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Caregivers' Perceptions of the Influence of Covid-19 Pandemic on the Well-Being of Secondary School Learners in the Vosloorus Area, Gauteng, South Africa

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

"CAREGIVERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE INFLUENCE OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE WELL-BEING OF SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN THE VOSLOORUS AREA, GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA"

A report on a research study presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

University of the Witwatersrand

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Social Work the field of School Social Work

By

Slindile Alicia Mqadi

June 2023

DECLARATION

I, Slindile Mqadi, 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: 2515872

Research Ethical Protocol number: SW23/01/03



Signature

Date: June 2023

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic did not only impact the education system in South Africa but as affected the lives of learners when remote learning was introduced to the education system. This new way of learning affected the well-being of learners in different ways. The purpose of the study was to explore the caregivers' perception of how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the well-being of secondary school learners in Vosloorus, Gauteng, and South Africa. The ecological perspective was the theoretical framework underpinning the research study. A qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design was used to focus on the social meaning that individuals attach to their circumstances, experiences, and situations. The design allowed exploring the caregivers' perceptions on how COVID -19 pandemic affected the well-being of their grade 10-12 school going children. The population of the study was caregivers of grades 10 to 12 learners, at a secondary school in Vosloorus Gauteng. Purposive sampling was used to sample eight caregivers of grades 10-12 learners. The research instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide and the method of data collection was face-to-face interviews with caregivers. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data. The main findings showed that the COVID-19 pandemic left most homes in devastating condition, it left many mourning for their loved ones. Many learners were left orphaned or with one parent. Very few families did not experience the death of a loved one during this time, if it wasn't a death of a family member, it was the passing on of a schoolteacher, a friend, or just someone you knew. This resulted in learners being bereaved, developing anxiety, and living in fear. Following the death of loved ones, the high rate of job losses was catastrophic. For caregivers and learners, the loss of employment or receiving a decrease in income added to their already poor socioeconomic status and it had other consequences for families and learners. Another major finding was that learners experienced overwhelming emotions, like fear, anxiety, and loneliness. There was also a high rate of grades dropping and learners being pushed to the next grade. Lastly caregivers perceived that COVID-19 contributed to the use of substances among learners.

Keywords: Caregiver, COVID-19 pandemic, learner, marginalised community, public school, well-being

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL ORIENTATION AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter the background to the research study is presented. The problem statement and rationale for the study are explained. The research question, aim and objectives of the study are described. The relevance of the study to School Social Work is highlighted. A brief overview of the research methodology applied is presented. The key concepts relevant to the study are defined. The limitations and delimitations of the study are addressed and how the research report is organised is explained.

1.2 Background to the Research Study

In December 2019 the news of a deadly and contagious virus called Corona (COVID-19 pandemic) that had already killed many people in China was spreading around the world. The awareness of this virus brought so much fear and anxiety to people, the world came to a standstill, people could not travel as they have been used to, countries were shut down, schools were closed, businesses and churches were closed, and only essential workers were allowed to go to work, it all became a scare.

The COVID- 19 pandemic as described by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), is a contagious illness brought on by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. According to the WHO (2020), the majority of infected people will suffer from mild to severe respiratory illnesses and recover without the need for special care. However, a few people will develop serious illnesses and require medical attention. During the pandemic, older people and those with underlying medical conditions such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or chronic respiratory ailments were at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill or dying.

This infectious pandemic started in South Africa on the 5th of March 2020 when the first case was reported, leaving many South African residents devastated because of the uncertainties about the

impact and consequences of the virus. A strict lockdown was implemented in the country from the 27 of March 2020. The lockdown affected everyone including learners as they were required to stay at home and not go to school.

Innumerable underprivileged communities all around South Africa have unhappily suffered greatly as a result of the lockdown, especially those whose members barely scrape by. Many people who were hired on a no-work, no-pay basis weren't getting paid during this time. The UIF COVID-19 relief program, which was designed to give those who had lost their income during this unusual time a lifeline, was also impacted, as were those who earned money through part-time labour in the unorganized sector. As South Africa's unemployment rate increased, job seekers became disillusioned and gave up hope of ever finding employment (Cassette et al., 2020; Kean & Armstrong, 2020).

As reported by Kean and Armstrong (2020) when the lockdown started, people were required to stay at home except for essential workers. This meant that there was no income for many households, and small companies had to shut down. As a result, many people lost their jobs, and there was a huge rise in unemployment. Most of the essential workers faced challenges as there was no one to leave their kids with since schools and day-care centres were closed. It was a struggle to buy essentials like bread as tuckshops were closed and going to a store was scary because the virus was spreading very quickly. Statistic South Africa (2020) indicated that, compared to the first quarter of 2020, the number of employed people fell by 2,2 million to 14,1 million in the second quarter. Since the survey's inception in 2008, this drastic drop represents the highest quarter 1 to quarter 2 decline.

Cassette et al (2020) stated that the lack of food security, unfortunately, reportedly led to incidents of looting grocery stores and food delivery trucks and contributed to the growing social unrest. In addition, despite the government's efforts, for millions of people their poverty deepened either due to the shortage of and slow distribution of food parcels, or because many failed to meet the criteria for disaster relief in the first place.

The Department of Basic Education (2020) released a publication that on the 1st of June 2020, the lockdown restrictions would lower to level three. This required learners to go back to school under

certain measures. Angie Motshekga the minister of basic education stated that the caregivers that were not feeling safe with returning their children to school may enrol them in home schooling.

Managing this virus has been very challenging as researchers had found that it was spreading through droplets coming from any infected person. One could be exposed to these droplets from touching the surface contaminated with the droplet or from being in close contact with an infected person. Therefore, social distancing as one of the most effective ways of saving oneself from encountering the virus. The implementation of social distancing resulted in the closure of schools in 109 different nations, which contributed to the disruption of education. Whichever way the education system would be affected, it was unknown if this interruption in the classrooms would be transitory or long-lasting. (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2020; Mohaye, 2020; Fernando, 2022).

Research that has been done on COVID- 19 pandemic has given evidence that marginalised vulnerable communities (communities from low socio-economic status) have become more vulnerable during this time, the gap that exists between learners from low socioeconomic status was visibly exposed for everyone to see (Andrew et al., 2020; Patel et al., 2020; Coe et al., 2022). People from low socio-economic status, especially in South Africa, are living in crowded households where social distancing is impossible, this already put them at risk and the schools in these communities are overpopulated, making it hard for educators to work under the conditions that came with COVID-19 pandemic (Andrew et al., 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic caused so much damage to the lives of multi-millions of people in the world, leaving many children as orphans and exposing the high rate of inequalities around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated poverty and severely poor conditions for many people who were already living in disadvantaged circumstances. Not only did this devastating pandemic contributed to higher unemployment, but the education system was severely affected and brought to a standstill. Even after schools re-opened, school attendance and safety, especially in the public schools where marginalised communities are based changed. With the reopening of schools, caregivers were scared of taking their children back to school because of the uncertainty and limited knowledge about the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools had lost some educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, which made matters worse. Reimers (2022) stated that even once the

COVID-19 epidemic is under control, there may still be educational issues brought on by it. This demonstrates that the battle persists, particularly for underprivileged school-going students who come from extremely low socioeconomic origins and lack the resources and infrastructure required to make a decent living.

The school closure during COVID-19 gave caregivers and learners more time to spend together, they were more accessible to each other than they have been before. Del Castelo (2021) stated that many learners battled mental health concerns as the fight against COVID-19 went on. They were compelled to remain at home and interacted with peers infrequently on a physical and social level. The caregivers of these learners were the ones who were there for them during COVID-19, so they could see first-hand what the students went through and how they felt. Many learners were confused as a result of the significant interruption to their everyday routines.

Caregivers have had personal experience of what the learners were going through since learners were at home 24 hours daily. Therefore, this study explored the perceptions of the caregivers on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on what the learners and their families had to deal with during the COVID- 19 pandemic and how this affected the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus area. The findings of the study contributed to the existing knowledge base on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the well-being of secondary school learners. In addition, it provided insight on what psycho-social support are needed in schools and communities to ensure that the well-being of learners are protected and preserved.

1.3 Statement of the Problem and Rationale for the study

COVID -19 pandemic negatively affected the education system all over the world. To contain the spread of this contagious virus schools were closed during the lockdown period. Later some schools afforded learners to study virtually while other schools lacked the resources. Learners were isolated from resources that are vitally important for their daily well-being such as the school counsellor, friends, and teachers as their support system. Some were even isolated from their parents because of the COVID-19 pandemic adding to their frustrations. For some learners, school is an escape from the challenges they go through at their homes, such as starvation, abuse, and loneliness. During the school closure, most learners were faced with their fears, and they could not escape it, which affected their well-being (Reimers, 2022; Del Castelo, 2021; Mahaye, 2020).

Jordaan (2020) reported on two teachers in one of the secondary schools in Vosloorus who passed away because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how this affected the learners, and all the school personnel at the school. As a result, a psycho-social team from the Department of Education was dispatched to provide support at the school to those affected. The death of teachers and loved ones during this time has affected the lives of secondary school learners.

The COVD-19 pandemic had a huge impact on the lives of learners, what is unknown, is how this impact affected their well-being and might affect the future of the learners. It is unclear how long this impact will last, and if there is anything we can do to be prepared to render psychosocial support and guidance to learners when a pandemic of this magnitude happens in the future.

Therefore, the study provides an overview of the caregivers' perceptions on the influences that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the well-being of secondary school learners in Vosloorus. In addition, caregivers' views on the challenges learners experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how their academic progress was affected were explored. Caregivers' ideas on how to manage a pandemic differently to minimise the effects on learners' well-being are shared.

This study contributes to the knowledge base on how pandemics might affect the well-being of learners, their academic progress, and their futures. The study makes a contribution to school social work practice and a multi-tiered approach to service delivery and interventions in school settings that will address the well-being of learners. In addition, suggestions and ideas on how a pandemic of this magnitude can be handled could contribute to the development of guidelines or policies in school settings on how to deal with incidents like pandemics in the future to minimise the influences on learners' well-being.

1.4 Research question, aim and objectives of the study

The research question of this study was: What are caregivers' perceptions of the influence of COVID-19 on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus Township, Gauteng?

This aim of the study was to explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of COVID-19 on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus Township, Gauteng.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1.4.1 To establish caregivers' perspectives on the main factors that influence and contribute to secondary school learners' well-being.

1.4.2 To explore caregivers' perceptions of the challenges secondary school learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic that influenced their well-being.

1.4.3 To explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' academic progress.

1.4.4 To explore caregivers' perceptions on how the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the well-being of secondary school learners' might shape their futures.

1.5 Definition of Concepts

The following concepts are relevant to study.

1.5.1 Caregiver

A Caregiver is any person other than a parent or guardian, who factually cares for a child and includes:

(a) a foster parent;
(b) a person who cares for a child with the implied or express consent of a parent or guardian of the child;
(c) a person who cares for a child whilst the child is in temporary safe care;
(d) the person at the head of a child and youth care centre where a child has been placed;
(e) the person at the head of a shelter;

(f) a child and youth care worker who cares for a child who is without appropriate family care in the community; and

(g) the child at the head of a child-headed household; "child" means a person under the age of 18 years; (Children's Act, 2005 Act No. 38 of 2005)

In this study, a caregiver is a person who takes care of a child or learner daily. The caregiver could be the child's parents, grandparents, foster parent, or an extended family member, like an aunt. Unrelated caregivers will also be considered as caregivers if they have been the primary carers of the learners during the COVID-19 pandemic. In cases of a child-headed household, the person placed by the court to supervise the child-headed household would be referred to as a caregiver.

