however, that even when children participate in decisions affecting them their rights are still limited in practise (Stoecklin,2019), hence the basis of the child standpoint theory (CST).

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Standpoint theory identifies a power differential between a group in power and an oppressed group, and the child standpoint theory identifies children as the oppressed group (Medina-Minton, 2019). The CST identifies two types of oppression suffered by children: marginalised and powerlessness (Medina-Minton, 2019). Children are marginalised in the family when they are placed in an insignificant position in the family and deemed powerless because they are regarded as incapable of decision making until they reach a certain age approved by the adults (Du Bois, 1994; Mason, 2008; Percy-Smith & Nigel, 2010). The power differential though well-meant can negatively impact the child's development. This, however, does not imply that children should be on the same decision -making level as parents but that there is value in realising the importance of age-appropriate decision making.

Furthermore, the notion that children are an oppressed, marginalised, and powerless group also stems from the issue echoed by many scholars that children in research have been situated as objects rather than subjects (Fattore et al, 2009; Medina-Minton, 2019; Savahl; 2017). In this regard, researchers should always be cognisant of the importance of enabling children to express themselves adequately to the researcher during data collection as they

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often feel unimportant and marginalised in the adult dominated society (Punch, 2015). A standpoint theory aims to provide a different view, and interpretations from the lenses of the marginal group, which are usually contrary to the ones held by the dominant group (Kokushkin, 2014). As such, CST seeks to provide an understanding of the perspectives of a child, from the position of the child (Medina-Minton, 2019). This study intends to reiterate the importance of listening to children and to reveal the potential which can be found within children. Some of the questions the children were asked were, do your family members have typical 'roles' they play? Is there a 'leader'? What do you think your role is within your family? What do you think your family could do better? These questions assisted to highlight the importance of recognising children as important informants and active members of the family. They may also lead to a different needs' assessment in developing interventions for South African families (Medina-Minton, 2019).

2.6.2 The Walsh Family Resilience Framework

The family resilience framework is deeply rooted in developmental and ecological theories. These theories put an emphasis on the value of both the individual and their environment and attest that the environment plays an equal part if not greater in fostering positive response to a crisis as compared to one's individual capacity (Masten, 2014; Theron & Theron, 2010; Ungar, 2012). The Walsh Family resilience framework illustrates crucial variables that contribute to the well -functioning of the family and individual resilience, especially within the context of adversity (Walsh,2003). Walsh integrated key family processes and created a conceptual model with three overarching constructs which relate to family functioning, namely, family belief systems, organisational processes, and communication and problem solving. Each of the main constructs contain three sub-constructs. The figure below presents a summary of the nine key processes of the Family resilience framework which will be briefly discussed in this section.

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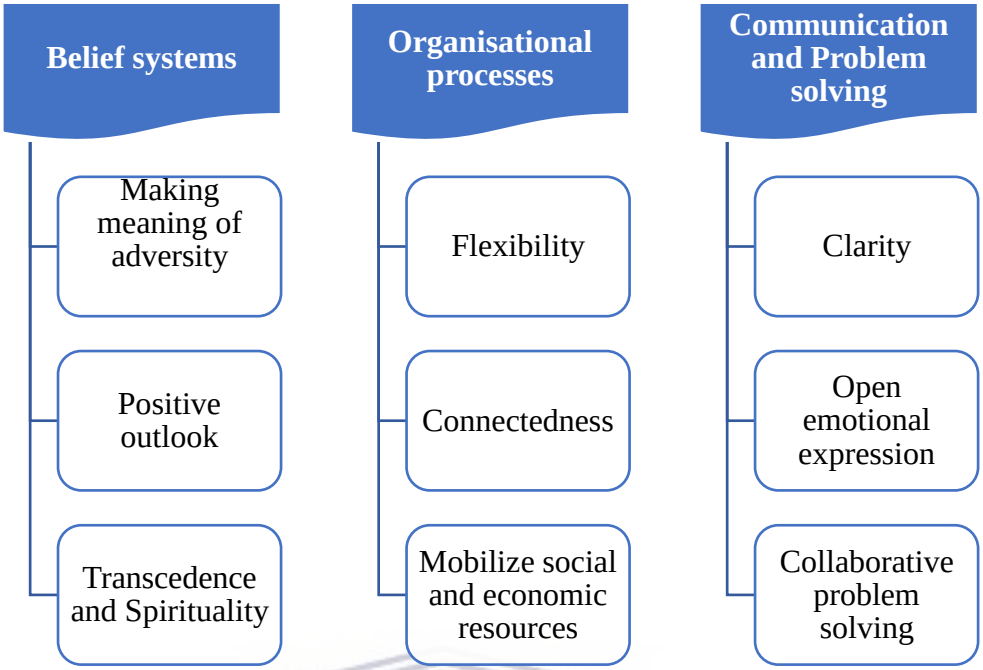

Figure 1 Walsh family resilience framework (Walsh, 2002; 2016a; 2016b)

Family Belief Systems. Belief systems are at the heart of the family resilience framework and greatly influence the way the family responds to a crisis (Nadrowska et al., 2017). According to Walsh (2016), "Belief systems broadly encompass values, convictions, attitudes, biases, and assumptions, which coalesce to form a set of basic premises that trigger emotional responses, inform decisions, and guide actions" (p. 40). The family's shared beliefs which are usually transmitted from generation to generation through storytelling, routines, and cultural activities, shapes the family's norms, values, and identity (Imber-Black, 2012). In this construct there are three sub-constructs which are making meaning of adversity, positive outlook, and transcendence and spirituality. The families' success in overcoming adversity is mainly rooted on how the family views and makes meaning of their experiences (Basu et al., 2021). The family's belief systems also include their locus of control and their idea of connectedness, which also influences what family members view as resolutions to their challenges (Walsh, 2014). Meaning making serves as a buffer against adversities the family might be going through, hence it is important to develop an understanding of events occurring and make sense of the situation (Walsh, 2016). The family can better overcome life challenges if they believe that they are stronger together, if they have a positive attitude towards challenges and view them as meaningful and manageable, and also if they have hope

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and a shared confidence in overcoming challenges (Bethell et al., 2019; Nadrowska et al., 2017). Walsh equates hope to the oxygen needed by the lungs to survive alluding that hope gives the family the willpower and a positive outlook for a brighter future during a bleak present (Walsh, 2014). Holding on to successful experiences and how the family overcame previous challenges (learned optimism) can help the family develop an optimistic future (Walsh 2003; Isaacs 2018). The last sub-construct relates to transcendence and spirituality which speaks to finding strength and guidance in adversity (Walsh, 2003). When tragedy occurs, religious beliefs are usually a common source of meaning and hope if the family's beliefs are rooted in the power of a higher deity (Koerner et al., 2013). Religion and spirituality play an important role particularly in the African culture as it might be a source of comfort or a well of support to be drawn on for resilience (Haji et al., 2018; Walsh, 1998; 2020).

Organisational processes. Family belief systems and cultural norms help the family to build up organisational patterns and resources needed in the time of distress (Walsh, 2012). Effective family functioning can be fostered through flexibility, connectedness, and social and economic resources (Walsh, 2012). Organisational processes (patterns) refer to the flexibility of the family structure that includes the roles and responsibilities of family members, rules and routines that guide family patterns and how the family is organised in terms of leadership (Edwards, 2015; Slezackova & Sobotkova, 2017; Walsh, 2006). Families need to build flexible structures to help them quickly adapt and adjust to changes they encounter (internal or external) and meet new challenges (Greeff & Lawrence, 2012). Family needs to be able to move forward especially after major losses or changes in the structure of the family that would have caused major disruption (Slezackova & Sobotkova, 2017). The family needs to work together and seek reconnection and repair grievances (Bethell et al., 2019). As rituals and routines help reinforce the family identity, they also foster healing and enable stabilisation and continuation of the family's tradition and connectedness (Masten & Monn, 2015; Reay,2019). A sense of connectedness helps family members to be emotionally bonded enhancing cohesion and a sense of security within the family (Masten, 2018; Walsh, 2006). Cohesion in the family also implies members understanding and accepting individual differences in opinions, needs and goals. Connectedness in the family is also important especially for children as it influences their psychological wellbeing (Walsh, 2012).

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Community and religious congregations also provide support to families in distress by promoting a sense of belonging and providing social, emotional, and economical support (Masten & Monn, 2015). One example is the practice of burial societies (e.g., The Goodwill burial society or the Old Mutual's burial society support plan) where members of the group continuously contribute money which can be used if any member loses a loved one. Such linkages with the social world are vitally important for family resilience as the community offers respite, solidarity, and companionship in times of crisis (Edwards, 2015; Isaacs et al., 2018). Social support from community or professionals and involvement in community groups and congregations strengthens resilience and is fruitful in helping families' or members 'bounce back' (Isaacs et al., 2019; Walsh,2003). Economic resources and financial security also play a role in resilience (Lewis, 2018). Most families engrossed in poverty or persistently experiencing unemployment and financial strains need support from social and governmental bodies to foster their ability to thrive (Isaacs et al., 2018; Maholmes, 2014; Roman et al., 2016). In South Africa, different grants are in place to support individuals at risk and there are also many non-profit organisations in communities aimed at improving the lives of community members (Köhler & Bhorat, 2020). These efforts alone are however inadequate to alleviate and break the cycle of poverty particularly in low-socioeconomic communities given the magnitude of unemployment and financially vulnerable households and the miscellaneous issues around the distribution of the grants (Mazibuko, 2021).

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Communication and Problem Solving. The third and final over-arching construct of family resilience highlighted by Walsh (2006) is communication and problem solving. This family resilience process is facilitated by clear and consistent messages, open emotional expression with tolerance of differences and individual ownership of feelings, and collaborative ways of solving problems that are proactive, goal-oriented, and based on fairness and reciprocity (Anderson et al., 2013).

Clarity in communication is the ability to convey messages that are not vague and ambiguous which is essential for the well-functioning of the family as it yields a shared understanding (Walsh, 2016; Isaacs, 2018). During challenging periods, the family might be facing, communication can be dented which can result in unresolved issues, unspoken tension and misunderstanding between members (Power et al., 2016). If the family, however, consistently follow family rules, behaviour can be monitored, and this can help the family to

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effectively respond and coordinate during crisis events (Bates et al., 2021). It is important for family members to have honest and open conversations on how each member interprets the occurring events. Clarity in communication dismantles the incorrect perceptions and assumptions members could be having, making situations easier to bear as compared to when life-threatening situations are not acknowledged and discussed (Walsh,2016).

Sharing emotional experiences openly both painful and positive emotions facilitate resilience among family members, and according to Walsh (2016) well-functioning families comfortably show their varying range of emotions. Bottling emotions only results in bitterness and remorse towards members of the family which can be detrimental to the well-functioning of the family (Edwards, 2015; Lewis, 2018; Masten, 2018). Open, and empathic sharing of emotions warrants a climate of mutual trust; however, socialisation and cultural difference always influence the way members are comfortable to fully express their views (Saltzman, 2016; Simon et al., 2005). In some cultures, children are not allowed to express anger and blame towards their parents or elderly family members as this is seen as a sign of disrespect (Masten, 2014). Again, in some culture's women are not allowed to express their emotions if those emotions can be interpreted as challenging and tainting the masculine image (Masten, 2015; Walsh, 2003). In the same way men also fear expressing vulnerability. It is important for members to feel safe to speak truthfully as this can help the family resolve problems better when facing hard times (Raniga & Mthembu, 2016).

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The last element of the communication processes is effective problem-solving practices which are essential for families to deal with crises and persistent challenges. It is human nature and inevitable to live a problem-free relationship. According to Walsh (2002), all relationships will have problems and well-functioning does not mean the absent of problems, but rather, the ability to manage conflict and address problems collaboratively. If family members are proactive and resourceful, new strategies to overcome adversity will emerge.

The family processes mentioned above are mutually interactive and synergistic, both within and across domains and requires a counterbalance for a smooth transition (Walsh, 2016). The family resilience perspective believes in the family's potential to overcome any challenge, self-heal, and grow and its primary focus is on strengths forged under stress, in

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response to crisis rather than focusing on how the family has failed (Isaacs et al., 2018). Given the growing diversity of families in societies, the resilience framework acknowledges the uniqueness of each family in relation to stressors, belief systems and resources and confirms that no single model of healthy functioning fits all families or their situations (Walsh, 2016). Not all families may measure up to the ideal models, but the family resilience framework persists on a positive growth out of adversity which can evolve over the course of life and across generations (Isaacs et al., 2017; Walsh, 2016). The Walsh Family resilience framework is applicable to this study as it gives a guideline to answer three of the main questions in the study; What does communication look like in your family? How does your family typically 'organise' itself? What do you think your family believes in? (Appendix G). Therefore, this theoretical frame guided the development of the questions as well as a frame for the discussion of the results.

2.6.3 The current study

Research has shown that children generally begin to develop and undergo cognitive and socio-emotional development from the age of 6 years going up. In one study children showed that their understanding of adoption and capacity to solve problems heightened with the emergence of adolescence (Brodzinsky, 2011). During adolescence, children have now developed abstract thinking and the capacity to understand not only their feelings but other people's too. In South Africa numerous studies have been done with children as participants for example, a study by Raats et al. (2018) with adolescents was also indicative of children's ability to discern important variables in their lives as they felt satisfied with their lives regardless of the class they belonged to and most importantly family variables such as, family structure, parenting style, parental emotional, social support, and family conflict were important in the attainment of life satisfaction among these adolescents (Raats et al., 2018). Participants chosen for the current study were between the ages of 14-16 years old. This age group is believed to have achieved mental and emotional milestones thus the ability to navigate social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural tasks (Finklestein et al., 2020).

