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Primary caregivers' perceptions of the effect of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of learners at a secondary school in Soweto

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Primary caregivers' perceptions of the effect of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of learners at a secondary school in Soweto.

A report on a research study presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Social Work the field of School Social Work

By

Nokuthula Maseko

March 2024

DECLARATION

I, Nokuthula Maseko, hereby declare that this research report is entirely my own original work, generated without the help of others and that all sources utilized in the study have been correctly and appropriately recognized and cited. I additionally declare that steps have been taken to ensure that the publication of this work does not go against academic standards or ethical principles defined by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand (Non-Medical). I further attest that I have never submitted this research paper for a degree or exam to another university.

Student number: 2507498

Research Ethical Protocol number: SW23/01/01



Signature

Date: March 2024

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ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 lockdown restrictions were introduced in South Africa and around world. This led to school closures as well. During this period learners around the world experienced mental-health challenges due to the restrictions on gatherings, school attendance as well as social distancing. Some of the mental-health challenges that affected the learners include depression, anxiety, sleeping disorders as well as weight gain. This study explored the perceptions of the primary caregivers of secondary school learners in Soweto on the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. The study was conducted using an ecological theoretical framework which looked at the relationship of the learner in relation to different systems that they interact with. The researcher used a qualitative research approach and a phenomenographic research design.

Purposive sampling was utilised to select the sample of 8 primary caregivers of grade 11 learners at a Secondary School in Soweto. Semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection and a semi-structured interview schedule was used as the research instrument. Data collected was coded, themed, and analysed using reflective thematic analysis. The results from this study showed how COVID-19 had a negative effect on the academic performance of learners. The learners still could not achieve pre-COVID-19 results even after efforts were made for after-school programs and catch-up sessions. The learners' attitudes towards the virus included fear of death or losing loved ones due to COVID-19 as well as confusion and fear of contracting the virus. The learners shared that coughing, sneezing, or the mere sight of a tissue triggers them to date as they associate such symptoms with COVID-19. The learners in this study experienced psycho-social effects such as anxiety and stress as well as physical challenges such as weight gain, migraines, sleeping challenges as well as communication issues with the family members. Social media and technology acted as a buffer for learners as it offered them information, knowledge as well as social connections with teachers, peers, friends, and extended family members. The importance of working in a multi-disciplinary team to support and foster resiliency for the learners is highlighted. The learners in Soweto had their own experiences, but they were similar to those from around the world and therefore one can conclude that pandemic experiences were generic to some extent.

Keywords

Primary caregivers; COVID-19; Learners; Mental-wellbeing; Secondary School

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the background of the research study is presented and the problem statement as well as the rationale for the study are explained in detail. The research question is stated and the relevance of the study to School Social Work is highlighted. A brief overview of the research design and methodology is discussed as well as the definition of key concepts relevant to the study. Lastly, the research report is outlined.

1.2 Background of the study

COVID-19 virus, a pandemic was first discovered in Wuhan in 2019. The virus is transmitted from one infected person to another and is known to cause severe respiratory problems (Huang et al., 2020). The emergence of the virus has subsequently influenced the lives of people around the world, especially after it was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). Around the same time, South African President, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa also introduced the first lockdown which was declared in his speech which was aired on the 23rd of March 2020. The regulations included social distancing by the introduction of home quarantine and the closure of all businesses, non-essential services as well as schools.

The closure of schools caused disruptions to the normal learning for learners in schools in South Africa and countries around the world. Different researchers looked at the spread of COVID-19 and its impact on the mental health of people. Pan (2020) looked at the experiences of learners in China during COVID-19 and his findings were that learners improved their hygiene and survived the effects by getting into a routine with regards to online studying as well as household activities. The writer however did not explore the mental well-being challenges experienced by learners due to COVID-19. Islam et al. (2020) looked at depression and anxiety among university students in Bangladesh during the COVID-19 lockdown, and their findings were that university students were not immune to the effects of the lockdown. The lockdown affected their learning patterns, and their anxiety concerning the uncertainty of the future as well as financial implications, those with familial support emotionally and financially seemed to cope better with the anxiety and depression associated with the pandemic compared to those without the support of family (Islam et al. 2020). This statement is supported by findings from Porter et al. (2021) which state that there is a

correlation between mental health and poverty: those who have lower income are most likely to suffer from anxiety and depression compared to their wealthier counterparts.

While there are similarities between university students as well as middle school learners, with regard to anxiety, stress, and improved hygiene Li et al.'s (2022) research looked at the effects of learning attitudes to influence the achievement or the failure of learners as well as their perceptions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect thereof on their academics. Li et al.'s study applies to this research as learning attitudes may have played a major role in the academic performance of the learners at a lower-income households with learners at a government secondary school in Soweto as well as the peer support and availability of online learning platforms.

When it comes to the mental health and well-being of learners, there are several international research studies about the coping of students before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors all state that during the quarantine there was an increase in depressive symptoms like sadness and loss of interest in activities that they normally enjoy. The adolescents displayed anxiety especially when it came to social anxiety and fear of the unknown due to social distancing as well as school closure. They experienced fear, uncontrollable worrying, and uncertainty due to the disruptions in their normal daily routines. There were issues of loss of sleep and appetite amongst the adolescents, as well as how the adolescents dealt with issues of loss, grief, and bereavement. COVID-19 affected the normal way in which African practices were done, like attending a memorial service, being able to grieve or view the deceased before burial, or even attending a funeral as only 50 people were allowed to attend (Andrés et al., 2022; Racine et al. 2021; Ravizza et al. 2021; Houghton et al.; 2022; Slomski, 2021; Magson et al., 2020;Tandon et al. 2021; Thomas, 2021).

While global indicators have assessed how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the learner's mental health they also equipped workers in different fields with policies and implementation guidelines on how to improve the mental health of learners as well as their academic performance. South African school policies, as well as researchers, agree with the international authors and state that in their findings, they have found that the COVID-19 lockdown and the complete closure, as well as the 15 months of partial closure of schools, caused mental health problems for learners, teachers as well as parents, especially those who were unable to provide for the basic needs of the learners (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021). Van der Berg and Spaull (2020) looked at the effects

of school closure on the mental health and well-being of learners compared to other countries. Their study found that learners in South Africa are at high risk of developing psychological distress such as depression, fear, loneliness, child abuse, and exposure to domestic violence.

In the current study, the researcher explored the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown in a Secondary School in Soweto from the primary caregiver's perspective. The learners in a no-fee-paying public school had different experiences during the COVID-19 lockdown as compared to their counterparts in private or semi-private schools. The learners in the township schools experienced the levels of lockdown differently as compared to suburban areas and thus have unique experiences. This research explored caregivers' perceptions of the academic performance of learners before, during, and after the lockdown. It looked at how learners utilised social media as a means of educational, mental, and emotional support from peers, parents, teachers as well as extended family members. The research also looked into the physical and psycho-social consequences of COVID-19 experienced by learners and their perception of COVID-19 as a pandemic.

1.3 Statement of the problem and rationale for the study

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on learners worldwide, including those in South Africa, who faced extended school closures and remained at home for 15 months. The prolonged lockdown significantly affected the mental well-being of South African learners, depriving them of essential familial and peer support (Naicker et al., 2021). The primary problem addressed by this study is the need to understand how these unprecedented disruptions influenced the mental health and academic performance of learners in South Africa from the perspective of their primary caregivers.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of primary caregivers' perceptions regarding the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. It explores caregivers' views on the academic performance of learners before, during, and after the lockdown, as well as their use of social media for educational, mental, and emotional support from peers, parents, teachers, and extended family. The research also delves into caregivers' perceptions of the psycho-social and physical consequences of COVID-19 on learners and their overall view of the pandemic. Specifically, the study focuses on caregivers in Soweto, examining their insights into the support systems, coping mechanisms, mental wellness challenges, and resilience of learners during the

pandemic. Additionally, it investigates how caregivers and professionals collaborated to support learners in achieving the best academic outcomes during and after the lockdown.

The findings of this study are intended to inform school principals, teachers, and school-based support teams about caregivers' experiences and perceptions of the challenges faced by learners during the pandemic. It highlights recommendations and potential resolutions for creating effective contingency plans in schools to address future disruptions. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader knowledge base on COVID-19 by providing insights through the lens of caregivers, and it offers guidance to school social workers on developing new practices and policies to enhance intervention strategies and support for learners and their families.

Despite the availability of significant information on the effects of COVID-19 on learners' well-being globally and some studies within South Africa, this research uniquely focuses on the direct impact of the pandemic on learners from the caregivers' perspective. It also highlights solution-based interventions aimed at improving learner resilience. Recognizing access to education as a fundamental human right, this study underscores the importance of implementing necessary structures to ensure education remains accessible and equitable for learners in Soweto.

The recommendations from this study provide valuable insights for efficient and effective service delivery in implementing care and support services for the community, educators, learners, and their families. Although COVID-19 is no longer classified as a pandemic by the WHO, understanding its impact on learners and preparing for future disruptions is crucial. This research aims to enhance the preparedness of social service practitioners and the education system to support learner resilience and ensure comprehensive preparedness for any future challenges.

1.4 Research question of the study

Research question

The research question for the study was: What are the perceptions of primary caregivers regarding the well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown at a secondary school in Soweto?

1.5 Definition of Concepts

The following concepts are relevant to the study.

Caregivers- A person who gives care to people who need help taking care of themselves. Examples include children, the elderly, or patients who have chronic illnesses or are disabled (VadenBos, 2007). For this study, a caregiver is a person who looks after the learners at a secondary school in Soweto.

COVID-19 lockdown- a restriction policy for people to control their movement due to the high risk of infection should people be allowed to interact freely (Wikipedia, 2022).

Learners- are persons who are trying to gain knowledge or skill in something by studying, practicing, or being taught as defined in the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996). For this study, the researcher focused on learners in grade 11.

Mental well-being- A subjective sense of psychological coherence, emotional stability, and social connectedness in environments that are experienced as supportive, promoting the flexibility and resilience to adapt in situations of stress and adversity (Keyes, 2002). For the purpose of this study, the researcher will be focusing on the coping mechanisms of learners and the support they received from caregivers, teachers, and school social workers.

Secondary school- schools starting from grades 8 to 12 in South Africa are regarded as schools that offer secondary schooling to learners (South African Schools Act, 1996). The researcher focused on grade 11 learners at the secondary school in Soweto.

1.6 Brief overview of the research methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach and a phenomenographic research design to find out different ways that people understand, describe, analyse, and understand their lived social experiences. The design made it possible to investigate the caregivers' perspectives on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the learners in their care, who were enrolled in grades 11. The study's participants were the primary caregivers of learners in grades 11 at a Soweto, Gauteng, Secondary School. Eight primary caregivers of learners in grades 11 were sampled using purposeful sampling. Face-to-face interviews with caregivers served as the method of data collection, and a semi-structured interview guide was the research tool used. To analyse the data, thematic analysis was used.

1.7 Organisation of research report

This chapter provided the background to the study and contextualises the area of the research study. Chapter two provides a review for the related literature and addresses the theoretical framework underpinning the research study. Chapter Three explicates in detail the research methodology and methods applied during the research study. Chapter four provides an in-depth discussion and presentation of the research findings and analysed data that emerged from the study. The final chapter summarises the major findings of the study, conclusions, and proposed recommendations emanating from the study.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the literature review contextualises the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the mental well-being of learners as well as the effect on the learning system internationally and nationally. The challenges of the financial implications as well as social media usage during the lockdown are discussed in this chapter. The usage of social media as a coping tool is looked into while taking into consideration the lack of access to social media in South Africa due to high inequality. Responses to challenges via coping mechanisms, learner resilience as well as afterschool programs are looked into and the role of school support in promoting the mental well-being of learners, as described in the literature, is discussed. Lastly, the chapter looks into the theoretical framework underpinning the study and it is explained in detail.,

2.2 Literature review

One key goal that was outlined in the SDGs (UN, 2015) relevant to the Global Agenda's commitment to promoting people's dignity and worth includes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This goal was severely affected when the lockdown happened across the globe as there was no equality and accessibility to education for all learners.

2.3 South African policies and legislature that promote learners' mental well-being.

The mental well-being of learners is highly important for their development and growth and as a result South Africa has a vast range of policies and frameworks that can be utilised to improve the mental well-being of learners. These include Chapter 28 of the Constitution (1996), which focuses on the protection of the rights of children. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 states that the best interest of the child is of paramount importance, thus protecting children and ensuring that they receive prevention, early intervention, statutory and continuum care services are implemented by the multidisciplinary team is of high importance for protecting our future leaders. The White Paper on Families (2021) looks at the primary role that families play in enhancing the mental well-being of

learners and by focusing on the strength-based approach, families can be capacitated with parenting skills as well as life skills to improve the lives of learners.

The National School Safety Framework, Health Promoting Schools Framework, Care and Support for Teaching and Learning provide guidelines for parents, teachers, and school social workers to improve the mental as well as psycho-social well-being of learners. Thus vast training should be conducted for all those involved in the lives of learners for them to understand their role in producing effective and resilient adults. This should be done in conjunction with the South African Mental Health Act, Integrated Social Health Policy as well as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Policy Guidelines. COVID-19 may have been the eye opener that was needed to understand as well as promote the mental well-being of learners.

2.4 International studies on the effects of COVID-19 on learners' mental well-being

COVID-19 had a great effect on learners everywhere and therefore this section will start by looking at international research regarding the effects of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of learners across the globe. Faize and Husain (2020) in their research looked at the anxiety and sleeping patterns of university learners in Pakistan and found that most students reported psychological problems due to COVID-19, they experienced mental stress, depression, anxiety, and anger caused by the fear of getting infected as well as the growing number of positive cases. The words that students used to express their feelings included helplessness, depression, sleep disorder, nausea, and frustration (Pan, 2020).

Studies conducted in Pakistan, Spain, Japan, America, and the United Kingdom state that the pandemic also affected the learner's physical health, as it affected their weight due to inactivity during the lockdown, which also had an impact on their anxiety and depression (Faize & Husain, 2020; Viner et al., 2020; McMillen, 2020). Lee et al. (2021), as well as Morata et al. (2021), concur with this and further state that learners expressed that they experienced sleeplessness, loss of appetite, dizziness, and abdominal pains as part of the psychological and physical problems they associated with COVID-19.

2.5 South African literature on COVID-19 and learners' mental well-being

With various sources talking about the effects on the mental well-being of learners across the globe, the researcher wanted to ensure that she looked at the similarities in research studies in

South Africa. van Bruwaene et al. (2020), as well as van der Berg and Spaull (2020), talk about how the care of learners has been severely compromised by the lockdown, and how certain regulations had a direct impact on the learners access to healthcare and education, although this is their basic right. There was a risk of dropout of learners in South Africa especially those from vulnerable groups due to prolonged school closures (Ardington, 2021).

With the closure of schools, several learners experienced isolation, anxiety, and hunger. The restrictions imposed during the period could have been considered to be a form of abuse to the learners (van Bruwaene, et al., 2020; van Der Berg & Spaull, 2020; Naicker et al., 2021). The learners had no access to the school feeding scheme and thus were prone to malnutrition, the families also experienced increased financial stress, and in turn there was an increased the rate of child abuse, substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, anxiety, fear, and loneliness (van Bruwaene, et al., 2020; van Der Berg & Spaull. 2020; Naicker et al., 2021). The learning losses suffered by South African learners during COVID-19 have still not been recovered, even though learner support systems such as catch-up sessions, holiday programs as well as the hiring of teacher assistance were applied for mitigation purposes as well as to bridge the gap, there is still a lot of work to do in order to ensure that learners are equipped through the Learning Recovery Program LRP (Wills & van der Berg, 2024).

Skeen et al. (2022) concur with the above authors and further state that being in secondary school is the most critical time in the adolescent's development, and state that common mental health conditions that emerge at this stage are anxiety, moods, substance use, attention, behaviour disorders as well as being suicidal. These are heightened by risk factors such as poor socioeconomic status, parental depression, dysfunctional families, poor parental skills, bullying as well as low self-esteem (Skeen, 2022).

Shepherd and Mohohlwane (2021) agree with the authors above and also insist that the pandemic put learners at a greater risk of dropping out as well as either lagging behind or losing out on learning. Economic hardships faced by households led to the inability to fulfil basic needs of food and shelter and this led to adverse mental health outcomes for parents as well as emotional health deterioration for learners. The authors state that these adverse mental health issues can be reversed by improving learners' access to sufficient, healthy, and nutritious food (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021).

The mental well-being of adolescents is crucial as it looks at how they cope with life challenges as well as finding appropriate ways to respond to stressors and negative events they encounter such as poverty, violence, and widespread discrimination as this has a direct influence on their mental well-being (Kleintjes et al., 2022). Learners especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds are enabled to engage positively in school when there is a positive relationship between their primary caregivers as well as teachers (Mamutse, 2023). Naicker (2022) looks at families' key role in providing nurturing care and conducive environments for adolescent mental health well-being and how working with families from a strength-based approach can optimise family functioning.

2.6 Financial implications of the lockdown on the learners and their families.

Given that the primary caregiver group that the researcher worked with is from a low socioeconomic background, she looked at programmes that were established with learners as well as families with a similar background and how their issues were addressed in their respective areas. Morata et al. (2021) did a study on after-school programme's response to the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons learned from Barcelona, Spain. Their findings regarding learners' experiences were similar to those in Pakistan, America, and China regarding how COVID-19 had a severe negative impact on the lives of learners in Spain, especially those in low-income households. In the four months that the schools were closed, learners were subjected to emotional and behavioural changes such as poor concentration, anxiety, depression, irritability, decreased physical activity, and disturbed sleeping patterns from the parent's perspective. In addition to these, a negative economic impact created by the pandemic enhanced stressors for financially distressed families and influenced their functioning. The financial issues increased behavioural problems and incidences of domestic violence, substance abuse, and the number of children removed from the care of families (Morata et al. 2021; Shah et al, 2020).