1.5.2 COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 pandemic is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. They further added that most people infected with the virus would experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses. Anyone at any age can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die (WHO, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic in this study refers to a respiratory virus that spread from an infected person through coughing or sneezing. The virus caused many disruptions in the education system affecting the well-being of the learners, and COVID-19 pandemic as described by the WHO (2020) is relevant to this study.

1.5.3 Learner

A learner means any person obtaining education or required by the South African School Act to receive education (South African School Act, 1996 Act No. 84 of 1996).

A learner in this study is someone who goes to a secondary school in Vosloorus, Gauteng who is intending to learn and acquire knowledge and skill from the teacher and his/her interactions with other learners.

1.5.4 Low socio-economic status communities

Ambika and Krishnamoorthy (2019) define socioeconomic status (SES) as a measure of a person's employment information, as well as their or their family's economic and social position in relation to others. It is based on household income, and payees' employment, education, and combined income are examined. When compared to individuals with higher SES, people with lower SES typically have fewer access to financial, educational, social, and health resources, which can have a negative impact in their development as well as their well-being.

Low socio-economic status communities in this study refers to a community of people that feels they are powerless, not important, or insignificant and their voices are not heard. The feeling of powerlessness is mostly caused by the way in which people in power are treating them and ignoring them when decisions are made about their lives.

1.5.5 Public School

A school is defined as a public or private institution that enrols students in one or more grades from Reception which is popular known as grade R through Grade 12. (South African School Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996)

The above definition of a school will apply to this study, which refers to an institution where learners are enrolled to get their education. In this study, the school will be a secondary school which provide education for grade 8 to grade 12 learners in Vosloorus.

1.5.6 Well-being

García-Bacete et al. (2014) argue that since well-being is a complex construct having psychological, bodily, and social components, there is no precise definition of it. Additionally, a person's ability to participate creatively and actively in activities valued in their culture is facilitated by their level of well-being, and the result of engaging in these activities is a positive

state of mind. Additionally, feeling satisfied that one's basic bodily, psychological, and social requirements have been addressed is a sign of wellbeing. Healthy self-esteem, living a worthwhile life, and people's overall attitudes toward their current circumstances are all examples of what is meant by "well-being."

Well-being, in this study means, a state of having one's needs (physical, emotional, psychologically, and social) taken care of. Well-being is a state of being content and happy and this usually happens when there is a balance in someone's physical, emotional, psychological, and social being.

1.6 A brief overview of the research methodology

In this study, a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design was used to focus on the social meaning that individuals attach to their circumstances, experiences, and situations. The design allowed exploring the caregivers' perceptions on how COVID -19 pandemic affected the well-being of their grade 10-12 school going children. The population of the study was caregivers of grades 10 to 12 learners, at a secondary school in Vosloorus Gauteng. Purposive sampling was used to sample eight caregivers of grades 10-12 learners. The research instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide and the method of data collection was face-to-face interviews with caregivers. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study	**Delimitations of the study**
Getting access to the potential participants was very challenges as I could not manage to attend the parents meeting as initially planned so access to the participants was through the learners and finding learners that were interested to give their caregivers the PIS and consent forms was a challenge.	I managed to give the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) to 21 learners grade 10- 12 learners with the assistance of their Life orientation teachers. I kept visiting the school to keep reminding the learners how much I needed the consent

Getting back the consent forms so I can get contact numbers for participants and start with data collection was also a challenge.	forms back and finally 15 consent forms were back where I got to choose the eight participants I needed.
The limitations were that the PIS is written in English, for the caregivers that cannot read English, and for the caregivers that cannot read at all it might have been a challenge.	The PIS was translated into IsiZulu on the other side and for those who cannot read at all, the researcher explained the PIS in vernacular language at the start of the interview to make sure that the participants are well informed.
Some participants initially did not feel comfortable with a social worker coming to their house.	During the phone calls where I was arranging the visit with the participants I informed them that the visits will involve only the interview for the purpose of the research and nothing more.
One of the limitations of this research effort is that the findings cannot be generalized to account for the total population of caregivers because of the limited sample size used.	The intention was to collect qualitatively rich and in depth and the number chosen was therefore the number chosen was perfect for such purpose.

1.8 Organisation of the Research Report

In Chapter one information on the background to the study contextualises the research study. The problem statement and rationale for the study is explained, and the research question, aim and objectives of the study are presented. Key concepts relevant to the study are defined, and a brief overview of the research methodology applied is described. The limitations and delimitations of the study are highlighted.

Chapter two addresses the theoretical framework underpinning the research study and relevant literature pertaining the study are explained.

In Chapter three, the research methodology and methods applied during the research study are described.

Chapter four deals with the presentation and discussion of the analysed data, and in Chapter five, the main findings of the study in relation to the study objectives, the conclusions and recommendations are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical framework underpinning the study is explained. The literature review contextualises the COVID-19 pandemic. The influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on education systems and learners' well-being internationally and nationally are addressed. The gaps in the literature are highlighted, and the role of school social work in times of disasters such as pandemics are explained.

2.2 Theoretical framework underpinning the research study.

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is the ecological systems theory. According to Saleebey (1997) ecology is the study that examines how creatures interact with their surroundings, and it may be compared to the human experience to show how individuals and their surroundings influence and shape one another. Darling (2007) argues that the ecological systems theory is a theory of human development that emphasizes how everything is interconnected and how context, culture, and history limit our understanding of development.

The ecological theory looks at a children's development within the context of the system of relationships that form their environments (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The ecological environment is seen to go well beyond the immediate circumstances that the developing person is directly affected by, the things that elicit responses from him, or the people he interacts with directly, relationships between other people in the environment, the nature of these relationships, and their potential to have an indirect impact on a person's development by affecting those who come into contact with them directly are all viewed as being of equal importance (Donald et al.,2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

From the above definitions, it is evident that the ecological perspective has to do with the relationship of individuals with their surroundings. Keeping in mind that a person does not live in a vacuum, to fully understand an individual one must investigate their relationship with their surroundings or their environment, which can include their family, community, and the resources they have.

Steinberg (2001) argues that the ecological perspective provides a conceptual framework within which to investigate more complex interactions between persons and environments. He further states that proximal setting, namely events or incidences that occur in a person's life and socialisation are the key focuses of the ecological perspective. It is argued by Steinberg (2001) that the proximal setting and socialisation contribute to individuals 'behaviour and development. Socialisation in the family influences how adolescents behaves in their peer group, and peer influences affects how adolescents behave in the classroom which ultimately impact on their academic performance (Steinberg, 2001).

Darling (2007) and Steinberg (2001)'s definition of the ecological approach informs us that the family is an institution that influences the child's socialisation with people outside the family. During the lockdown, the learners spent more time with their families, and depending on the kind of family settings they are in their socialisation with others was influenced by the family more than it has been when they had to go to school. The family also had a big impact on the learner's well-being during this time as more time was spent with them. According to the ecological perspective a child's development is hugely affected by their interactions with their environment, from the closest direct interactions to the interactions in the larger environment and any change in these interactions affects the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

One's ecological environment is composed of several nested layers, including the microsystem, mesosystem, exo-system, macro-system and chrono-sytem (Donald, et al., 2010). Donald, et al, (2010) continues to say that microsystem refers to the people, groups, and organizations that directly affect a child's development or growth the most. Mesosystems are the interactions and transfers that occur between smaller systems during a child's development. Exosystem includes social settings like government policies that a child cannot influence but nonetheless have an impact on them.

According to Drew (2023) the ecological approach is a theoretical and practical school of thinking that emphasizes how individuals interact with their environment. According to the ecological perspective, humans are active agents who engage mutually beneficially with their physical, social, and cultural environments. The theory explains the complex interactions between people and their environment, which affect interventions aimed at fostering healthy growth.

The ecological perspective is suitable for this study because it allows for a holistic view of learners and all aspects that played a role in the learner's well-being during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners develop in an environment, that includes their families, school, community, their peers, health, laws, and regulations made by the government, and all of these have had an impact on the learners' well-being. During the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were so many changes in the lives of every individual including the learners. Many losses were experienced because of COVID -19 and the restrictions, for example the loss of the school environment, interactions with peers, the loss of health, the loss of the breadwinner's job and the loss of loved ones. This theoretical framework will help us understand how these changes affected the learner's well-being as perceived by the caregivers.

2.3 Literature review

In the literature section the COVID-19 pandemic is contextualised, an overview on how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the education system internationally, nationally, and provincially is explained. How the COVID-19 pandemic affected the well-being of learners are highlighted. The gap in the literature is mentioned and the role of the school social worker in school settings in relation to critical incidences like a pandemic is discussed.

2.3.1 Contextualising the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic and the strict lockdown restrictions forced countries to a standstill. Education systems were forced to close and learners from low socio-economic communities where limited or no resources are available were affected badly and made their situations worse. Fernando (2022) stated that the COVID-19 outbreak stunned the academic community. The pandemic did not only influence people's health, but it also harmed family income, increased food insecurity, domestic violence, and other societal issues like poverty and unemployment. The pandemic had serious repercussions in different spheres of people's lives.

As stated by (Fernando, 2022; Iqbal et al., 2021; Mahaye, 2020) during the lockdown restrictions, remote learning became the mode of teaching and learning in schools. It became a "new normal"

for teaching and learning in schools, something teachers and learners had not done before. Implementing this “new normal” and adjust to the new mode of teaching and learning was hard because most of the schools had not prepared for such a shift. The biggest challenge was that not all the schools were afforded to shift to this new way of learning either because of a lack of resources or because of network problems. The inequality in education was further exacerbated during this time causing lots of uncertainties about the future of the learners.

The move from face-to-face learning to online learning was a big change. Not having devices and internet connection that were required for online learning meant being left behind for many learners. As a result, learners became anxious and worried and disrupted the well-being of the learners left behind. Iqbal et al. (2021) in their research study done in Pakistan speak about how the COVID-19 pandemic negatively influenced the social lives of learners, and their academic progress and how this pandemic is more likely to cause depression, anxiety, and reduced emotional well-being in learners.

Since most of the social and interpersonal contacts that students were accustomed to were severely curtailed, the decision by the majority of schools to switch from traditional face-to-face learning to digital learning had an adverse effect on the students' wellbeing (Huck & Zhang, 2021). They lost their interactions with the school, with friends, their peers, and others because they are from very disadvantaged circumstances, they did not even have access to digital learning (Mahaye, 2020). Learners were not supposed to leave their homes, and they were stuck indoors (Spaul &Van Der Berg, 2020). The lives of learners now depended on the lockdown restrictions that was decided by the government, they lost control of whom they interacted with, whom they played with, and where they go, and all this influenced their well-being.

Lee et al. (2021) stated that the way that students saw the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected their academic performance. The likelihood of inferior academic performance was higher for students who disliked online learning and preferred being in class.

In the next section, an overview of the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the education system at international, national, and provincial levels are described. In addition, the influence of COVID-19 on the well-being of learners and their academic progress are discussed.

2.3.2 International overview on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system and learner's wellbeing

A study by The Mental Health Foundation Scotland (2020) found that several research on the effects of lockdown on young people's mental health and wellbeing found a rise in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The symptoms they encountered increased levels of sadness, worry, and anxiety, which were mostly brought on by feelings of isolation and concerns about the future and school. Piye et al. (2022) mentioned that research showed that remote learning meant being away from school which served as a coping mechanism for most of the learners. This had a negative impact on their mental health because as most had to face their realities at home which they escaped when attending school (Lee, 2020; Huck & Zhang, 2021).