2.7 Chapter conclusion

Studies in South Africa focusing on children's subjective well-being and child space (Adams et al., 2017; Adams et al.,2018), have revealed that for some children their homes and

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families were not a safe place for them, (González-Carrasco et al., 2018; Bedin & Sarriera, 2014). Research on family resilience is much needed to investigate South African families during such turbulent and inequitable socioeconomic times (Roman et al., 2016). Albeit the myriad research on family and family resilience studies and children's subjective wellbeing, a gap remains in literature on children's perception of their families and family resilience, particularly in the South African context. There is much uncharted territory when it comes to understanding the multiple system levels that influence resilience in terms of vulnerability and or protective factors. Extensive research is much needed to understand mechanisms that lead to risk reduction and interventions to foster resilience among vulnerable children and their families (Wright et al., 2013). This study seeks to acquire such an understanding through the children's lens in comprehending family, family functioning and resilience particularly for the benefit of South African families. The next chapter will focus on the methods utilised in this study.

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Chapter 3

Method

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an account of the research approach and procedures employed in this study. The areas which will be discussed includes the research design employed, the participants and data collection procedure and the data analysis technique. The chapter also provides a reflexivity section illustrating how the researcher acknowledges possible biases and the steps taken to ensure that the interview process as well as the data analysis process was conducted as objectively as humanly possible. The closing section of this chapter is the ethics statement which indicates the measures taken by the researcher to ensure that the entire study was conducted in an ethical manner from the beginning of the research study to its completion.

3.2 Research design

The study was explorative in nature as it sought to explore the different perceptions and experiences of children about their family and their families' functioning. A qualitative approach was best suited for the study as it focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding and interpretation of meanings and traits children attach to the concepts of family and family resilience (Flick, 2017). Qualitative samples are purposively made small to produce rich quality information (Young & Casey, 2019). It is an appropriate tool for a comprehensive description of issues pertaining family livelihood without limiting the scope of the research and the nature of participant's responses (Young & Casey, 2019; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

3.3 Participants and the research context

3.3.1 Research context

The research focused on schools in Pretoria, the capital city of South Africa and also a familiar city to the researcher as it is where they reside. There are four education districts in Pretoria, namely Tshwane South, Tshwane North, Tshwane West, and Gauteng North. The initial plan as mentioned in the proposal was to approach several schools in different district, targeting at least 2 schools (picked randomly) per district, but as data collection occurred in

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early 2021 before the COVID-19 vaccine was available, most of the schools did not allow visitors on their premises as a precautionary measure. It was very difficult for the researcher to gain access into the school. The researcher decided to focus on one district, Tshwane South as it was closer to the researcher's proximity, had many schools in the low-socioeconomic communities and provided permission for research to be conducted. A total of six schools were approached from Tshwane South district and three schools gave the researcher permission to carry out the study. The first and second schools were the sites for the pilot study (School A and School B). The actual study then took place at the third school (School C), which is situated at the heart of Pretoria town (CBD) making it accessible to all students coming from different parts of Pretoria. This particular school was the chosen site because most of the children enrolled at the school reside in areas considered to be low to middle socio-economic communities. The school also attributes its 80% pass rate to their tireless collaboration with the family in developing the students holistically and not only academically.

3.3.2 Participants and Sampling

Participants were accessed using purposive and convenience sampling. Of the three schools that agreed to participate (School A, School B and School C), the proposal was then to use two different schools for the main study, School B and School C (one in which the pilot study was also carried out, School B). Gauteng Department of Education approved for the research to be carried out at these two schools (School B and School C), however, owing to the abrupt announcement of the level 3 lockdown during the data collection period, the researcher could not access learners from School B. All ten interviews were hence carried out at one school (School C) within five days.

Convenience sampling involves gathering participants who are easy to contact, willing to participate and available for the study (Flick, 2017). This method was best suited for the study given the limited time the researcher had to collect data before the COVID-19 level 3 lockdown was about to be implemented. This sampling method is also cost-effective and was hence more affordable for the researcher as the school is located in the CBD hence very accessible in terms of transport.

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The sampling method was also purposive in nature as, first, learners had to be between the ages of 14-16 years old. This age group was chosen because most students will be in the adolescent stage, which is a very critical time of life highlighted by many different developmental social and cognitive skills (Csikszentmihalyi, 2021). According to Steinberg (2003), reasoning abilities at this age will usually be fully or nearly developed, hence for this study this age group was able to reflect on their family experiences and their perceptions of events that happens in their family. Second, the leaner had to be able to communicate and express themselves in English. The interviews were conducted in English as this is the only South African language in which the researcher is fluent. Ideally, accommodations would have been made if participants wanted to express themselves in their mother tongue, however owing to limited resources, this was not possible. Fortunately, all participants were very comfortable in English. The principal of the school assisted in the recruitment process of the participants. The principle went to grade 8 and 9 classes announcing and explaining the study to the learners. All learners interested in participating came forward and the first 10 learners participated. After the leaners read through and signed their Assent Forms (Appendix B) they took the information sheets and parental consent forms home for their parents and guardians to sign (Appendix A and Appendix C). Ten learners were interviewed but one interview was incomplete, as the participant decided to withdraw from the interview with no clear explanation (he just mentioned he needed to leave). Adhering to ethics principles, the participant was thanked for his time and the entire interview was discarded. Excluding the discarded interview, the remaining sample size of 9 participants had an average age of 14.7 years (SD = .87). Table 1 below is a summary of participants that took part in the study.

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Table 1

Summary of participants

Participant	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Grade	Family members (children's perception)	Family structure (people under the same roof)
Participant 2	John	14	Male	9	Mother , father , aunt ,grandmother , uncle	*6 people*: Father, uncle, stepmother, 2 stepbrothers, John(participant)
Participant 3	Mary	15	Female	9	Mother, stepfather, brother, grandmother, friends, and teachers	*5 people*: Mother, stepfather, brother, nephew (brother's son), Mary(participant)
Participant 4	Jane	15	Female	9	Mother (has a biological sister and father but does not regard them as her family members)	*2 people*: Mother , Jane(participant)
Participant 5	Peter	16	Male	9	Parents, sisters, brothers, dog	*6 people*: mother, father, 2 sisters, 1 brother, Peter(participant)
Participant 6	Billy	14	Male	8	Mother , father, grandmother, brother, cousins , uncles, aunts	*4 people*: Mother , father, brother, Billy(participant)
Participant 7	Nelson	14	Male	8	Parents only (prefer them as only family, however, other family members are 4 sisters, brother, grandmother, grandfather)	*4 people*: Mother, father, brother, Nelson (participant)
Participant 8	William	14	Male	8	Mother , aunt (mother's sister)	*11 people*: Mother, aunt (mother's sister), 4 siblings (aunt's children), grandfather, 3 cousins (grandfather's children), Willian(participant)
Participant 9	Grace	14	Female	9	Mother, grandparents , cousins	*2 people:* Mother, Grace(participant)
Participant 10	Mark	16	Male	9	Father , mother, little brother, best friend	*5 people*: Father , mother, little brother, sister, Mark(participant)

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3.4 Data collection procedures

3.4.1 Obtaining relevant permissions

After obtaining the necessary ethics clearance from the university, i.e., Human and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (reference number HS19/7/12) and the Gauteng Department of Education (reference number 8/4/4/1/2), the researcher had to get an approval letter from the Tshwane South District Director permitting her to approach two schools in the Tshwane South district. The letter was mandatory and was to be submitted to the school before the principal could approve the conduction of the research. The researcher also sought permission from the principal (Letter to the Principal –Appendix E), the parents and/or guardians of the child willing to participate (Parental consent forms – Appendix C) and most importantly the children themselves (Assent forms – Appendix B).

All COVID-19 safety protocols were observed during the pilot study and the final interview. The researcher ensured that there was a one-meter distance between herself, and the participant being interviewed. Face masks were kept on all the time and each participant was sanitised upon entering the interview room. The participants were also requested to use their own pens when completing and signing relevant forms (Information sheet- Appendix A, and the Assent form- Appendix B).

3.4.2 Pilot study

Conducting a pilot study is a crucial part of the research process particularly in qualitative research as this has the potential to increase the quality, credibility and dependability of the study (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Pratt & Yezierski, 2018). A pilot study highlights weaknesses and challenges likely to be faced during the actual research hence helps the researcher to be more prepared and more confident in the chosen instrument (Ismail et al., 2018). A pilot study was conducted by selecting five, 14–16-year-olds to determine how they respond to the questions and whether they understood what was being asked of them. Four interviews were conducted at the school premises (School A) and the fifth interview took place at the participant's home. The participants understood some of the questions but some questions the wording was quite difficult for them to comprehend. The researcher changed the wording

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of most questions for them to be clearer and some probing questions on the interview guide were shortened.

From the pilot study the researcher gathered that, apart from the lessons learned regarding the interview schedule, the interview environment and timing were also a very crucial consideration (Dudovskiy, 2018). After the interview with the participant at their home, the researcher concluded that the school premises provided a more secure and relaxed environment for the interviews as the interviews were held in a private room where learners felt they could speak freely. The researcher also noticed that with some participants they would take some time to get comfortable hence the researcher introduced an icebreaker, which was in form of a short 3-5min game or sometimes, a simple introduction whereby both the researcher and the participants would introduce themselves and share some personal information about themselves. In some cases, some participants were not interested in the icebreaker games and preferred to get right into the interview itself. These participants who were not keen to the ice breaker games wanted to spend as little time in the interview as possible and evidently displayed nonverbal cues of restlessness (yawning, inattentiveness) towards the last questions. To avoid this during the actual study, the researcher gave the participants an opportunity to choose the game they wanted to play, and they also had an option of not playing at all if they wished. The pilot interviews ranged from 15 minutes the shortest to 40 minutes the longest. The researcher also acknowledge that conducting a pilot study helped develop the researchers skills in conducting interviews and hence the lessons learnt improved the quality of the main study (Wray et al., 2017).

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3.4.3 Data collection

The researcher collected data using individual, semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview was aligned to the aims and objectives of the study; as questions are pre-constructed based on the identified theme in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Children have varied experiences with their families, and subsequently different perceptions, hence individual face-to-face interviews are a safe space compared to group interviews or telephonic interviews as they allow room for the child to be more comfortable and confident in expressing their views (Meijer et al., 2021; Vogl, 2013). Children are able to express

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multiple individual realities and perspectives regarding family and family resilience (Dudovskiy, 2018). The questions were structured in relation to exploring their understanding of what family is and what being a family member means to the children, (see Appendix D). The questions were also structured along the three dimensions of the family resilience processes according to Walsh (2021). This type of interview allowed the participants to talk in-depth about their perceptions and experiences of family functions and being a family member. The interviews were conducted in English and although the researcher would have wanted the interviews to last longer , the longest interview was 30minutes in duration. Jamshed (2014) suggests that semi-structured interviews are a schematic presentation of the research objective usually taking up to 30minutes to more than an hour depending on the focus of the study. This time frame is adequate as the interview guide keeps the interview focused (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Jamshed, 2014). The duration of the interviews in the current study, although shorter was adequate and understandable as the researcher was not necessarily known to the participant.

3.4.4 Data saturation

The goal of data collection was to ensure the rigour of the study and one way of achieving this is through data saturation. Thematic data saturation also referred to as data adequacy or data redundancy is reached when no new information or themes are yielded from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Hancock et al., 2016). As much as this is an acknowledged concept literature and guidelines on how to achieve this is very scant (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Although they have been many thoughts on the rationale and principles underlying saturation particularly with thematic analysis (Constantinou et al., 2017), the researcher adopted the criteria set by Hancock et al. (2016) and set data saturation at five responses per theme and subthemes. According to various scholars, (Constantinou et al., 2017; Fugard & Potts, 2015; Mason, 2010) when using thematic analysis, saturation is usually reached after 6-10 interviews depending on the context of the study. Based on the data from the current study, although nine full interviews were conducted, saturation was reached after seven interviews, and no new themes emerged from the data.

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3.5 Data analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) is an appropriate and powerful method to use when seeking to understand a set of experiences, thoughts, or behaviours across a data set (Braun & Clarke 2012). T A was the best suited technique for this study to adequately elucidate the specific nature of children's conceptualisation of the phenomenon of family and family resilience. Semi-structured interviews are at the root of thematic research as it is aimed at capturing themes or patterns across the data set, analysing what the data says and identifying patterns within the data (Braun et al., 2018). Both the data collection techniques and analysis are therefore aligned. A theme refers to a specific pattern of meaning found in the data and there is need to stipulate what can and cannot be coded within a given theme (Joffe, 2012). As per Braun and Clarke (2006) the researcher conducted her analysis according to the suggested six-phase process.

During the interviews the researcher was recording the interview as well as documenting thoughts and impressions. In the initial phase (phase 1 of Braun and Clarke, 2006), the researcher familiarised herself with the data by going through the notes, then the recordings for the first time. The researcher went through the recordings again for the second time, now transcribing the data.

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The second phase was to generate codes, which was a more detailed and systematic engagement with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After transcribing the data, the researcher went through the recordings again making short summaries of the interviews and highlighting possible codes. This was a lot of information as the researcher highlighted every point that the participant made as an initial code which amounted to more than 50 codes.

After all the codes had been successfully collated, the researcher moved to the third phase of constructing themes by building, moulding, and giving meaning to the coded data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition to the manual coding, the researcher also analysed the data using ATLAS.ti which is a computer-assisted data analysis package. This package allow researchers to examine the patterning of themes across the range of interviews (Joffe, 2012). The analysis provided an examination of themes and their inter-connections, and the prevalence of the themes in the sample.

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The fourth phase was to review the initially established themes. This phase involved revising, refining, and then defining the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). According to Kiger and Varpio (2020) there is no set threshold for data that constitutes a theme, however it is important for the researcher to identify significant links between data items that answer the key aspects of the research questions. With this in mind, the researcher considered collating some initial themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The researcher managed this process by first looking at the codes and the collated extracts of each theme to establish a coherent pattern, then considering the pattern accurately as well as how it reflected the meanings evident in the data set.