Other challenges experienced by learners in Spain as well as in other countries included the lack of access to electronic devices, elevated risk of social exclusion due to unemployment, acute financial concerns like food insecurity, and the inability to make ends meet. There were inequalities in providing educational support to low-income families who could not afford educational materials and support services offered, especially for learners with special needs. The lockdown also elevated behavioural changes as learners found it difficult to focus on schoolwork due to a lack of routine, structure, and adverse sleeping patterns. The coexistence between stressed

family members and learners led to a substantial increase in family conflicts. There was also a lack of knowledge due to resources being scarce, limited or no access to technology. Families had no idea how to apply for financial aid, food relief, health care, and how to engage remotely with service providers for social assistance as well as health care (Morata et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2020). This is concurrent with the findings of Hassan and Daniel (2020) as well as Allan et al. (2020) who looked at the implications of COVID-19 for Black students in high schools. Their studies talk about the underreporting of challenges experienced by the different African students in different countries and these challenges are similar to this research study.

In South Africa, families that have experienced socioeconomic challenges during the lockdown were increased as there were major job losses during the pandemic, as much as the government tried to provide Social Relief of Distress grants for the unemployed, it was not enough to provide for the basic needs of the learners (Mamutse, 2023). Primary caregivers were compelled by COVID-19 to take on the role of educator for their children while also dealing with stress and financial hardships (Schmidt et al., 2021).

2.7 Usage of social media by learners.

According to Faize and Husain (2020), the social media posts and extensive broadcasting of COVID-19 by television and news channels played a major role in psychological problems that were experienced by the learners. The learners blamed the media for perpetuating fear and anxiety. The pandemic also had a severe effect on the anxiety and stress levels of learners when it came to their academic performance as learners with severe anxiety found it difficult to study, and thus their academic performance was affected (Wang et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022).

COVID-19 also affected the learners socially and this added to their anxiety. The students had no access to their social circle due to the pandemic, the institutions of education were closed, and they were not allowed to move outside except for essential services and at specified times (Pan, 2020). The lockdown pandemic also elevated behavioural changes that affected the learner's physical health. Learners found it difficult to focus on schoolwork and due to a lack of routine, structure, and inactivity their weight was affected during the lockdown. This also had an impact on their anxiety and contributed to adverse sleeping patterns (Marelli et al., 2020). The coexistence between stressed family members' depression (Faize & Husian, 2020) and learners led to a

substantial increase in family conflicts (Morata et al., 2021; Faize & Husain, 2020; McMillen, 2020).

2.8 The role of social media usage by learners in South Africa

Desai and Burton (2022) looked at the effect of the digital world on the mental health of adolescents and found that the onset of COVID-19 increased the usage of technology and the internet for South African adolescents. Adolescents in the country access the internet on smartphones while using mobile data as mobile networks provide cheaper access to social media platforms and the usage of a home computer or tablet is rare in lower socio-economic households and this showed the digital inequalities (Desai & Burton, 2022) in the South African context. South African parents limit the usage of social media as they have limited knowledge of the risks and opportunities that the digital world offer. As much as there are potential threats to the usage of the internet, it is said to be able to offer opportunities in enhancing the health and well-being of learners through psycho-social support and mental services and information that adolescents may be uncomfortable about in seeking physical services or through consultations (Desai & Burton, 2022).

2.9 Coping mechanisms applied by learners during the lockdown.

According to Faize and Husain (2020), the learners coped with the pandemic by developing various coping mechanisms. Some spent more time assisting with household chores, they also ensured that they built bonds with family members in the household and kept contact with extended family members and friends by video calls and chatting on WhatsApp and other apps. The learners mentioned that they developed new hobbies or brushed up on old ones to deal with being indoors the entire day. Some stated that they kept busy by enrolling in online courses that taught cooking, décor, and art.

To avoid infection, learners reported that they applied the WHO guidelines in hygiene as well as social distancing and wearing masks, they also avoided crowded places and only went outside if it was for essential purposes (Faize & Husain, 2020). One solution that learners in various parts around the world did to avoid depression was to avoid social and electronic media from unverified sources as exposure to unverified sites added to their anxiety (Wang et al., 2020).

2.10 Response to challenges of the lockdown by social services in different countries.

Bird and Bhardwaj (2020) discuss the responses that took place during the lockdown and part of the response was the ASP (after-school programmes) in Barcelona Spain. The ASP responded to the above challenges by requesting assistance from donors to assist with electronic equipment for learners that they serviced. They coordinated social services by assuming the role of the broker between families and different social services such as health, housing, food aid, and unemployment aid. The ASPs focused on reinforcing schoolwork and routines, opening communication channels between schools and families and collaborating with teachers to create plans of action by packaging learning material and delivering it to families unable to collect. They also provided learner support in the form of individual and remote group work for the learners to complete their schoolwork. A behavioural shift needed to be implemented for the learners to go back to their normal routines which were broken by the lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic, as much as it was a pandemic, created an opportunity for different professionals to be innovative and understand and apply alternatives to classroom-based learning and social services (Bird & Bhardwaj, 2020).

Socio-emotional and behavioural support was provided to families in distress by the ASPs to assist families with emotional self-regulation mechanisms for them to deal with financial uncertainty. The ASPs also provided psychoeducation on family conflict due to coexistence, the interventions provided included conflict resolution skills, relaxing techniques as well as family leisure activities. Virtual meetings ensured that individual counselling was practiced more than normal groupwork, and these assisted to strengthen the relationship between the learners as well as the ASP. They also assisted learners and families by unpacking fake news spread by the media and giving accurate information about the pandemic (Morata et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2020). Social workers, as well as other social welfare organisations in America, focused on their own ways of offering care and support in an exciting and unique manner like the summer hip hop camp, this offered social workers as well as the multidisciplinary team an innovative way to offer support for the mental well-being of learners to reduce the effects of child and adolescent anxiety and depression (Travis et al., 2022).

Studies related to the COVID-19 pandemic found that there is a need for social workers to be trained to address the mental health issues which may have stemmed from the pandemic. Especially in psychotherapeutic techniques, given that social workers have unique access to

families most affected, they must receive adequate training to support the mental health of these families (Morata et al., 2021). Williams (2020) in Jamaica looks at the importance of ensuring that learners have a strong faith-based and religious background, that they have strong resiliency to face difficulties and succeed. The authors state that for the learners to be successful they need to be innovative and have communal foundations that provide them with support. Shah et al. (2020) state the importance of working in a multi-disciplinary team to ensure that there are adequate resources as well as a comprehensive school mental health system to assist with ensuring effective assessment, early intervention, and prevention as well as referrals for the learners who are diagnosed with mental illness in order for them to get assistance efficiently and effectively.

2.11 The importance of resilience for the learners.

The researcher believes that for learners in South Africa to be successful and to 'find their feet' back in school post-COVID, resilience plays a major role in their day-to-day lives. According to Van Breda (2018), resilience theory focuses on ensuring that there are better-than-expected outcomes when faced with adversities. As much as learners were faced with the pandemic of COVID-19, how each student dealt with the mental and emotional effects depended on their resilient nature. Breen and Chalmers (2020) studied the importance of building resilience during COVID-19, especially for learners as well as families.

The pandemic affected the entire world and taught people to not only focus on having successful daily routines, learning new skills and caring for loved ones but to also find creative ways of expanding their circle of care through technology. Families were better equipped to weather pandemic hardships because of the resilience of caregivers and their kids as well as family functioning, which is made up of healthy coping strategies, wholesome relationships, and family resilience. Families that experienced few financial difficulties were also more likely to be resilient (Yates & Mantler, 2023).

In South Africa, it was found that positive outcomes in the lives of adolescents are shaped by a combination of resources in their systems and these include their physical health, psychological well-being, the support they receive from their social circle, financial resources that they can access, the quality of schooling that they have access to, facilities that they can access in their environment as well as opportunities for them to engage in religious or cultural activities around their community (Kleintjes et al., 2021).

2.12 The role of school support in learner wellbeing.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were several challenges experienced by schools in South Africa, including challenges related to poverty and inequality. The learners in the country experienced a range of social issues such as malnutrition, HIV-AIDS, substance abuse, and others which had an impact on them reaching their academic potential and displaying behavioural problems in schools (Pretorius, 2020). Thus, to offer support to educators in the school setting and to assist learners as well as families to be part of the care and support for teaching and learning it was important that the frameworks developed by the Department of Education as well as the Social Development be applied by the multi-disciplinary team in a school setting (Pretorius, 2020.; Skeen et al., 2022).

School environments are meant to provide safe environments that create interconnectedness, nurturing relationships as well as interactions between the learners, and teachers as well as a supportive learning environment (Skeen et al., 2022). This is including an important role that school social workers play in upholding section (28)1 of the constitution by ensuring that children's rights are protected and that learners are not exposed to abuse, neglect, maltreatment, violence, or harmful behaviour (Children's Act, sections 7(l)(i-ii)). Skeen et al. (2022) lay out several ways in which secondary schools can support the mental health of learners, including providing caregivers, teachers, and learners a chance to be trained on and implement and evaluate Health Promoting Schools (HPS) initiatives. Implementing policies on bullying as well as substance abuse, supporting learners physically, emotionally, and psychologically, ensuring learners have access to psycho-social support, treatment as well as after-school programs, and lastly providing peer support for mental well-being to improve self-esteem in bullying victims as well as to improve learner relationships (Skeen et al., 2022).

Thus, looking at the literature review the researcher looked into how COVID-19 affected the learners in Soweto concerning their mental well-being, their experiences of anxiety, depression, sleeping patterns, and challenges with their weight. The researcher also looked into the usage of social media as a coping mechanism, an educational tool, an information guide, and how it also played a role in increased anxiety for the learners at Soweto. Given that the school is situated in a low socio-economic environment, there are a number of financial implications for families of learners that are enrolled at the school. The researcher looked into how families coped with

psychosocial challenges in relation to the lockdown and how it affected their relationships as well as their mental wellbeing. The role that resilience played in the learners' coping mechanisms was also looked into. The researcher also explored what measures were taken by school social workers in their role to support learners, educators, and parents during the pandemic and how their role can be improved to better support learners and their environments should there be an emergence of any other pandemic that may affect the livelihoods of learners.

2.13 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework appeals to an existing theory or a well-documented appropriate study of the new issue (Cooper, 2018). The most relevant theoretical framework identified for the purpose of this research study is Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979 as cited in Card, 2014; McWhirter et al.; 2014 & Pretorius, 2015).

According to the model, there are five systems that a learner's development is nested into. These are the microsystem, which looks at the relationships that a learner has with the immediate people around them, this includes the parents, the extended family, the schoolteachers, and classmates. The mesosystem talks to the interconnectedness between the microsystems and can talk to the parent-teacher relationship, the relationship between the learners and the school, and the relationship between learners and the surrounding environment or other community members that they communicate with (Card, 2014; McWhirter et al., 2014 & Pretorius, 2015).

Thirdly there is the exosystem, which are systems that the learners are indirectly involved or affected by. These include the parents' workplace and working hours and also includes the school's failure to run programs due to funding and how this affects the students.

Fourthly, there is the macro system which looks at social and economic structures that affect the child, this includes poverty, social norms, gender roles, and cultural values that the family identifies with.

All these systems interact in the chronosystem, which looks at the changes of the learner in relation to the developmental stage of the learners and the relationship between the systems. An example of this is how environmental change such as loss can affect learners in different developmental stages, while the younger ones tend to not understand death and loss effectively, adolescents are more likely to be grief-stricken by the loss (Card, 2014; McWhirter et al., 2014 & Pretorius, 2015).

The model explains how children's behaviour is influenced by individual, socio-environment, and cultural aspects and how each of these systems interacts and affects their behaviour. With that said, COVID-19 as an environmental change has negatively influenced the mental health of learners at a Soweto secondary school by adding stressors such as academic success expectations. The COVID-19 pandemic played a role in enhancing the learner's stresses when it comes to issues such as access to online learning, pressure from the family to pass, the anxiety that came with contact learning as well as hygiene information, also the access to online study materials and supplies such as food and medicine. The ecological model is most applicable to the study as it looks at the effects of COVID-19 on learners from all the spectrums of systems that affect their development as well as their coping mechanisms. Thus, this study explored the perceptions of primary caregivers of learners at a Soweto Secondary School on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic based on an ecological systems theory perspective.

2.14 Gaps in Literature

Research on COVID-19 has been conducted since its emergence in 2019. Most of the research conducted focused on its transmittance, emergence, as well as protective measures against contracting the virus. There is limited research on the perceptions of caregivers on the mental well-being of learners and especially on the wellbeing of learners in Soweto, thus the rationale for this study focuses on the oldest township in South Africa in order to look into the COVID-19 effects on their academic performance, psychosocial wellbeing as well as usage of technology and social media. Research has been conducted on the mental wellbeing challenges experienced by learners around the world as well as in South Africa from their perceptions (Li et al., 2022; Slomski, 2021; Tandon et al. 2021; van Bruwaene, et al., 2020; van Der Berg & Spaull, 2020; Naicker et al., 2021).

Spaull and van Der Berg (2020) and Wills and van der Berg (2024) look into the academic challenges and learning losses suffered by learners during the period as well as the mitigation processes applied during the period. In Shepard and Moholwane (2021) study, the perceptions of South Africans regarding the impact of COVID-19 are looked into and their findings on the huge inequality between urban and township areas are highlighted. The usage of technology as social media as a tool for educational, emotional support as well as entertainment is looked into from the international and South African literature (Wang et al., 2020; Desai & Burton, 2022)

Thus, this research study aims to add to the body of research already conducted on COVID-19, but the focus will be on the perceptions of primary caregivers of learners in a secondary school in Soweto, Gauteng. It looks at how the pandemic affected the learners academically and psychosocially. It also looks into the accessibility and usage of technology and social media for educational, emotional, and peer support as well as the importance of learner resiliency. Although the focus of this research will be in Soweto Gauteng, it might prove to be useful to add to the body of knowledge for other studies across the country's townships and provide intervention methods for future challenges and pandemics.

2.15 Summary

In this chapter, the literature regarding South African Policies and legislation regarding learner wellness is assessed as well as the national and international effects of COVID-19 on the mental wellbeing of learners. The physical and financial implications of the virus on the learners as well as the usage of social media to access information as well as maintain contact with family and friends is discussed. The responses to challenges through after-school programs, learner resilience, as well as the role of school support on the mental well-being of learners, are analysed. And lastly, the theoretical framework underpinning this study is explained.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the research aims and objectives are outlined and the research approach as well as the research design utilised for the study are explained. The population, sampling, and sampling procedure used in the study are outlined. The research instrument used for the study as well as the pre-testing of the research instrument is described. Data collection and data analysis methods are explained, and the trustworthiness of the study is described. Thereafter, the ethical considerations that were observed during the study are explained in detail.

3.2. Research Aim and Objectives

The study aimed to explore primary caregivers' perceptions of the mental well-being of Grade 11 learners at a secondary school in Soweto during the COVID-19 lockdown. The objectives focused on learners' academic performance, perceptions of COVID-19, psychosocial consequences, and the use of social media for mental and emotional support.

3.3. Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was used for the research study. According to Fouchè and Schurink (2011), the qualitative approach aims to understand the meanings people give to everyday life. Babbie and Mouton (2015) state that qualitative researchers always try to study human behaviour from the perspective of those that are studied, and the primary goal of the qualitative research approach is exploring, describing and understanding as opposed to explaining human behaviour.

This approach was suitable for the study as the researcher got to explore the perceptions of primary caregivers of learners in a Secondary School in Soweto regarding the effects of COVID-19 on the learners' well-being. The data was interpreted according to the meanings that participants attached to their experiences and perceptions.

3.4. Research design

The study used a phenomenographic research design, as it aims to study various people's conceptions of and experienced phenomenon and this research attempts to understand the

perspectives of caregivers of secondary school learners, who have witnessed how those under their care experienced COVID-19 and its effects on them (Larsson & Inger Holmström, 2007). Larsson and Inger Holmström (2007) describe the phenomenographic study as how people understand, conceive, and experience a phenomenon around the world – in this case, how the primary caregivers witnessed the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. Through a phenomenographic design, the researcher could describe how the people's understanding and experiences of the phenomenon vary with regards to "what happened" during the lockdown and "how" that affected the learners as perceived by the caregivers.

The advantage of using a phenomenographic design is that the researcher was able to obtain multiple perspectives from caregivers regarding the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown and how the school closures affected their patterns, unlike in a narrative study where the study is on one or two individuals (Creswell, 2013; Fouché & Schurink, 2011). The advantage of using this research design is that the researcher was certain that the participants had all experienced the phenomenon in question so a common understanding could be derived (Larsson & Inger Holmström, 2007). The researcher explored information regarding the lived experiences of learners in a secondary school in Soweto as perceived by their primary caregivers.

3.5. Population, sample, and sampling procedures

Population

The population of a study refers to individuals who have characteristics of what needs to be studied (Coper, 2018). The population in this research study included the primary caregivers of learners in a no-fee-paying secondary school in Soweto. The researcher utilised primary caregivers of grade 11 learners in a secondary school in Soweto, who have been enrolled at the school during COVID-19.

Sample and Sampling procedure

A sample of the population is the subset of the population that needs to be studied (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). The goal of a sample is to understand the phenomenon under study better. The targeted sample was 10 primary caregivers as the researcher felt that 10 participants would be able to provide in-depth quality information that could have saturated results. Who and how many participants could participate in the research depends on what the researcher wants to know (Cleary

et al., 2014). But due to different challenges of time and appointments and participants not honouring the meetings, the sample comprised of only 8 primary caregivers of grade 11 learners who had been enrolled at the secondary school in Soweto, when the COVID-19 lockdown began.

The researcher utilised purposive sampling, which is a type of non-probability sampling for the study. According to Strydom and Delport (2011), non-probability sampling is based on the notion that participants are not randomly sampled, the participants are selected based on having the necessary characteristics which are necessary for the study. The researcher used the school to issue a notice to inform all grade 11 primary caregivers about the study and requested that they contact her if they were interested in participating in the research study.