With schools being closed, other worries included the potential for the learners' social and emotional health and well-being to be significantly impacted. Schools are a place where meaningful relationships are built. (Piye et al., 2022; Lee, 2020; Huck & Zhang, 2021). The shifts in school schedules caused changes in sleep habits and an increase in social media use, all of which made it harder to concentrate on academics, had a poor impact on wellbeing, and increased the chance of relapsing symptoms. (Piye et al., 2022; Lee, 2020; Huck & Zhang, 2021).

In their study of remote learning at schools, Gross and Opalka (2020) found that compared to more than half of urban school districts, only 27% of rural and small-town school districts expected teachers to teach. Gross and Opalka (2020) further added that similar discrepancies exist in expectations for engagement monitoring: Compared to 65 percent of urban school districts, just 43 percent of rural school districts required teachers to regularly check in with their learners or take attendance. Additionally, as compared to urban districts, there is a disparity of more than 25 percentage points between the proportion of rural districts that mandate progress monitoring and the proportion of rural districts that offer formal grades of any type.

The rural schools where the internet access is a challenge or not existing and schools from low socio-economic status had similar challenges to connect a huge struggle during this time. One needs to keep in mind that learners from rural and low socio-economic communities are mostly living in poverty, some learners experience a lack of support from home and all these circumstances affect their well-being and hamper their academic progress. The COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown restrictions added to these learners' daily challenges and disadvantaged them more (Gross & Opalka, 2020; Weidmann et al., 2022).

UNESCO (2020, as cited in Dhai, 2021) stated that during pandemics, the already vulnerable get much more so, while the previously invulnerable might get that way for the first time. Because of the COVID-19 epidemic, already-vulnerable families were forced to live in appalling circumstances. This made it difficult for already-vulnerable students to succeed in school, which raised anxiety levels and reduced academic achievement for the majority of students.

Hoffman and Second (2021) stated that sstudents were denied access to newly adopted special learning programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic's loss of face-to-face instruction and the widespread use of virtual learning, which notably harmed those in poverty and those for whom English was a second language. In addition, Hoffman and Second (2021) noted that in addition to the actual school closing, access to friends, structured activities, and school lunches were also no longer available. The majority of students were worse off after the COVID-19 outbreak than they had been.

Weidmann et al. (2022) stated that widening disparities in a variety of educational inputs were a result of COVID-19. According to the average predicted learning loss caused by COVID-19, schools, and localities with higher proportions of poor learners tend to suffer disproportionately. Andrews et al. (2020) state that learners who miss several months of school risk having their learning and development halted. This is especially troubling for students from underprivileged backgrounds who, on average, perform and achieve less than their contemporaries from more

fortunate situations. Remote learning lessened the equalizing effect that students' attendance at school might have on their learning as a result of the pandemic. Both Weidman et al. (2022) and Andrews et al. (2020) mention learning loss as more concerning for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds because they have access to limited or no resources and loose out more on learning opportunities.

Baumann et al. (2021) in their study in France found that during the COVID-19 shutdown, post-secondary learners' living situations had a clear effect on their mental health. They also emphasized the necessity for university administrators, professors, and learners to work together to develop a coordinated action plan to address the psychosocial and mental health requirements of the learners who are most at risk during a lockdown. In the context of South Africa, this should also be taken into account.

2.3.3 National overview of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system and learner's wellbeing

Spaull and Van Der Berg (2020) reported that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa led to many challenges regarding health services. The public's fear of contracting the COVID-19 pandemic led to children missing immunisation, pregnant mothers avoiding antenatal care appointments, and many patients with chronic comorbidities not presenting for treatment or not collecting needed medications. The physical and mental health of many South Africans were influenced negatively.

When the schools re-opened strict measures such as social distancing was put in place in South Africa, and some schools chose to continue with virtual learning as it was still seen as the safest way to attain education. Some caregivers decided to home-school their children because they did not want to take the risk. As a result, learners suffered many losses during this time, like loss of loved ones, important interactions, and food security. All these losses had a huge impact on their well-being and academic progress (Bradshaw et al., 2020; Jordaan, 2020; Mahaye, 2020).

Shepherd and Mohohlwane (2021) stated that children have been put at greater risk of dropping out of school, lagging, and losing learning, as well as food insecurity and emotional health

deterioration ever since the pandemic started and all of these may last a lifetime if no serious measures are taken. In addition, at least half of adults reported food insecurity and that learners in their households did not receive a school meal in two weeks out of school and signs of depressed mood were showing (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021).

Studies conducted in South Africa on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learners, showed that because of their low socio-economic status, most South Africans live under the constant worry of food loss from feeding schemes, job losses of parents or caregivers, abuse, and violence at home, and all of these were pressing issues causing worry and depression (Mahaye, 2020; Kean & Armstrong, 2020; Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021).

According to Shaval et al. (2021) results from a survey done in South Africa on subjective well-being of children between the ages 10 and 12, it was evident that South Africa scored higher than other countries concerning children's satisfaction with their lives as students and what they learned at school. These findings point to the important role that school plays in children's lives and their experiences of well-being (Shaval et al., 2021). With the COVID-19 pandemic causing schools to close and most schools doing online learning, it can be assumed that there is a high possibility that most of the learners' well-being was affected - the question is how huge the impact was and what are the consequences for their futures?

2.3.4 The role of the school social worker in school settings in relation to disasters

The need for school social workers was seen during the COVID-19 times, especially in the locations where there are many social problems. Kemp (2014) claims that the need for establishing school social work in the South African educational system was acknowledged in 1973. This resulted from a rise in social issues in schools, such as poverty, school violence and many more.

According to Huxtable (2013) school social workers promote students' well-being so that they are prepared to learn, while educators develop students' potential by imparting knowledge, skills, and values. The author goes on to say that school social workers give particular attention to students who are disadvantaged due to issues like poverty, oppression, or disability by creating programs and interventions that draw on the resources of the community, school, and family to overcome

these challenges and facilitate learning, as will be covered in the discussion that follows. During the COVID-19, school social workers would have played a huge role as authors have stated that many learners were not coping very well during this time. (Shaval et al., 2021; Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021).

2.4 Gaps in the literature

Although COVID-19 was researched since 2020, there is no, or limited research conducted regarding the perception of caregivers on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' well-being in South African townships. Many researchers have focused their research on what coronavirus is and how it came about, how it has been transmitted from one person to the other, the challenges and impact brought by the coronavirus pandemic in the everyday life of individuals as well as in the education system, this research has been conducted internationally and here in South Africa (Spaull & Van Der Berg, 2020; Weidmann et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2020). Research on the perceptions of South Africans regarding the impact of COVID-19 has been conducted and from this research, the huge inequality between urban areas and townships has been noted (Shepherd & Mohohlwane, 2021).

This research study aimed to add to the body of research on the impact of COVID-19 research already done, but with the focus on the perception of caregivers on the influence of COVID- 19 on the well-being of secondary school learners in Vosloorus, Gauteng. How the pandemic influenced the well-being and changed the lives of these learners and might influence their futures and generations to come. Although the focus of this research will only be limited to Vosloorus area in Gauteng, it might be useful to do similar studies in other townships in Gauteng and nationally to contribute to the body of knowledge that can guide interventions to salvage the situation.

2.5 Summary

This chapter explained the ecological perspective as the theoretical framework in which the study was rooted, and why it was applicable for this study. The ecological perspective focuses on the relationship between the developmental of persons and their environment. This perspective describes how circumstances in people’s lives affect their behaviour and their well-being.

Literature presented covered the contextualising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and provides an international and national overview of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system and learners' well-being. The role of school social workers in school settings in relation to disasters and the gaps in the literature are addressed. From the literature it is evident that COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the education system as well as on the lives of learners and their families who are living in low socio-economic communities. In the following chapter, the research methodology applied will be explained.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three, the research approach and design applied during the study are explained. The population, sample, and sampling procedures are accounted for. The research instrument used in the study and the pre-testing of the research instrument is described. The methods of data collection and data analysis are explained, and the trustworthiness of the study is accounted for. Lastly, the ethical considerations observed during the research study are described.

3.2 Research approach

A qualitative approach was used during the research study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human problem. In addition, it allows the researcher to collect in-depth and thick data from participants to interpret the meaning that they attached to the social issue. Braun and Clarke (2013) argue giving that qualitative research uses words that might be either in written or spoken format as data. Neuman (2011) mentioned that a qualitative approach uses soft data, which is in the form of words and sentences, and the emphasis of this approach is on exploring details and give detailed descriptions of the cases.

The qualitative approach is suitable for this study because the perceptions of caregivers were explored, and their perceptions shared were used to describe how they made sense of the influence of COVID-19 on secondary school learners in Vosloorus. The researcher interpreted the data using the meanings participants attached to it within their context.

3.3 Research design

The research design used in this study is phenomenological design, as stated by Creswell and Poth (2018) the goal of phenomenological research is to comprehend the essence (true meaning) of an experience, and the objective of this study is to describe this essence. The emphasis is on the significance that certain lived experiences have for individuals, understanding the essence of

several people's encounters with a phenomenon, such as sadness, exclusion, and motivation, in the case of this study COVID-19 pandemic, and explaining the shared significance of multiple people's lived experiences of a phenomenon.

Creswell and Poth (2018) argue that phenomenological research places greater emphasis on describing participant experiences than it does on the researcher's opinions. When possible, researchers put their past experiences aside and approaches the phenomena under investigation through new eyes.

The phenomenological research design recognises that there is no single reality, but everyone has different experiences. The researcher focuses on finding information that explains how an individual experiences their world. In this study, the researcher will be reporting on the perceptions of the caregivers on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on secondary school learners' well-being which is the phenomenon the writer wants to bring insight on.

This research study was rooted in the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm cosider people's subjective experiences as the essence of what is real for them (Blanche et al., 2006). The participants'experiences made sense when interacting with them during semi-structured interviews, and paying close attention to what they were saying, This study thus tried to understand and interpret the perceptions of the caregivers when using qualitative research techniques during the data collection and data analysis processes.

3.4 Population, sample, and sampling procedure

A population is the group people from whom a researcher selects a sample about whom data can be collected, analysed, interpreted, and contextualised (Babbie, 2021; Neuman, 2011). The population of this study was the caregivers of learners from grades 10 to 12 attending a secondary school in Vosloorus, Gauteng.

According to Neuman (2011), a sample is a small set of individuals a researcher selects from a large pool. This a sample is a subset of individuals from a population. The goal of a sample in qualitative research is to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon under study.

In selecting the sample for the study, the researcher used purposive sampling, a sampling strategy that qualitative research in general makes use of (Niewenhuis, 2020). Purposive sampling implies that members of the sample are chosen based on the knowledge of the population (Babbie, 2021), or for a specific reason or purpose, to represent the phenomenon under study (Niewenhuis, 2020). Purposive sampling is also referred to as judgemental sampling because researchers use their judgment in selecting individuals who will be most representative of the population (Babbie, 2021; Niewenhuis, 2020; Neuman, 2011). Purposive sampling was relevant for the conceptual framework of the study, to address the research question, aim and objectives of the study and it enhanced the transferability of the findings. The conclusions made from the finding of the sample is then used to understand the whole population. The sample of the study was eight caregivers of grades 10 to 12 learners from a secondary school in Vosloorus. The following inclusion criteria guided the researcher during the process of sampling:

- a resident of Vosloorus.
- the primary caregiver of a learner who attended secondary school in the Vosloorus area.
- of legal age to be a caregiver.
- willing to voluntary participation in the research study.