The fifth phase was to define and name the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher had to ensure that all the named themes are clear, comprehensive, and concisely capture what is meaningful about the data. The essence of this phase was to write a detailed analysis of each theme interpreting the children's perceptions and views. Braun and Clarke (2006) caution researchers to be vigilant at this stage and be able to adequately narrate the 'story' told by the participants and be able to illustrate how these stories fits into the overall 'story' the researcher is telling in relation to the research questions, aims and objective. The researcher generated two categorical themes and seven themes. Most of the themes had two or more sub-themes which will be discussed extensively in the following chapter.

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The final phase, phase 6, was to produce the report which entails revisiting the research question, and the other phases to ensure that the final themes remain close to the data and answer the research question well (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This also meant providing adequate extracts from the interviews to support the named themes. This phase and the results thereof will be discussed in detail in the following chapter of results (chapter 4), findings (chapter 5) and discussion (chapter 6).

3.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity can be understood as the researchers understanding and acknowledgement of how their self-knowledge might influence the participants and the study itself, while simultaneously recognizing how the research experience is affecting the researcher (Dodgson,2019; Gilgun, 2008; Pillow, 2010). In qualitative research the concept of reflexivity is very important as it increases the credibility of research findings, ensuring rigor

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and quality of the research work, which is a gold standard for determining trustworthiness (Berger,2015; Buetow, 2019; Dodgson,2019; Teh & Lek,2018). To achieve this the researcher focused on their pre-existing knowledge about the group under study, and how this knowledge could possibly impact their unconscious bias. In writing a reflexivity section, the researcher will be referred to in the first person.

I am a foreign national of African descent (Zimbabwe) embarking on graduate studies in South Africa. I was born and raised on a farm and attended boarding school. Given the historical background of South Africa, I acknowledged, early on, the differences in language, customary practises, experiences, and challenges faced by most South African day scholars coming from underprivileged communities. Although I identify myself as being in a similar socio-economic bracket as the participants in the study, families from low- to middle social economic contexts in South Africa face unique social, economic and structural challenges which affects family functioning and contributes to the child's well-being on different levels (Isaacs et al., 2019) alien to other African countries. I acknowledge the similarities and huge differences with the participants and that families face multitude challenges regardless of being in the same socioeconomic background. I aimed to maintain a balance between personal bias and the participants' experiences during interviews.

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Being cognisant of how I might feel or disagree to some expressions by the participants as a result of difference in culture and upbringing, I kept a journal recording the entire research process, noting down every detail at every stage of the research process. During interviews, apart from extensive notetaking, I also audio-recorded the interviews to accurately capture the interview while simultaneously, noting how participants expressed different concepts about their family. These notes and recordings before, during and after the interviews helped me to keep track of the evolving process and to avoid distorting events that took place and or forgetting initial ideas that looked pertinent to the study but not immediately relevant. Again, during the interviews, I remained cognisant of my own biases and avoided non-verbal expressions of shock, disapproval and or disagreement but always sought to encourage the participants to continue with their narrative by nodding in agreement and always smiling at the participants.

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I also maintained safe boundaries even in situations that resonated with my own experiences of my family. In some instances, however the participants would ask for an example to clearly understand the question and would ask me to give an example using my family. Being a mother, I avoided examples that presented an adult perspective but instead gave examples of my own childhood experiences emphasising on how the experiences differed completely with the participants' experience (for example I was in boarding school and the participants are day scholars, and differences in technology during my time and the present time) but at the same time giving clarity to the questions asked. This seems to assist the participants greatly as they could differentiate between their experience and meaning from my own previous experience.

Another area of reflexivity that I was cognisant of was to reflect on the impact of power differences that might intimidate the participants. During the pilot study I noticed that being introduced as a Psychology Masters student to the primary student, influenced how some participants were more focused on providing a 'clever' response which they thought might impress me on an academic level, for instant during the pilot study one participant kept misplacing English jargons when telling their story. Other participants had the impression that I was there to psychoanalyse and bring solutions to their problems. During the main study I introduced myself just as a student to the participants "who also does not have all the answers". I also emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers but what mattered the most was their narration and understanding of the subject matter. In a bid to establish common ground with the participants, I asked the participants to choose their icebreaker and whether to play a game before the interview or not. This helped the participant feel powerful and that there were more in charge of the interview process than the researcher. The child standpoint theory emphasises the power differential between children and the adult and caution researchers to always be cognisant of the importance of treating children as important and adequate informants during data collection (Medina-Minton, 2019). Empowering children by having them feel a sense of control during the interview also resonates with what the child standpoint advocates for.

My main goal in this study was to faithfully represent the voice of the participants by presenting the children's perspectives of their families while also making a significant contribution to this highly under-researched field of study accurately and objectively. To

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remain reflexive, I discussed every stage of the research process with my supervisor and shared the recordings and transcripts with my supervisor. I also sought assistance from a third party from the Student Development Centre (SDC, a thesis coaching company) who because of their detachment from the study, was able to highlight possible blind spots that I might have misunderstood, omitted, or taken for granted thereby providing me with an objective contribution to the data analysed. I undertook this reflexive process throughout the study from planning, conducting semi-structured interviews, analysing the data, and writing about the findings thereby, promoting an ongoing, recursive relationship between the limits of my own subjectivity and the intersubjective dynamics of the research process itself (Probst, 2015). I was also able to identify limitations of the study and situate these findings in existing knowledge by returning reflexively to the literature and critically examining how these findings conflicts or agrees with existing knowledge (Probst, 2015).

3.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the truth value and the degree to which the study was conducted and interpreted in a transparent manner (Connelly, 2016). The researcher considered four criteria as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) in pursuit of a trustworthy study namely, credibility, transferability, dependability, and objectivity.

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The most important criterion is asserting confidence in the truth of the study and the findings and therefore credibility. For the current study to be considered credible, the researcher adhered to all the necessary standard procedures required when conducting a qualitative inquiry as this one. The theoretical basis of the study was built on established theories, the family resilience framework, and the child standpoint theory, which are both relevant to the study and crucial in eliciting children's perceptions and experiences of their family life and family resilience. Credibility was also achieved through the adoption of well-established research methods (interviews and thematic analysis) which have been successfully employed in previous studies of a similar nature (see e.g., Isaacs et al., 2019; Louw, 2018; Swain; 2018; Yamamoto & Keogh, 2018). The researcher conducted a pilot study to test the flexibility of the interview questions and adjusted accordingly, engaged with the participants through an icebreaker game to establish rapport before the interview; and kept a journal for all the procedures which assisted the researcher to continuously reflect on

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every decision made. In an endeavour to ensure and enhance credibility and trustworthiness the researcher also engaged in peer-debriefing with a consultant from SDC and numerous consultations with her supervisor who was able to provoke critical thinking and assist with additional perspectives and explanations for the findings. The researcher also wished to return the transcripts to the participants for comments, corrections and to ask them to provide feedback on the results, to ensure validity. As a result of the sudden announcement of lockdown level 3,it was however no longer possible to carry out this exercise as student's exams and the closing date for schools was pushed earlier and learners where no longer available as they were either writing exams or at home.

Transferability is the extent to which the findings are applicable to the research situation in other contexts (Hadi & José Closs, 2015). To ensure that future studies can be able to transfer findings from this study to a different site on a conceptually equivalence level, the researcher provided thick descriptions and adequate contextual information of the finding. The researcher also provided rich descriptions of the setting to enable the reader to judge the applicability of the results to other familiar situations.

In order to prove dependability, which is the stability and consistency of findings over time, the researcher should be able to repeat the interviews under similar conditions and obtain the same results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). In the current study dependability was achieved by keeping a detailed chronology of research activities, processes, and emerging themes. The researcher also had interview guide questions and was consistent with the interviews in order to produce dependable results.

Lastly, the researcher maintained a humanly possible degree of objectivity and neutrality by reporting only the findings of experiences and ideas of the children to ensure confirmability. The researcher reported interpretations that were derived from the data and showed how the conclusion was reached (Chapter 4-5). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved. In the final chapter (Chapter 6) the researcher demonstrates how the choices made throughout the study (how the chosen theoretical framework, the selected methodology and analytical technique), all connect and tie together so that the reader can understand how and why decisions were made (Nowell et al., 2017). Findings from this research will

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contribute to the larger study, for implementation of better Family Resilience programmes compatible for South African families and will serve as a reference point to all other African families (Isaacs, et al., 2017).

3.8 Ethics statement

The researcher first gained ethics clearance from the University's ethics committee, the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC Reference Number: HS19/7/12). Permission to approach primary schools at one of the Gauteng districts was then sought and granted by the Gauteng Department of Education (reference number: 8/4/4/1/2). The researcher then sought permission from the Tshwane district to approach the schools within the chosen district and the school principals of the chosen schools. Upon receiving the Principal's permission, the researcher first explained to the children what the study entails and their rights while participating. It was made clear to the children that since they are under the legal age of 18, their parent's decision would override their own. This meant that even if they sign the assent forms, if their parents refuse to sign the parental consent form, they will not be able to participate (which was the case with some students who failed to participate). It was also explained to the children that even if parents or guardians give consent and the child decides they no longer want to participate (as with the first participant), it was within their rights to do so and withdraw at any point of the study without prejudice or any negative repercussions (see appendix A). The researcher ensured that no harm was brought to the child, emotionally or psychologically by avoiding sensitive issues the participants were not willing to discuss. When the researcher picked emotional discomforts for example the participant would take long pauses, stammer, or show non-verbal cues of discomfort, the researcher reminded the participants that they did not have to answer if they were not comfortable to do so. The researcher also had information for professional counselling recommendations whenever necessary. Participants who needed further professional help were provided with details of the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), a non-profit organisation offering telephonic counselling that they could call and receive free counselling without incurring any costs. This was particularly helpful to one participant. Participants were also assured of anonymity as no names were mentioned in the reporting of the findings. The participants were assigned with pseudonyms to protect their names and there was no mention of the school's name in the report to also protect the

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school's identity. Quality and integrity were maintained throughout the research study and data will be stored in a password protected machine, only accessible to the researcher and supervisor for a period of five years.

3.9 Chapter Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided an outline of the methodology employed in this study. The chapter discussed the research design employed, the research context, and outlined the data collection procedure. According to the reflexivity, trustworthiness, and ethics considerations mentioned above, it is evident that the researcher has taken all measures to ensure unbiased data collection and analysis. The following section will focus on the findings of the data collected through semi-structured interviews with the children.

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Chapter 4

Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with participants. Data analysis was completed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The overarching aim of the study was to explore children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience processes. Thematic analysis was the best suited technique for the obtained qualitative data and provided insights on children's opinions, experience, and values they placed on family and families in general. Two important thematic categories as well as corresponding themes and sub-themes were developed from the data. The table below is a summary of the thematic categories and associated themes from the data analysis.

Table 2

Summary of developed themes

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Thematic category	Theme	Subtheme
Children's understanding of a family	A Family's function	A family should provide care and support A family should provide for its members A family should protect its members
	A family's structure	Close relations Living under the same roof
	Children's perception of the importance of and meaning of family	A family is a primary source of unconditional love A family gives advice and encouragement A family sacrifices for their children
	Children's perceptions of families of today	Communication free from distraction Governmental intervention Children's perception of the importance of a father figure
	Belief systems	

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Children perception of family resilience processes	Organisational process	The importance of family rules Family roles and responsibilities of its members How children perceive connectedness Children's perception of a family's social and economic resource
	Communication and problem solving	Communication during adversity and when flourishing Collaborative ways of solving problems and conflict resolution.

4.2 Children's understanding of a family

Children had different points of departure in terms of what they believed a family is. These points of departure viewed as what they believe a family's *function* is, what its *structure* is, and their understanding of the *importance* (or role) of the family.

4.2.1 A family's functions

Children demonstrated their understanding of what a family was to them by mentioning mostly what they expect from the family, or rather, what they viewed as the functions of the family. Under this theme, three functions were identified namely, the family as a support system, to be able to provide for its members and provide protection for its members.

A family should provide care and support. Most of the participants mentioned that the main function of the family was to support them, to be there for them and to care for them. William[4] described family as follows:

> *I would say a family is people who care about you. People who are always there for you and people who love you no matter what you are going through and no matter how you see yourself. So basically, a family is people who boost you and pick you up when you fall down (14-year-old, male)*

[4] To protect the participants' anonymity, the names presented here are pseudonyms

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Participants described what they experience as the most important functions they experience within their family. Grace and Mark described how they were dependant on their family's support:

> *They support me, and they are kind. Sometimes l depend on them (Grace, 14-year-old, female).*

> *Anytime or every time l want help, they are able to help, and they support me, they always support me (Mark, 16-year-old male)*

Other participants in the study also attested to the importance of this function. Billy also mentioned how families must support their children emotionally and financially *"…they must support us more often… Yes, they must please buy us everything that we need*" *(14-year-old, male).*

A family should provide for its members. A family was also described as the primary source of provision for the financial, emotional, and social needs of the participants. All participants mentioned that the main function of their family was to provide for their daily needs.

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> *A family needs to take care of you I guess, and when they take care of you, they need to do it with love not for them expecting that okay, since we are taking him to school, he must be rich then provide for us. No, it's not like that. They need to take care of you with love so that you can also prosper (William, 14-year-old, male)*

> *Family is …. people who will look after you… your health and education. They are responsible to make sure l go to a doctor…shelter (Mark, 16-year-old, male)*

> *…shelter, food and to take care of me… buy groceries, pays rent and my school fees, and buy me clothes (Jane,15-year-old, female)*

Children were able to reflect on a range of important necessities for which a family is responsible, such as shelter, health, and education. One participant (William) was even able to reflect on the aspect of selflessness within the family by mentioning that these acts of

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providing were not conditional of children being forced to provide financial support in the future.

A family should protect its members. Some of the participants mentioned that family provides a safe space and protects them. The concept of safety and providing protection was a significant function of the family. Nelson mentions that family is made up of people who love him, hence they protect him all the time: *"A family are people who love you and always protect you all the time" (14-year-old, male).* For Peter, it was an absolute responsibility of the family to provide protection as he mentions *"Okay, obviously they are protective" (16-year-old, male).* Mark further asserts to this by indicating the importance of a father figure in the family *"…you need a father figure you want him to protect you" (16-year-old male).* Interestingly, Mark sees protection as something which is provided more especially by a father-figure.