Purposive sampling is based on the researcher's discretion regarding the population that has characteristics that best serve the purpose of the study and there is a clear indication of pre-selection criteria for the selection of participants (Strydom & Delport, 2011). The sample of the study was eight primary caregivers of grade 11 learners from a secondary school in Soweto. The following inclusion criteria guided the researcher during the process of sampling:

- The primary caregivers were between the ages of 18-65.
- The primary caregivers have a basic understanding of English as well as a vernacular language (isiZulu) as a means of communication.
- Participants willing to volunteer to participate in face-to-face interviews and be recorded by the researcher.
- The caregivers have basic knowledge about technology such as mobile devices and access to data and its usage.
- The learners in the caregiver's care have been in secondary school since January 2020 and were in grade 11 in 2023.

The exclusion criteria

- Non-residents of Soweto.
- Primary caregivers of Primary School learners.

- Primary caregivers who have no knowledge of technology i.e how to use a mobile device and data usage.

In selecting the sample, the researcher attended a parent-child meeting for the grade 11 learners at the school as she was invited by the principal. She introduced herself and her work with the school as well as the research study. She gave the parents who were at the meeting PIS (Participant information sheet) and consent forms for those who were interested in participating in the study. The target sample size was 12 primary caregivers of which 2 would be used to pre-test the research instrument. The researcher managed to recruit 10 primary caregivers to form part of the research study.

The challenge that was experienced by the researcher was getting the PIS back from the learners, as she went to the school more than three times and only received 12 consents back from the primary caregivers. The researcher contacted the participants telephonically to make appointments with them to meet at the local Department of Social Development offices near the school. Two of the participants were used to pre-test the research instrument, and the other two never made it to the set appointments thus the number of the sample went down from 10 to 8 participants. Participants were selected by being in close proximity to the departmental office.

3.6.Description of research context

The school is located in Soweto, which is in the South of Johannesburg. The township consists of middle-class workers as well as the unemployed grant dependants and the elderly who care for multi-generations in one household. The school is a non-fee-paying government school and gets support from different departments as well as NPO's and other stakeholders in the community to empower, protect and support the learners and the staff.

3.7. Research instrument

A semi-structured interview schedule is a list of questions written by the researcher used to guide interviews, it has predetermined questions that can be utilised to drive a narrative and set the tone it also forces researchers to think explicitly about themes they hope that the interview will cover (Greef, 2011). The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule (Annexure D) as a guide containing appropriate questions to be covered. The guide had the same questions for all the research participants and open-ended questions were used. The researcher probed further when the

need arose and it allowed for participants to share what is significant to them regarding the phenomenon (King et al., 2019; Saunders et al., 2016). The use of open-ended questions and probing of responses provided in-depth information that was expressed differently by participants (Greef, 2011).

The researcher first brainstormed what she would like to achieve from the research and then developed the list of questions to be utilised in the research instrument. This was done by focusing on the themes that are the focus of her study and taking into consideration previous studies on the mental well-being effects of COVID-19 on learners. To achieve this the researcher also looked into literature by Faize and Husain (2020), Viner et al. (2020), McMillen (2020), Lee et al. (2021), as well as Morata et al. (2021) who all discuss the effects of COVID-19 in different communities around the world. The goal of qualitative research is to gather distinct aspects of experiences rather than having a set questionnaire for a survey, therefore the interview guide had leeway to be altered during the research, however, the researcher did not alter the questions in this study as there was no need to do so.

3.8. Pre-testing the research instruments

The researcher received the to conduct her research on the 17th of February 2023 and after the ethics clearance and permission from the Department of Education and the school was received by the researcher, she commenced with pretesting the instrument on the 20th of May and the actual data collection commenced on the 4th of June 2023. The reason for the delay was the inability to secure an appointment with the caregivers.

A pre-test is informal with a few participants who possess the same characteristics as those who will participate in the main study (Strydom & Delport, 2011). The researcher used two participants who matched the criteria to test the research instrument and who had learners studying at the same school as the sample utilised for the study. The researcher pre-tested the semi-structured interview schedule before conducting the empirical study by interviewing two caregivers that met the inclusion criteria of the sample but were not part of the sample selected. This allowed the researcher to see that there was no need to make changes to the questions as the participants were able to answer them without difficulties. The questions that were in the interview guide were open-ended in order to allow the participants to be able to be flexible when responding and provide detailed responses. The data that was collected during the interviews to pre-test the instrument was

not analysed with the data collected during the study. The researcher developed the interview questions to explore the perspectives of caregivers taking existing literature into account as well as the aim and objectives of the study.

The developed questions were in line with the goals for the research to ensure that the questions tap into the expertise of the participants and ensured that themes can be derived from the data collected. The researcher did this by reading literature regarding COVID-19 and its effects on learners' well-being around the globe as well as in South Africa. She also read articles regarding how to develop questions for the interview schedule. Pre-testing the research instrument allowed the researcher to be able to estimate the length of the interview, see if the questions were not ambiguous, and to also determine if participants understood the questions. In addition, suitable language was used when developing the research questions to ensure that participants provided answers that were as honest and truthful as possible as the questions were in both English and IsiZulu to accommodate the participants fully (Babbie & Mouton, 2015).

3.9. Methods of data collection

The researcher made use of semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. Efficacious interview studies are dependent on establishing an understanding with participants through active listening (Leavy, 2017). An interview is a spoken exchange, frequently face-to-face, in which an interviewer attempts to obtain data, views, or beliefs from other individuals (Kumar, 2014). In semi-structured interviews, the participants share perspectives and experiences during the interview that might provide more information than what the researcher expected or thought about collecting (De Vos et al., 2011).

The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews for the purpose of this study, and this assisted her to be able to get in-depth rich data as she was able to observe non-verbal ques from the participants as they expressed their perceptions regarding the learners in their care. The researcher called the participants who consented to be part of the study and made appointments with them for the day’s most suitable. The interviews were conducted at the local Department of Social Development offices that are close to the Secondary School. On the day of the interviews, the researcher went through the PIS as well as the consent form with the participants. She explained the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity and requested permission to audio-record while taking notes during the interview. Once permission was granted, the researcher went through the

questions with the participants which were in both English and IsiZulu for the purpose of data collection as these were the languages understood by the participants who reside in Soweto. The duration of the interviews was between 30-45 minutes depending on the participant.

3.10. Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process through which the researcher brings order, structure and meaning to the collected data (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011). The analysis of data is defined as outlining and arranging information and understanding, discovering, or making sense of collected data (Leavy, 2017). All information must be analysed and clarified formerly before it has meaning (McNabb, 2010). Different methods can be used to analyse the data depending on the nature of the study and the method that suits that particular research best (Cooper, 2018). In the research study, reflexive thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data.

Thematic analysis is a technique for studying qualitative data that involves looking through a data collection to find, examine, and document recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Clarke and Braun (2017), the aim of thematic analysis is not only to summarize data but also to identify and interpret key aspects of data that are guided by the research question. Thematic analysis is flexible in the sense that it can work on any research question, sample size, data collection method, and approach. It can also be utilised to identify patterns concerning participants' lived experiences, views, perceptions, thoughts, practices, and beliefs, it seeks to understand the feelings, thoughts, and behaviours of participants (Clark & Braun, 2017). In order to examine the patterns of the perceptions of primary caregivers on learners' wellbeing during COVID-19 the thematic analysis of data was used by the researcher.

The researcher used the thematic analysis guidelines as discussed in (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) to identify the codes and themes. They include:

i. Becoming familiar with the information

   The researcher familiarised herself with the data by converting the recordings into transcripts, she read and re-read the data and also made notes.

ii. Coding the information

   Information that was similar, different, or stood out for the researcher in step one was grouped into codes.

iii. Searching for themes and recognising relationships

In order to make sense of the data and find meaning, the researcher searched for patterns and relationships from the codes to create a short list of themes that related to the research question.

iv. Refining themes

Themes were refined until primary themes emerged. the researcher reviewed the themes and checked if these themes worked in relation to the coded extracts, analysed, and kept refining the specifics of each theme.

v. Defining and naming themes

The researcher in this step ensured that they put more emphasis on each theme, in order to generate a clear definition and names for each theme until the production of a good account of what is being illustrated by the data occurs.

vi. Writing up

The last stage involved is writing a report that contains a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon under study. The final report, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), includes the chosen extracts as examples and a final analysis of the selected extracts that are linked to the examination of the literature and research questions. The researcher ensured that the final report is written up and submitted.

3.11. Trustworthiness of the study

The degree of trustworthiness or rigour of a study is determined by the level of confidence in the data, interpretation, and procedures utilized to guarantee the quality of the research (Shenton, 2004). It is important to discuss how qualitative researchers establish that the research study's conclusions are credible, transferrable, confirmable, and trustworthy because they do not use instruments with established metrics for validity and reliability (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012; Shenton, 2004).

3.11.1. Credibility

According to Kumar (2014), the participants of the study are the greatest critics to decide whether or not the research findings have been allowed to mirror their views and frame of mind truthfully. Shenton (2004) states that credibility establishes if the research findings are a valid interpretation of the participants' original perspectives and represent information that is workable and obtained

from the participants' original data. The researcher utilised the following methods to ensure that the research is credible, she engaged in recurrent debriefing sittings between her and her seniors.

She kept reflective notes and prepared her interview techniques adequately to get good responses from the participants, this included ensuring that she explained the PIS and the consent form with the participants and in vernacular before interviews were audio recorded. This allowed participants to share their true perceptions of the phenomenon comfortably (Shenton, 2004). She also did member checking by going through the verbatim transcripts of the interviews with the participants ensuring that she recorded data in an integrated and logical manner and was unbiased.

3.11.2. Transferability

Transferability is the capability to move research results from a single framework to an alternative framework (Leavy, 2017). The researcher certified that adequate background data about the research areas are distributed to allow the participant to make the transmission (Shenton, 2004). The researcher gave enough background information about the study site and the participants to facilitate the transfer process in order to assure transferability in the current study. The research has the potential for the findings to be relevant and useful in other contexts. Detailed reporting by the researcher was done so that careful consideration by those seeking to apply the findings elsewhere could be able to do so. The researcher accessed and assessed other projects carried out in various contexts using the same methodologies in order to confirm transferability and the degree to which the study has a true proposition.

3.11.3. Dependability

Dependability involves attending to the conclusion path utilised by the researcher (Cho & Trent, 2014). According to Shenton (2004), the developments within the research should be described in full information, thereby allowing a future researcher to replicate the research, if not essentially to improve the matching outcomes. The researcher ensured that she utilised an audit trail for the purpose of this study, ensuring that all the steps taken from the start of the project to its development and the research report were transparent and truthful. The researcher kept a research journal and ensured that all the information was kept safe and secure and should need arise. Given that the research was similar to other colleagues, peer examination was done in order to increase the dependability of the research. The researcher will be able to conduct peer debriefing sessions

regarding this research, challenges that occurred and its success and how she got the conclusions of this study.

3.11.4. Confirmability

Confirmability alludes to the extent to which the results might be established or validated by different researchers (Kumar, 2014). Measures must be carried out to assist certify that the research's results are the findings of the skills and thoughts of the participants, instead of the aspects and biases of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). Shenton (2004) informs us that an audit trail in qualitative research details the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data by the researcher. The researcher utilised an audit trail that details each step of data analysis and shows that her findings aren't motivated by her conscious or unconscious bias but accurately describe the participants' responses. The researcher kept the recordings of the interviews and took full responsibility for all preparations involving this research study.

3.12. Ethical considerations

Ethics is defined as the established values that symbolise or embody what is moral or correct or permit us to recognise what is substandard or inaccurate (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Research ethics assists to encourage the goals of the study and it assists to make sure that the investigators are held responsible to the community (Bhole, 2015).

The researcher applied for ethical clearance from the HREC (non-medical) at the University of Witwatersrand before the data collection began. An ethics clearance certificate was achieved, and the protocol number is: SW23/01/01 see Appendix D. The researcher applied for the approval from the Department of Education to conduct research at the school which was granted see Appendix C. She also acquired a permission letter from the school granting her access to the primary caregivers of the learners in grade11 at the school see Appendix F.

3.12.1. Avoidance of harm

Participants can be harmed physically or emotionally during a research study (Strydom, 2011). Any foreseeable harm to the research participants should be avoided, and if it happens, it must be minimal (Kumar, 2014). The researcher anticipated that the caregivers can be harmed emotionally when they are expected to relate their perceptions on the mental well-being of the learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. To minimise the emotional harm, the researcher ensured that she developed a distress protocol to assist the participants and she also informed the participants about

the potential impact the study would have on them before the interview and ensured that she shared information about a school social worker in The Department of Social Development with whom prior arrangements had been made.

3.12.2. Voluntary participation

Voluntary participation entails that all research participants must voluntarily participate to avoid any sort of coercion or pressure and every participant is free to stop participating in the study at any time without feeling obligated to do so (Neuman, 2011). The researcher provided and discussed in both English and Isizulu the participant information sheet (PIS) (see Annexure A) containing details about the research study with the participants to enable them to make an informed decision to participate in the study or not, all the details for supervisors as well as the withdrawal process.

3.12.3. Informed consent

Informed consent is obtained when the research participants get involved in a research study with the full knowledge and understanding of the risks involved (Babbie & Mouton, 2015). Informed consent intends to properly prepare participants for the research study and its intentions so that a participant can enter into the research voluntarily with full information about the scope of the research and give their consent in writing (Strydom, 2011). The participants were thoroughly informed about the research and once they agreed to participate in the study, the agreement was formalised by the signing of the informed consent form that explained the purpose, goal, and nature of the study, duration of the study, the procedure to be followed and the possibility to withdraw from the study at any given time (see annexure B) (Strydom, 2011). The researcher also asked the participant's permission to make use of an audio recorder during the interviews for accurate data collection purposes (Creswell, 2013, Strydom, 2011).

3.12.4. Violation of privacy/anonymity/confidentiality

There is a distinction between confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy. The researcher adhered to confidentiality in the sense that, the identity of the caregivers' will be known, however, their identity will not be revealed in the report (Kumar, 2014). In this study, anonymity could not be guaranteed, as the caregivers were known to the researcher, however, their identity was not revealed in the report as pseudo names were used instead of their names (Babbie, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Strydom, 2011). The researcher ensured that she avoided probing into beliefs, backgrounds

and behaviours that might reveal intimate private details of the caregivers and the learners and only focus on the caregivers' perspectives and perceptions of the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the mental well-being of the learners (Neuman, 2011).

3.13. Summary of Chapter

In this Chapter the research methodology and design used in this study were outlined. The qualitative research approach as well as the phenomenological research design was explained. The population of the study, sampling as well as the sampling procedure was discussed and 8 primary caregivers of learners who attend a secondary school in Soweto were interviewed. The research instrument and show it was pre-tested is explained and the method of data collection was face-to-face interviews with the participants at the Department of Social Development offices which are close to the school. Thematic analysis as a method of data analysis is discussed as well as the trustworthiness of the research and how it was adhered to by the researcher. Lastly this chapter looked at the ethical considerations that were observed during the research study. In the next chapter data collected is presented and results emanating from the study are discussed.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology for this study. This chapter focuses on the research findings in relation to the aim, objectives, and research question that is to be answered by the study.

4.2. Participant profiles

The research participants were all primary caregivers of the learners currently enrolled at a Secondary School in Soweto doing grade 11. The primary caregivers who volunteered were working in different spheres. A detailed representation of the participants' demographics is displayed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Demographic details of participants.

Participant	Employment details	Participant Age	Learner Age	Learner gender	Children looked after
Participant 1	Security guard	35	17	Male	3
Participant 2	Admin Officer	36	17	Male	2
Participant 3	Social Worker	51	16	Female	2
Participant 4	Unemployed	41	18	Male	4
Participant 5	Retired Nurse	53	18	Male	3
Participant 6	Teller	53	17	Male	3
Participant 7	Volunteer at NPO	30	16	Male	2
Participant 8	Supermarket Packer	25	17	Female	1

The names of the participants were coded to protect their anonymity, hence the use of Participants 1 to 8. Six of the participants are employed and one participant is unemployed the other one stated that she resigned from work during COVID-19 due to health concerns. The participants

interviewed stated that 6 of the learners were male and the other two were female, and the average age of the learners was 17 years old.

4.3. Study findings

The themes that were identified in this study were how COVID-19 had a negative impact on learners' academic performances, the learners could never achieve the results that they were used to before the lockdown. The second theme looked into the fear and isolation experienced by the learners during the period. The third theme focused on psychosocial and physical changes that were experienced by the learners during COVID-19 lockdown. The fourth theme focused on how access to technology provided support for learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. The last theme looked at how the lockdown led to improvement in learner support by the parents, community as well as the social workers. The themes and sub-themes obtained from the study during the analysis of the interviews are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1. Table of themes identified in the study.

Themes	**Subthemes**
Theme 1 COVID-19 had a negative impact on learners' academic performance.	Doing well before COVID-19 lockdown
	Learners' marks dropped during the lockdown
	Improved marks due to catch-up sessions
Theme 2 COVID-19 led to fear and isolation among learners.	Learners were scared and confused during the lockdown.
	Ongoing fear of death and sickness due to COVID-19
Theme 3 COVID-19 produced psychosocial and physical changes in learners.	Anxiety/ stress experienced by the learners

	Learners' physical changes due to the lockdown
	Communication and isolation patterns within the family unit during the lockdown
	Learners' relationship with television and the effects on sleeping patterns
Theme 4 Access to technology provided support for learners during the COVID-19 lockdown.	Access to social media and technology linked to improved learners' moods
Theme 5 The COVID-19 lockdown led to the improvement of support structures for learners.	Supportive role caregivers played for learners during the lockdown
	The role the school and the community play in the learners' lives
	The role School Social Workers can play in learner support.
	Improvement of learner resilience amid pandemics.