The exclusion criteria were:

- Non-residents of Vosloorus
- Caregivers of primary school learners
- Caregivers of child-headed households

In selecting the sample, the researcher went to the school where the planned research was conducted, engaged with the principal and teachers requesting them to allow the researcher access to the caregivers of the grades 10 to 12 learners. The researcher went to classroom of the grade 10 to grade 12 learners and gave 21 learners the Participation Information Sheet (PIS) and consent forms to give to their caregivers as the plan of attending parents meeting could not be achieved. The challenge was getting the PIS and consent form back and the researcher had to keep going to the school to check if the learners brought them back, only 17 learners brought back the PIS and consent forms. The researcher contacted the participants telephonically and made appointments to visit them at their homes. Three of them were used for pre-testing, the selection of the participants

mostly depended on their address, the researcher tried to find participants closer to where she stayed so that she would not have to travel far.

3.5 Research instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. According to Bryman (2016b) A semi-structured interview is one in which the interviewee has a lot of freedom in how to respond despite the researcher having a list of questions or specified themes to address. The order of the questions might not proceed exactly as shown on the schedule. The interviewer may ask more questions as they arise from the respondents' comments, but, all of the scheduled questions will be asked, and the wording will be consistent from interview to interview. Semi-structured interviews are in-depth interviews, which require participants to respond to pre-set open-ended questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The advantage of using a semi-structured interview guide is that it provides participants the opportunity to speak freely about the phenomenon under study and share what was significant to them (Hesser-Biber & Leavy, 2011; King et al., 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to King et al. (2019), since the goal of the qualitative study is to gather participant stories of distinct aspects of their experiences rather than compile answers to a particular question as if they were variables in a survey, the interview guide may alter throughout the course of the research.

3.6 Pre-testing the research instrument

The researcher instrument was pre-tested before the data collection started. According to Babbie (2021), when pre-testing any data collection instrument there are always the possibility of ambiguous questions, or questions that participants cannot make sense of. Therefore, pre-testing of the research instrument was done with three participants from the population who did not participate in the research study. these participants were recruited through the PIS which was explained to them, they were also informed that their information is for pre-testing, and they signed consent forms. The data collected from the pre-testing were not incorporated in the data analysed

from the study. The pre-test helped in estimating the length of the interview and determining whether the research questions were understood by the participants and yielded the necessary information to answer the research question. Pre-testing also allowed the researcher to determine whether the questions were not ambiguous. Before the pre-testing of the research instrument started, the researcher went through the PIS and consent form with the participants. Both documents were translated into isiZulu, because the English language is not the participants' mother tongue. The researcher did not make any changes to the semi-structured interview because the participants of the pre-test were able to answer all the questions without difficulty.

3. 7 Method of data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection. A semi-structured interview guide was used during the interviews. The nature of the semi-structured interviews allows the interview to flow more naturally, and scope for the participants to raise issues that the researcher has not anticipated which allow for the conversation to go in an unexpected direction (Braun & Clarke, 2013). King et al. (2019) support the argument by Braun and Clarke (2013) that flexibility is the key requirement in qualitative interviews.

The semi-structured interviews with the selected sample were conducted face-to-face which helped in observing the non-verbal communication, observing the gestures when they trying to describe something, and getting rich and detailed data about the caregiver's perceptions.

The researcher made telephonic contact with the potential participants who consented to participate in the study. Appointments were made on dates most suitable for participants, and where it was most suitable for participants to be interviewed. King et al. (2019) state that it is good practice to ask participants where they would like the interview to be held. This will help in making sure that the environment is physically and psychologically comfortable for the participant. The researcher was willing to interview the participants at their homes unless they required otherwise. The average duration per interview was 30 minutes and all the interviews took place at the homes of the participants.

The researcher went through the PIS and consent form at the start of the interviews to ensure the participants are informed about what the research study entails and what they have consented to. The purpose of recording the data was explained to the participants as assisting the researcher to ensure that she captures exactly what participants were sharing to report on in the research report. The researcher reminded the participants about confidentiality and anonymity of data sharing. Warren (2002) stated that recording might have a negative impact if it is not explained to participants thoroughly and especially highlighting that confidentiality will still be adhered to. Where permission to record the interview was not granted the researcher made notes during the interview to capture the responses of the participants. The language used during data collection was IsiZulu and English as these are the languages best understood by the researcher and the participants in the township.

3.8 Method of data analysis

Thematic analysis (hereafter referred to as TA) was used as the method of data analysis. TA is a widely used data analysis technique and it allows for the identifying, determining, analysing, and reporting of themes or patterns within the text (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Guest et al., 2013). This is done to reduce the pool of collected data from the participants to an understandable summary.

Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that TA is a pragmatist method because it focuses on the participant's perceptions, experiences, reality, and how they make meaning of everything happening around them. They further add that thematic analysis can be constructionist in that it can be focused on examining how events, realities, meanings, and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Braun and Clarke (2016) mentioned that TA is flexible because it is not bounded by a theoretical framework, and it is flexible in terms of the research question, sample size and data collection methods because it is a simple, and organised method for extracting codes and developing themes from qualitative data. The smallest analytical units are called codes, and they are used to record intriguing aspects of data that can be (possibly) relevant to the study. The building blocks for themes are called codes. Themes offer a structure for compiling and presenting the researcher's

analytical findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, Guest et al. (2012) state that the focus of thematic data analysis is on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the collected data that is the themes. Codes are then developed to represent the identified themes.

TA fits in perfectly with the research, as the focus of this research study is the perceptions of caregivers. The main aim of doing a thematic analysis is to examine the patterns in the perceptions of the caregivers regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the learner's well-being.
To identify the codes and themes the researcher follows the six steps of thematic analysis mentioned by (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2013)

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data.

The researcher transcribed the interviews, and from the data collected, the researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to get familiar with the data and then identify similarities, differences, unfamiliar words, and interesting or surprising text or words were noted down.

Step 2: Generating initial codes.

The similarities, differences, unfamiliar words, and interesting or surprising text or words that were noted down were then grouped into codes.

Step 3: Searching for themes.

The codes created in step two were then collated to create themes relevant to the study to make sense of and find meaning in the collected data.

Step 4: Review the themes.

In this step, the researcher reviewed and modified the themes at two levels. Themes were reviewed to see if they apply to Level 1, which is on coded extracts, and Level 2, which refers to the complete data set. A thematic map of analysis was produced.

Step 5: Defining the themes.

In this step the researcher put more emphasis on the details of each theme and the concepts underpinning each theme, leading to the creation of precise descriptions and names for each theme.

Step 6: Write up the findings.

In this step, the researcher resumes preparing the chapter of the research report related to the presentation and discussion of the findings in the final report. This entailed choosing appropriate extracts for analysis, discussing the analysis, and making connections to the theoretical framework underpinning the research study and supporting literature in the report.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

As part of the research process, data verification involves examining and ensuring that the data are legitimate, trustworthy, and accurate interpretations or representations of the experiences or views of participants. Morse et al. (2002) stated that without rigor, research is worthless and turns into fiction. It also loses its usefulness. In order for a study to be trustworthy and valid, it must be carried out with integrity.

Data verification is one way to make sure that the researcher's conclusions are reliable and supported by the relevant literature. Shenton (2004) talks about four criteria for trustworthiness that are adopted from Guba (1981), these are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. These criteria assist in determining whether the research report is valid, reliable, and supported by evidence.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that the reliability of the study is also greatly influenced by the researcher's ethical behaviour. They went on to say that when a study is being proposed, its potential reliability and worth should be evaluated not only by how competently it is designed in accordance with the norms and standards of the discipline, but also by how morally or ethically engaged the researcher is likely to be throughout the study's execution. A researcher who is morally constrained will always consider more than just filling out paperwork and will work honestly.

The four constructs of trustworthiness and how it was adhered to in this research study are discussed next.

3.9.1 Credibility

Credibility implies that the findings of a research study is consistent with the reality and that the researcher presented the real picture of the phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2004). There are

ways that a researcher can ensure that the phenomenon under study is correctly documented. (Miller & Creswell, 2010; Bryan, 2016; Shenton, 2004).

In this research study, the researcher used well established research methods, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and the process of thematic analysis to ensure that the findings reflect a true picture of the phenomenon studied. In addition, to allow the participants to comfortably share their true perceptions on the phenomenon (Shenton, 2004), the researcher discussed the participant information sheet, that stipulated the purpose of the study, as well as their rights, and explained the consent form in the vernacular language before the interviews were conducted and audio recorded. The researcher asked probing questions and was reflexive during the data collection process to ensure that the voices of the participants were correctly recorded and to avoid bias. Lastly, the researcher gave thick and rich descriptions (Shenton, 2004) when the findings were presented and discussed in Chapter Four of the research report.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings of a research study can be applied to other research studies (Shenton, 2004) or generalise the findings to a wider population (Merriman, 1998). Because of smaller sample sizes in qualitative research, it is not possible to generalise findings to a wider population (Shenton, 2004). However, the researcher should contextualise the study and provide detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research, is like reliability in quantitative research, and according to Shenton (2004) more challenging to achieve in qualitative research. There is a strong relationship between credibility and dependability. If a study is credible it contributes to and ensures dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985.) To ensure dependability in this study, the researcher described the research methodology and processes followed during data collection in detail in

Chapter Three of the research report. Therefore, other researchers will be able to determine if sound research practices were applied (Shenton, 2004).

Creswell & Miller (2010) argued that comprehensive information regarding the research background, techniques, and participants should be presented by the researcher.

To ensure transferability the researcher gave a thorough explanation of the problem statement and rationale for the research study, its aims and objectives, and the research methodology in Chapters One and Three. The findings were presented and discussed in context, therefore other researchers can compare the findings of the research with their own research studies or other studies done on this phenomenon.

3.9.4 Confirmability

According to Shenton (2004) confirmability in qualitative research means how much the research findings acknowledge and take into consideration the subjectivity and bias of the researcher. As argued by Miles and Huberman (1995) confirmability is concerned with the objectivity of the research study. To attend to confirmability, the researcher described the steps taken during the method of data analysis to demonstrate that the findings were developed from the collected data in Chapter Four where direct quotations for participants supported the different themes and not from the researcher's own predisposition. In addition, the limitations and mitigation of the limitations were explained in Chapter One.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The researcher applied for ethics clearance from the Departmental HREC (non-medical) before the data collection process started. An ethics clearance certificate was achieved, and the protocol number is: SW23/01/03 see Appendix D.

The researcher applied for approval to do research with a school from the Gauteng Department of Education. Approval was received (see Appendix D). A request for a permission letter was sent to the principal of the Vosloorus Comprehensive Secondary School to ask permission to conduct the

research with the caregivers of the grades 10 to 12 learners. The school granted the researcher permission (see Appendix F).

3.10.1 Voluntary participation

The fundamental ethical consideration of research is that participants shouldn't be coerced into participating and informed that they are not in any way forced to be part take in the study (Strydom, 2011). Potential participants should also be notified that if they wish to pull out during the study they have the right to do that without being penalised or any consequences.

The participants were informed that participation in this study is voluntary. The research participants were reassured that they can withdraw from the interview at any time during the research study without any penalty. Participants were informed that if at any point during the interview, participants are emotionally or psychologically upset, the researcher will stop the interview and continue at another time. Before the interview started the researcher discussed the PIS with the participants to make sure that they understood (see Appendix A).