4.2.2 A family's structure

Most children viewed the family unit as composed of people with whom they had close ties and a meaningful relationship with. Other participants mentioned that a family is made up of people they shared a biological connection with, yet for others, it was about people they lived with under the same roof.

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Close relations: The majority of the participants in this study mentioned that family was not only about biological connections, instead, they regarded everyone they had a close and meaningful relationship with as part of their family. For William, his mother's sister (who he describes as his 'older mother'), and her children are part of his family because of how they have supported him after a difficult experience and the position they hold within the family:

> *For me it's my mother because my father passed away when I was 9 years old, so my mother is my pillar for me…Yes, my mother's sister she is like my older mother. She has also been there for me, and she is like the power of the family. She picks up the family and she make the family strong… It's basically me and my siblings….my mother's sister's kids…. on my mother's side l am the only child (14-year-old, male).*

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Mark responded similarly when he included a ‘close friend’ as being part of his family. When asked why he feels this way he said, “*I think these people are my family because anytime or every time l want help, they are able to help and they support me, they always support me.*” (16-year-old, male).

Jane also describes that who she regards as family members were those people who she was close to regardless of any biological ties. Although she has a biological sister, Jane does not regard her as family because they do not stay under the same roof, and she is not close with her. Instead, she emphasised her mother to be her only family regardless of any other biological ties that she had with other people:

> *My mum... Yeah, ONLY… My mom has gone through a lot for me. She made a lot of sacrifices. Like, she's that type of person who put her life on the line for me, yes. So that’s why I put her first, she is my number 1. (15-year-old, female)*

Jane also does not regard her biological father as her family as she said *“He’s mostly working; I've never seen him before like eye to eye. He's mostly working”.*

Another participant, who lives under the same roof with his father, uncle, stepmother, and stepbrothers, did not consider his stepmother and stepbrothers as part of that family. John regard his stepmother and stepbrothers as his father’s family only and instead mentioned people who he did not live with (such as his mother, aunt, and grandmother) as part of his family. It is evident that these children, viewed the quality of the relationship – vs biological ties and proximity – as the most important aspect of considering ‘family’.

Living under the same roof. While some regard quality of relationships or closeness as important, some children expressed the view that family was people that one lived with regardless of biological ties or close relations. Grace mentions that her mum is her family because she only lives with her alone *“It’s my mum… Yah, I only live with her” (14-year-old, female).* Peter also indicated that sharing a roof was one of the determents of one being regarded as family. He gives mention to everything that lives under his roof as his family including pets when he says *“People you live with, sisters, brothers, blood, that’s family... Parents... My dog...”.* When asked why he considered these as part of his family he said,

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"Ahhh… l don't know, because my father told me so, so l just know". This also highlights the influence parents have in shaping the perspectives and believe systems of their children.

In summary, the majority of the participants associated 'family' with people they believed they were bonded to or who they believed they shared close connections with, regardless of biological ties or living under the same roof with them. As shown from the excerpts, participants' first instinct in responding to the question was usually based on their relationship with the people and it was only after probing when they would mention other people they thought, they can call family.

4.2.3 Children's perceptions of the importance of and meaning of family.

Children in this study also described what they believed to be the importance of family and the meaning they attached to the family unit. Three subthemes were identified under this theme, that a family is the "primary source of unconditional love", a family "gives advice and encouragement' and a family "sacrifices for children."

A family is a primary source of unconditional love. A number of participants expressed that family was the place where unconditional love is experienced. Jane, a 15-year-old, female emphasised the importance of family by stressing that one cannot survive without the family unit *"A family. It's a home. It's love, a family is where you find comfort, warmness inside you, it's everything…Family is your life. Without family, you are nothing"*. Some participants also highlighted the importance of family as a primary source of love, the type of love you experience from birth, and you grow with. John asserts that no one knows and love him better than his family *"… they know me, what kind of a person I am, and they love me" (14-year-old, male).*

The use of phrases such as 'family is your life' and 'it's a home' indicates the nature of the meaning and importance they have attached to family. They equate love to finding comfort, warmth and accepting of each family member (as John asserts that 'they know me'). Similarly, other children commented:

> *"A family are people who love you… since from when l was born, they were there for me" (Nelson, 14-year-old, male).*

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"…people who love you no matter what you are going through and no matter how you see yourself…" (William, 14-year-old, male).

A family gives advice and encouragement. The participants concur that family provides advice and encourages good behaviour. According to these children, the family unit is the foundation whereupon one receives sound advice with confidence that the family has children's best interest at heart. Sixteen-year-old, Mark said *"A family is … people who you can trust, people who will give you advice, people who will look after you"*. Mark highlights the role the family plays in moulding good behaviour, trust, and dependency. According to Peter, the family *"Making sure you on the right path… making sure that we go to school, you choose right friends" (16-year-old, male).* Another participant also mentions how her family encourages her to work hard so as to have a brighter future "*They always tell me that I must study to have a better future" (Mary, 15-year-old, female).*

A family plays certain roles which is important for the child's future from physical and/or biological development to social and moral and/or ethical development.

A family sacrifices for their children. The family also makes physical and emotional sacrifices for their children, to ensure the wellbeing of their children. For one participant when he got into trouble with neighbours, he mentions that his mother physically fought for him: *"My mom was getting beaten up by neighbours and she broke her arm… because they beat me first then my mum was trying to fight for me" (Billy, 14-year-old male*). This was a particularly difficult time for Billy but seems to have showed him the sacrifice his mother made for him.

The family also makes emotional sacrifices for their children. Jane and Peter expressed how their families have put their own life on hold to ensure their children's wellbeing:

My mom has gone through a lot for me. She made a lot of sacrifices. Like, she's that type of person who put her life on the line for me, yes. So that's why I put her first, she is my number 1 (Jane, 15-year-old, female)

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When l was sick, I had epilepsy, ……. we couldn't sleep like no one could sleep…That time she (mum) didn't even go to work…She started going to work when l was feeling a little bit better (Peter, 16-year-old, male)

Peter mentioned how his family made sacrifices to be supportive to him when he was sick when he mentioned that no one in the family could sleep. His mother took control of the situation by sacrificing her work as she had to stop going to work for a few months until he had recovered. The term 'sacrifice' was mentioned several times by participants and is evidently central to the roles of what a family should do for its children.

4.2.4 Children's perceptions of families of today

Another theme that was developed from the research data was the different ways that children viewed and understood the concept of a *family*. Most of the children were able to attest to the challenges families experience today and the important need for the family institution to be strengthened. This theme was slightly different from the above theme where children described the importance of and meaning of family in that here emphasis was put on the challenges faced by the family unit. The children also made contributions on the possible solution to these challenges.

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Communication free from distraction. The first sub-theme linked to this theme was the lack of communication in some families of today as pointed out by some children. The lack of communication was linked as the root cause of several malfunctions in the family. The children in this study mentioned that because of the prevailing lack of communication, particularly parents not communicating with children frequent enough, most children suffer silently and at times resort to deviant behavior.

John (14-year-old male) reiterated the need for families to pay more attention to their children, to listen to them and to be more cognisant of the issues that affect them. Below is an extract of his inputs

John: Families today, they don't give children the attention they need…They are always on the internet, they don't pay attention to the children, they use internet more than they…they just, yah they just don't give much attention to children. They just don't care about what their children are going through.

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Researcher: What are some of the things that children go through but the families they don't see or just don't care?

John: I will say (children go through) depression … (and)…They (the parents) don't take them (the children) seriously

Here John emphasises the importance of families to be actively engaged with children and pay more attention to what they are going through. Attention might also have been lacking in John's own family driving him to his perceptions as noted in the earlier conversations with him *"It's only…. my father does talk to me, but we are not that close…I teach myself and I teach myself what l don't learn from school…and …yah".* His expectation of what a family should be, how parents should pay attention to the needs of their children reflects the lack of attention in his own family.

Mark also mentions the lack of communication in most families which is crucial for the well-functioning of the family*, "Most families they don't understand each other…They don't go along…they lack communication" (16-year-old, male).*

According to Peter, most children engage in poor behaviour and lack judgement because of the lack of communication within their families and because parents do not take time to talk to their children and form important connections.

"Some parents should be supportive. Sit down with their children, discuss everything sometimes because some children are corrupt…They swear to their mothers…In my community they smoke in front of their parents. I don't know how they're doing that. They disrespect their elders and fight with their parents, physically" (16year-old, male)

Peter highlights the link between the quality of communication and deviant behaviours.

Governmental intervention. The need for the government to intervene and support the family system for the optimal functioning of the unit was also highlighted in the study. Billy comments on families of today saying that "*some families it's very hard for them, they must create many jobs for other families" (14-year-old, male).* It was interesting to note that children recognised how South African families need support from governmental bodies.

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Children's perceptions of the importance of a father-figure. Children in the study also raised the concerns of being raised by single parents. Having acknowledged the importance of a father figure in the family, *"It's important to have a leader, because sometimes you need a father figure, you want him to protect you"* (Mark, 16-year-old, male), Nelson also reiterated the need of fathers to be supportive to their families *"Families of today, some fathers; leave their child and they don't care about what they are eating. They just leave and the mothers is the one who takes care of the child" (14-year-old, male).*

The next section is focused on the perceptions of family processes which can contribute toward family resilience.

4.3 Children's perceptions of family resilience processes

The second thematic category explored how children understood some of their family processes, including events that their families experienced and how issues were resolved as a family. This provided the basis for understanding how children could understand family resilience, i.e., the family processes associated with managing challenging experiences. Themes developed under this thematic category reflect how children described and interpreted the events that happened in their family and their family life.

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4.3.1 Belief systems

The belief systems theme includes children's experiences of their family life and their awareness of the norms and values held by their family. In this study, transcendent values and beliefs were anchored popularly in religious practices and spiritual routines. Answering the question *"What do you think your family believes in?"*, most participants reported that it was a routine for them to pray together as a family every time before they eat and or sleep, *"We are Christians…Yeah, we pray as a family… Before we eat and before we sleep" (Mark, 16-year-old, male).* Mark reported that his family valued prayer and was also able to highlight how they make meaning of their challenges through religious beliefs *"We pray, and we support each other, we motivate each other" (16-year-old, male).* William also highlighted how his family makes meaning of adversity by consulting religious mediums:

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"They believe in… they are Christians. Because most of the time, if when we have problems…, they never go to sangomas, they always go to like ZCC[5], it's a church, so they always go there and check there what is wrong because our people, prophets can communicate with God and my parents all the way in the family, all the way they are Christians" (14-year-old, male).

Other participants, also confidently spoke of their faith *"My mom, my grandma, almost the whole family believes in God…We only pray to God…every day before we go to sleep…we pray as a family" (Billy, 14-year-old, male).* Religious routine helps transmit family norms and values, and for Grace although she did not particularly enjoy praying, she was aware that the norm at home is to pray *"We are Christians …No, I don't like going to church. I only pray at home…Every time before we sleep" (14-year-old, female).*

4.3.2 Organisational Process

The three constructs of organisational process (flexibility, connectedness and social and economic resources), as postulated by Walsh (2003) were all present; however, the construct of flexibility will be defined in the context that was expressed and understood by the children in the study (family rules, roles, and responsibilities). To address these constructs, the interview questions asked *how does your family typically 'organise' itself?* The question was further elaborated on in terms of what the rules are in their family and what the different roles are.

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The importance of family rules. The importance of rules in governing family organisational processes was evident in this study. The participants attested to this notion by responding to the question of whether they had rules at home and if they thought that rules were important or not. Some participants believed that rules were important in order to keep order in the house *"It's important so there can be order in the house" (Mark, 16-year-old, male).*

William, a 14-year-old, male also makes the following comment:

[5] ZCC stands for Zion Christian Church

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"Because your family will be organised. If you don't have rules your family will just be going around not knowing what they want and just see themselves ending up as people who do drugs and everything, so if you have rules, you can escape those things, escape the peer pressure"

Having rules, also asserted the family leaders' position, as well as serving an ethical and/or moral function. Mary believed that following rules was a way of obedience and showing respect to the leadership position, *"Because when your mother and father put a rule and you follow that rule it means you respect them" (15-year-old, female).*

Interestingly, some participants indicated not having heard their parents explicitly express the rules *per se* but acknowledges that the family is governed by determining right from wrong. According to Jane, a 15-year-old, female:

My mom like, I've never heard her talking about rules in the house…Isn't it like you know like what you're supposed to do and what you're not supposed to do in the house? but it's just that I've never heard my mom saying that these are the rules.

Similarly, Peter mentioned not also having heard his parents discuss any rules with him *"Yeah, it's never mentioned, we just know that this is wrong, this is right" (16-year-old, male).* According to Mark, he knew the rules through his ability to discern right from wrong *"*I *knew that because I know the good and the bad stuff".*

These participants mention what a lot of families often experience: rules are not always set in stone nor are they often expressed explicitly. There seems to be an *implicit* understanding of the family rules.

Most of the rules the children mentioned served a purpose of organising the family (Mark and William), protecting them, and safeguarding their wellbeing; For example, most children mentioned they were not allowed to come home late (John, Mark, Peter, Nelson) as well as other rules relating to being responsible, respectful, and doing house chores *"wash dishes... clean your room." (Billy), "never answer back to my mum" (Peter)*.

To make sure that these rules are enforced, and stability is ensured in the family, participants mentioned the actions that their parents took if the rules were not followed.