4.4. Presentation of the research findings

4.4.1. COVID-19 had a negative impact on learners' academic performance.

The first theme looked at the negative impact on the academic performance of learners due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The learners' academic performance varied before the lockdown, compared to during the lockdown and post-lockdown. The learners were said to be doing well before the lockdown, but during the lockdown, their marks dropped remarkably. Post-lockdown there was some improvement in their academic performance due to the extra effort by all parties to ensure that the learners were catching up on lost syllabus time. While contingency plans were put into action the researcher asked the participants to share information regarding the learners' performances since 2020 and the changes thereof.

i. "Doing well" before COVID-19 lockdown.

Before the lockdown participants' frequently shared that learners were "doing well" in their academics. The participants in the study expressed that the learners under care were able to achieve good results in their schoolwork before the pandemic. One was an excellent learner who received distinctions, while another learner was at the top of the class and even received awards. Two of the participants expressed how the learners in their care were doing well apart from challenges with mathematics as well as physical science. This illustrated that as much as learners were doing extremely well, they had challenges which certain subjects that the caregivers were aware of before the lockdown occurred and this theme was captured when participants shared that:

"I think he was doing very well. Uh, he was also receiving awards. And I think he was the top of the class, if not mistaken. He was doing very well." (P5)

"Well, her performance was very excellent. Yeah. She was, she's a distinction learner before COVID-19 lockdown." (P3)

"Before the Covid bekayenza kahle eskolweni actually because angithi bekangaka fiki ku Science because he was at the lower grade, COVID was 2020, right?"

"Before the COVID-19 lockdown, he was doing well at school actually because he was not yet doing Science. Because he was at the lower grade, COVID-19 was 2020, right?" (P7)

"Eh, ubeqhuba kahle ngaphande kwe maths, kade imusokolisa."

"He was very doing well in his studies, apart from Maths, which was giving him a challenge." (P1)

Even though most of the participants' stated that the learners were doing well prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, participants shared that there were a few challenging subjects that the learners had in their curriculum. Participant 7 mentioned that the child was not yet doing pure science which is a challenge for the learner currently and Participant 1 felt that the one subject that was challenging the learner at the time was Mathematics.

While one might say that the learners in this study were performing well academically before the lockdown, it is also important to note that not all learners achieve the same results. Therefore, the researcher found that two participants had a different perspective on the learners' academic

performance prior to the lockdown. One participant was not residing with the learner during this period, while the other learner was according to the caregiver just an average learner; this illustrated that as much as the lockdown affected many learners academically, it was detrimental to those that were below average learners.

"I can't really say. Cause yeah, before Covid, I can't really say because I wasn't in contact with him that much, especially with regards [to] schooling. So yeah, that one I cannot answer per se because I would be lying. Yeah." (P2)

"It was, he was just an average student and a performer nje, bekungana macomplaints or anything like that, but beka passer."

"He was just an average student and a performer. There were no complaints or anything like that, but he was passing." (P4)

According to the dynamic systems theory of development, one way to think about development is as a system made up of interactions between various social actors, and thus learners develop according to their interactions with their environments and social structures such as the school (Thelen and Smith, 2006). Most of the learners who were under the care of the participants were said to be doing well academically before the pandemic. This could be attributed to their relationship with the school as well as their peers. Participant 3 stated that the learner under her care was very independent when it came to her studies, and the primary caregiver was there as a support structure for the learner. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of maintaining relationships is highlighted in this theme as the interconnectedness of the microsystems of teacher, peers and parental relations in the learners' lives had a direct influence on the learners' academic performance (Card, 2014, McWhirter et.al., 2014 & Pretorius, 2015).

Roche et al. (2022) state that learners' academic performance is directly related to their social connectedness and a disruption in their self-development process may affect their mental well-being, academic performance as well as their development of peer relationships, individual identities, and being autonomous. Before the lockdown, one participant was said to be an average learner while Participant 3 and Participant 5 stated that the learners in their care were distinction learners who even received awards for their academic performance. Card (2014) attributes learner academic performance to achievement motivation and this is linked to previous experiences and

the ability to do tasks and achieve performance and learning goals. The learners in this study were able to achieve good results through efforts and commitment to their studies.

ii. Learners' marks deteriorated during the lockdown.

While several challenges came with learning systems being implemented while the lockdown kept on being extended, learners' workload increased drastically during that period. They started receiving work online and doing rotational attendance which was when learners attended school once a week or had one week in the month where they had contact learning. According to the primary caregivers during this period learners had increased workloads and were under pressure to complete work within a short space of time. Some learners were able to apply themselves, others found it difficult to study due to a lack of structure as well as lack of motivation and one was said to be playful during this period as he found it difficult to focus on his studies. Extensive workloads, lack of structure, non-contact learning, and the lockdown stress affected the learner's academic performance as they all experienced poor academic results and this was evident when participants shared learners' experiences:

"Bekasebenza kahle nje, but bekaba nomsebenzi omuningi ngoba bebaphiwa umsebenzi omuningi ukuthi bazo cover lezi nsuku abebangazi ngeni. Uthole ukuthi use Sebenza under pressure, bafuna uku cover lomsebenzi omuningi ngeskhathi esincane." (P1)

"He was doing just fine apart from the fact that he had a huge workload, they gave them lots of work to complete at home so that they could cover for the days they didn't attend or the days they are not at school. You will find that he is working under pressure in order to cover the workload in a short space of time." (P1)

"It was not impressive because I think he was very playful at the time. Yeah. So, we just had to drill it into him that we needed to study and focus on his schoolwork." (P2)

"She was a little bit stressed because she couldn't attend all the classes at the same time as normal. Yeah. And. The work was too much. She had to do work at home. She even studied at night. Her performance was starting to go down cause um, she couldn't study much. Yeah, she couldn't study much with her workload. (P8)

"I think his performance went a little bit down. Because, uh, he, he's a person of structure. If there's no structure in him, he, he. You know, it gets lost a lot… And also, with the homework. The

homework, we know that he's supposed to do the homework at about six o'clock, and all of a sudden you have to do it in the morning when you wake up, you know, so those things affected him." (P5)

The findings in this study align with those of Skeen et al. (2022) who stated that the switch to online learning had its own set of challenges for the learners, as this meant that learners were not afforded the opportunity to ask questions during class and do their work in class as they were used to. The participants all shared that the learners in their care had challenges with getting used to the new norm of doing their schoolwork at home. Their workload was more that they were used to getting through on their own and it affected their studying schedules as they now had to either do their schoolwork in the morning or at times, they slept late just to cover their workload. The issue of structure also affected them as they had to manage their time differently and without a specific time set out to do their schoolwork, this affected their performance. The switch to online learning affected them as not being in class also meant not being able to receive peer support as well as teacher support.

The findings in this study are in alignment to the ones from Skeen et al. (2022) and they show that during the lockdown, there was an unprecedented loss of learning in person, and this led to a swift shift to an educational model that focused on remote learning. The learners from the Secondary School in Soweto were not used to online learning which had its own challenges and these challenges led most of the learners to experience a decrease in their academic performance. This can be directly linked to the exosystem in the ecological theoretical framework as there was a lack of funding for school programs to run remotely and this affected the learners performance (McWhirter et.al., 2014 & Pretorius, 2015).

Hillekens et al.'s (2023) findings are also similar to the ones for this study which showed that school adjustment during the lockdown was a major challenge for learners. Some learners were able to adapt to their new norm, while it took some time for others to adapt as they were used to contact learning in a physical school environment. This, in turn, resulted in learners having lower results than they are used to achieving under typical conditions. The participants' felt that the workload that learners had to do, their lack of concentration and lack of structural learning as well as learners' playfulness directly influenced the learners' grades as their performance decreased and their marks were not impressive during the COVID-19 lockdown.

iii. Improved marks due to catch-up sessions

Post-COVID-19 lockdown, learners had to return to school on daily basis. This was hard for them as getting back to what was considered 'normal' life pre-COVID-19 could never be truly achieved. When the learners returned to school full-time, they also had their challenges with adjusting to the routine at school and they had to ensure that they attended extra classes after school and during the weekend to catch up on work that was left out in their syllabus due to the lockdown. Support was given to the learners by the teachers through WhatsApp groups to assist the learners with understanding the context and it also served as a platform for offering peer support. Though support was given to learners to adjust, not all of them went back to their academic performance levels pre-COVID:

"Oh, they're doing well because now they can see their teachers every day. They can go to them when they have problems. They were communicating at night, with the WhatsApp group. WhatsApp groups help them a lot. Saturday schools they attend even on Sundays sometimes. No, they catch up very well." (P2)

"You know when you compared to before and after [the lockdown]. It's improving. Yes, it's improving, but not to the way he was before Covid." (P5)

"Um, now he's improved very much so, because there are extra classes as well. Even on the weekends, they go to school just to make up for lost time. So yeah, his performance has improved. Even his first-term report results were impressive." (P2)

"Hai u improve kakhulu, manje. Use improve kakhulu, plus ne workload yabo iyehlile and then bayenza nama extra classes bangene nangama weekend." (P1)

"He has improved a lot now; he has really improved plus his workload has gone down and then they are doing extra classes and attend on some weekends." (P1)

Educational institutions play a vital role in the improvement of the mental well-being of learners. School-connectedness promotes a positive sense of well-being and improves the learners' ability to regulate negative emotions, have positive self-esteem, promote a sense of belonging, and improve the learners' attitude toward the school, thus motivating them to succeed in their academic performance (Skeen et al., 2022). This is evident in the sense that the participants felt that there was an improvement in the learners' academic performance post-lockdown, and this appears due

to the commitment by the schooling system, the learners, and parents to ensure that they attend extra lessons to make up for lost time.

Núñez-Regueiro et al. (2022) supports this notion and further state that school engagement plays an important role in the development of learners. Stronger engagements between learners and teachers as well as their peers are directly linked to improved academic performance and educational aspirations, and lower rates of students dropping out before graduation. Though there was a significant improvement in the results of the learners due to the time that they spent on their schoolwork, the marks according to the participants are not as they were pre-COVID-19.

According to Booth et al. (2021), parents were concerned about their learners academic progress due to the COVID-19 school closures and emphasized the mitigation of additional support and catch-up programs that could benefit learners. This is true for the learners in this study as the additional catch-up programs were utilized by their school in order to ensure there is improvement in learner academic progress.

4.4.2. COVID-19 led to fear and confusion among learners.

The second theme of the study looked at the perception's learners had towards the COVID-19 lockdown, while the disease spread fear across the world. Learners had their fair share of experiences and reactions toward the pandemic from the participants' perspective. Among other things, the learners also ensured that they followed the regulations stipulated by the WHO to avoid crowded places and to ensure that they sanitize and wash their hands regularly. Learners were said to have a fear of contracting the virus or worse experiencing the loss of a loved one or death due to it. Participants shared how the lockdown affected the families and how they perceived it affected the learners in their care.

i. Learners were scared and confused during the lockdown.

According to their primary caregivers, the learners feared the disease as it was unknown to them and new information was being shared daily regarding how to protect oneself from the disease. The fear of contracting the disease was daunting in the learners as they had to find ways of keeping healthy and safe, they did this by ensuring that they took on the task of sanitising their parents after work as they had fears that they may infect them with COVID-19. Another learner was so scared that she even considered dropping out of school to not get infected, while the other was just scared

and the participant could not elaborate on the extent of the learners' fear. Two of the participants shared that the learners in their care were confused and it took some time for them to adjust as it was not easy for them especially being indoors as part of the conditions of the lockdown. The fear and confusion of learners ensured that they were not reminded about regulations on how to stay safe by their primary caregivers as it came naturally to them. This was evident when participants shared the following:

"You know, uh, he was very scared. Very scared. And then he ended up being also scared, uh, for me. Like, because he knew, he knew that you know, as I was uh, working by then, he knew I might come with COVID-19 at home, so he would like to spray me before I go." (P5)"

"I think he was scared. He was scared, he was very scared." (P6)

"She was very scared. She was, she was even thinking of just dropping down and she would repeat the again next year because she feared being infected and stuff." (P8)

"Um, uh, beka, uzoqoqile kakhulu uOwethu ukubonisa ukuthi uthukile, iyamuthusa this thing. Bekungamelekanga umkhumbuze ukuthi kugezwa izandla, yabona all lezinto ebekuthi kwamele sizilandele."

"He was very disciplined; you could see that this thing scared him. You need not remind him about washing hands and following all the other regulations to keep safe." (P4)

"So, their mind is getting a bit confused, even though she's adjusting, but it's not easy for her to adjust." (P3)

"Like ngizothini, babe confused khona ngoba uyabona ukuhlala indoors iskhathi esiningi kukuthi bajwayele ukuthi bagcwala gcwale."

"Like, what can I say, they were confused because they had to stay indoors instead of going to the streets." (P1)

According to the participants, the learners were scared and confused during the lockdown period as they spent so much time indoors and they needed to adjust to their new norm. One learner was said to be very disciplined by their caregiver as he followed all instructions to ensure that he kept himself safe from contracting the virus, while another learner was so scared of the virus that she was on the verge of dropping out of school. One common factor was that learners were not

reminded about the regulations regarding washing hands and sanitising. According to van der Berg and Spaull (2020) being scared was one of the psychological distresses experienced during the lockdown. Breen and Chalmers (2020) further state that the uncertainty of the future scared the learners and the establishment of healthy routines and learning new skills was imperative for keeping the family safe as was the case in this study as well.

During the hard lockdown people were remarkably more scared about what could happen to their family members when they returned to work or school as they would be exposed to the virus (Cortés-García et al, 2021). This is applicable in this study as well, as Participant 5 shared how the behaviour of the learner under her primary care changed as he was scared of exposure to the virus for both himself and his caregiver. Lee et al. (2021) further state that learners were scared about contracting COVID-19, they were unsure how long it would last, and its effect on their health and they were scared about how it limited their daily activities. Participants in this study mentioned that learners were confused as they could not go out to the streets as they were used to before the lockdown and they were afraid that they may contract the virus.

ii. Learners experienced ongoing fear of death and sickness due to COVID-19

The learners experienced fear of contracting the illness as well as fear of death as the COVID-19 lockdown was the first pandemic that they had ever experienced. Information about having loved ones hospitalised as well as losing them after contracting the virus increased the learners' fears, proper sanitisation and social distancing was utilised to try and keep safe. The participants shared that the learners realised that the illness was serious when they started getting information about people who passed on after contracting the virus and this increased their fears as they did not want to die or lose loved ones due to COVID-19 infections. A participant shared that even 'regular' behaviours like sneezing or coughing became triggers for the fear of illness and even death post-COVID-19 lockdown. This shows that even after the lockdown, learners still fear contracting a virus that might have symptoms similar to COVID-19. While another participant stated how the learner would be the one to sanitise family members and guests to ensure that they were properly sanitised before entering his household. This is shared below: -

"She even hates to see a tissue, a simple tissue, when she sees it. It's a trauma for her because I think she sees a killer. And some weeks ago, she was sneezing and sneezing. Then she said, eh,

mama, I hope this is not COVID-19 because everything to do with sneezing and coughing is associated with covid. Yeah." (P3)

"So beyi serious mase bayibheka and mabezwa ukuthi abantu bayashona from ukuthola iCovid 19. So, ngingasho ngithi beyiba thusa kakhulu."

"It was very serious and when they looked at it, there were people even dying from being infected with COVID-19, so I can say that it was very scary for them." (P4)

"You know, another thing, you know, a small cough, he will be worried, you know, just like, like, clearing sputum, he will be jumpy." The participant further expressed that: *"And then before you enter the house, especially, you know, even our family, they, they would come before. He would like, you know, sanitize them. He was the one who was sanitizing People. Make sure that they are sanitized."* (P5)

"Yeah, because that thing we experienced, people were dying, even our relatives, our friends, it was, we were scared. In fact, he, we were scared and psychologically everybody did change. it was scary. Some learners were nervous, others were sick. You know, some learners lost their friends." (P6)

"She [the learner] was scared of being infected, dying and losing loved ones" (P8)

As much as there were behavioural changes due to the fear of contracting the virus, one caregiver further stated that the learner in her care became religious during the COVID-19 lockdown and resorted to prayer:

"Um, you know what it became, I think he became a bit religious. (Chuckles) We became a bit religious. We were praying in the morning; we were praying in the evening. We became religious, let me just say, we became religious." (P5)

As much as most learners under the care of the participants did not contract the virus or have severe symptoms of it, the fact that there was an unknown disease that was killing people changed how they viewed sickness and death. Lee et al. (2021) looked at how learners were scared that they would contract COVID-19 and that they were more scared of not knowing when the pandemic would come to a halt. As the death toll kept on rising the learners were afraid as the disease had a negative impact on their lives as it limited the learners' daily activities (Lee et al., 2021). The

findings in this study are similar to those stated by the author as one participant shared that the learner displayed behaviours as a result of the fear as he ensured that in order for him and his family to not contract the virus, he would take on the responsibility of ensuring that persons who came to their household are sanitised.

Wright (2021) agrees with the said statement and further expresses that there was overwhelming fear of the virus as well as fear of death. This is also evident in these research findings, as learners were scared of getting infected as they knew people who were infected and had in fact lost loved ones, friends and teachers due to the virus and this affected them psychologically according to one participant. Baumann et al. (2021) and Slomski (2021) state that the lockdown caused fear of contracting the virus, having loved ones contracting the virus as well as serious consequences that may emanate from the virus like permanent illness as well death and it was worse for the young ones as they feared losing their surviving parent or siblings. The aftermath of COVID-19 has lingered on in their lives that a mere sight of a tissue or coughing and sneezing still triggers the learners and is associated with the virus.

Ajiboye and Ajokpaniovo (2019) agree with the writers above and state that the age and stage of development of the child affect how they deal with the loss of a loved one and understanding their cognitive and emotional development is ideal in assisting them to cope with grief and deal with emotions such as emptiness and loneliness to guilt and anger and also taking into consideration confusion, anxiety, remorse, fear and frustration that they experience. Adolescents do not deal with the loss of a loved one in the same way, some use sports or extracurricular activities or they consume themselves with schoolwork, while others use spirituality as a coping mechanism for the loss (Lawrence-Webb & Okundaye, 2006).