3.10.2 Informed consent

Participants were given consent forms for them to sign that they agree to be part of this study and they are doing it voluntarily. Signed consent forms were returned to the researcher. According to Saunders et al. (2015), obtaining informed consent from study participants means providing them with the information they need to make an informed decision. This entails that the consent form clearly states what the participant is consenting and/or not consenting to. See (Appendix B).

3.10.3 Confidentiality

In line with Saunders et al. (2015). When a researcher maintains confidentiality, they take precautions to prevent the identities of research participants from becoming public knowledge. The participants were informed about confidentiality when the PIS (see Appendix A), was shared

with them, and the researcher also spoke about confidentiality with the participants before the interviews started.

3.10.4 Anonymity

Anonymity is achieved, when the researcher is unable to connect the raw data collected to individual participants (Rubin & Babbie (2001). This means that participants identifying details should not be made available to anyone or presented in the research report. During the interviews, the researcher numbered the participants and only noted the participants initials with the number. The data was anonymised in writing up the research report.

3.11 Summary

This chapter explained the research methodology used in the research study. The qualitative research approach and phenomenological design were explained. The population, caregivers of grades 10-12 learners attending a secondary school in Vosloorus was defined. The ample of eight participants and how they were sampled and what sampling procedure was followed were highlighted. The research instrument, a semi-structured interview guide, and the pre-testing of the research instrument were described. The method of data collection, face-to-face interviews at the participants' homes, and the process of thematic analysis as the method of data analysis was explained. What trustworthiness means and the four constructs and how it was adhered to were discussed. The ethical considerations observed during the research process were explained in detail. In the next chapter the analysed data will be presented and discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses th findings gathered during semi-structured interviews with eight caregivers of grade 10-12 learners of a secondary school in Vosloorus, Gauteng. The research site is explained. The profile of the participants is outlined in Table 4.1 and interpreted below the table. The themes and subthemes that were developed using thematic analysis are presented in Table 4.2. The findings are presented per themes and subthemes and supported by direct quotations from participants, applicable literature, and the theoretical framework.

4.2 Research Site

Vosloorus is a township based on the East Rand of Johannesburg. Vosloorus has different areas called extensions, some areas are well-built, and some are informal settlements. Vosloorus Comprehensive Secondary School is located at 4221 Mbatha Street, Vosloorus, Boksburg, 1475, Gauteng Province, South Africa. The school is a government school and commences from grade 8 to grade 12. It is well built with face brick and has a fence around it. The school has a feeding scheme that provides lunchtime meals for the learners as most of the learners attending this school are from the surrounding areas of Vosloorus where most families have very poor socioeconomic status. Learners in this school are multicultural and multilingual and so are the teachers. Different languages are taught in the school such as Zulu, Sotho, and English

The school employs 54 teachers, four security guards, eight members of the community who runs the feeding scheme, two interns who have qualifications as childcare workers working as part of the learners' support programme assisting with the psychosocial issues the school comes across and a principal. The school has 1280 pupils who are coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds and are unique and diverse culturally. Most learners in this area are from poor backgrounds, most are staying with grandparents and most families are dependent on pension, foster care, and child support grants.

4.3 Profile of participants

In Table 4.1, presents the profile of the participants.

Table: 4.1: Profile of the Caregivers (N=8)

Caregiver Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Child's grade	Occupation	Siblings
Zee	52	Female	10	Unemployed	1
L	38	Female	10	Cashier	0
D	40	Female	11	Cleaner	3
N	36	Female	10	Cashier	1
SK	40	Female	12	Unemployed	2
SM	41	Male	11	Petrol attendance	2
MM	46	Female	10	Cashier	0
SP	36	Female	10	Unemployed	2

Table 4.1 shows that there was one male participant, and the rest of the participants were females. Of the eight participants, one was older than 50 years, four were in their 40s and three were in their 30s.

Three of the participants were unemployed, three were employed as cashiers, one was employed as a cleaner and there was one petrol attended. It is evident that most of the participants were blue collar workers probably falling in the lower income bracket. Apart from two participants who only cared for a grade 10-12 learners, all the other participants cared for a grade 10 to 12 learners and for between one and two other siblings. It is noteworthy that two of the three unemployed participants cared for two other siblings apart from the learners in grades 10 to 12. It is evident that all the participants were from a low socioeconomic status community.

4.4 Themes and Subthemes

In the following section, the themes and subthemes developed from the analysed data are presented in Table 4.2, and the themes and subthemes are discussed in detail below Table 4.2

Table 4.2: Themes and subthemes developed from the analysed data

Themes	Subthemes
1. Multiple losses experienced by the learners and their families	1.1 Loss of loved ones 1.2 Loss of employment 1.3 Loss of important interactions with teachers and peers during school closure
2. Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the emotional well-being of the families.	2.1 Fear and anxiety 2.2 Loneliness and depression
3. The COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on the school	3.1 School attendance changed. 3.2 Dropping of grade 3.3 Increase of substance use
4. Positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and restrictions	4.1 Family time increased 4.2 Resilience was strengthened. 4.3 Communication between the school and caregivers improved

4.4.1 Theme One: Multiple losses experienced by the learners and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic came with so many devastating changes in the lives of individuals around the world, this includes the lives of Vosloorus Comprehensive secondary school learners in Vosloorus, Gauteng. The first theme that was developed during the process of data analysis is the multiple losses experienced by learners and families. Caregivers perceived that the learners were bombarded with many losses which affected their well-being. Caregivers observed that the different losses experienced by the learners influenced the learners' lives in different ways.

The losses that were observed by the caregivers are the three sub themes that are described below. These are supported by direct quotations from the caregivers, literature, and the theoretical

framework where appropriate. How one develops depends a lot on their environment according to be expected because as stated by Moen et al (2001) further add that various aspects of the upbringing environment in the home and at school have been regarded as causes in the developmental process of individuals.

Darling (2007) stated that the ecological systems theory is presented as a theory of human development in which everything is seen as interrelated. The losses that took place in the lives of the learners as expected affected them.

Some families had numerous losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has a high possibility of bringing devastation and confusion to the developing adolescent who already has so much to deal with in the changes they are facing at their stage of development. The following was quoted from participant SP **"***loss of family members, me losing my job, their father having to work only a few days, being isolated from their parents as my husband and I were also infected at some point and we had to isolate, they were lonely*" it is an example of what the writer means by numerous losses in one family. The findings are discussed in more detail below:

4.4.1.1 Subtheme: Loss of loved ones

The COVID-19 pandemic as recorded by Statistics South Africa (2020) took the lives of millions of people around the world, and mostly breadwinners that left many families in dire situations. During the interviews and analysis of the collected data it was noted that caregivers thought that in Vosloorus area, many families suffered a loss of a loved one. According to the caregivers, multiple losses influenced the well-being of the learners negatively. In addition, it had a ripple effect on their progress at school. Many learners were traumatised by the losses, and none of the caregivers reported receiving bereavement counselling for the family. It was noted by the caregivers that some learners had adjusted and recovered, but others are still experiencing stress related to the COVID-19 consequences.

This is what the caregivers had to say regarding the multiple losses experienced by learners and their families:

> "*She* (the learner) *lost her friend, and this was the hardest part, she was forever anxious and hurting, and her school progress dropped tremendously."* (Participant SK)

> *"His* (the learner) *friend passed away from COVID19*, (and) *before he was buried their class teacher also passed away, so that really hurt him, especially for the friend as he was his biggest support system, and the worst part is that he could not attend the funeral. I would hear him complaining all the time saying if his friend was here, he would be helping him and he would have been done with a lot of things."* (Participant ZEE)

> *"Losing her father, she* (the learner) *just lost her mind, she could not cope with her studies, she got physically ill, she ended up being admitted in a psychiatric ward as she was paranoid, thinking I was going to die and leave her also."* (Participant MM)

> *"The loss of my parents really brought a lot of shock and trauma to my kids, they passed away in the same week, and we had to make one funeral for both of them."* (Participant SP)

According to Moen et al., (2001) when there occurs a change in a person's environment, it can be expected that it will impact the person. the ecological systems theory confirms that all systems are interrelated and influencing each other (Darling, 2007). From the direct quotations of the caregivers, it is evident that the loss of a loved one influenced the learners' well-being in different ways. It resulted in changes in their personalities, their school grades and behaviour. Brown (1999) mentioned that because children depend mostly on their primary caregivers or parents for their well-being, if their sense of security is threatened, they get anxious and worried about losing other adults in their lives.

Louw and Louw (2014) state that all aspects of adolescents such as physical, cognitive, personality, social, and moral development occur within a social context that either promotes or hampers the adolescent's development. During this stage of development, this social context is formed mostly by parents and peers. Moen et al., (2001) further add that various aspects of the upbringing environment in the home and at school contribute to and determine the developmental process of individuals. The losses of significant others (who were part of their family and social context)

experienced by many of the secondary school learners of Vosloorus is likely to influence and affected their development as adolescents. Moen et al (2001) stated that in times of sudden transitions or drastic changes these can cause personal disruption and incoherence of various kinds.

4.4.1.2 Subtheme: Loss of employment

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a severe economic downturn in South Africa. Due to the lockdown restrictions, many businesses were instructed to implement a shutdown, which in many instances resulted in many job losses. Three of the eight participants reported losing their employment and others had their working days being reduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The loss of employment or decreased working days of the breadwinners seemed to have been one of the most disruptive and disturbing losses the learners and their families had to deal with. Even though, at some point only essential workers were allowed to go to work, most people had no income, and this caused a lot of frustration, discomfort, and uncertainty in the everyday lives of secondary school learners in Vosloorus. Many adjustments had to be implemented in the homes for learners and families to continue living, for others adjustments included moving from what they had known as home to places that they could afford which took away the comfort and happiness they had.

Caregivers shared the following discomforts and the disruptions that came with the loss of income:

> "*It a lot, firstly my husband lost his job, my child use to take transport to school after his father lost his job he had to walk to and from school and he would be tired most of the time as it was a very long distance*" (Participant ZEE)

> "*Where I was working at the time, they had to cut down the staff as a result I lost my job. I think that had a huge impact on my whole family, but especially on my kids. There was no income, kids could not get their school things as required and they could not carry lunch boxes anymore. Because of this, we also had to move from the location to an informal settlement, with no electricity, no water, and toilet we were using the pit toilet provided by the government as I could no longer pay rent. My children's lives were really affected as they would fight for a candle when doing homework."* (Participant D)

> *"I lost my job, my husband started working only a few days, and less money was coming into the house…. the loss of my job meant they* (the learners) *could no longer get everything they needed like before"* (Participant SP)

Bhorat and Kanbur (2005) argued that the lack of access to necessities like safe drinking water, medical care, and adequate housing is a natural consequence of having a low income. Losing jobs meant that there was no income in many families, while others were depending on social grants like the child support grant, foster care grant, and care dependency grant or a pension. Depending on grants as the only source of income is challenging, because the households are big, sometimes as many as 10 members in one household. The government tried to better the situation by approving the social relief grant for some families, however, to apply and gain access to the social relief grant was difficult.

In South Africa the unemployment rate is very higher, children are from homes that are stricken with poverty, child-headed household, and others are from abusive backgrounds which in many cases is caused by the frustration in the house because of unemployment.