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According to Billy and Nelson, their father is usually the one to act *"He disciplines us… they shout at us…sometimes hit us" (Billy, 14-year-old, male); "… My dad will beat me" (Nelson,14-year-old, male).* William also responded saying, *"They receive a punishment. Definitely a punishment because our family doesn't like beating…It's like a strict family but it doesn't beat. The most used or the most common punishment is being grounded"* Mark's family also discipline the children *"Ahhhh, I get penalised like they discipline me…Sometimes they take my phone for months…Sometimes they just talk to me".* Although the form of punishment differed from every family, it is evident that most families discipline their children through negative reinforcement and/ or positive punishment. Billy also voices how the family must engage in better disciplinary strategies, *"…they must stop beating us, they must support us more often…" (14-year-old, male).*

Family roles and responsibilities of its members. The results of the current study demonstrated how the flexibility of the family is governed by its members having roles and responsibilities in the family. The participants also acknowledged the importance of leadership within the family:

> *"Yes, it is important because a leader gives you instructions that will help you in the future. But if you don't have a leader, you will just do things randomly, you don't know what you are hoping for but as a family you need to have that one person who will always help you so, that is my mother's sister." (William,14-year-old, male)*

It is interesting to note that most if not all children were able to identify who they believed the 'leader' of the family was. Billy believed that his father was the leader of the house: *"My father…so he can give us instructions…He always has a good mind; he always does stuff right…. To keep order" (14-year-old, male).* Billy was able to see his father as a leader, who not only gave instructions but also helped in keeping order in the house. For other children, leadership was not only about making the rules and being a leader, but the leadership role was also important in that the individual also had a guiding or educative function as expressed by these girls

> *"They will teach you how to do things and stuff" (Grace, 14-year-old, female).*

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"*Because sometimes children like to do mischiefs, so the leader tell him or her that this is good this is wrong" (Mary, 15-year-old, female).*

The children in the study had a clear idea of the individual family roles played by its members. They were able to identify their parents and elderly members of the family as responsible for taking care of the children and being breadwinners. The adult males' role was to provide for the family and buy food while the adult females' role was usually to prepare the food, cleans, cook and iron clothes (Mark, John, Grace)

"…my father's responsibility is to make sure that there is food at home…my mother's responsibility is to make sure that she makes food for us and clean…my dad is the leader…my dad is the head of the family" (Mark, 16-year-old, male).

"My father provides food…my uncle also provides food… she (grandmother) cleans (John,14-year-old, male).

"…she (mother) cleans and cook and iron the clothes" (Grace, 14-year-old, female)

The children also identified themselves as active members of the family who also contributed to the optimal functioning of their families. Billy, when asked what his role was, said *"My role is to go to school, be a kid at hom*e", when further asked to explain what it means to be a kid he said *"Kids do chores. They help parents" (14-year-old, male)*. The majority of the participants agreed to this responsibility as they all mentioned that their role was to do chores (William), help parents (John), take care of the garden and wash dishes (Nelson), and take care of younger siblings (Mark).

How children perceive connectedness. Connectedness in this study was evident among the interviewed children as they described how they stay connected with their family members by spending quality time together and supporting each other. It was also described earlier by children in terms of who they believed was part of their family (See first thematic category) as well as part of the family functions. Below are some examples from the interviews:

"*Yes, very well. We also hang out sometimes, we go out together… No, me and my mum, the relationship is very good, we are very close l can tell her anything" (Jane)*

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"Yeah, sometimes we play soccer together…We go like on a cruise ship…sometimes we do lots of swimming" (Billy)

"My mother and my stepfather, during school holidays they love going out with me and my brother and my brother's son…We can go for maybe a week" (Mary)

The connections created during activities are important as they help with reconnection after family disputes. The participant below narrates how easy it is for her to reconnect with her mum after they have had a fallout because of the close connection they have:

Grace: I cook with her, and sometimes she teaches me how to cook and read…Sometimes when l do something wrong my mum gets angry and she shouts at me and be like, 'you are useless, you don't clean' and l get angry

Researcher: So how are these situations usually handled?

Grace: Sometimes I backchat at her and l feel sorry afterwards

Researcher: How does that usually ends?

Grace: Sometimes we don't talk at all, and then the next thing I will be like 'mum can l have money I want to buy something'(translated) and then that's how we start talking again.

It is evident that children have learned different ways to (re)connect with their parents when there has been a disconnect and simultaneously highlights the importance children place on feeling connected to different family members.

Children's perceptions of a family's social and economic resources. The participants expressed that most of their families prefer solving family problems internally. The following extracts exemplifies instances families opted to solve their own problems instead of seeking help *" No, we would like to keep our problems inside the family but the only person who comes from outside is my mother's sister's husband. That's the only person otherwise no" (William, 14-year-old, male).*

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More than that, when asked, children mentioned emphatically that *"We solve our own problems" (Billy, Grace, Mark).* Conversely, Jane mentions when her family chose not to seek professional help *"…so my mom like it literally broke her heart like…she was numb at all the time. So that literally caused something. It took her a month to recover… No, my mom, she didn't go to therapy, no…Like it took her some time to recover from the pain. It's painful for my mother".*

Some children, however, did mention that, sometimes there is need for the family to reach out for help from their community or professional bodies. There are times where the family is going through a tragedy like the loss of a loved one and the family seeks assistance from the community. Additionally, in their interpretation of events and how they think the matter could have been handled better, children indicated the importance of reaching out to community bodies and seeking professional help:

> *Mary: "The time when my dad passed away…my grandmother, my neighbours, some other mothers (took control)" (15-year-old, female)*
>
> *Billy: "My mom was getting beaten up by neighbours and she broke her arm…She went to court…the court gave the neighbours a protection order" (Billy, 14-year-old, male)*
>
> *John: "My stepmother tried to commit suicide…they took her to the hospital then after that they took her back to her mother…I think that they should have taken her to a psychologist" (14-year-old, male).*

Although the children mentioned, empathically that their families preferred to manage their own problems, almost having a negative association with asking for external assistance and the complete pride experienced when they 'handle their problems on their own', they could describe situations which called for accessing external assistance.

4.3.3 Communication and problem solving

Important considerations within this theme related to how the children experienced communication during difficult times and how they experienced communication when the

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family was flourishing. The participants mentioned how they believed that their families overcome adversity.

Communication during adversity and when flourishing. Most of the children in this study indicated that when the family is going through difficult times, they experience poor communication in their family but when the family is flourishing communication is improved.

Grace, a 14-year-old female, who lives with her mother, mentioned that whenever things 'went wrong' between them, she experiences her mother as becoming difficult and often shouts. For example, *"when l do something wrong my mum gets angry and she shouts at me and be like, 'you are useless, you don't clean' and l get angry… she likes to shout".* Similarly, Jane, who also stays alone with her mother, said whenever she has an argument with her mother, her mother "*shouts…She shouts and sometimes she uses words that break me… yah sometimes but at the end of the day she will apologise".* This type of communication affects the children and when they were asked what they would want their parents to know about that kind of behaviour, Grace wanted her mother *"… to stop shouting at me and insulting me",* while Jane wanted her mother to know that *"I wanted her to know that when she's angry her words…they must move from level 10 to level five".* The children also highlighted that they are usually the targets of the shouting. One participant mentioned that *"my parents… they always shout at the kids…they shout at us…they always shout …I don't think its stress but sometimes it does happen because of stress…" (Billy, 14-year-old, male).*

This narrative is indicative of how children experience their parents during stressful times. The children do not react well with harsh tones in the form of shouting. The children have even expressed it as 'insulting' and that it 'breaks' them.

Although most participants indicated that when experiencing a challenging time in their families, the communication is not always good, the same participants also expressed how great their communication is when things are well within the family. According to Nelson, a 14-year-old, male, the family communicates perfectly well when things are good but when things are challenging in his home, his parents shout at him "*We talk to each other*

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fine but sometimes eish…we shout. Sometimes they shout at me, but they don't beat me, they just shout at me."

Participants also expressed how there is open emotional sharing among members of the family when the family is flourishing. Jane expressed the bond she has with her mother as very strong that they talk to each other using colloquial language *"We communicate very well. I can say anything to her like, even when I get home, I just say, 'Shaw ma!' (Greet in slang) …and then she's like 'Enta' (replies in slang). Yah like that that's how we communicate, that's the bond…".* Grace also mentions how she communicates well with her mother, when her mother is not angry with her and how she is able to openly express her emotions to her *"Yeah, we communicate very well…Sometimes l tells her that she is wrong, but she will be like 'Ha ahhh l am not wrong, am your mother, am telling you to do this and that…".* Mary, a 15-year-old, female also express how her family communicates well with each other *"We are always happy, always talking to one another in a nicely way".*

Collaborative ways of solving problems and conflict resolution. As much as communication can be less than the child's ideal when the family is experiencing a challenging time, or when the family disagrees amongst themselves, some families are able to resolve their conflicts and work together. William explains this well by noting:

> *…Yes, yes it gets worse because they end up trying to fight but they do not fight. That's how they love each other. They only shout at each other and insult each other, then the following day they will be fine… In everything that we do, some of us don't like the same things but we always trying to put our differences aside so that we can help each other and make us a very good family. Because if your family is tense, your life will also be tense (14-year-old, male).*

It is interesting to note that during these periods, William describes how different people make up a family and therefore have different views (giving credence to this cohort's ability to differentiate between individual perspectives/needs and group needs) and that this might contribute to further conflict, however he still describes the importance of helping each other through these times which, according to him, make them a good family.

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Other participants mention that they are able to support each other during adversity *"We are able to support each other as a family…We pray, and we support each other, we motivate each other" (Mark, 16-year-old, male)*. Mark's family's ability to support each other during challenging times is also encouraged by the way they communicate with each other during those difficult time *"We are always calm, we don't fight, we don't talk with anger"*. The family's behaviour can also be attributed to their belief in prayer during difficult times.

Another participant describes additional techniques their family puts in place in order to resolve conflict, overcoming both external and internal challenges by setting up a family meeting organised by their mother *"We set up a meeting, on a specific day...everyone can say whatever they want." (Peter, 16-year-old, male).* In these meeting issues that concern the family are addressed and the family can collaborate and resolve those issues. Most of the participants in the study confirmed that they usually solve their own problems as a family, without asking any help from external parties

> *"No, we would like to keep our problems inside the family" (William, 14-year-old, male),*
>
> *"We solve our own problems as a family" (Grace; Mark; Billy).*

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This also highlights the ability of some families to collaborate and work together for the wellbeing of the family, but also how asking for or receiving external support is not viewed in a very positive light. This is similar to how the families are not comfortable to ask for social and economic resources from outside.

To summarise this theme, communication is evidently a key aspect that governs family relationships and creates a safe environment for family members to seek empathy and support during challenging situations. Communication allows for the expression and teaching of values of the family. If communication is poor, family bonds are weak, and members of the family become alienated from one another. From the subthemes mentioned above, children attach positive meaning to the good relations and bonds they have with each other such that when trouble comes, they are quick to make amends. Absence of good

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communication results in members of the family being withdrawn from each other weakening the relevance and importance of the family unit.

4.4 Summary of findings

Two thematic categories were developed through the data analysis process and these themes were in-line with the objectives of the study. The children highlighted an understanding of their family by describing the structure of their family and what they thought were the functions of the family institute (theirs or another). They were also able to deduce from their experiences the importance and meaning of family as they mentioned the admirable functions of their family members and or what they would desire their family to look like.

The second thematic category highlighted children's understanding of family resilience processes. From the results of the analysis mentioned above, children seemed to have a novice understanding of family resilience processes and could only relate to constructs that they have experienced in their family. One such example is how they were able to describe their belief systems through religious routines as exercised by their family. The results also showed how the children were able to describe the communication process in their family as dependant on what the family will be experiencing at the time. Generally, when the family is flourishing most children reported that their family communicates well with each other, however, when the family is experiencing adversity, the children reported that the communication does not usually go well, with them, the children, being victims of their parent's experience of immense stress. In terms of organisational processes, the children in the study were clear who the leader was in their family, the roles, duties and responsibilities of the leader and of every other family member. Although acknowledging the rules put in place to govern their behaviour and protect them, the children admit to sometimes disobeying these rules even though they are quite aware of the repercussion of doing so. The children in the study were also able to narrate challenges that families in South Africa are experiencing and the important need for families to communicate and support each other. It was alarming to learn how some of the children in the study echoed the sad realities of absent fathers and how it negatively affects the adolescent's health and wellbeing, thereby reiterating the importance of a father figure in the child's life.

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In conclusion, findings from the study reaffirmed the importance of listening to children and involving them in issues that concerns them. Children were able to highlight matters that are crucial for the well-functioning of the family. Children's experiences of their family life were unique and greatly influenced by the relationship that governed their social environment. The following Chapter discusses these findings and how they differ from or resonate with the theoretical framework employed in this study, and other previous studies.

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Chapter 5

Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a representation of the final stage of thematic analysis which is to provide a discussion of the developed themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The following discussion will be structured in accordance with the objectives of the study and how these results resonate with the literature and the theoretical frameworks employed in the study.

5.2 Children's understanding and experience of 'family'

The first objective of this study was to explore children's understanding and associated experiences of their family and family life. Three themes and eight subthemes emerged from the qualitative data which explained children's understanding and perceptions of their family and families in general. Children expressed their understanding of family and described it through their definition of the family institute and what they regarded as the importance and functions of the family. Figure 1 below is a graphic representation of children's definition, importance and meaning attached to family.