The learners in this study also portrayed what the literature insinuated as they were also afraid of contracting the virus as well as of losing loved ones due to the COVID-19 virus. The lockdown affected them psychologically according to one participant as the learners lived in constant fear of the unknown. The learners' ensured that they followed the rules and regulations as stipulated by the WHO in order to keep safe and as much as some experienced the loss of loved ones, others were scared that they may also lose loved ones. One learner used religion and spirituality to strengthen his faith and according to the participant, the learner ensured that the family prayed as much as possible during the lockdown.

4.4.3. COVID-19 produced psychosocial and physical changes in learners.

The third theme of the study was to understand the psychosocial and physical consequences of COVID-19 that the learners' experienced during the lockdown. During the lockdown learners experienced anxiety and stress due to the pandemic, they also experienced weight challenges due to prolonged inactivity due to the lockdown. The learners sleeping patterns changed during the period as they were always indoors and that in turn made them resort to watching TV to fill the time and space. The learners had similar experiences, and these are evident in the sub-themes that were identified below:

i. Anxiety and stress experienced by the learners.

The learners experienced anxiety especially because they had no understanding or knowledge of COVID-19 and in turn, it affected their behaviour in the household. The participants' shared that the learners also experienced stress especially due to the restrictions imposed to them by the lockdown. Exam preparation times also proved to be stressful for the learners as there were not getting much support during the time that they were studying remotely. This is evident in what the participants shared:

*"*You, um, ianxiety kakhulu yiyo ebeyiphuma phambili because abayazi okokuqala iCovid-19 into entsha and the term Covid-19 nje beyiba thusa." (P5)

"First and foremost, there was a lot of anxiety because there was a lack of knowledge regarding COVID-19 and the term itself was very scary." (P4)

"He was more anxious than stressed. And then if he says, uh, uh, something must be done, he will like, you know, it must be done immediately, very quickly. You know, yeah. He was, I think he was anxious. Very anxious." (P5)

"She was a little bit anxious. Yeah. With her studies and stuff, she was anxious. Yeah, she was, she did suffer from anxiety, but not depression." (P8)

As much as most of the learners' experienced anxiety as perceived by the primary caregivers, two caregivers mentioned that the learners' experienced stress as they could not do things the way they normally do them if it is not the lockdown. Approaching exams was stressful for the learners and their marks suffered due to the stress.

"Just that stress yeah, because I can't do the things that we normally would do when it is not the COVID-19 lockdown." (P2)

"So, it was a bit hectic the most difficult part was to approach exams for yourself. It was very stressful, and her marks actually dropped because of all the stress." (P3)

Rochat and Redinger (2022) investigated how stress has a major impact on the development of learners' and their mental health trajectory and the relationship between high levels of stress and how it leads to anxiety. The authors further state that all children experience stress at one point in their lives and how they learn to manage stress is important for their development, protective factors can help to balance the impact (Rochat & Redinger; 2022). The findings of the authors regarding stress and anxiety were applicable in this study as well because as much as the participants' in the current study did not have control over the COVID-19 lockdown as a stressful event that learners' went through, they were there to provide support and protection as a protective factor to assist learners in finding the balance and finding effective ways of dealing with the impact of the pandemic.

Rapee et al. (2019) state that the adolescent stage is the most crucial stage in the learners' lives as this is the time that they may develop mental health issues such as anxiety and depression that may prolong into their adulthood, a traumatic social factor like COVID-19 contributes to the emergence of these mental health issues. This is evident in the current study as the participants' shared that the learners' experienced stress and anxiety as a psycho-social impact of the COVID-19 lockdown. This was mainly from not having much knowledge regarding the virus as well as how the pandemic affected their livelihood and their studies. One participant stated that the learner in her care was hastily and if something needed to be done, he wanted it done immediately and he was very anxious. Two participants shared that the learners' experienced stress in relation to the new norms of the lockdown as they could not do things the way they were used to doing them and they were also stressed when they approached their exams and as a result their marks decreased.

ii. Learners' physical changes due to the lockdown

The learners also experienced physical changes due to the lockdown. Some learners experienced weight gains due to not participating in any physical activities. Some learners were said to be lazy as they would eat, sleep, and watch TV most of the time, especially if they did not receive their schoolwork packages. Remote learning posed its own challenges as learners were trying to get

used to the routines of learning from home and if there was no learning, they would sit around as they could not go and visit friends or move around due to the restrictions imposed. One learner was said to have experienced migraines during the period while another ate as though she was given multivitamins pills to increase her appetite as she was constantly snacking. Another physical issue that the learners' experienced was weight gain. Participants shared that given that the learners were lazy at home and not doing any physical activities, most of them gained weight:

"Like angithi uya gainer umzimba because uyadla, uyalala, uyahlala, akasadlali, umzimba wa gainer ke, wagainer iweight." (P1)

"He gained weight because he would eat, sleep, sit, he didn't play, so yes he gained weight." (P1)

"She was eating too much (chuckles). Now and then she snacks now and then she snacks. She gained a lot of weight, a lot. She was forever eating as if I gave her multivitamins (chuckles)." (P3)

"Um, uh, other than ukuthi, this uh, ukujwayela ma, cause besebane routine abahamba ngayo sekungathi manje sebaba, uba lazy nje. But okunye uhlala akhathele, lazy kphela nje. Okunye ai because bebangananto abangayi yenza, they were just lazying around and balinde ukuthi kuthunyelwe umsebenzi weskolo. If ungathunyelwanga kuhlelwi nje and then bayanona."

"The learner was becoming lazy as they no longer had a routine. He was always tired, at most he had nothing to do so they were lazing around, waiting for schoolwork. And if they don't receive it, they are just sitting around and gain weight." (P4)

"But I experienced that he did have even migraines as well." (P6)

While some experienced weight gain, there was an exception as one learner was said to have lost weight and started eating healthier during the period. He even had a period where he was bed-wetting, and this may be linked to the fear and anxiety related to contracting the virus.

"He lost weight. I don't know why, he lost weight. He lost weight. And then there was a time when he was bed-wetting. I don't know what made him to bed wet, but he lost weight, but not that much. Yes. And uh, you know, he started eating very healthy, no more junk food, quarters and whatnot, we were cooking our own meals." (P5)

Tadon et al. (2021) state that during the pandemic there was less physical activity among learners', which led to weight gain and high obesity rates for most of the learners' and they link these to poor mental health outcomes as physical activity declines with age. According to these authors, adolescents are less physically active. This is applicable to the learners in the current study as they also gained weight during the lockdown due to a lack of physical activities and they were unable to spend time with friends or play any sports during the period due to restrictions.

Faize and Husain (2020) agree and also state that learners' gain weight when they are out of school and it is due to the lack of physical activities that they are prone to when schools are open like sports or physical education periods. The stress that comes from gaining weight may cause learners to experience anxiety and depression. One learner experienced anxiety which resulted in him eating more healthily but the negative effect was that he started bed-wetting and the reason behind this could not be explained by the participant but can be linked back to fear. Rochat and Redingeri (2021) state that the stress that is experienced by adolescents can lead to poor health outcomes such as obesity. The learners under the care of participants in this study also experienced weight gain due to a lack of physical activities. The learners were said to be lazy and did not have the luxury of being physically active during the lockdown. While most learners gained weight there was an exception of a learner who chose to focus his anxiety and stress on healthier eating habits and better physical activities.

iii. Learners' relationship with television and the effects on sleeping patterns.

Given that learners were home for long periods of time without attending school, another physical change that they adapted to their sleeping patterns. The participants all stated that the learners' sleeping patterns were affected by the lockdown and they utilised those times to entertain themselves by watching TV to keep abreast with developing news and spend time on their mobile devices. There was some disruption in the learners' routines during the lockdown as they were indoors for long periods of time. Other learners used self-initiative to find ways to support their own learning during the period to attend to online lessons and keep abreast with their academic work: -

"He would sleep late because he will be at home, sleeps late. Then wake up late around 11:00 AM not unless you wake him up. Like you can't be sleeping the whole day. Yeah, as a person you

wake up in the morning clean, bath, leave or do your house chores. Then after that, you can go back and sleep. No one will tell you anything." (P2)

"Hey, you know, he, he couldn't sleep. The reason why he couldn't sleep, uh, he was watching tv, you know, remember, there, there, there was this, uh, tv. They would say, how many people died. He was watching tv most of the time. And, then even at night, he would go to bed very late, very late. Very late. And then he'd wake up very early. And run to the TV to check how many people have died. (Chuckles) have died, you know." (P5)

"So, he used to sleep in, uh, during the day and in the morning a lot. But afternoon. And at night he wakes up and starts studies." (P6)

"Oh, bese balala iskhathi eside manje, abasana skhathi soku vuka cause iskolo siba. Kuba ne routine umntwana makaya eskolweni."

*"They were sleeping for long hours, they didn't have a specific time to wake up you know because when learners' attend school they have a routine." (*P4)

"Bagcine babhoreka uthole ukuthi kwesinye iskhathi usuke sekahlalele iTV iskhathi eside. Then afunde ngalesoskhathi, esikhathini esiningi mina into engayibona ukuthi beseka concentrator kuTV kakhulu yabona."

"They would be extremely bored and find comfort in watching TV for long hours. He would study at times, but I noticed that he was more concentrated on watching TV." (P1)

"Yoh, he was sleeping very late. Cause obviously iTV beyikhona ubukela ama Popeye from cartoons to soccer, soccer to movies, movies, to cell phone research. So nje no one would sleep early back then because we even get tired of sleeping. So ncono uzilalele late, you just wake up, watch TV again. It's just a daily routine nge lockdown huh uh."

"Yoh, he was sleeping very late. Cause obviously there was a TV in the house, and he was watching cartoons from cartoons to soccer, soccer to movies, movies, to cell phone research. So, no one would sleep early back then because we even get tired of sleeping. So, it would be better to sleep late, you just wake up and watch TV again. It's just a daily routine during the lockdown." (P7)

"She would study at night, yeah, she wouldn't sleep. Then she would look for online classes during the day on different websites or on TV, right. Yeah. So, she would attend online lessons in the

morning and then at night when she was supposed to sleep, she would never sleep. She'll continue writing her schoolwork." (P8)

Tadon et al. (2021) state that several learners in their study spent a lot of time on-screen due to the number of activities that were either done online due to school or entertainment. The learners spent their time working on their schoolwork during the night so that they could keep busy. Lack of sleep is according to Rochat and Redingeri (2021) one of the poor health outcomes experienced by adolescents due to stress, the learners in this study were unable to sleep much because they were worried about the spreading of the virus around the world as well as their schoolwork. Faize and Husain (2020) found that student's engagement with watching TV, focusing on different hobbies and playing computer games assisted learners' in managing their time. The learners in the participants' care spent a lot of time watching TV and being on their cell phones to keep abreast of the developments around the world which in turn increased their stress levels as the news increased their fear of contamination as well as their fear of death. Uncertainty fuelled them to keep searching news and social media for up-to-date information and also provided a form of entertainment. This in turn affected their sleeping patterns as they would sleep longer during the day and sleep later at night.

iv. Communication and isolation patterns within the family unit during the lockdown.

Communication patterns are different in every family, and they change depending on the age, the boundaries, and the family relationships. Baumann et al. (2021) state that the lockdown had economic and psychosocial consequences on the learners' and that prolonged social isolation due to the lockdown is linked to mental health issues, post-traumatic stress symptoms, avoidance behaviours, and family conflicts. The participants' shared that learners' communication patterns changed during the lockdown because they developed a tendency to isolate themselves. This may be attributed to the impact that the lockdown had on the learners' mental health and the possibility of them being sad during the period:

"Um, cause yena umuntu othulile vele neh, mara uh unoku khuluma sixoxe nyana. But at that time bekazi thulela nje, bekuyi hi, sanibonani angene azi valele nje."

"He is a quiet person naturally, but he does talk sometimes. During the lockdown he was quieter, and he would just greet and lock himself in his room." (P2)

"She started not, uh, not communicating with us. She was isolating herself cause of stress due to school and education." (P8)

"The learners are isolating themselves cause there's too much havoc things happening, and our kids are forever hiding. So, let's try to, check why is the child always in the bedroom and not coming out? Let's check the isolations. Let's check all these corners of kids." (P3)

Different factors affect a family structure, and these include the power structure, the family decision-making process, the family goals, and communication patterns (Rooney et al, 2017). The researcher found that in this study the communication styles in the home often affect the people in the system, the current communication style that was used by the learners was avoidance, as the learners were not communicating their thoughts and feelings with their caregivers and even went to the extent of isolating themselves from the family unit. McWhirter et al. (2007) talk about the importance of communication with adolescents, taking into account how their behaviour may be affected by external forces, how they solve interpersonal problems, and their ability to cope with anxiety and stress. One learner who was usually quiet in the household, was far worse as he would just greet the family members and lock himself in his room for long periods, this was due to the anxiety and stress that was caused by the COVID-19 lockdown and his inability to communicate his feelings with the family as he is usually a quiet person who did not share much with his family members.

Romm et al (2021) talk about the learners feeling isolated due to the lockdown and the same can be said about the learners in this study as they were said to be feeling isolated. This was due to the fact that the learners could not spend time with or see their peers, teachers, and friends. One participant stated that the learner under her care would isolate herself due to stress. Other participant advised on the importance on checking up on learners who isolate themselves as much as possible. Rochat and Redingeri (2021) as well as Magson et al. (2020) state that social isolation results in adolescents having limited exposure to positive influences that they may receive from teachers, friends, and peers. The learners were isolating themselves from their families as they did not like socialising much with them as they prefer spending time with their peers and the lockdown did not provide a platform for physical socialisation. The learners' spent time in their rooms and would greet and go back into their private space. Lee and Goldstein (2016) state that friendship

plays a pivotal role in the buffering of stressors for learners' and thus the lack of access to these relationships during the lockdown may have been stressful for the learners in the current study.

4.4.4. Access to social media provided support for learners' during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The fourth theme looked at the utilisation of social media as a support tool for learners. The utilisation reached its peak during the lockdown as people relied on technology for education and communication. While the participants' talked about the access to schooling for learners' during rotational attendance and remote learning, the utilisation of technology played a key role in learners' receiving and submitting their schoolwork. Participants shared the importance of ensuring that the learners had access to learning devices and the data needed to access work during remote learning. This access played a major role in the improvement of the learners' moods. Learners also stayed up late and used both social media as well as TV as a form of entertainment.

i. Access to social media and technology is linked to improved moods among learners.

Learners were said to be on their devices for long periods of time during the lockdown. They utilised different apps to access social media as well as gain access to information and knowledge. The Apps were also used as communication tools to stay connected to their friends, extended family members, teachers, and access to and submit their schoolwork. The participants' stated that the usage of technology as a communication tool improved the moods of learners' as they became livelier and would often smile when they were communicating with friends or extended family members on their phones:

"And then mayibekhona, umntwana bowumubona ngokuthi a, eh at least kuba nento emuyenza ukuthi abe active. Maka engager nabo teacher ayenza umsebenzi weskolo ngathi manje uba alive nyana, khona into akayenzayo than just ukuhlala nje. So, his mood, improved a lot once kwaba na that interaction nama friends or iskolo over time."

"And then when there was communication, you could see that the learners' were looking forward to the work and they were kept active. When they engage with the teacher and do their schoolwork, they become livelier than when they were idling around. So, his mood improved a lot once they had that interaction with friends or the schoolteachers over time." (P4)

"His mood improved a lot, especially when they replied faster you know, and they would gossip. Especially with other boys, they just like to talk, like hey did you see that person Mbali? Yoh that girl likes me, you know it's just fun talk between them." (P7)

"She was talking to her teacher and her auntie and it improved her mood. She's very close to my younger sister. Yes. She knows her even if maybe she's got a crush on somebody, she knows all the stuff. So, she kind of motivates her on life in general." (P3)

"Uh, he, uh, that one improved his mood moods very, very much. Because, uh, I can see him laughing. I can see him, you know. When he is busy with, uh, his books and discussing them with peers, excitement is there." (P6)

The learners in Faize and Husain's (2020) study managed their anxiety by spending time watching movies, spending time on social media, and attending online courses on cooking, painting, and learning new languages. Desai and Burtoni (2021) state that technology especially the usage of social media has provided learners with a platform for social connection, education, information sharing, and support groups. While socioeconomic issues affected how learners had access to data and devices, there were still discrepancies when it came to access to the internet for some learners' showing the digital divide (Desai and Burtoni, 2021). The findings from the above authors were the same as for this study as the learners from a secondary school in Soweto also used social media as a tool for accessing information as well as using WhatsApp to access their schoolwork and submit it to their teachers. Social connection was the key that assisted the learners to stay connected with their family, teachers, and friends. The learners were said to be excited when they were chatting and catching up with friends, they also used social media to gossip and motivate each other and get motivation from their extended families. Communicating with the teachers made them livelier and look forward to each day and the work that they would receive from the teachers.

The caregivers shared how they either installed WIFI in their households, bought the learners' a device to work on, or ensured that they bought data for the learners' to be able to have access to technology so that they can be entertained and not lag behind with their schoolwork and submissions. The participants ranged from a retired worker to unemployed persons as well as a security guard, their socio-economic status was difficult but for the sake of the learners they pushed to ensure that learners had access to technology and data. One caregiver stated that she even bought a contract phone for the learner to ensure that he is not left behind with his schoolwork. The

caregivers also shared that having access to technology and the devices improved the moods of the learners' exponentially as they communicated with teachers, friends, and extended families.

"Okay at home we didn't have Wi-Fi, so we thought that installing Wi-Fi would make things convenient for her. Yeah, so we added Wi-Fi and we also bought, bought her a phone because she didn't have much of a phone. She was using a small phone. So, we had to get a smartphone for her. So, she can write to her schoolwork." (P8)

"I bought him a cell phone and I bought myself a tablet, but it was on contract so that we could have, uh, access to data." (P5)

"Siyenze sure ukuthi ugesi ukhona azokhona ukubhala, iphone yakhe we made sure ukuthi idata ikhona. And angithi itechnology so kwamele umkhombise ama apps a right for the research like I abo Google."