Kean and Armstrong (2020) in their study on a snapshot of COVID-19 related unemployment in South Africa, reported that the first wave of the survey released in July 2020 showed the impact of lockdown (alert Level 5) on employment and earnings in South Africa. The second wave, tracking the same individual respondents, was released in September 2020. The results showed that approximately 3 million people who were employed in February 2020, were either temporarily or permanently unemployed in June 2020. In addition, they noted that the 'vulnerable' groups (those at the lower end of the income distribution, workers with lower levels of education, workers in rural areas) were disproportionately affected by employment loss.

According to The Stationery Office Ltd (2000) there is a direct correlation between the health and development progress of children, and parents or caregivers' ability to ensure that the developmental needs during all the stages of development are met. The question is how do caregivers ensure that these needs are met, when they lose their sources of income? Caregivers were hopeless and this was felt and seen by the learners as some families had to undergo a drastic change which affected the well-being of learners negatively.

4.4.1.3 Subtheme: Loss of important interaction with teachers and peers during school closure

School for most learners is a place of comfort, a place where they meet their friends whom they enjoy spending time with, and whom they feel comfortable around. Others have developed a relationship with their teachers that they wish they had developed with their parents or caregivers at home. These relationships play a meaningful role in the lives of learners. Losing important interactions with teachers and peers during the closure of schools had a severe effect on the learners. Three of the eight participants spoke about how their kids were affected by the loss of interaction with their friends. They were unable to get in touch with their friends, or able to play with other learners, or go to the library to meet their friends. As a result, most learners were lonely during the school closure period.

Louw and Louw (2014) stated that adolescents have a strong desire to belong somewhere. When they are with peers, they feel a sense of belonging and understood which is different than when they are with their parents or their caregivers. Therefore, during adolescence, there is a heightened interest in and interactions with their peer group which characterises their social growth. Adolescence emotional needs are satisfied when engaging with peers. The following perceptions were shared by the caregivers:

> *"I would hear him complaining all the time saying if his friend was here would be helping him and he would have been done with a lot of things*." (Participant ZEE)

> *"Not going to school every day I could tell that he was lonely since most of his friends are at school, so he could not be with them."* (Participant L)

> *"My child loves spending time with his friends he could not do and he was so lonely and stressed out. He was frustrated most of the time, there was no freedom, being in one place for too long is so frustrating …. the freedom was taken away, the 'normal' my kids know, the 'normal' we all know, changed when they stopped going to school."* (Participant N)

The loneliness because of the isolation and restriction of freedom to engage with friends and peers are evident. Not having someone to share your worries with, someone who truly understands you as most of the adolescents feel not understood by their caregivers, and some do not really have much of a relationship with their siblings. Papalia et al (2001) stated that as adolescents begin to

separate from their families and spend more time with peers, they have less time and less need for the emotional gratification they used to get from their sibling bonding. Therefore, the interaction with friends or peers who you feel truly understand you and with whom you can share your worries with, was a big loss.

Adolescence is a stage of development where many changes take place. Papalia et al (2001) stated that adolescents going through rapid physical changes take comfort from being with others going through similar changes. They find reassurance from their friends as some would be at a stage where they are challenged by the relationships they have at home with their parents' standards and parental authority.

Having their peers around provides that sense of support when it seems like everyone is against them. The lockdown restrictions and school closure left them with no freedom and forced them to be with the caregivers whom they feel don't understand them, and who are 'against' them all the time. Many felt lonely, frustrated unhappy and without support during the lockdown. All these emotions and with no one to turn to can easily affect the well-being of learners and and lead to them constantly feeling down and stressed.

4.4.2 Theme Two: **Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the emotional well-being of the learners and their families**

The analysed data indicated that almost all participants and their families experienced a lot of emotions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Emotions such as fear of the unknown, anxiety, depression, being alone, as some had to isolate during lockdown. The caregivers perceived that all the emotions learners and families were exposed to, hugely affected the learners' well-being. They were restricted and not living full, and happy lives as adolescents should.

"We also lost the pillar of our home, my husband through COVID19 and it really was the biggest and traumatizing change in our home. The changes brought by COVID-19 were huge and life-threatening." (Participant MM).

One of the two subthemes on the consequences of COVID19 on the emotional well-being that developed strongly during the analysis of the data was fear and anxiety.

4.4.2.1 Subtheme: Fear and anxiety

All the caregivers referred to experiencing fear and anxiety because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The fear mostly stemmed from the unknown and the uncertainty of a virus that is not visible that had severe consequences. In addition, the regular updates from government *"was stressing everyone in the house, especially the update on how quickly the virus was spreading and the increasing death rate."* (Participant SM)

Participants mostly spoke about the fear of death that caused their anxiety and shared the following experiences:

> *"I don't know if I am wrong, my son was not smoking before but now he smokes, I think it because of COVID19, and I think it helps him as he was telling me it distresses him.*" (Participant ZEE)

> *"there was a lot of fear round the disease as it was unknown and already a lot of people had died from it, my child and everyone in the family were forever living in fear of not knowing what was going to happen next, the update from the government was also stressing us out, not being able to go to the shops, there was no measure impact other than that."* (Participant SM)

> *"Going for grocery shopping alone caused anxiety."* (Participant N)

> *"I think the fears that came with COVID-19 were just causing anxiety to her* (the learner)*."* (Participant SK)

> "*We all had anxiety as we thought we were going to die because everyone in the house started getting sick, even though I was the only one who tested we knew that they too were infected."* (Participant L)

> "*Anxiety caused by not knowing if the virus is going to take another member of our family as almost every family member got infected at some point." Further added "she was admitted in a psychiatric ward because she was anxious and paranoid."* (Participant MM)

According to Adwas, et al (2019) the most prevalent mental disorders are those involving anxiety. problems in thought, behavior, and physiological activity are among its symptoms, in addition to emotional problems. Adwas, et al (2019), further add that the symptoms of anxiety include restlessness, feeling tense or on edge, being easily tired, having trouble focusing or going blank, being irritable, having tight muscles, and being irritable.

A study by The Mental Health Foundation Scotland (2020) discovered that some research on the effects of lockdown on young people's mental health and well-being suggested a rise in PTSD. The symptoms they encountered were increased levels of sadness, worry, and anxiety, which were mostly brought on by feelings of isolation and concerns about the future and school. This is supported by the study's findings, which are evident in the quotes above and demonstrate a rise in anxiety among the learners and their families.

4.4.2.2 Subtheme: Loneliness and depression

In addition to the fear and anxiety faced by the learners, the findings revealed that five caregivers perceived learners to be lonely. The loneliness was ascribed to being locked down, not being able to see their friends, having their loved ones dying and others being sick from the virus. Learners missed being free and having their 'normal' back. They had to adjust to the 'new normal' of wearing mask when in public, and practice social distancing. This loneliness caused depression as learners had no one to talk to. Secondary school learners are in the adolescent stage and without their peers or friends around they rather keep how they feel or what they are going through to themselves than talking to their caregivers or siblings. For the learners to be lonely makes sense as they are away from friends and the people, they have created meaningful relationships with (Piye et al., 2022; Lee, 2020; Huck & Zhang, 2021).

Caregivers observed the following behaviour about the learners:

> *"He was lonely and not happy with not having his freedom, he got really sick, and he is not a sickly person, he had a lot of stress as he was not attending his classes as usual, and dropping his grades really affected him."* (Participant L)

> *He looks very lonely at times, especially after losing his friend, he has really changed, he smokes now, and I no longer understand him. He is forever on his phone I don't know what to do really."* (Participant ZEE)

> *"We could not tell if someone is sick from flue or covid we were always stressed, a cough alone would cause each of us a lot of stress, my child loves spending time with his friends he could not do and he was so lonely and stressed out."* (Participant N)

> *"The loss of her father as a result of covid, the closure of schools living the child stuck at home and lonely as I had to be at work most of the time, she could not even visit other family members as they are far."* (Participant MM)

> *"Loss of family members, me losing my job, their father having to work only a few days, being isolated from their parents as my husband and I were also infected at some point and we had to isolate, they were lonely, they have to learn to do certain things that they were never used to doing by themselves like cooking, cleaning the house and the yard"* (Participant SP)

With schools being closed, other worries included the potential that the social and emotional health and well-being of the learners will be affected badly. According to Lee (2020) the educational setting is where deep connections are made. Changes in daily routines forced students to adapt, which had an adverse effect on their sleep patterns, increased their use of social media, made it more difficult for them to concentrate on their academics, had a poor influence on their wellbeing, and raised the risk of relapsing symptoms.

4.4.3 Theme Three: The COVID-19 pandemic's consequences on the school

The education system and schools were hugely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa, schools were closed for the longest time in history. Initially there was no interaction between teachers and the learners for a while and once schools opened again, the system changed to accommodate social distancing because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Learners had to go to school on a rotation basis. For some schools, this meant that the syllabus could not be fully covered, and it also brought a lot of confusion and frustration to some of the learners. The perceptions of the caregivers were that learners were hugely affected by the initial school closure and the rotation basis schooling system. Their academic progress declined; some failed the grade while almost all the caregivers reported that the grades of the learners have dropped.

4.4.3.1 Subtheme: School attendance changed

The attendance of schools changed as indicated above. In addition, online learning also was introduced, where some classes were attended online during the rotation basis when not attending school. However, that did not work very well everywhere, because learners had limited access to devices and internet connectivity, and some could not afford data. As a result, lots of homework were given and learners had to attend to that at home.

For many learners, school is one of the places where they know they are safe and can form trusted, enduring relationships. It makes sense that more learners seem to have been negatively affected by being stuck at home for a certain period. Caregivers experienced that the restrictions that were put in place at schools made things difficult, not only for the learners but also for the caregivers. Learners came with a lot of schoolwork and caregivers had to spend a lot of time trying to assist the learners with their schoolwork. Caregivers felt the one day in and one day out of school did not cover much and as a result the learners' grades dropped. The following are perceptions of caregivers on the change in school attendance:

> *"Even when the schools started opening, they would exchange days, today they go, tomorrow they are not going. I mean they had to do most of the work at home because*

teachers were trying to catch up with the syllabus, but due to COVID-19 restrictions they could not have learners in class at the same time." (Participant SM)

"Like all the learners, my child was not schooling, and he was affected as most learners struggle with studying by themselves, as there was a time when learners would only come to school one or two days in a week, you can imagine what a learner would hold in that one week, so he was really affected. His academic was affected. Even those who progress it was not because they were understanding, most of them were pushed to the next grade and so was my child." (Participant N)

"*Change that came with COVID-19 was that a lot of schoolwork is now required to be done at home, unlike before when the teachers were doing the teaching with less homework. My son is now always at his phone as they were required to be working on their phone during COVID-19 since they could not go to school as normal. Now the problem is you never know if the child is on the phone doing schoolwork or other things."* (Participant ZEE)

"*During COVID times, the children could not go to school as usual and that gave them a hard time. I have two sets of twins and they are not in the same classes so it was difficult as they could not go on the same day, they could not even catch up well on school others would be left behind and confused….and the school attendance changed, they did not even know at times when they are writing, I also lost a job during COVID19 and that had a lot of impact on them."* (Participant D)

"He had a lot of stress as he was not attending his classes as usual, and dropping his grades really affected him." (Participant L)

Remote learning may have worked well for some learners, but that was not the perceptions of the caregivers participating in this study. The caregiver's sentiments are confirmed by research studies findings on remote learning. Remote learning meant being away from a coping mechanism for most of the learners, it had a negative impact on their mental well-being as most had to face their realities which when they are at school they get to escape (Piye et al., 2022; Lee, 2020; Huck &

Zhang, 2021). In addition, secondary school learners are adolescents, and they want to belong and spend more of their time with their peers than with their caregivers (Louw & Louw, 2014). Therefore, this might be why they were feeling lonely, frustrated, and stressed during the school closure and not attending school regularly.