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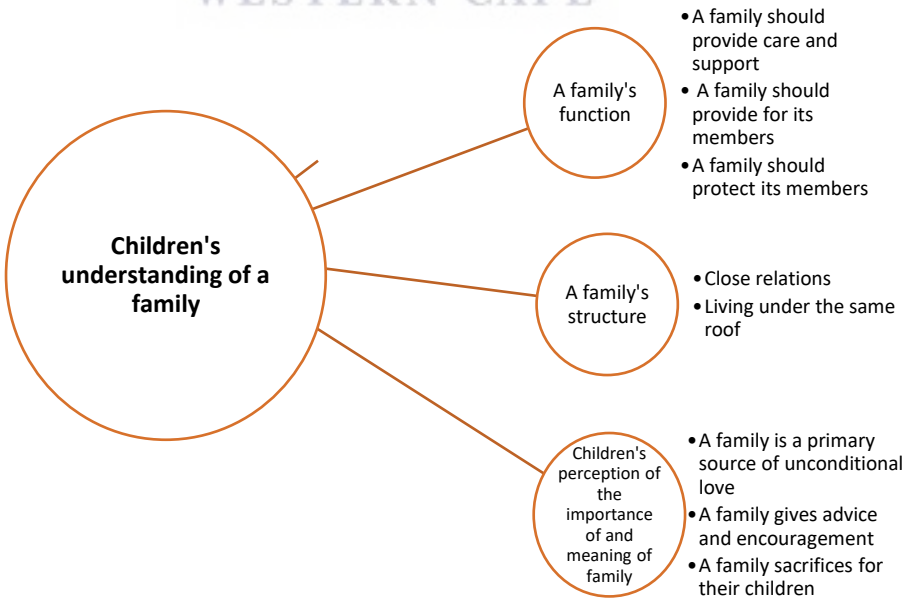

Figure 2: Children's perception of family

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The children in this study were able to describe what family looked like to them in terms of its functions (what they think the family should be doing) and its structure (who they considered members of the family). With regards to **family functioning**, children in this study identified family membership based on what they thought were the responsibilities of the family members. All the children in this study agreed that the main responsibility of the family was to provide for its members in terms of offering **support**, making **provision**, and providing **protection**. Moral and emotional support were very prominent in the responses as children emphasised how much they need their families to support them with their school activities (work and sports) and all other areas of their lives.

The responsibilities that the family unit has, and familial support is prominent in the literature and has been echoed by different researchers (Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Narbona et al., 2021; Plamondon et al., 2018). In a study by Pannilage (2017), a family was found to be largely responsible for children's wellbeing, as the study showed that lack of love and affection to the children, negatively affected the children's wellbeing. Hellfeldt and colleagues (2019), investigated the effect of support from family on cyberbully-victims and found that although other social relations mattered, family support was more important for the children's subject wellbeing (Hellfeldt et al., 2019). Children in the current study also emphasised how much they need their family's support. One participant was even able to describe how many children end up suffering and struggling psychologically as a consequence of parents not paying enough attention to them. Studies have shown that children who are victims of bullying or other psychosocial challenges, experiences low quality of life which can result in academic difficulties, low self-esteem, and poor peer relationships if they do not receive adequate moral and emotional support from their family when going through difficult phases of their lives (Chester et al., 2017; Hellfeldt et al., 2019; Miranda et al., 2019; Plamondon et al., 2018).

Participants also mentioned that financial support, shelter, clothing, food, education, health, and overall wellbeing was a crucial responsibility of the family. According to Pannilage (2017), the family is responsible for the financial wellbeing of children and other members of the unit. The ability for the families to provide as much as the children expects is, however, largely determined by the family's socioeconomic status. One of the children mentioned how she admires her friends at school and wishes that her parents could also

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afford to buy the things that she sees her friends with. Unfortunately, most families, especially in impoverished communities, are unable to fulfil this given the immense pressure they face in a bid to make ends meet as a result of lack of resources, unemployment, and poverty (Savahl et al. 2016; Roman et al., 2016). Current results support previous findings that family income influences children's wellbeing (Emerson & Hatton, 2009; Hunt et al., 2015). In a study by McKeown and colleagues (2003), children in their study showed fewer signs of psychological disturbance as family income raised, and they concluded that social class has an indirect influence on children's wellbeing. In contrast, Ge (2017) examined the relationship between socioeconomic status and children's psychological well-being and found no significant relation.

One of the children in this study (William) was also able to describe how the family should be responsible for providing for them selflessly, without expecting any future returns from the child in form of repayment, obligation, or blackmail. William referred to the pressure of 'black tax'[6] a common phenomenon among black middle-class individuals usually from broken family structures (Magubane, 2017). Discussions around this concept of 'black tax' have emerged, questioning if it is a blessing or a burden (Mhlongo, 2019). As much as it promotes the value of 'ubuntu', social and economic support to family members, paying 'black tax' also hinders the individual's capacity for personal growth, investment, and savings leaving many benefactors battling to cope with their own personal obligations (Magubane, 2017; Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019; Mhlongo, 2019; Sibiya, 2018).

Participants in the current study also demonstrated contextual awareness of the challenges South African families face and the need for government bodies to intervene and assist South African families as one participant (Billy) quoted *"some families it's very hard for them, they must create many jobs for other families"*. Such remarks resonate with what most researchers have been echoing with regards to how South African families can be healed and assisted (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Rabe 2017a; 2017b). Isaacs et al. (2017) also

[6] Black tax refers to the income black professionals share with their struggling family members to support them (Mangoma & Wilson-Prangley, 2019).

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emphasise the need for policies and interventions to be put in place to help struggling families in South Africa.

Also prominent to this study is how participants emphasised the importance and responsibility of the family to create a safe space for them so that they feel safe and protected all the time. Most of them acknowledged that it was the family's responsibility to protect them. When asked what they would like their families to know, participants in this study mentioned *"…they must stop beating us, they must support us more often…"* and *"…stop shouting at me and insulting me"*. Gathering from the expressions of these respondents, the type of discipline the children experience at their homes might make children feel unsafe at home. A previous study with 24 South African children demonstrated how corporal punishment (which seem to be an experience in some homes, even for some children in the current study), exposed children to mental, physical, and emotional health problems (Breen et al., 2015). Child abuse (often disguised as discipline) – a common parental practice (Seedat et al., 2009; Grobbelaar & Jones, 2021; Mathews & Martin, 2016) – has become an endemic in South Africa. The first national study in South Africa found that over 1000 children die every year as a result of child homicide in which the majority of these deaths are a result of fatal child abuse (Mathews et al., 2013; Grobbelaar & Jones, 2020; Grobbelaar & Jones, 2021). As the children in this study mentioned that they would want their parents to support them more than beat and insult them, positive parenting techniques and alternative approaches of discipline have been emphasised for benefit of physical and mental wellbeing, interpersonal development of the child and intergenerational violence (Breen et al., 2015; Jamieson et al., 2017; Mathews et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2018).

The prevalence of community violence in South Africa especially low-socioeconomic locales aids the children's need for their family's protection from the violent perilous community (Hoosen et al., 2022). One participant in the study (Billy) describes how his mother was beaten up by the neighbours as she was trying to protect him from the neighbours who were beating him. Almost all the participants also mentioned how coming home late is a serious rule with grave consequences if not adhered to. This rule is important because it is one method parents use to protect their children from the dangerous streets especially at night. Other participants even acknowledge that this rule is for their own protection. The works of Adams and colleagues (2016; 2019) sought to investigate how

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children's environment contributes to their subjective wellbeing and critical aspects in creating child friendly cities on the Cape Flats, Western Cape (Adams et al., 2019). Children in their studies indicated that their community was not child friendly and a safe space for them (Adams et al., 2016; 2019).

Another noteworthy finding was that one participant saw protection as something provided more especially by a father-figure. He mentioned that the importance of a leader, (who he recognised as his father) was because *"you need a father to protect you" (Mark)*. Unfortunately, most South African children grow up being looked after by single mothers and according to Stats SA (2019) 42% of the children in SA live only with their mothers. Two participants in this study attests to and are part of these statistics and mentions that they have never met their biological fathers. Another participant (Nelson) even emphasised the need for fathers to be supportive to their families as he mentions how some fathers *'just leave'* their children and do not assume responsibility for them. The participants highlighted how father-child relationship is important for children's wellbeing as previously emphasised by McKeown and colleagues (2003). Tami (2016) also found that adolescent's satisfaction with the father-adolescent relationship significantly influenced fluctuations in children's psychological wellbeing. Supporting research has shown how children yearn for father's protection, respect, and guidance and how father absenteeism is related to developmental challenges in children and other socio-emotional and economic challenges (Salami & Okeke, 2018; Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020). In Pannilage (2017)'s study, most children mentioned that *'when a child has no father, she or he is very sad'* (p154). Results of Pannilage (2017)'s study are similar to the results from the current study and further emphasis how children experience economical, psychological, and social voids in the absence of a father-figure in their lives.

In terms of **family structure**, most children in the study agreed that the family was made up of people who share a common goal. The results from this study demonstrates the importance of the structure of the family and how it influences children's conceptualisation of the family, and the relationships children choose to endorse. The current results also mirror previous studies that have found that family structure is strongly associated with the health and wellbeing of children (Assari et al., 2017; Hadfield et al., 2018; Narbona et al., 2021).

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It is evident from the results of this study that one cannot fully understand the uniqueness of a family without considering its structural properties in terms of people who make up the family and the rules of relating that spearhead the unique patterns of interactions within the family (Behere et al., 2017; Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019). The unique structures of different families also influence strategies families employ in executing their functions and enforcing organisational patterns (Behere et al., 2017). From the study, participants from single-parent-headed families, living with their mothers only showed different strategies in communication, rules, and responsibilities different from those from two-parent-headed households. The composition of the family, hence, affects family dynamics by shaping the strategies employed in the system's effort to accomplish its tasks (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019).

Research has shown that in single parent headed families (especially single mothers), the parent has to be the sole economic and parenting resource which can put a strain on the parent both financially and emotionally (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2019; Marcdante & Kliegman, 2018). As a result, children may either develop resilience and feel obliged to assist in household chores and/or experience high levels of behavioural, emotional and psychological problems (Behere et al., 2017). Two female participants in the study, (Grace and Jane) living with their single mother and being the only child in the family, reported how roles and responsibilities were basically shared between them and their mothers. The mother assumed all the adult-financial responsibilities and they were responsible for house chores. The girls also displayed a more intense, intimate relationship with their mothers, reporting how their mothers' struggles and sacrifices has caused them to cherish their mother more, compared to other participants who did not quite express the same passion when speaking about their mothers. Resonating with results from this study are studies that have highlighted a positive correlation between family structure and quality of closeness of parent -child relationships (Golombok & Tasker, 2015; King et al., 2017; Luthar et al.,2015).

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5.2.1 Children's perception of what families should look like

Children in this current study also expressed their perceptions of what families of today should look like. Important to this theme were the negative consequences to the children, as a result of lack of communication and support by parents and the importance of a father figure in a children's life. Lack of communication and support was linked as the root cause

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of a number of malfunctions in the family and a result of children suffering in silent. Buehler (2020) emphasised the importance of paying attention to children because whatever they experience during childhood and adolescence, if not resolved, will not only affect them but also generations to come. One example is the transmission of generational violence, anger and compromised parental skills.

Children in this study also expressed the importance of a father-figure for their development. Their critique is that fathers abandon their children, yet their presence is quite important to them. Research has also shown that, in South Africa, majority of the children are raised in absent father homes (Magqamfana & Bazana, 2020; Martial, 2013; Salami & Okeke, 2018). Most participants (save for those being raised by single mothers) reported their fathers or stepfathers being the leader of their homes with the important role of protecting them. Most children who grow up in father absent homes exhibit behavioural problems emanating from feelings of resentments, anxiety, and unhappiness (Minow, 2020). The importance of co-parenting and constructive communication between parents and children are associated with lesser psychosocial and behavioural challenges (Buehler, 2020; Knopp et al., 2017). Choi and Becher (2019) also found supportive co-parenting (i.e., communicating affirmation, appreciation, and respect for one another's parenting) to be associated with child-wellbeing. Although fathers often exercise less direct influence than mothers on the well-being of children, even in two parent families, their supportiveness increases the child's life satisfaction and reduces their psychological disturbance suggesting that supportive parents may reinforce each other's supportiveness (McKeown et al., 2003).

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5.3 Children's understanding of belief systems, communication, and organisational process within the families

The second objective of this study was to investigate children's understanding of family resilience within their families, with a close focus on how they comprehend and conceptualise the family resilience key constructs which relate to the well-functioning of the family. The study employed Walsh Family Resilience Framework (FRF) as the theoretical basis. According to Walsh (2003), family resilience is the family's ability to cultivate strength in order to positively meet the challenges of life. Crisis and adversity are inevitable in life, but the family resilience framework positions the family as an institute capable of

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fostering healing, growth, and positive transformation among its members (Walsh, 2012; Slezackova & Sobotkova, 2017).

Walsh's FRF acknowledges the uniqueness of each family with regards to the varying difficulties they face, different structures which may influence the relationships within the family, their values and principles, and the resources at their disposal (Walsh, 2003; 2012; 2016). The results of the study attest to the diverse structures and traits of families as seen from the participants' responses. Participants' description highlighted different insights in how they manage adversity and 'bounce back' from their everyday struggles which make their family resilient. Other families however, as reported by the participants, indicated the need for resilience interventions (counselling or therapy) to help strengthen their families which have otherwise been crippled by the adversities of life. One participant (John) mentioned how he is disoriented from his family, how he does not know much that happens within his family and is not close to his stepmother and stepsiblings to the extent that he feels he does not need family in his life. This child further describes how children fall into depression and their families are ignorant about it. Walsh's framework, which is deeply embedded in ecological and developmental theories, emphasise how the environment in which the child develops in plays a crucial part in fostering resilience and positive response to a crisis. Evidently, children's perception of their everyday family life and function mirrored how their home environment influence their development and wellbeing. It is also evident, from the current study, how changes in the family structure and process affect children's wellbeing as previously echoed by Buehler (2020) and Kaisers (2016). It is important to strengthen the family's ability to weather both internal (e.g., divorce, death, sickness) and external (e.g., unemployment, crime, and violence) undue adversities for the development and progression of the child and future generations of the family (Isaacs et al., 2017; Roman et al., 2016). This theoretical framework was important for this study as the study sought to understand family functions and processes of families in South Africa, to strengthen struggling families in South Africa (Isaacs, 2018).

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Walsh describes three key integral processes crucial for the well-functioning of the family; family belief systems, communication processes and organisational patterns (Walsh, 2016). The children in the study also described their family life, adversities and how they face everyday challenges following the three key constructs as outlined by Walsh. It is important to note that some of the constructs, however, did not appear as clear cut as was described by Walsh's FRF as some sub-components were absent from the participants' responses. The following figure is a summary of children's understanding of family resilience processes.