"We made sure that we have electricity and data available for him to be able to do his schoolwork. And we also ensured that we showed him the appropriate apps that he could use for schoolwork, like Google." (P7)

Friendships play an advantageous role in the lives of learners as having good friends fulfils important functions and is associated with well-being and self-esteem as well as lower levels of depression and loneliness for learners (Steven Lee & Goldstein, 2016). This was evident in the current study as the learners enjoyed chatting with their friends or close family members and this lowered their levels of loneliness to a certain extent. As much as there are positive aspects to social media there are also negative connotations to its usage for the learners'. The media as well as social media play a major role in the lives of the youth by promoting social status quo expectations and this could expose those adolescents who are seen not to live up to the status quo to cyberbullying (DBE, 2015). Even though this may be the case, the learners in the current study used social media to not only maintain connection with their friends but also their connection with their teachers, peers and extended families.

4.4.5. The COVID-19 lockdown led to the improvement of support structures for learners.

The fifth theme that was identified in the findings was how learners coped with challenges that resulted from the COVID-19 lockdown. The importance of supporting learners was shared by the

participants, as well as the role of the community and the school, and the role of social workers. Participants shared how learners' resilience can be improved to cope with any pandemic that they may face in the future. The research looked into ways in which the participants felt that they supported the learners during the lockdown, as there was an increase in mental health challenges faced by the learners as well as their families. Participants mentioned the importance of showing the learners that they are loved and cared for. The participants further shared the role of the community, social workers as well as the school in ensuring that learners receive the support they need to function at their optimal capacity. Lastly, this study looked at ways in which learner resilience could be improved to ensure that learners are equipped with the knowledge and skills that can sustain them amid pandemics.

i. Supportive role that caregivers played for learners' during the lockdown.

One of the key roles primary caregivers played during the lockdown was being a supportive structure for the learners. Participants shared how the caregivers took the issue of the well-being of learners seriously in order to be able to identify if learners were experiencing depression or any other challenges. Having a close relationship with the learners plays a huge role in being a supportive caregiver, by talking to them, showing them love, and being present in their daily academic and life challenges. One participant shared that being able to stay up late when they study overnight is a form of support and comfort for the learners. Support also comes in a way of ensuring that learners can be able to depend on the caregiver as a constant person with unconditional love and believe that no matter what they have done or what they have experienced they can always count on them to be there for the learners.

"Uh, eishh ukuthi siba supporter nje ngendlela zonke. Bayithathe Serious into ye mental well-being, into e serious kakhulu because, eh. Abantwana abaningi bayaba nedepression, abantwana bafika lana ba dropper out eykolweni. Cause banga cope eh nama pressures aza nje just ngokuba nje iteenager nje, unezinto eziningi obhekane nazo. So umzali uyadinga ukuthi uh, angene ezicathulweni zomtwana, and then amu supporter ngangendela zonke akhona ukumu supporter ngayo."

"We should support learners in every way possible and take mental well-being seriously because it is very serious. There are several learners who may have depression, they get to a place where their marks even drop at school, because they are not coping with the pressures of being a typical

teenager as they face a lot of challenges. So as a parent, you need to put yourself in the shoes of the learners and support them in every way that you possibly can." (P4)

"I think the most important is to be closer to your child and also support him." (P5)

"Obviously ukumu supporter, show him love, show him a ukuthi ngikhona, I'm there for him. Even if the friends could, bangamu jikela he must just know I am one person he can always turn to noma ngabe wenzani, ngizo dlala leyo ndima."

"*Obviously it is to support him, show him love, show him that you are there for him. Even if the friends could turn their backs on you, just know I am one person he can turn to. No matter what he does, yes, that's the role I would play."* (P7)

"Ukuthi sihlale sinabo and sibuze ukuthi kwenzakalani kuqhubakalani empilweni. Sihlale sibabhekile futhi ukuthi like ube involved kumsebenzi wakhe weskole khona azobona naye ukuthi at least angingedwa, umama uyangisekela somewhere, somehow."

"We need to sit with them and question them about their well-being as well as their livelihood. We need to be more involved in their lives and schoolwork so that they can be confident and believe that they are not alone, as their parent you are there to support them somehow." (P1)

"I think we can be a support structure for them as best as we know how you let them be free around us and to think like, they should be able to express themselves. Like we just need to be there to support them." (P2)

"And then also to support them. Yeah, help them if they cross night, cross night with them, help them study, you know, and stuff. Yeah. And then also, uh, comfort them. Cause they really need comfort. Yeah." (P8)

The most important thing for learners' is the feeling of being safe and being supported by their family (Kleintjes et al., 2022). The learners spent a lot of time with family members during the lockdown and this provided a sense of social support since there was a lack of peer support during this period (Li et al., 2022). This is evident in the current study, as the participants shared the importance of having a close relationship with the learners where they can be able to be in a safe space to express themselves without fear of judgment and be able to receive comfort from their

caregivers. The primary caregivers provided social support during the period as no physical peer support was achieved due to the lockdown.

Bi et al. (2021) agree and further explain that support from family and parents has a strong correlation with adolescent's life satisfaction, as they rely mainly on their parents for emotional and physical support in the form of love and financial support, this, in turn, ensures that they experience less stress which strengthens them against mental health issues (Rueger et al., 2016). This is evident in the current study by the participants sharing that they needed to take the mental well-being of learners seriously in order to be able to identify if they may be experiencing challenges such as stress, anxiety and depression. The participants showed their support towards the learners' academic challenges by assisting them with overnight studies and being a source of comfort through those challenging times.

The formation of an identity is important in the adolescence phase, a healthy identity is usually fostered by positive cognitive development, having parents that encourage self-expression, and a culture that allows for adolescents to find their roles (Card, 2014). The participants expressed that they encourage learners to sit and talk to them about their challenges, to express themselves freely, and also try to put themselves in the shoes of the learners in order to understand the challenges that they face in each development stage. Each participant shared their ideals of proper support for the learners emotionally, mentally, educationally, and financially to ensure that they felt loved and accepted throughout the pandemic.

ii. The role the school and the community played in the lives of the learners.

Learners' lives do not exist in isolation. The researcher utilised the ecological model of development for an in-depth understanding of how the learners' lives are interconnected in the communities they belong to as well as the school. Participants shared ways in which the school and the community can play a role in supporting learners by having a platform where mental wellness is discussed openly to create an environment of respect amongst community members and learners. Foster an environment that is non-judgemental in a way that there is understanding of different developmental challenges experienced by some learners, and they are not shunned upon. There needs to be a determination that learners are not exposed to additional stressors due to their differences as teachers, caregivers and communities need to have open communication

regarding the best interests of the learners and encourage them to do better in life and reach their full potential.

“I think if bangaba nama sessions laku discuswa zona lezinto lezi. Babe neplatform la kukhulunywa nje nge mental wellbeing. Ba assessor abantwana and ba assist la babona ukuthi kudingeka usizo khona. Ngoba abaningi ba disturbed ngoku buya kwethu ku Covid abasa, maku fikwa ezintweni zesikolo akusasi yibo labayana.”

“I think if they can have sessions where such issues are discussed, have a platform where they talk about mental well-being. Assess learners and assist those who are found to be needing assistance. A lot of learners have been disturbed ever since the COVID-19 pandemic and when it comes to their academia, they are no longer achieving the results they had before the pandemic.” (P4)

“Supporting learners, showing them love, showing them ukuthi even if your parents are not at school, they have parents at school. Noma ungabona ubaba in the community. Just know that you need to respect them. So, they can also respect you, show you love, and give you advices. Let's say you go with friends and then baya bhema, kufika umama athi wena ngikubona uwumuntu oright phuma kulabangani aba sona, lalela. That's what they need.”

“Supporting learners, showing them love, showing them that even if your parents are not at school, they have parents at school. Even if you can see a man in the community. Just know that you need to respect them. So, they can also respect you, show you love, and give you advice. Let's say you go with friends, and they smoke, A lady comes up to you and says that you seem like a well-behaved young man, leave your friends as they might put you in trouble, they must listen. That's what they need.” (P7)

“The school community ukuthi kwamele bangabi ne judgemental attitude towards them, because kukhona abantwana abanokuthi icommunity ithi hey ubani bani uslow, ubani bani yabo. Um, cause I mean, it's difficult enough to be cooked up endlini. You understand that? And then the next thing, umuntu uzothi yoh lona mase useskolweni hay wena u slow, hay wena ini ini stress nje yabo. They shouldn’t judge because already une stress cause yoh life is hard and stressful. So, our teachers, they should just support you as you are and bakhone ukuba gquqguzele, encourage the kids.”

“The school community should not have a judgmental attitude towards the learners, because there are children who are judged by the community for being slow or being different. I mean, it's

difficult enough to be cooked up in the house. Do you understand that? And then the next thing, a person talks about the learner's slowness and other things and stresses them. They shouldn't judge because already he has stress because life is hard and stressful. So, our teachers, should just support you as you are, and they should be able to encourage learners." (P2)

"Iskolo angithi siyaba provider ngestationary, kukhona esiba provider ngakho kustationanry. Thina abazali lesi iskolo esingakhoni ukuba provider ngaso istationary sizame ukuthi basithole. And sizame ukuthi like meba funa something eskolweni sikhone ukuthi sibathengele. Nabothisha sikhulumisane nabo like mawubona ukuthi angikhoni ukuthi ngifinyelele kuleyonto, ukhulumisane nabothisha."

"The school provides learners with stationary, we as parents need to provide what the school cannot provide for the learners. We need to try to buy their school necessities. Communicate with the teachers when you have issues and cannot provide certain things." (P1)

Baysu et al. (2021) state that relationships between teachers and students are judged on how well they support or reject the learners' efforts. Although the effectiveness of teacher-student relationships is crucial for adolescents, adjustment to school regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, was crucial in helping learners move from contact learning to virtual learning and back to structured contact learning. The learners according to one participant suffered a lot academically during the lockdown therefore ensuring that proper assessments are done to evaluate which students need more support can play a vital role in learners' improvement.

Bi et al. (2021) further state that as learners become more autonomous as they grow into their adolescent stage, school becomes more important to them, and other sources of support like teachers, friends, and classmates become more important as the learners grow and form their identities. Participants in the current study spoke to the importance of the school community not being judgemental towards the learners, as they already have their own different stressors in life and school should not be an environment that increases their stress levels.

Stanton-Salazar (2011) states that today adolescents socialize with more than the school, peers, and parents, they indirectly have contact with the private sector, social services, non-government organisations, the workforce, and the religious community which impact adolescent socialisation either through direct contact or policies or the media. Participants believe that creating a safe space

for learners' to talk about mental well-being is a safety net where they may also be able to discuss their academic performance and the reasons behind why others' academic performance has declined and come up with solutions as to how they can be assisted to achieve better results. They can also look into how the community can play a role in supporting them in achieving their goals through the local government, NPO's and other entities. Anderson-Butcher and Ashton (2004) talk about the importance of working to come up with innovative collaborations between schools, nongovernmental organisations, the state, interprofessional collaborations, family support as well as community collaboration to develop ideal services for learners and this was highly expressed by the participants in this study as well.

The Education white paper 6 (2001) talks about special needs education and building an inclusive education and training system. This approach talks about addressing barriers to education by encouraging learners' strengths and empowering them to participate in identifying and overcoming learning difficulties. Pretorius (2016) further states that the paper aimed to integrate special needs and support services for the education system through intersectoral collaboration as well as working with community-based support systems to have a preventative and developmental approach to support learners. This approach is important in identifying the reasons behind learner challenges post-COVID-19 and how the challenges could be addressed to ensure that they are empowered enough and have enough support from the education system as well as the community at large. The one important factor that the parents talked about is a collaboration between the school and the parents to ensure that the learners needs are met mentally, physically, and educationally so that they can achieve great results and be better leaders in the future.

iii. The role School Social Workers can play in learner support.

School social workers play a role in the psycho-social support of learners' and thus it is empirical for school social workers to play their role in learner support. The visibility and availability of social services is empirical to address psycho-social issues faced by the learners. A participant stated that social workers must be visible, so that the public knows that they are available in the schools, and information regarding the kind of services that they render is public knowledge. The values and principles applicable to social workers include confidentiality, respect for diversity, non-judgemental attitude, social justice and the respect and dignity of a human being must always be upheld. These values were also highlighted by the participants who shared the importance of

social workers having a confidential relationship with the learners and creating an environment that is a safe space for learners to share thoughts, feelings, and perceptions where there is a non-judgemental attitude towards them.

“Ukuthi kwaziwe ukuthi sine social worker lana, if kukhona umuntu onezi nkinga ezisona nasona, sinabantu abangasi siza ngalokho. So, if ama social worker angazi veza, azibonakalise ezikolweni. Ukuthi bakhona ukudlala indima yabo, ngicabanga ukuthi kunga siza lokho.”

“So that it is public knowledge that the school has a social worker and if someone has certain issues, they are there to assist with that. So, if they can be visible and work in schools. Show they are there and playing their role, I think it could be very helpful.” (P4)

“Cause mentally and emotionally you know how to sit with them, play your role as social workers. Do not be judgmental to towards them. Uh, have your own secret and make sure whatever they share with you, you do not take it to someone else. Cause you will find that they feel comfortable with you and they trust you. Then you go take it to someone else it will cause problems for him.” (P7)

“Osonhlalakahle maybe ikhona indlela yokuthi umntwana akhone ukuyithola lento leyo. Nokuthi kwesinye iskhathi bamukhuthaze ngokwenqondo.”

“Social workers may assist learners’ to access certain services and things, and to also motivate the child mentally.” (P1)

“Be true to your learners’ during consultation, open up as you know that, we are always creating a good and conducive environment. Let's love them and make sure that we don't breach confidentiality unless otherwise it's life-threatening. But those learners’ out there, they need us.” (P3)

Johnson and Mckay-Jackson (2017) look into the role of the social worker in ensuring academic support through social and emotional learning. The authors state that it is the process of learning to understand emotions and providing opportunities for young people to get skills that allow them to build and maintain positive relationships throughout their life span. These authors talk about self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsive decision-making. The participants in this study shared the importance of social workers being responsive

and supportive to learners, being able to show them love and care while also providing a conducive environment for learners to open up to social workers about their challenges.

Clark and Gilmore (2010) discuss different tiers of intervention in schools that social workers can utilise to support learners in coping with challenges, tier 3 interventions are said to require high levels of vigorous assessment, intervention, and evaluation for students who need more intensive and individualised intervention. Assessing those learners that may need individualized support and ensuring that confidentiality is not breached according to the participants.

Tier 2 focuses on early intervention and prevention programs as well as specific programs to address issues that learners may be exposed to in the school as well as the surrounding community (Clark & Alvarez, 2010). Being able to motivate learners and ensure that access to programs and services that they need should according to the participants be a priority for school social workers.

While tier 1 looks at the universal support of learners to meet their social-emotional and behavioural needs, the school should create an environment that promotes good learner behaviour by following instructions and school protocol (Fynaardt & Richardson, 2010). Understanding the community in which the school is located, and the challenges faced by the community is ideal in ensuring that proper services that address immediate needs and impediments are offered to the learners as well as the surrounding community. Social workers link the learners with adequate resources as well as offer emotional support to learners as well as their families and they can only render such services if they are known by the school, teachers, the community as well as the learners.

Tomlinson et al. (2021) state that one of the challenges of learners as well as parents not reaching out for support is due to the stigma attached to seeking professional help, this is applicable in this study as learners may not know where and how to find social work help. Accessing help may prove to be a challenge as well because the working hours for social workers in the employ of the state may prove to be another challenge. The participants also shared the same challenges concerning accessing school social work services as well as their expectations for school social workers to be more visible and accessible to learners as well as their families. The school itself does not have a social worker employed and the ones from the Department of Social Development provide early intervention programs and are rather reactive as they are only called to the school when there is a crisis that involves a learner.

iv. Improvement of learner resilience amid pandemics.

Learner resilience played a major role in how the learners under the primary care of the participants dealt with emotions and stress related to the COVID-19 lockdown. Participants felt that in order for the learners to be better equipped should any other pandemics or challenges come up in the future, they should be able to listen to their parents, the WHO or the government regarding the stipulated rules and regulations that are set to protect them from harm. Learners should be able to set their own long-term and short-term goals regarding their education and how best to improve their lives for the better. Participants shared the importance of the learners being prepared mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for challenges that may occur by having a good relationship with their parents as a support structure. Participants also mentioned the importance of self-love in fostering resilience, having a good network of friends, and not solely depending on information that is from their parents, teacher, or the media, but researching for themselves for better understanding and clarity on some issues is as important:

"Nokuthi babe cautious, babe careful, eh bamamele nabo, balandelele lokhu abatshelwa kona ukuthi bakwenze. Ngaleyondlela angeke si, ku spread ama pandemics nani nani kungaba izinto esikhona ukuzi gwema kalula if nabo bayamalela. Bamamele abazali, Then, ukumamelana, uku sebenzisana then yeah kuzoba right."

"Learners' need to be cautious and careful, listen to the rules and regulations, and follow instructions as directed. In that way there won't be a spread of any pandemic or anything else, if they listen, they would easily prevent the spread of anything. They should listen to their parents, we should listen to them, we should work together and then everything will be fine." (P4)

"Make sure they love themselves. Mm, they have long and some short-term goals. They prepare themselves physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally. They must just prepare themselves and also love themselves." (P7)

"They mustn't rush into things. They must just focus on the fact of, uh, why are they at school? Um, we are looking forward to tomorrow's president, leaders, and they must just focus on education. It doesn't mean that he will always be, he or she will always be on grade 10 or grade 11 or grade 12. They must always aim high to improve themselves." (P3)

"They must take care of themselves if they don't take care of, so, uh, learners must also get lots of information, and they have the ability actually to, to get information for themselves besides being told by the teachers, by the parents. Yeah, and also, uh, allow them, to develop more friendships and have a good network of friends." (P5)

Learner development into responsible adults includes being resilient and being able to cope with certain challenges that they face currently and in the future. According to Van Breda (2011), resiliency is the ability to bounce back from adversity. Tomlinson et al. (2021) state that the COVID-19 pandemic opened the eyes of communities to start creating systems that enable learners to adapt to emerging shocks and crises. The participants shared the importance for learners to be able to be self-reliant, ensure that they do their own research besides the information given to them by the teachers as well as their parents and have strong relations with friends.