The socioeconomic status of many caregivers was low, and an additional challenge and stressor was to buy data to join online teaching or use WhatsApp. The participants shared the following:

> "*They started with online classes, which did not really help, my child was depressed and could not focus, and sometimes we would not have data for those online classes until one of the teachers bought her data as they wanted her to keep up with the others."* (Participant MM)

> "*The government need to make sure that schools are ready, there was a big lesson here, which is that we lack so much on technology, if we were that advanced on technology all schools would have had online classes, if we can improve on that, I mean our learners lost so much on their education on that time which could have been avoided had we been prepared, so let us be prepared for anything going forward."* (Participant SM)

To remedy the challenges caused by school closure and not attending school daily, online learning and studying were introduced. However, many learners could not participate due to limited or no devices and internet connectivity. Due to unemployment and job losses, many families could not afford buying data to enable the learners to participate in the online teaching and learning.

4.4.3.2 Subtheme: Dropping of grades

Learners' education is frequently affected when they are faced with external challenges in the other subsystems as explained by the ecological perspective, because all systems of an individual's life are interconnected (Steinberg, 2001). Research done by Klapproth and Martin (2018) found that students are negatively affected by the change in their environment and livelihood, the shift from the normal they know to a new nomallity don't generally profit the

students, and some even fall behind more than others. All the caregivers participating in the study reported that the learners' grades dropped during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Many of the caregivers perceived the pushing of learners from one grade to another if they did not achieve well, is not a good strategy. However, in this way learners were accommodated because they had no control over the practices implemented in the education system during COVID-19. The caregivers shared the following perceptions:

"Their marks dropped but they later picked up, academically I will not say that they were that much affected, they push each other, they are each other's motivation, and the person who passes with distinctions only gets to choose whatever they want, so their focus is forever on that achieving high marks." (Participant SP)

Fear reduces a person's ability to concentrate completely when at school and hampers achieving to be a good performer (Kreiner, 1996). Going back to school with all the fear and anxiety caused by the COVID-19 pandemic affected the learners' academic performance. Even though they were required to wear mask and sanitize the fear was still there, and this might have contributed to learners dropping in their grades.

> *"My child is very smart academically, but this time around there was just too much to deal with and her academic dropped tremendously, she did not fail though but her result were not pleasing at all. She has gotten better now; she is picking up."* (Participant MM)

> *"My children were struggling during the COVID-19 times I don't want to lie, their marks dropped a lot, one of them failed but they had to push her to the next grade because her sister was now going to be ahead of her, and she would have not coped with that."* (Participant D)

> *"His academic was affected. Even those who progress it was not because they were understanding, most of them were pushed to the next grade and so was my child."* (Participant N)

A study by Thompson (2018) found that an individual's academic success is impacted by their socioeconomic background. Therefore, discrepancies that learners are forced to deal with

because of their surroundings at home, in their neighbourhood, and in their community have evolved into inequalities that not only harm their time in school but also affect their ability to succeed as adults (Thompson, 2018). This is true in this case with the learners of the participants having been in situations where their loved ones died because of the COVID-19 pandemic, breadwinners lost their jobs, and learners had to go to school only on certain days because of the COVID-19 restrictions. The following views of caregivers are relevant:

"*There was no income, kids could not get their school things as required and they could not carry lunch boxes anymore. Because of that reason we also had to move from the location to an informal settlement, with no electricity, no water and toilet we were using the pit toilet provided by the government as I could no longer pay rent. My children's lives were really affected as they would fight for a candle when doing homework"* (Participant D)

The dropping of grades was mostly as a result of stre ss that most of the secondary school learnrs at Vosloorus Comprehensive undergone during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Rana et al (2019) stress is a natural occurrence in every aspect of human existence. it is physiological and psychological imbalance. It develops as a result of a person's demands and incapacity to meet those demands. The demands and change that came with the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a lot of stress for some of the learners.

According to Bernstein et al. (2008), a situation or occurrence that poses a threat to disrupt a person's regular functioning and require them to make adjustments is a source of stress.

Children who are frustrated, fearful, and depressed may fail to concentrate in class and therefore perform poorly. Failure by the school and the home systems to recognise these symptoms and address them will aggravate the child's psychological problems.

4.4.3.3 Subtheme: Increase of substance use

Of the eight caregiver participants, two were concerned about the use of substances among learners. This could be as a result of stress, fear and anxiety that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, or it might be because of peer pressure. It could have also been a result of pressure they faced at school during this time, as there was no much time really for school work and the work to be done at home kept piling up. But again it could just be from peer pressure. According to Manzoni, et al (2011) the majority of the time, peer pressure is linked to risky or harmful

behavior, but it's important to remember that peer pressure is inseparably linked to adolescent development of their own unique sense of self and identity.being part of a peer group in adolescence is very important as it satisfy their emotional needs and works as a source of information.

The following are the concerns expressed by the caregivers:

"*I don't know if I am wrong, my son was not smoking before but now he smokes, I think it is because of COVID, I think it helps him as he was telling me it distresses him. He looks very lonely at time especially after losing his friend, he has really change, and I no longer understand him. He is forever on his phone I don't know what to do really. He was never a smoker, and I really blame this COVID."* (Participant ZEE)

Transcript 4: *"I am nervous I don't trust the future because anything can still come, I try to help where I can, but I hope the future will be ok. This COVID added also to drugs, now children are drinking lots of alcohol and are on drugs, it is scary, children are now suffering from loneliness, I wish the government can bring back excitement at schools, like sport, music, and art, I think that might really help."* (Participant N)

Substance use in schools is a very big concern lately. Rice and Dolgin (2008) regarding the issue of drugs in adolescents as the need to engage in experimental activities due to the phase of development sometimes due to peer pressure or to be seen as engaging in adult like behaviour and to challenge adult authority. Unfortunately, taking substances affect learners' schoolwork and often they end up dropping out of school. Interventions dealing with substance use at schools are crucial and should not be compromised as it is a very high-risk factor to the youth of South Africa.

4.4.4 Theme Four: Positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and restrictions

The final theme developed from the analysed data is the positive outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and restrictions. As hard and harsh as the pandemic has been to the whole world, it came with lessons that will sustain us for years to come. The lessons learned here are life lessons that will sustain these learners for the rest of their lives.

"Both positive and negative. My children have learned a lot in that I can now go and sleep at my sisters' place without worrying if they will do their schoolwork or without worrying if they will be able to make something to eat. They have become resilient young adults." (Participant SP)

There are three subthemes in theme four. The three subthemes are family time increased, learners' resilience was strengthened, and more communication between teachers and caregivers was established, see below as a brief description of these subthemes is given.

4.4.4.1 Subtheme: Family time increased

Two caregiver participants from the findings reported having had quality time with their family, where they bonded and got to know each other better. Because of the busy schedule families have daily, in some cases, you find that they never really have time to spend with each other. The participant in transcript six shared how much stronger and closer their relationship became as a family, they started doing things together such as going to the gym, cooking, and baking. While the participant in transcript 7 also shared that her mother and her cousin came to stay with them, even though it was because of unfortunate circumstances, this gave them a chance to be together as a family, the participant stated that they stayed until her daughter was feeling better, this gave them a chance to support and be there for each other as a family. It gave them a chance to realize that no matter what happens they have each other. (See the quotations below)

> "*I will start with the positive, because as a family we had a lot of time to spend together, so we had a chance to bond more, we got a chance to learn about each other, we developed a stronger relationship, we got closer, we started some gym together, baking, cooking, involving the kids because we had the whole day together, so in a way that was a positive as our relationship became stronger and very close."* (Participant SM)

> "*My mother and my cousin came and stayed with us for a while until she was herself again."* (Participant MM)

Family support is crucial during difficult times, and occasionally you may see who your true family is when you're going through a difficult period. The term "family" in its basic form, according to White (1991), describes an intergenerational social organization organized and governed by social rules involving lineage and affinity, reproduction, and the nurturing socialization of the young. While Amoataeng and Richter (2007) expand on this definition of the family by claiming that the institution of the family can be "multidimensional in nature in that it affects and is affected by the various social, economic, cultural, and political institutions which together form the social structure of any society". Additionally, the revised white paper on families (2021) define the family as a social group that extends beyond a specific physical abode and is connected through blood (kinship), adoption, foster care, marriage (civil, customary, or religious), civil union, or cohabitation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions that were put in place, there were a lot of changes in the family structure. The findings showed that there were changes in terms of the employment people have within the family, changes with school, and church gatherings being closed. The learners were home with their caregivers all the time, this gave families a platform to create better relationships, which was the case for most families.

The time the family spent together will have a great impact that will be long-lasting for the learners and for the whole family According to research done by Bronfenbrenner (1979), interactions that occur in face-to-face, long-term relationships, such as that between a mother and child, are the most important in shaping lasting aspects of development. The more time the families spent together during these the COVID-19 pandemic might have been the best time in some of the learner's life and will have a positive influence on the learner's life going forward.

4.4.4.2 Subtheme: Resilience was strengthened

Three of the caregiver participants alluded to the fact a positive outcome was that learners became more resilient, and skills were developed.

> "*They have to learn to do certain things that they were never used to doing by themselves like cooking, cleaning the house and the yard, they had to study by themselves which did*

> *teach them a lot of independence, in a way COVID -19 was not that bad, my kids can now go into their rooms and study by themselves which they learned during covid, they can now make us a full meal and wash dishes after, I thank covid for that as well."* (Participant SP)

While the participant in transcript 2 showed how resilient her son became because of the COVID-19 pandemic. His result dropped but he did not then give up from there, instead, he became more committed to her books, started studying more and more, and his focus changed, the participant states that he became more independent. This participant felt that as a family they learned so much from the COVID-19 pandemic in that should anything of this magnitude come back, she feels they are ready to tackle it.

> Participant L: *"His grades dropped a lot, and although he did not repeat a class, he then had to start studying more than he used to, now he is always on his books, and I do not think he has a social life. But he has learned a lot of independence…. I doubt that my child will be affected going forward, I think it has made him stronger and more independent. We all have learned so much from COVID-19 and I now think we have ways of how to deal with it going forward."* (Participant L)

> "*I don't think my children's lives will be affected as I feel COVID 19 is gone and our lives are now back to normal, we are no longer affected by it in fact we have adjusted and learned a lot from it."* (Participant D)

All three participants quoted above stated that they have learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ungar (2012) stated that resilience results from a cluster of ecological factors that predict positive human development (more than individual traits), and that the effect of an individual's capacity to cope and the resources he or she has is influenced by the nature of the challenges the individual faces. According to the caregivers quoted above, the learners have been through the worst during the COVID-19 pandemic, but nevertheless, they have been able to recover and look forward to the future better equipped than before.

4.4.4.3 Subtheme: Communication between the school and caregivers improved

Lastly, the finding revealed that the communication between the learners and the teachers improved amazingly as WhatsApp groups became a trend, but this was not the only communication that improved, communication between teachers and caregivers improved too. Teachers started inviting parents on WhatsApp groups, where the teachers would communicate with caregivers on what is going on at school, homework and lots of other stuff that required the caregiver's involvement.