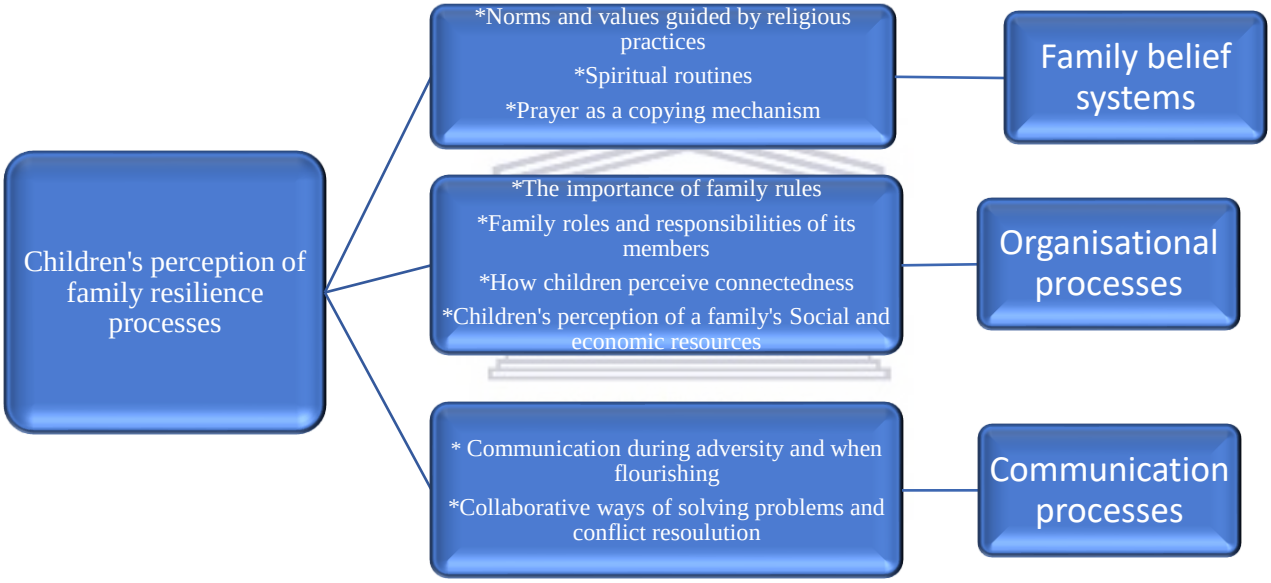

Figure 3: Children's perception of family resilience processes

The figure above first describes how children perceive the family resilience process and then links it with the three key processes as described by Walsh.

Belief systems are at the core of the Walsh family resilience framework as they encompass the family's norms, values and assumptions that guide their decision making particularly in times of crisis (Walsh, 2003). These values shape the identity of the family and is transmitted from one generation to the other through routines and cultural activities (Imber-Black, 2012; Walsh, 2012). Children are often described as 'the future' as they hold the mantle for the continuation of society's culture (Igwilo & Ogbo, 2019). In the present study, children demonstrated their awareness of the norms and values held by their families.

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In this family resilience dimension (Belief systems), there are three sub-constructs which are *making meaning of adversity*, *positive outlook,* and *transcendence and spirituality*. Of the three sub-constructs of belief systems, transcendent beliefs which was prevalently anchored in religious practices and spiritual routines was prominent. Transcendent beliefs and experiences provide meaning, purpose, and connection (Walsh, 2012) and this was also evident in the current study. Most participants mentioned how the norms and values of their families are guided by religious principles. Prayer was used as a coping mechanism as one participant, (Mark) mentioned how they pray for answers and how they support each other when an individual or the family is going through turbulent times. Another participant, (William), also mentioned how they consult religious mediums for answers if things are not going well in their family. The majority of the participants acknowledged the practice of religious routines within their families, and these routines help transmit family norms. Almost all the children mentioned that they pray as a family everyday either before meals and or before they go to bed. Highlighted in this study was the children's ability to express how their individual views often differed from the family's traditional norm. One participant mention that they pray every day even though she does not like praying (Grace). The children are slowly realising their individual ideas of spirituality but are forced to consciously abide to family routines as these belief systems provides a clear vision, of what the family stand for, represents the family's persona and creates a sense of belonging and harmony within the family.

Organisational process was one of the most dominant themes in this study. According to Walsh (2016), the adaptation of the family and effective family function is fostered through the way the family is organised and is strengthened by the three sub-constructs of this family process; *flexibility*, *connectedness*, and *social and economic resources* (Walsh, 2012;2016). All the three sub-constructs were present in the study.

Flexibility in the current study was described in terms of the roles, rules, responsibilities, patterns, and rituals that the family continuously adhere to, and the leadership of the family. According to Walsh (2016), flexibility is the balance between stability and change which enables the family to create and/or maintain structure in order to endure and overcome adversity. It was interesting to note that all the children were clear about who they considered the leader to be and why that person was regarded as the leader.

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The children in the study identified their parents, elders, and guardians as the leaders of the house, who held the power and voice to direct the family. The participants were able to reiterate and identify their leaders as their providers (food, shelter, education, clothes), protector (shield children and protect them), guarder (the one who provides direction and gives instruction, guides the family, puts rules, and ensure that everyone abides to them). Similarly, Walsh (2016) postulates that strong leadership is crucial in order to nurture, guide and protect family members. In the current study, good leadership was associated with effective parenting, effective communication, and the establishment of clear guiding ethical principles. These characteristics of good leadership in the family has also been established in previous studies as vital for the growth and wellbeing of the family unit improving the family's ability to function as a cohesive, supportive, and caring group (Bates et al., 2021; Kailasapathy & Jayakody, 2017; Walsh, 2003). Another peculiar finding was how the children in the study assigned gender-based roles to their parents and adults in the family. The adult males were identified as financial provider (buying food, paying fees and rent) as mentioned by Mark, John, Billy, and Nelson while the adult females' role was usually to prepare the food, cleans, cook and iron clothes (John, Grace, Mark).

Most children mentioned that principles were enforced through rules and these rules were usually enacted by the leader. These processes help maintain stability within the family. Acknowledging the consequences of disobeying the rules, the children in the study were quite aware of the discipline measures that would take place once they disobey any rule. According to Nieman and Shea (2004) rules are meant to teach children to live cooperatively with others, to distinguish right from wrong and to also protect them from harm and effective discipline help enforce these rules. Discipline is about changing behaviour and is very important and critical for the development of children as it encourages good behaviour, helps children make good choices, helps children manage emotions and help children become responsible adults (Dadds & Tully, 2019; Fletcher, 2012; Owen et al., 2012). In a study by Brassell et al. (2016), parents' psychological flexibility while parenting was found to be associated with fewer child and teen behaviour problems. In the current study, all the children reported that punishment was the yardstick for disobedience, although different forms of punishment would be given to different offenses (physical punishment, negative reinforcement, scolding). Unfortunately, most parents promote maladaptive behaviour unknowingly by focusing on failures and punishments (Breen et al., 2015; Dawes et al.,

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2005; Gershoff, 2002). This was evident in this study as participants mentions how it hurts and *"breaks"* them when their parents shout at them. The children in the study also highlighted that corporal punishment was still an everyday experience for them. Evidence of the negative consequences of physical punishment on children's wellbeing is robust (Bauld, 2019; Carter-Davies & Bristow, 2018; Durrant & Ensom, 2012; Glicksman, 2019; WHO, 2021). The results of the current study are similar to previous studies that have shown that spanking children affects children's psychological wellbeing (Gershoff et al., 2012; Gershoff et al., 2017; Streit & Davis, 2021).

Connectedness in this study was evident among the interviewed participants as they described how they stay connected with their family members by spending quality time together and supporting each other. According to Walsh (2012) for a family to be able to be resilient when faced with adversities, the family needs to have in place a maintained connection with each other so that they can turn to each other in challenging times. The children in the study also showed that through these bonds it becomes easy for them to resolve any internal disputes. The participants also showed how they stay connected by spending time with each other and how much they value the times be it reading a book together, cooking together, going on holidays, or playing soccer and games together. Connectedness also means seeking reconnection and repairing grievances and broken relationships, making amends, and strengthening family relations (Walsh, 2012). Broken relationships cripple the family as one participant (Jane), describes how much her mother was affected by the rift between her older sister and her mother, who no longer talk to each other now, and how she wishes they would reconcile. Research and theory have shown the importance of repairing broken relationships on regulatory processes in families and how family members need to learn to soothe each other and be able to sustain strong relationships as turning away from connection only leads to withdrawal, and overtime loss of hope of repairing the relationship (Driver et al., 2012; Walsh, 2016).

A families' ability to overcome some challenges is also dependant on the *social and economic resources* at their disposal. Although most participants mentioned that their families prefer solving their own problems, they did acknowledge times when they needed help from outside members. For example, Mary, from this study, mentions how the community and neighbours came together and help her family with her father's funeral.

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Being a member of a societal groups or religious congregation provides individuals with a sense of belonging, security, and solidarity. Members of a social group also receive financial, emotional, and social support in times of hardship, by which the family could not have been able to cope alone. Walsh (2016) believes that strong families are those families able to admit that they have difficulties and in need of help, hence linkages with the social world is vitally important for family resilience.

According to Walsh (2003), **communication and problem solving** is the over-arching construct of the family resilience process as it intertwines with the other resilience constructs (involves transmission of beliefs and communication of organisational expectations). In this over-arching process, Walsh postulates that family resilience is facilitated by *clear and consistent messages*, *open emotional expression* with tolerance of differences and individual ownership of feelings, and *collaborative ways of solving problems* that are proactive, goal-oriented, and based on fairness and reciprocity (Anderson et al., 2013; Walsh 2012 ;2016). The subthemes generated for this construct related to how the children experienced communication during difficult times and how they experienced communication when the family was flourishing and the family's ways of solving problems.

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Findings from the current study are consistent with contemporary understanding of how communication governs key aspects of family relationships (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2012; O'Toole et al., 2019). Most participants acknowledged that when facing difficulties, communication is weakened, curbed by emotions and stresses surrounding the given situation. As a consequence, individuals tend not to communicate very well with each other. When the family is flourishing however, the communication also changes, and the children reports that the communication in the family is very good. The bonds created when the family is flourishing enables the family members to seek empathy and support from one another during challenging situations. Participants expressed how *open emotional sharing* among members of the family when the family is flourishing help strengthen bonds within the family. Jane, a female participant in the current study mentions how she can communicate in colloquial language about anything with her mother, (*l just say, **'Shaw ma!'** and then she's like **'Enta'** …yah like that that's how we communicate, that's the bond*) demonstrating a very strong bond between her and her mother, and how she can speak flexibly with her mother. Similarly, Grace, another female participant in the study also

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mentions how she can talk to her mother at any time about anything and how this brings her a sense of safety. Knopp and colleagues (2017) highlighted how clear, open, and constructive communication helps transmit positivity, warmth and cohesion in the family which is important for children's wellbeing. Sharing emotions and freely expressing feelings helps family members to feel connected and part of the problem-solving process. According to Walsh (2006), involving children and all family members informed of challenges being faced by the family (being also age sensitive about issues to share with children) facilitates cohesion within the family. Peter, from the study mentions how as a family they set up a meeting on a particular day to discuss all the issues concerning the family. In this meeting everyone is expected to freely express their views and contributions to the matters at hand.

The sub-construct of clarity through communicating *clear and consistent messages* was also reflected in the study. Sometimes children are not comfortable to approach their parents because there is no clear communication between the parents when it comes to issue that concerns them. An example is of John, a participant in the study who regards his stepmother and stepsiblings as his father's family not his. He even admits that he knows nothing about his stepfamily (their roles, responsibilities, belief system, events that happen around them like why his stepmother tried to commit suicide). According to Dunn et al. (2001), in their study of children's experience of their parent's separation / re-marriage, children who did not have an adequate explanation about the changes happening in their families often felt detached and confused. Such ambiguity and vague communication may lead to retaliation and maladaptive responses which will result in individual dysfunction, relationship distress, and family breakdown (Walsh, 2016). Clarity between family members is very important as vague messages might cause confusion and parents also need to be clear about their children's behaviour and understand their children's needs. Padilla-Walker et al. (2016) highlights how parental support and open communication within the family is positively associated with youth prosocial behaviours and socioemotional wellbeing.

Family communication patterns are important within the family as through communication the family can create mental models of family life which will determine various outcomes of children's ability to confront different social and psychological challenges. Children's ability to resolve conflicts, to be resilient, to manage future romantic relationships, to communicate apprehensively, and to exhibit social withdrawal behaviours is

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all dependant on the mental models created by the family. Relationships, feelings of membership and interpersonal connections within the family and between family members are also guided by the communication process within the family (Harold & Sellers, 2018).

5.4 Conclusion

Chapter 5 presented a discussion of the results from the semi-structured interviews with a focus of highlighting how the findings from the current study related to previous literature and the two theoretical frameworks employed. The objectives of the study were achieved through two thematic categories. Children in the study were able to describe their family, the people they regard as family and the importance and meaning of family. Meaning of family life was deduced from children's experiences. The theoretical frameworks employed in this study were also important in understanding the results of the study. The results provided qualitative evidence which aligns with Walsh family resilience framework. The framework which is deeply embedded in ecological and developmental theories attest to how environment influences children's development. Evidence from the study points to how the family institute, the family structure, the family day to day functions affects the health and psychological wellbeing of the child.