According to Tomlinson et al. (2021), there is a need to build a resilient system that extends beyond just disaster management but is embedded in leadership practices, the organisational culture as well as the social network that empowers the learners to adapt well to chronic stress while enabling them to lead their own generation and future generations to deal with the current and future crisis. According to Yates and Mantles (2023) families that experience less socioeconomic stressors are able to be more resilient and therefore support from different institutions is vital to improve familial resilience. The caregivers shared how they believe learners could be assisted to be more resilient in the future so they are able to face any adversities they may come across. They expressed the need for a multidimensional and cross-sectoral approach to ensuring that learners have the strength and the capacity to be resilient by working together with their parents, the state, and other entities that aim to enhance and protect them.

Tomlinson et al. (2021) state that since learners are part of an ecological system their resilience is not only shaped by their personal resources but also by the ones distributed across all the systems that the learner interacts with such as having caring parents, well-functional schools, well-protected classrooms and homes, an opportunity to form good friendships and environments that are ready for any disaster these are also known as protective factors (McLaughlin & Lambert, 2017). When all of these resources are at play it is easier for the learners to feel safe, calm, and protected and have a sense of self-efficacy, be connected with others, and have hope, thus their

resilience is dependent on how well all these resources as well as their social and physical ecologies respond to challenges such as the COVID-19 lockdown.

Engzel et al. (2021) state that the significance of social investment techniques for improving equity and resilience in education and for building back better. As a community, participants have stated that in order to improve learner resilience we need to ensure that we invest in strategies that will equip learners with skills and knowledge that will assist them in dealing with the long-term effects of the pandemic. Ensuring that learners learn to love and believe in themselves, look forward to being better leaders and listen to the regulations stipulated by the regulating body and their parents will empower each of them to be resilient to any present and future adversaries as each participant has highlighted in this study.

The findings of this study determine that Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of maintaining relationships played a significant role in understanding learners' challenges during the COVID-19 lockdown. The relationships between the learners, their peers, parents, and their teachers assisted them to cope with mental wellbeing challenges, it also assisted them to foster resilience amidst a new norm. The learners' interactions with the formal support systems, such as the schools, the community, and their parent's workplaces, policies, and new norms ensured that despite not having control over what transpires in the chronosystem, with a good support structure and policy development it is possible to develop interventions that can facilitate collaborations between primary caregivers and educators to improve and develop material, physical, emotional, and social dimensions of learner's wellbeing.

4.5. Summary of chapter

This chapter outlines the presentations and discussion of findings that arose from the study objectives. The first part of the chapter described the demographic information of all participants. Five themes that emerged from data analysis were discussed in detail. The first theme focused on the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the learners' academic performance. The second theme looked at how the pandemic led to fear and isolation amongst learners while the third theme looked at psychosocial and physical changes experienced by the learners during the period. The fourth theme discussed how access to media provided support for the learners during the lockdown and last theme of the study discussed how the lockdown improved the support structures for the learners. Chapter five, which follows next, presents a summary of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, major findings and conclusions of the research are recorded as drawn from the presentation and analysis of data in chapter Four. Recommendations and areas for further research are also suggested. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of primary caregivers of secondary school learners in Soweto on the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown. The research utilised Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of maintaining relationships between learners, peers, and teachers. The relationship between formal support systems, such as the school, community, and the place of employment of caregivers, and learner's interactions with these systems, as well as how these systems interact to affect the learner's wellbeing, all play important roles in our understanding of the learners wellbeing during COVID-19.

5.2 Main findings of the study

In this section, the main findings of the study are presented in relation to the objectives of the study.

5.2.1 Objective 1: To explore the perceptions of caregivers regarding the academic performance of the learners before, during, and after the lockdown.

From the analysed data it was evident that the COVID-19 lockdown negatively affected the learners' academic performance. Before the closure of schools, the learners were said to be doing well in their studies, some were even said to be distinction learners who received awards for their Stella performance in their academics. The learners' relationship with their primary caregivers, teachers and peers had a direct influence on their academic performance. This can be attributed to the social connectedness of the learners which influences their self-development, peer relationships, their autonomous traits as well as their individual identities that make them want to succeed academically (Roche et al., 2022).

This was in turn disrupted by the COVID-19 lockdown, which saw the introduction of the online learning systems, rotational attendance for social distancing purposes as well as the increased workload that learners had to cover on their own as self-study. The South African education system

was ill-prepared for the move to remote learning and even though there were apps and other creative devised ways to ensure that learners had access to education (Landa et al., 2021). During the hard lockdown the learners in this study were said to have been working under pressure to ensure that they complete tasks allocated by their respective teachers in a short space in time. While some learners tried to be disciplined enough to apply themselves during this period, some found it difficult to study as there was lack of motivation, lack of structural learning, poor concentration, unmanageable workload, poor time management and some were said to be playful during the hard lockdown. Not being in class meant that learners could not receive peer and teacher support and could not ask questions or get responses at the time that they were working on a task. This was in alignment to Skeen et al. (2022) paper which states that the switch to online learning was not easy for learners as they could interact with peers and teachers as they were used to. School adjustment was a major challenge for the learners, while some adjusted to the new norms, it took others some time to get used to non-contact learning. Wang et al. (2020) found that learners with extreme anxiety found it hard to study and that affected their academic performance negatively. This in turn affected the learner's academic performance as they were getting lower results. The findings in this study are similar to those in Hillekens et al. (2023) who stated that learners had challenges with adjusting and adapting to the new norms of learning and this in turn affected their academic performance.

After the hard lockdown was lifted and learners were able to attend school daily, getting back to their pre-COVID-19 lockdown norm was near impossible. Learners experienced challenges with getting back to their routines and adjusting physically and academically. To make up for lost time schools introduces extra classes and catch-up sessions for the learners to gain their lost syllabuses. There was improved performance post lockdown, and this is attributed to the commitment from the schooling system, the learners and the primary caregivers who supported these programs. There were stronger engagements between the teachers, caregivers, learners and peers to ensure that there is improved academic performance, educational aspirations and lower dropout rates. As much as there was improvement in the learner's academic performance, some participants have reiterated that the learners' results have not been as good as they were pre-COVID-19. Pretorius (2020) & Skeen et al. (2022) looked at the vast challenges faced by learners and the importance of implementing multi-disciplinary learner support systems in the school settings in order to support the learner's mental well-being as well as improve their academic performance and the same can

be said to have been applied by the secondary school in Soweto in order to support learners in achieving good academic results post COVID-19 lockdown. The pandemic led to innovative ways in which professionals can apply alternatives to assist learners as stated by (Bird & Bhardwaj, 2020).

5.2.2 Objective 2: To explore the perceptions the learners had towards COVID-19 from the caregivers' perspective.

During the lockdown the learners were said to be scared and confused as they did not understand what COVID-19 was but could feel its effects. The disease was new to the learners as well as the caregivers and new information was shared daily about how people could protect themselves from contracting the virus. The hard lockdown included being isolated and staying indoors and learners needed to adjust to this new norm, this was not easy as learners were confused. The fear of getting infected led one learner to consider dropping out of school as she was uncertain about the future. Shepard and Moholwane (2021) in their study highlighted how the pandemic put learners at greater risk of dropping out. One common factor was that learners were not reminded about the importance of adhering to the regulations stipulated by the WHO, and they were so scared about family members being exposed to the virus while going out to work and they ensured that family members were also sanitised whenever they came back home and that they wore masks. This showed that learners developed new healthy routines and skills in order to protect themselves as well as their families, these were also the findings of Breen and Chambers (2020) in their study.

There was ongoing fear of death and sickness amongst the learners as COVID-19 was the first pandemic that they have ever experienced. The fear increased when the learner's got information about the increasing death toll and learning of loved ones as well as friends who passed on due to the virus. The learners did not want their loved ones to contract the virus or even lose them due to COVID-19. They were afraid that the virus might kill their parents, siblings, teachers or friends. These findings in this study are similar to those of Lee et al. (2021), Slomski (2021) as well as Baumann et al. (2021) who all discuss how leaners were scared of contracting the virus as well as losing loved ones due to COVID-19. One factor that stood out from this research is how regular behaviours like 'sneezing' and 'coughing' and a mere sight of a tissue became triggers for learners as they feared contracting the virus and even death due to illnesses post-COVID-19. The learners associate flu like symptoms to COVID to date. Using sports, applying themselves in their

schoolwork and being spiritual and religious was some of the ways that the learners used to cope with the fear of death and sickness due to COVID-19. Williams (2020), Ajiboye and Ajokpaniovo (2019) as well as Lawrence-Webb and Okundaye (2006) discuss the importance of learners having a strong faith based and religious background to foster resiliency and coping mechanisms while dealing with the loss of a loved one, as well as how learners may consume themselves with sports, academics and extra-curricular activities to cope with loss.

5.2.3 Objective 3: To explore the psychosocial and physical consequences of COVID-19 experienced by learners during the lockdown as perceived by the caregivers.

The learners in the study experienced stress and anxiety due to COVID-19, they were anxious as the virus was something new to them and there was lack of knowledge regarding the virus. Their studies also added to their anxiety as there was a lot of uncertainty regarding the future and they reacted to their anxiety in different ways as one was said to lack patience at the time and would like things to be done immediately. The learners were stressed by the pandemic as well, as they could not do things the way that they were used to before the lockdown, this in turn stressed them when they approached exams and as a result their marks decreased during the period. This was similar to the findings of Faize and Husain (2020) as well as Pan (2020) who talk about the anxiety, mental stress and sleep disorders that were experienced by the learners in other countries due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The learners experienced physical changes due to the lockdown, there was lack of physical activities during the period and as a result this led learners to eat, sleep and watch TV hence majority of them gained weight. The restrictions imposed during the lockdown meant learners could not visit friends or loved ones or play with them as the social distancing was imposed and contact was limited therefore not much physical activities were done. Participants were said to be eating most of the time and one was eating as though she was given multivitamin tablets to enhance her appetite. The learners were said to be lazy by the participants and any physical activities were only house chores, hence the weight gain. Viner et al. (2020) and McMillen (2020) had similar findings about the pandemic having affected the learner's physical health and contributed to their weight changes.

Only one participant stated that the learner in her care lost weight as he started eating healthier, avoided junk food and started exercising; the one challenge was that he was bed-wetting at one

point, and this was due to the fear and anxiety of contracting the virus or losing loved ones due to it. Another physical change that was experienced by a learner was constant migraines at the time, and this bothered the participant. Moratala et al. (2021) states that learners experienced psychological and physical problems during the period and these included sleeplessness, dizziness and abdominal pains and this was also the case in this current study.

Being at home during the hard lockdown affected the sleeping patterns of the learners as their routines were affected. The learners used the time to entertain themselves with watching TV or playing on their mobile devices. While others used their time to support their learning and taking initiatives by watching educational programs. As much as watching TV or being online assisted them to keep abreast of the new developments in the world it also added to their fear and anxiety of death and contamination. These findings were also found to be applicable in Faize and Husain (2020) study and they stated that the news channels played a major role in perpetuating fear and anxiety amongst learners. This in turn affected their sleeping patterns as they would sleep later at night or longer during the day (Marelli et al., 2020).

Another psychosocial issue that affected the learners was communication and isolation patterns that were observed by the participants during the lockdown. Participants stated that the communication patterns in the household changed during this period as the learners were no longer communicating with them openly and started isolating themselves. The learners would greet, go stay in their rooms and isolate themselves from family members. The learners were feeling isolated as they could not spend time with their peers, friends and teachers and this left a void as the lockdown did not provide a platform for physical socialisation. These findings in this study are similar to those of van Bruwaene et al. (2020), van Der Berg and Spaull (2020), Romm et al. (2021) as well as Naicker et al. (2022) who discuss how the closure of schools led learners to experience social isolation as well as anxiety.

5.2.4 Objective 4: To explore caregivers' perspectives on how learners utilised social media as a means of mental, educational, and emotional support from parents, peers, extended families, and teachers.

The usage of social media ensured that globalisation and communication channels with loved ones and friends were kept open. The learners used social media as a tool of communicating with their friends, peers, extended family members and teachers. When started communicating with their

teachers, their moods improved as they looked forward to receiving their schoolwork and engaging with friends regarding the work. Communication between the friends, extended family members and teachers made them excited as they were motivated by their close relationships with those, they could no longer see physically due to the restrictions, they laughed, gossiped and shared details with them, and the social connection played a role in improving their moods. These findings are similar to those of Faize and Husain (2020) and Desai and Burtoni (2021) the discussed how learners used social media to manage their anxiety as well as for social connection that they needed during the lockdown.

In order to ensure that learners had access to social media and technology for schoolwork and communication purposes, the primary caregivers shared how they installed WI-FI in the house, tried their best to ensure that they bought the learners devices to use for research and submission purposes. The primary caregivers are from different socio-economic statuses and therefore may have had difficulties in acquiring the said technology for the learners. Shah et al. (2020), Daniel (2020) as well as Allen et al. (2020) discussed the financial implications of learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and the issues they had with accessing resources such as technology and learning devices such as smartphones.

Apart from challenges experienced the caregivers' bought data for the learners and themselves to keep abreast with communications with the schools and one participant went to the extent of buying the learner a contract phone as she did not want him to lag behind with his schoolwork. According to Wills and van der Berg (2024) 60% of the youth between 5-24 years had a smartphone in 2020 and there was a possibility for digital learning through a combination of phone-based tutoring as well as texts and this was applicable to the learners in this study as technology was utilised for remediation in learning losses. Social media and technology played a vital role in ensuring that the learners could study remotely and keep communication with close family, friends, and their teachers, it was a safe way of socialising with those they cared about the most. This was also found to be true in Desai and Burton's (2022) study which states that the usage of the internet offers opportunities for learners to enhance their health and well-being through psycho-social support received from such platforms.

5.2.5 The COVID-19 lockdown led to the improvement of support structures for learners.

As much as social media played a role in the support of learners, one of the findings of this study is how COVID-19 led to the improvement of support structures for the learners. COVID-19 lockdown posed a number of challenges for the learners and in order to build resilience and coping mechanism, participants shared that supporting the learners was the corner stone of ensuring their survival. Loving and caring for the learners as primary caregivers played a crucial role in building the confidence of the learners. This was similar to the findings of Naicker (2022) who states the importance of strength-based approach in optimising family functions and providing conducive environments for the mental wellbeing of learners.

Participants shared the importance of ensuring that a multidisciplinary team effort is made to support learners in order for them to reach their optimal capacity. The level of support given to the learners will ensure that learner resilience is built as they will be equipped with the life skills and knowledge, they will need to survive any pandemic that they may face in future. This was also applicable in the study by Shah et al. (2020) who looks into the importance of the multi-disciplinary team ensuring that adequate resources are allocated to the school and proper school mental health systems are implemented for ensuring comprehensive services are rendered to learners. Primary caregivers play a major role in supporting the learners and making them feel safe, as their emotional, financial and physical support has a direct correlation with reduced stress levels. Encouraging learners to express themselves freely regarding their challenges and putting themselves as caregivers in the learners' shoes ensured that learners felt loved and accepted during the lockdown.

The community and the school play a major role in the mental well-being of the learners and fostering an environment that is non-judgemental ensures that learners are not exposed to additional stressors and their best interest is adhered to by all those involved in their lives. Kleintjies et al. (2021) states that positive outcomes in adolescent's lives are shaped by a combination of resources in their system, and these includes access to opportunities to participate in communal activities. The pandemic has shown that despite fact that learners' had no control over the pandemic as a macrosystem, the interaction between the systems in the chronosystem assisted in them having improved resilience to deal with adversities which emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic (Card, 2014, McWhirter et.al., 2014 & Pretorius, 2015).

The psychosocial support by school social workers and their visibility is important to ensure that challenges experienced by the learners are addressed and that learner support is prioritised by the school, the department of education as well as government and NPO that foster and pioneer for childhood development as outlined in the care and support for teaching and learning. COVID-19 has opened the eyes of communities to start putting systems in place that will foster resilience in learners and enable them to adapt to shock and crisis that may emerge in the future and have the required leadership skills and understanding of the importance of being resilient as outlined by Van Breda (2018) as well as Breen and Chambers (2020).

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations formed from the study, and they are directed at the Department of Basic Education, the school, the primary caregivers as well as the school social workers.

5.3.1 Implications for Policy

Efforts should be taken by the DBE to ensure that they hire school social workers and social auxiliary workers to provide psychosocial support for learners in every school. Given that the Department of Basic Education as well as the Department of Social Development cannot place full-time school social workers in the schools around Gauteng and South Africa, the School Governing Body can ensure that the relevant personnel are hired with the SGB budget. This will assist in minimizing the mental health effects that learners experience in the school and easy referrals can be done by the teachers. It can be emphasized that in order to improve and develop the material, physical, emotional, and social dimensions of learners' wellbeing, schools must prioritize evidence-based interventions that aim to promote the optimal wellbeing of children within the school context.

The department should invest in expanding and exploring e-learning platforms in non-fee-paying schools in Soweto so that the learners do not lag behind should challenges like another pandemic happen in the future. Therefore, investments in lower socio-economic township schools in order for learners to have access to technology should be prioritised for the learners to have a competitive chance of achieving academically.

5.3.2 Implications for Practice

The school social workers need to be present and visible for the learners to gain easy access to them should they have any challenges. The implementation of early intervention and prevention programs should be prioritised in order to avoid escalation of cases to statutory intervention. It is important for social workers to develop an ideal multi-disciplinary team which includes teachers, nurses, psychologists, policeman, counsellors, NPO's, government departments and other child protection entities in order to address the socio-economical, physical, emotional and psychosocial challenged that are faced by the learners.