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The rich, quality content of the response of the children proves the Child standpoint theory which vividly protests for the involvement and serious attention to children's voice when it comes to matters that involves and concern them (Fattore et al., 2016; Medina-Minton, 2019; Savahl, 2017). The children in the study demonstrated a unique understanding of family relations within their family and were distinct about relations that mattered to them. Children from the study were also able to highlight how their thoughts and ideas can positively contribute to the well-functioning of the family, proving the need to be identified and treated as individual family members of the unit.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The study aimed at exploring children's experiences and perceptions of their family life and family resilience process. The objective of the study was achieved through qualitative individual face to face interviews which warranted the researcher with an in-depth understanding of how the children defines, value, interpret and understand the family institute and the family resilience processes. The dimensions of family functioning and processes within the context of adversity were also explored according to the Walsh family resilience framework. The aim of this final chapter is to integrate the previous chapters focusing on how the findings of the study and the discussion of the findings answers the aims and objectives of the study and the implications of these results in terms of adding new knowledge to family resilience science and its contribution in developing family resilience-strengthening programme for families in South Africa. The chapter will also highlight limitations of the current study and recommendations for future research.

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6.2 Implications of the study (theoretical and practical implications)

The concept of families and the importance of family resilience has been explored in many spheres of research, clinical practice and policy (Jones et al., 2021; Karpunina, 2019; October 2018; Slezackova & Sobotková, 2017 White Paper on Families, 2012;2021). Although numerous studies have sought to investigate and foster family resilience programmes and interventions (Basu et al., 2021; Isaacs et al., 2020; Masten, 2018; Saltzman, 2016; Van't Noordende et al., 2021), children are yet to be adequately involved as primary informants in the literature, knowledgebase and implementation of research and interventions. This study sought to investigate the untapped source of children's knowledge and family life experience and contribute to bridging the gap in literature of children's understandings of family and family resilience. According to Walsh (2016) the need for a focus on family resilience "has never been more urgent, as families today are challenged with global economic, social, political and environmental upheavals" (p. xii). Given the South African political legacy which continues to afflict the socio-economic conditions of

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families (Isaacs et al., 2020), understanding first children's knowledge and experiences was a necessary establishment in the pathway to resolving the impeding family crisis. The study analysed qualitative interviews from nine children from low to middle socioeconomic status to further explore family resilience among the mostly afflicted group. The results of the study attests to the need for implementing more comprehensive family resilience programmes for struggling families in South Africa.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, save for the Masters thesis by Louw (2018) which investigated adolescent's perceptions of family resilience in an absent father family, the current study is the second, qualitative study in South Africa to investigate children's perceptions and experiences of their family lives and how children understand resilience and resilience processes within their families.

The two theoretical frameworks employed in this study were effective in adequately addressing the aims and objectives of the study. The concept of 'child standpoint' is still an uncharted ground, and though growing, very little is still known especially in South Africa (Savahl, 2017). The academic implication of this research is to add knowledge to the scarce literature on children's voice and the child standpoint framework.

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The Child Standpoint framework position children as being often marginalised, and the main concern of Child Standpoint is to highlight children's voices. According to Medina-Minton (2019), children are viewed as being oppressed through two types of oppression: marginalisation and powerlessness. The marginalisation of children is evident from how they are separated from decision makings and other societal inclusions which inhibits their abilities. The children in the current study expressed different incidence where they felt their input would have mattered if they were asked. The importance of including children in matters that affect them was also highlighted through two different outcomes. From John's experiences, being excluded from decision making and family affairs had negative consequences on his wellbeing as he no longer felt the importance of family anymore because of how he has been side-lined in his own family. On the other hand, Peter, whose family set up meetings to discuss issues concerning the family, giving children a platform for their voices to be heard, shows that involving children in matters that concerns them gives them a sense of belonging and confidence.

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The study's findings offer further information on how to communicate and interact with children about their families, how to connect with the children and how best to design family programmes targeted for children. Discipline is an important and crucial aspect of a child's development, however findings from the study offers insight on the importance of continuous educational campaigns to alert and educate parents on appropriate discipline strategies. Children also expressed the emotional and moral need for their parent's support and attention, in which most cases parents do not notice the struggles and sufferings their children go through in silence. The adolescent stage is a very crucial stage in the development of a child as they experience immense emotional, biological, cognitive and personality changes. The results highlight the importance of parent-child relationships during this period from a child's standpoint which is very important in decreasing future risks on children.

Children communicated very clear and concise information regarding what they believed family life is about and should be about. The children in the study expressed how much they depend on their family for moral, emotional and financial support. Parents being available and involved in the children's academic and non-academic activities at school was an important gesture for the children. Through the lens of the children from the current study, although the family is responsible for the financial provision of the children, this should be done selflessly without putting the pressure of 'black tax' on them. The children also mentioned how the family should protect them from both the outside world, and within family structures. The children also, mentioned specifically how a father figure is important for protecting them from the violent community and how less evasive disciplinary methods from the parents themselves protect them mentally and emotionally.

The second theoretical framework employed in this study was Walsh's Family Resilience framework. Walsh stipulates nine distinct dimensions and processes within this framework (Walsh, 2012). From the results of this study, however, some of the themes, Walsh deemed relevant were not necessarily relevant to the children's standpoint. The three constructs under the belief system (meaning of adversity, positive outlook, and transcendence and spirituality) could not quite align with what the children were saying when they spoke about their belief systems. For the children in this study, the meaning of adversity and having a positive outlook, though not clear, was mostly expressed as important

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for the communication and problem-solving key process. Additionally, a construct like flexibility, which is one of the three sub-constructs under organisational process, could not adequately capture the multitude expressions by the children. In explaining their understanding of organisational processes, the children spoke about rules, roles, responsibilities, and leadership. To bracket all these different constructs under a single term of "flexibility" seems inappropriate hence the question of whether or not 'flexibility' is the best term to describe these different constructs should be considered. The researcher concurs with Slezackova and Sobotková (2017) assertion that the terms need further depiction both terminologically and semantically. The principles of the Walsh framework helped contextualise children's opinions and sentiments about their family functioning and everyday life. However, taking into consideration the few but significant differences within the collective constructs of the family resilience framework, the Walsh family resilience framework can be employed as a footing for developing a theoretical family resilience framework more compatible with children, particularly South African children (given the cultural, socio-economic, and political background of South Africa).

6.3 Limitations

Children have been for a long time viewed as humans *"becoming*" rather than "*being*". This has understandably resulted in stringent gatekeeping systems when it comes to research with children and views children as dependent and in need of protection (Balen et al., 2006). This is undoubtedly for the protection of the children. The researcher first met with the children and explained in detail what the study entails, interested participants then signed the ascent form (Appendix B) and took the consent form (Appendix C) home for their parents to sign. Acquiring parental informed consent was challenging to a degree as some parents denied their children the opportunity to participate out of their own fears of what the child might say about them, disregarding the child's excitement in participating in the study. The sample size was therefore smaller than the researcher had envisioned. The sample size was further reduced as a result of the abrupt implication of Level three lockdown. The researcher could not access schools as initially anticipated in the proposal as a result of lockdown regulations. Using one school and having a smaller sample size meant that the population was not represented enough and that results are more liable to bias.

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One of the inclusion criteria was that the participant had to be confident in speaking and capable of fairly expressing their views in English. The researcher was not familiar with other South African languages, nor did she have access to other resources which could have assisted with translation. Other studies should consider having more home languages represented.

The research was qualitative which by nature means that the results do not entirely represent the perceptions of all the children from low- middle socioeconomic backgrounds in South Africa, and hence the results cannot be generalised. However, conducting a qualitative query was paramount as this was the first study of its nature and hence requires an in-depth analysis for future recommendations

6.4 Recommendations

To address the limitations noted above, the following recommendations for future studies will be made. One recommendation is for future studies to conduct the study in the different South African languages, thereby giving children the freedom to express themselves in their home language and expand the sample to be more representative of different cultures and backgrounds. In the current study, Mary expressed how she wished her parents could buy her things she sees her friends having, and William expressed how saving was a rule at their home. Children from other social classes may not necessarily share the same financial experiences, hence it will also be interesting for future studies to expand the scope of the study and investigate on a larger scale to include participants from upper and upper-middle socioeconomic classes to get a general perception of children from different backgrounds in South Africa. Another recommendation will be to use a much larger sample with participants from different schools for variability.

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Appendix A: Information letter to parents/ learners

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2283/2453, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail : 3936923@myuwc.ac.za

INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience in South Africa

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Placidia Shoko at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because your understanding of what family means to you will be highly valued and contribute greatly to this study.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to sit down with the researcher and answer a few questions concerning your understanding of the meaning of families. There are no right or wrong answers – we are only asking for your experiences.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

The researcher undertakes to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To help ensure your anonymity, your name will not be connected to the information you provide. Your confidentiality is of the utmost importance. To

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ensure your confidentiality, all transcriptions of the interviews will be kept on a password-controlled computer and will only be accessible to the researcher and her supervisor.

In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities' information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.

What are the risks of this research?

Some questions during the interview might make you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed. I assure you that the only aim of this study is to gain an understanding of your experiences and your perceptions. You may choose not to answer questions you are not comfortable with.

What are the benefits of this research?

Although this research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher learn more about how your age group perceive and understand family dynamics. We hope that our findings may be useful in the implementation of other family-based interventions and contributing to the knowledge base children's experiences of family life.

Do I have to be in this research, and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalised or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

Is any assistance available if I am negatively affected by participating in this study?

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

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Yes. Please contact the researcher (details below) and she will arrange for the appropriate care. We will provide referrals for you to talk to someone.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Placidia Shoko at the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact:

Placidia Shoko
Masters Student
Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
0671698192
3936923@myuwc.ac.za

Serena Isaacs
Supervisor
Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
021 959 3096/071889999
sisaacs@uwc.ac.za

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Prof Anita Padmanabhanunni
Head of Department
Department of Psychology
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
apadmana@uwc.ac.za

Prof Anthea Rhoda
Dean
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17
Bellville 7535
chs-deansoffice@uwc.ac.za

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This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (REFERENCE NUMBER:_____)

HSSREC, Research Development
University of the Western Cape Private
Bag X17, Bellville 7535
researchethics@uwc.ac.za
021 959 4111

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Appendix B: Assent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel : +27 21-959 2825, Fax : 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: 3936923@myuwc.ac.za

ASSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience in South Africa

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand, and I freely and voluntarily agree to participate. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed and that I may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and this will not negatively affect me in any way.

Participant's name…….

Participant's signature …….

Witness …….

Date ……

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Appendix C: Parental Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2825, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: 3936923@myuwc.ac.za

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: Children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience processes in South Africa

The study has been described to me in a language that I understand, and I freely and voluntarily give my child permission to participate in this study. My questions about the study have been answered.

I understand that my child's identity will not be disclosed and that he/she may withdraw from the study without giving a reason at any time and will not be negatively affected in any way.

Parent's name ……..

Parent's signature …….

Date……

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (REFERENCE NUMBER:_____)

HSSREC, Research Development
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535
research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

021 959 4111

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Appendix D: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Participants details: Age…….. **Grade……** **Gender…….**

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a family to you?
    a. What does it look like?
    b. Can you describe it?
2. What do you think is the role of the family?
    a. What are some of the things that a family is responsible for?
3. What does communication look like in your family?
    a. How does your family talk to one another?
    b. Do you think they do this very well?
    c. When you're going through difficult times, how does your family talk to/communicate with one another?
4. How does your family typically 'organise' itself?
    a. What is each person's role within the family?
    b. Do your family members have typical 'roles' they play? Is there a 'leader'?
    c. What do you think your role is within your family?
    d. When you experience a difficult time, does this change?
5. What do you think your family believes in?
    a. What are your family's views on religion and/or spirituality?
    b. When you experience a difficult time, can you describe what your family attaches meaning to?
    c. Family sayings, prayers, beliefs?
6. What do you think your family does very well together?
7. What do you think your family could do better?

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Appendix E: Letter to principals

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2283/2453, Fax: 27 21-959 3515

E-mail: 3936923@myuwc.ac.za

Dear [INSERT PRINCIPAL NAME)

Re: Permission to conduct research

Project Title: Children's experiences and perceptions of family and family resilience

My name is Placidia Shoko, and I am a master's student at the University of the Western Cape. I am currently conducting a study investigating children's experiences and perceptions of their family life and the importance of family to them.

I would like to invite some of the learners from your school, girls and/or boys, aged 14-16 to participate in an individual interview. I will be happy to arrange online interviews outside of school hours in order to accommodate covid-19 safety protocols as well as respecting the limited time schools have with learners.

I will undertake to protect your school's identity as well as the identity of each participant. Permission will first be sought from interested learners' parents. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance.

In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities' information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others. We hope that the results may help us learn more about how this particular age group perceive and understand family dynamics. We hope that our findings may be useful in the implementation of our child-based Family Resilience Strengthening programme.

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Please find attached the information letter, consent forms and interview schedule to be sent to interested students and their parents for their consideration.

Placidia Shoko
Masters Student
0671698192
3936923@myuwc.ac.za

This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (REFERENCE NUMBER: HS19/7/12)

Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape
Private Bag X17, Bellville 7535
research-ethics@uwc.ac.za

021 959 411

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Appendix F: Ethics Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY *of the* WESTERN CAPE

14 May 2021

Ms P Shoko
Psychology
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

HSSREC Reference Number: HS19/7/12

Project Title: Children's experiences and perceptions of familiesand family resilience in South Africa.

Approval Period: 12 May 2021 – 12 May 2023

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval.

Please remember to submit a progress report by 30 November each year for theduration of the project.

The permission to conduct the study must be submitted to HSSREC for record keeping purposes.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse events and/or termination of the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

Appendix G: Gauteng Department Education Research Approval Letter

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	10 June 2021
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2021– 30 September 2021 2021/160
Name of Researcher:	Shoko P.M
Address of Researcher:	03 Kissmequick
	826 Dorandia
	Pretoria North
Telephone Number:	0671698192
Email address:	placyshumba@gmail.com
Research Topic:	Children's experiences and perceptions of families and family resilience in South Africa.
Type of qualification	Masters in Research Psychology
Number and type of schools:	1 Primary School and 1 Secondary School
District/s/HO	Tshwane South

UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

11/06/2021

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. *Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.*

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