Primary caregivers play a major role in the establishment of learner identities as well as resilience, therefore efforts should be put in empowering them with parenting skills and communication skills to be able to notice learners when there are changes and refer them to professionals should a need arise. Primary caregivers should be supported with new information, trends and challenges in order to be able to notice learner challenges. Teachers will not have to play a dual role of being educators and counsellors for the learners as well as their primary caregivers and but will be able to focus on educating the learners.

5.3.3 Implications for Theory

This research showed the interconnectedness and globalisation of the pandemic, as learners in a township school in Soweto had similar experiences as those around the globe in relation to the mental effects of COVID-19 on their well-being. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory best describes how a global pandemic like COVID-19 affected learners across the globe differently, but they all had similar experiences when it came to their academic progress, mental well-being, usage of technology for educational and communication purposes as well as the importance of improvement of resilience for the learners. This means that future practices should have global resolutions to ensure that service users are assisted effectively during practice.

5.3.4 Implications for Future Research

- The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on learners should be researched, as the participants in the study were either unemployed or in low-paying jobs, and therefore as much as they tried to ensure that the learners had gadgets as well as data, but not all the parents could afford such during the lockdown.

- A study should be done regarding the implications for future pandemics "what will social service practitioners do differently to prepare for pandemics in the future?" the importance of building learner resilience as social service practitioners.
- There should be a study on the utilisation of technology in township schools and the readiness of schools to mitigate challenges should another pandemic disrupt the lives of learners.
- Another study should be a comparison of resilience and coping mechanisms for learners with access to a school social worker as compared to learners who have never been exposed to such services.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion the COVID-19 pandemic affected the learners in a secondary school at Soweto in a similar manner as other learners in Brazil, USA, China and Jamaica. The academic progress of learners was affected, as learners in Soweto are achieving better results than during the pandemic, but none of them have been able to achieve the academic marks that they did before the pandemic. The learners still have ongoing fear of COVID-19 and refer to any flu-like symptoms as COVID symptoms, they have triggers from coughing and sneezing as well as seeing tissues and still relate these to the pandemic. Learners in Soweto suffered from psycho-social challenges such as anxiety, stress, communication patterns, and fear and physical challenges such as weight gain, headaches, and altered sleeping patterns during the lockdown.

Even though there were financial challenges, the primary caregivers in Soweto ensured that learners had access to technology and the internet to keep abreast with information, education as well as communication with extended family members and friends. The mental well-being of learners was a priority resources were utilised to ensure that the multi-disciplinary team offers support and fosters resilience for learners in Soweto. Therefore, one can say that during the pandemic, through globalisation, the challenges experienced by the learners in Soweto, a township in Gauteng South Africa, were similar to those experienced in the USA, China, Spain, Jamaica. One can thus conclude that pandemic experiences were generic to some extent.

7. Limitations of the study

Limitations	Delimitations
Broad goals and objectives	The researcher ensured that she narrowed down the objectives to be more specific about exactly what needs to be in the study.
Adequate implementation of data collection and data analysis methods.	The researcher read books about data collection and analysis to ensure that the method is not flawed and rigorous supervision from research supervisor proved to be helpful as well.
The sample size may be small as 8 participants participated in the study. The researcher initially anticipated to have 10 participants and due to logistical and communication challenges, the number was not reached.	As much as the sample is small, the researcher found that the information was rich and yielded in-depth, important findings for the research study. While conducting data analysis the researcher found that there was a high level of saturation in the study as the participants shared similar responses on each theme that was being studied.
The PIS and the interview schedule were initially written in English and would therefore pose a challenge to participants who understood vernacular only.	The researcher ensured that both the PIS as well as the interview schedule are translated into vernacular to accommodate participants who needed both documents in their native languages.

8. Strengths of the research study

Validity and reliability of the research report.	The study provides a comprehensive and transparent report of the research process, including its limitations, this would allow others to evaluate the study's validity and reliability. It also facilitates replication and further research.
Recommendations for future research.	The study gains value from a comprehensive discussion that shows how the research advances the field and influences practice or policy, interprets the findings in light of existing knowledge, weighs implications, and recommends future research directions.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

Good day,

My name is Nokuthula Maseko, and I am a post graduate student registered for the degree MA in Social Work in School Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am doing research on the mental-health effects on students in a secondary school at Soweto, South of Johannesburg. I hope that the information gathered may assist in developing strategies that will address the mental effects of COVID-19 on learners and the role of school social workers in curbing challenges faced by learners.

Usuku oluhle,

Igama lami nginguNokuthula Maseko futhi ngingumfundi obhalisele iziqu ze-MA kuSocial Work in School Social Work eNyuvesi yaseWitwatersrand. Njengengxenye yezidingo zeziqu, ngenza ucwaningo ngemiphumela yempilo yengqondo kubafundi besikole samabanga aphezulu eSoweto, eNingizimu yeGoli. Ngethemba ukuthi ulwazi oluqoqiwe lungasiza ekwakheni amasu azobhekana nemithelela yengqondo ye-COVID-19 kubafundi kanye nendima yosonhlalakahle bezikole ekunqandeni izinselele abafundi ababhekana nazo.

I therefore wish to invite you to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, meaning it is not forced. Refusing to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part, I shall arrange a face-to-face interview with you. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. You can withdraw from the study at any time and you are not forced to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable.

Ngakho-ke ngifisa ukukumema ukuthi ubambe iqhaza esifundweni sami. Ukuhlanganyela kwakho kungokuzithandela ngokuphelele, okusho ukuthi akuphoqiwe. Ukwenqaba ukubamba iqhaza angeke uze ubhekane nawe nganoma iyiphi indlela. Uma uvuma ukubamba iqhaza, ngizohlela ingxoxo yobuso nobuso nawe. Inhlolokhono izothatha cishe imizuzu engama-45-60. Ungakwazi

ukuhoxa ocwaningweni nganoma yisiphi isikhathi futhi awuphoqelekile ukuthi uphendule noma yimuphi umbuzo okwenza ungakhululeki.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. No-one other than the researcher and the supervisor will have access to the tapes. The transcripts will be kept in a password protected computer for 10 years. Due to the nature of face-to-face interviews confidentiality and anonymity of information shared during the study cannot be guaranteed, however no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

Ngemvume yakho, inhlolokhono izorekhodwa umsindo. Akekho omunye ngaphandle komcwaningi kanye nomphathi ozokwazi ukufinyelela kumateyipu. Okulotshiweyo kuzogcinwa kukhompuyutha evikelwe ngephasiwedi iminyaka eyi-10. Ngenxa yemvelo yezingxoxo zobuso nobuso ukugcinwa kuyimfihlo nokungaziwa kolwazi olwabiwe phakathi nocwaningo akukwazi ukuqinisekiswa, nokho alukho ulwazi oluhlonzayo oluzofakwa embikweni wokugcina wocwaningo.

Please contact me on 082 415 5895 or 2507498@students.wits.ac.za or my supervisors, Prof Jennifer Watermeyer on Jennifer.Watermeyer@wits.ac.za or Prof Edmarie Pretorius on 011 717 4476, Edmarie.Pretorius@wits.ac.za if you have any questions regarding the study. We shall answer them to the best of our ability. Should you wish to receive a summary of the results of the study; an abstract will be made available on request.

Ngicela ungithinte ku-082 415 5895 noma ku-2507498@students.wits.ac.za noma abaphathi bami, u-Prof Jennifer Watermeyer ku-Jennifer.Watermeyer@wits.ac.za noma u-Prof Edmarie Pretorius ku-011 717 4476, Edmarie.Pretorius@Pretoriuswits .za uma unemibuzo mayelana nocwaningo. Sizobaphendula ngokusemandleni ethu. Uma ufisa ukuthola isifinyezo semiphumela yocwaningo; i-abstract izotholakala ngesicelo.

Distress protocol for the study

When a participant indicates during an interview that she/he is experiencing a high level of stress or emotional distress, OR exhibits behaviour such as a trembling voice, crying, or shaking, the interviewer will do the following:

- Stop the interview.
- Assess the psychological/emotional status of the participant by probing what her/his thoughts and feelings are. She will avoid unsustainable promises, *e.g. "everything will be OK"*
- If the participant indicates that they feel able to continue, resume the interview.
- If not, arrange to reschedule an appointment to continue with the interview and encourage the participant to contact the counselling service provider indicated on this information sheet if they experience increased distress in hours/days following the interview.
- Follow up with a courtesy call to the participant (if the participant consents).

Should you experience any emotional discomfort after the interview, you are welcomed to contact Ms. Brenda Tinyiko Maluleke, school social worker at the Department of Social Development on 011 355 9573 or 079 529 4618 Brenda.Malukele2@gauteng.gov.za

Iphrothokholi yokucindezeleka yocwaningo

Lapho umhlanganyeli ebonisa phakathi nenhlolokhono ukuthi ubhekene nezinga eliphezulu lokucindezeleka noma ukucindezeleka ngokomzwelo, NOMA ebonisa ukuziphatha okufana nezwi eliqhaqhazelayo, ukukhala, noma ukuqhaqhazela, obuza imibuzo uzokwenza lokhu okulandelayo:

• Misa inhlolokhono.

• Hlola isimo sengqondo/ngokomzwelo sombambiqhaza ngokuphenya ukuthi iyini imicabango nemizwa yakhe. Uzogwema izithembiso ezingabambeki, isib. "konke kuzolunga"

• Uma umhlanganyeli ekhombisa ukuthi uzizwa ekwazi ukuqhubeka, qalisa futhi inhlolokhono.

• Uma kungenjalo, hlela ukuhlela kabusha i-aphoyintimenti ukuze uqhubeke nenhlolokhono futhi ukhuthaze umhlanganyeli ukuthi axhumane nomhlinzeki wesevisi yokwelulekwa oboniswe kuleli phepha lolwazi uma ehlangabezana nokucindezeleka okukhulu emahoreni/izinsuku ezilandela inhlolokhono.

• Landela ngokushayela umhlanganyeli ngenhlonipho (uma umhlanganyeli evuma).

APPENDIX A

Uma kwenzeka uphatheka kabi emoyeni emva kwenhlolokhono, wamukelekile ukuthi uthinte uNksz Brenda Tinyiko Maluleke, usonhlalakahle wesikole eMnyangweni wezokuThuthukiswa koMphakathi ku-011 355 9573 noma 079 529 4618 Brenda.Malukele2@gauteng.gov.za

Siyabonga ngokuthatha isikhathi sokucabangela ukuhlanganyela ocwaningweni.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in the study.

Yours Sincerely,



Nokuthula Maseko

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

The Caregivers' perspectives on the effect of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of learners at a secondary school in Soweto

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name will not be used by the researcher in their research report	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

_____ _____

Name of Participant: Signature of Participant: Date:

Nokuthula Maseko _____

Name of Researcher: Signature of Researcher: Date:

APPENDIX C

GAUTENG PROVINCE
Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	**17 February 2023**
Validity of Research Approval:	**08 February 2023– 30 September 2023** **2023/51**
Name of Researcher:	**Maseko N**
Address of Researcher:	**183/66 Mosu Street**
	Chiawelo ext.3
	Johannesburg
Telephone Number:	**0824155895**
Email address:	**2507498@students.wits.ac.za**
Research Topic:	**Caregiver's perception of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the secondary school learners in the Vosloorus area**
Type of qualification	**MA in SW by CW and RR in School Social Work**
Number and type of schools:	**1 Secondary School**
District/s/HO	**Johannesburg South**

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.

17/02/2023

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

Office of the Director: Education Research and Knowledge Management
7th Floor, 17 Simmonds Street, Johannesburg, 2001
Tel: (011) 355 0488
Email: Faith.Tshabalala@gauteng.gov.za
Website: www.education.gpg.gov.za

APPENDIX D

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: SW23/01/01**
PROJECT TITLE	The Caregivers' perspectives on the effect of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of learners at a secondary school in Soweto.
INVESTIGATOR	**NOKUTHULA MASEKO**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SOCIAL WORK
DATE CONSIDERED	17 February 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	MINIMAL RISK
EXPIRY DATE	17 February 2026

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 20 February 202 **CHAIRPERSON**
(DR S Bala)

cc: Supervisor:

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

Date 21/02/2023

APPENDIX E

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Overview: To explore the perceptions of caregivers of secondary school learners in Soweto on the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Purpose of this interview: The purpose of the interviews is to gain insight into the mental well-being of learners at a secondary school in Soweto during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Type of Interview: Semi-Structured interview (Face- to Face)

Duration of interview: 60 minutes

Sampling Type: A non-probability sampling

Goals of the interview: To explore the perceptions of caregivers of secondary school learners in Soweto on the mental well-being of learners during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Interview details:

Interviewee No.: _____

Time and date of the interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Audio recording: YES/NO

Confirmation of signed consent forms: YES / NO

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/ IMIBUZO YENGXOXO

THEME 1: Demographics and background / Izibalo zabantu kanye nesizinda

- Please tell me about yourself and your age.
- Ngicela ungitshele ngawe nangeminyaka yakho.
- Please inform me about the learner in your care, their age as well as their grade.
- Ngicela ungazise ngomfundi omnakekelayo, iminyaka yakhe kanye nebanga lakhe

THEME 2: Academic Performance/ ukusebenza kwezemfundo

- Before the COVID-19 lockdown, how was the learner's academic performance?

- Ngaphambi kokuvalwa kwe-COVID-19, bekunjani ukusebenza komfundi ezifundweni?
- During the lockdown and rotational attendance, how was the learner's academic performance?
- Ngesikhathi sokuvalwa kwesikole kanye nokuba khona kokushintshana, bekunjani ukusebenza komfundi ezifundweni?
- With the learners back at school full-time, how is the learner's performance?
- Njengoba abafundi sebebuyele esikoleni isikhathi esigcwele, kunjani ukusebenza komfundi?

THEME 3: Psychological consequences/ Imiphumela yezengqondo

- What was the learner's attitude towards COVID-19 lockdown?
- Sasiyini isimo sengqondo somfundi ngokuvalwa kwe-COVID-19?
- What behavioural changes did you notice during the lockdown?
- Yiziphi izinguquko ekuziphatheni ozibonile ngesikhathi kuvalwa izwe?
- What were the physical changes perceived by the caregiver regarding the learner?
- Yiziphi izinguquko zomzimba ezibonwa umnakekeli mayelana nomfundi?
- Did the learner experience any psychological issues like depression, anger and anxiety?
- Ingabe umfundi uke wabhekana nezinkinga ezingokwengqondo njengokudangala, intukuthelo nokukhathazeka?
- How were their sleeping patterns affected by the lockdown?
- Ngabe izindlela zabo zokulala zathinteka kanjani ngenxa yokuvalwa kwezikole?

THEME 4: Usage of technology/ Ukusetshenziswa kobuchwepheshe

- Did the learner have access to a cellphone, tablet or PC?
- Ingabe umfundi ubekwazi ukuthola umakhalekhukhwini, ithebhulethi noma i-PC?
- Was there access to WI-FI or data connection in the household?
- Ingabe bekukhona ukufinyelela ku-WI-FI noma uxhumano lwedatha ekhaya?
- Does the learner have online apps such as whatsapp, facebook, Instagram, tik-tok or twitter?
- Ingabe umfundi unezinhlelo zokusebenza eziku-inthanethi ezifana ne-whatsapp, facebook, Instagram, tik-tok noma i-twitter?
- Did the learner communicate with teachers, friends and extended families during the lockdown, and how did it improve their mood?
- Ingabe umfundi uxhumene nothisha, abangani kanye nemindeni eyengeziwe ngesikhathi sokuvalwa, futhi lokho kwathuthukisa kanjani isimo sabo sengqondo?
- Did the learner use technology to receive and submit their schoolwork?
- Ingabe umfundi usebenzise ubuchwepheshe ukuze amukele futhi athumele umsebenzi wakhe wesikole?

- How did you as the caregiver offer support with the usage of technology?
- Wena njengomnakekeli ukunikeze kanjani ukwesekwa ngokusetshenziswa kobuchwepheshe?

Theme 5: Recommendations/ Izincomo

- How best do you think we can support learners should another pandemic hit us in the future?
- Ucabanga ukuthi singabasekela kangcono kangakanani abafundi uma kwenzeka esinye isifo esiwubhadane esikhathini esizayo?
- What role should the caregivers play in the mental well-being of learners?
- Iyiphi indima abanakekeli okufanele bayidlale enhlalakahleni yengqondo yabafundi?
- What role should the school and the community play in the mental well-being of learners?
- Iyiphi indima okufanele isikole nomphakathi zibe nenhlalakahle ngokwengqondo yabafundi?
- What role can school social workers play in the improvement of the mental well-being of learners?
- Iyiphi indima osonhlalakahle besikole abangayibamba ekuthuthukiseni inhlalakahle yengqondo yabafundi?
- What role can the learners play in their well-being and resilience towards pandemics?
- Iyiphi indima abafundi abangayibamba enhlalakahleni yabo nasekuqiniseni ukulwa nobhubhane?

APPENDIX F

PROGRESS COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL
P.O. Box 38543
BOOYSENS
2016
Telephone: +27 11 933 2585
Email: progresscomprehens@gmail.com

To: Ms. N. Maseko
Progress Comprehensive High School
23 January 2023

Re-request for permission to conduct research at Progress Comprehensive High School

Good day Ms. Nokuthula Maseko

The school acknowledges your request to conduct research at our school with our caregivers titled "Primary caregivers' perceptions of the effect of COVID-19 on the mental well-being of learners at a secondary school in Soweto" and we are pleased to inform you that permission has been granted.

C. MONAGENG (PRINCIPAL)

MR S MARHSALL (CHAIRPERSON)

PROGRESS HIGH SCHOOL
P.O. BOX 38543, BOOYSENS 2015
TEL: 011 933 2585 FAX: 011 933 2585
23 JAN 2023
C. MONAGENG
PRINCIPAL