One need to also keep in mind that caregivers have a significant influence on their children, for this reason it is crucial that the school or teachers create a partnership with the caregivers, and the community as a whole to reaching the aims and goals of the school. Open communication between the caregivers and the teachers is something that the caregivers quoted below were very happy about as it gave them the platform to share their concerns and to also be part of their learner's school journey.

> *"Teachers also started communicating more with us parents, they opened a WhatsApp group where they would inform us of changes and everything we needed to do."* (Participant ZEE)

> *"Online learning and WhatsApp groups where learners together with their teachers would share the challenges they are having, there also have been WhatsApp groups for teachers and parents where teachers will inform us parents what homework kids have and how we need to help them, which I think has really helped."* (Participant SP)

This improved communication between teachers and caregivers correlates very well with what Constable et al (2006) call a dual and simultaneous function which is a process of working with both the child and the environment to strengthen people's coping patterns and their growth potential on the one hand and to improve the quality of the impinging environment on the other. If the teachers have good communication with the caregivers a lot can be achieved in terms of getting the child to where they need to be with their academics.

4.5 Summary

This chapter described the research site, and the profile of the participants. The findings of the data collected and analysed were then presented and discussed in terms of the themes and subthemes that developed during data collection, and these were then supported by relevant literature.

The above-reported findings are all an indication that more than one aspect of the learner's life was affected by the social problems that they experience as Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that the ecosystem of an individual involves the biological, psychological, social, and cultural contexts in which a developing person, in this instance, the adolescent learner, interacts and the consequent learning and behavioural trends that develop over time.

From the findings it became obvious the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the learner's life also depended a lot on their surrounding environment, it terms of the things that happened in their environment such as losing loved ones, not being able to say your last goodbye to those people which normally give individual closure, caregivers and breadwinners losing employment, school closure, support from family members, the role played by the government, all these and more had an impact on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the learners. In the final chapter, the main findings, conclusions, and recommendations are explained.

CHAPTER FIVE

MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

To contextualise the study, the final chapter gives a summary of the research question, aims and objectives. These are followed by emphasising the main findings in relation to the four objectives that guided the research study. Conclusions and recommendations for the relevant role players conclude this chapter.

5.2 Research question, Aim and Objectives of the study

The research question that guided the study was,

What are caregivers' perceptions of the influence of COVID-19 on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus Township, Gauteng?

The aim of the study was to explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of COVID-19 on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus Township, Gauteng.

The following objectives guided the study to achieve the aim and answer the overall research question:

i. To establish caregivers' perspectives on the main factors that influence and contribute to secondary school learners' well-being.
ii. To explore caregivers' perceptions of the challenges secondary school learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic that influenced their well-being.
iii. To explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' academic progress.
iv. To explore caregivers' perceptions on how the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the well-being of secondary school learners' might shape their futures.

5.3 Main findings of the study

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

5.3.1 Objective 1: To establish caregivers' perspectives on the main factors that influence and contribute to secondary school learners' well-being.

From the analysed data it was evident from the caregivers' perspectives, that the following factors influence and contributed to the learner's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, losing loved ones during the COVID-19 pandemic was devastating and many of the learners were not able to attend the funerals because of the lockdown restrictions. Caregivers confirmed that this was a very traumatic experience for the learners. Secondly, the initial school closure, and later the rotation basis attendance when schools finally opened led them to have a lot of schoolwork to do by themselves at home, with assistance of caregivers and without immediate guidance from teachers. Thirdly, the sudden loss of employment and income was catastrophic, because most companies and small businesses were initially shutting down. When the restrictions were lowered, some caregivers or other members in the family were going back to work but only a few days a week, which meant no income or reduced income for some caregivers and their families. The loss of employment and income forced some families to move from where they were staying because they could no longer afford the rent, and other needs of the learners could not be met. Lastly, being locked indoors, one of the lockdown restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and not having the freedom to socialise with friends and other important people in their lives was affecting the general well-being of the learners negatively.

5.3.2 Objective Two: To explore caregivers' perceptions of the challenges secondary school learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic that influenced their well-being.

In exploring caregivers' perceptions regarding the challenges learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic that influenced their well-being, the loss of loved ones affected them most. The consequences were that they lived in fear because of the uncertainties and thoughts that they might lose more significant others in their lives. This loss also caused sadness and loneliness. The secondary school learners were in their adolescent stage of development, and many were not comfortable with discussing what they are going through with their caregivers and become more

isolated and withdrawn because they missed the interactions with their friends and peers. Therefore, caregivers mostly guessed or assumed how the learners felt. There were changes in behaviours and habits of learners like smoking, becoming restless and more isolated and withdrawn noted by the caregivers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.3.3 Objective Three: To explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' academic progress.

Caregivers was aware of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' academic progress. All caregivers indicated that the learners did not perform as well in their grades as before COVID-19, and the grades for their learners had dropped because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Firstly, the changes in the attendance of the school caused confusion for many learners. The different modes of teaching, i.e., on a rotation basis, and online had implications for learners and caregivers. Caregivers mentioned that learners received a lot of homework to do at home, and because the caregivers were not always able to help, and the teacher was not always reachable and available to guide the learners, studying became a struggle for the learners. In addition, many learners were not able to attend online teaching because they had no or limited access to devices, internet connectivity and data.

Secondly, on a personal level, losing a loved one or a friend, a caregiver or breadwinner in the family losing employment or the income decreased and not being allowed to engage with friends and peers all contributed to and affected the academic progress of the learners. The Ecological perspective is focused on the relationships between individuals and different sub-systems in their environment which constantly affects and shapes the other. Therefore, the focus should be on a holistic approach to consider the complexities of the environment and the complexities of the person (Constable et al, 2006). The COVID-19 pandemic played a significant role in the academic performance and progress of learners. However, the socioeconomic and political environment in the community, the school environment, relationships in families and with friends and the learner's personal characteristics and attitudes should be considered when assessing the drop in academic performance and progress of learners.

5.3.4 Objective Four: To explore caregivers' perceptions of how the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the well-being of secondary school learners might shape their futures.

Although most of the caregivers felt that the COVID-19 pandemic took a lot from them and the learners they felt that experiencing the COVID-19 era made them and the learners aware of their own strengths. Caregivers observed that their learners developed in maturity and became resilient throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They believe that the Covid-19 will not affect them negatively going forward. Caregivers perceive that the scars of losing loved ones will forever be there and dwelling on it is what might hinder them to move forward. Covid-19 resulted in the change of communication with caregivers and learners. Open and regular communication are perceived as positive. Caregivers feel they are now better informed and that they part of the learners' educational journey.

In addition, the minority of the caregivers expressed fears for the future of learners. The fears were mainly based on the substance use the learners started during the COVID-19 pandemic. In support of perception about COVID-19 and substance use, it was mentioned that loneliness and isolation as well as boredom in and after school are other factors contributing to the use of the substance. A caregiver expressed a wish that the government must bring back the excitement in schools, like sport other interests and activities like new hobbies and that might help learners not to revert to the use of substances. These worries are valid because as stated by Tshitangano and Tosin, (2016) drugs and alcohol exposure contribute to school dropout, unemployment, high level of crime, and poverty. So what future is there for these children if they continue with substance use?

5.4 Main findings and Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic left most homes in devastating condition, it left many mourning for their loved ones. Many learners were left orphaned or with one parent. Very few families did not experience the death of a loved one during this time, if it wasn't a death of a family member, it was the passing on of a schoolteacher, a friend, or just someone you knew. This resulted in learners being bereaved, developing anxiety, and living in fear. The effect of the loss of a loved

one was far reaching among learners and families in Vosloorus, yet hardly any of the affected learners received counselling, or were debriefed, they just had to carry on with life as if nothing happened. This raises the importance of having school social workers as part of the educational team in school settings.

Following the death of loved ones, the high rate of job losses was catastrophic. For caregivers and learners, the loss of employment or receiving a decrease in income added to their already poor socioeconomic status and it had other consequences for families and learners. When moving, to an informal settlement, access to basic amenities like toilets, water and electricity hardly exists. This meant using candles, and sometimes fighting over these candles to study. It meant having to walk for a long distance to attend school or for some it meant the change of schools which is always unsettling and frustrating for adolescents as it influences their relationships with friends and peers negatively.

Another major finding was that learners experienced overwhelming emotions, like fear, anxiety, and loneliness. One of the learners developed paranoia and was admitted to a psychiatric ward. Caregivers perceived that the COVID-19 pandemic had a serious influence on the learners' emotions and believed it has been one of the reasons why many learners did not do well at school. The high dropping rate in school grades, and some learners being condoned to the next class, could not only be associated with the school closure and restrictions. However, everything else that happened at home, school, and in their environment should be considered. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) mentioned, psychosocial factors that influence children's health and development is part of the ecological system where there are interactions among different systems that influence each other, and these determine the outcomes.

Caregivers perceived that COVID-19 contributed to the use of substances among learners. The history of substance use among learners shows that it has been prevalent in schools and among adolescents for many years. Parry et al. (2004) found that cannabis was the most common primary drug used by adolescents in substance and alcohol was the second most frequently reported primary substance of abuse among adolescent patients in Durban. COVID-19 probably exacerbated the use of substances like tobacco and alcohol among learners in Vosloorus.

The findings of this study provided an overview of caregivers' perception of the influence the COVID-19 pandemic had on the well-being of secondary school learners in Vosloorus. The perceptions of caregivers in Vosloorus were explored and they were given an opportunity to make their voices heard about the challenges and the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study makes a contribution to the knowledge base on how some secondary school learners' well-being was disrupted and affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in the Vosloorus area. Considering how learners were affected provides an opportunity for school social workers to consider interventions dealing with the consequences on learners' well-being and guide them not to allow the COVID-19 pandemic to continue affecting their well-being and their futures. The study might influence guidelines on how to deal with similar incidences in future to minimise the disruption of learners' academic performance and the effect on the well-being of learners.

In conclusion, sharing the findings of the study about the perceptions of caregivers in Vosloorus allows access to educators, professionals, and the public to hear the voices of the caregivers in the Vosloorus area on how the COVID-19 pandemic influenced the lives and well-being of the secondary school learners.

5.4 Recommendations

The following are recommendations that emerged from the research study and are relevant to different stakeholders. The recommendations for the Department of Education, the secondary school, school social workers and caregivers are highlighted below.

5.4.1 Recommendations for the Department of Basic Education

It is recommended that the Department of Basic Education permanently employ school social workers within the DoE to be part of the multidisciplinary educational teams in regions and/or districts. This will allow for thorough assessment of the psychosocial circumstances of learners and development of plans to address the psychosocial issues in the school, on a micro, mezzo, or macro level to the benefit of the learners and their academic performance.

It is further recommended that the Department of Basic Education ensure that all schools are furnished with devices and data and have access to the internet to enable learners to attend online

classes during unforeseen circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic, or to catch up or have access to learning material if they have missed out on classes because of a valid reason.

5.4.2 Recommendations for the secondary school

It is recommended that schools either appoint school social workers or allow Department of Social Development's school social workers to access the school and accommodate them as part of the education team. This will allow for the early detection of challenges and rendering psychosocial services to learners and families on micro, mezzo, or macro levels to the benefit of the learners and their academic performance. In addition, school social workers can facilitate interventions that are preventive, or crisis interventions like trauma debriefing to ensure the well-being of learners.

Vosloorus is a low socioeconomic community and the availability of devices, internet connection and data for learners who do not have access to these at home, is recommended. The school social worker can assist with the assessment of learner's circumstances and recommend which learners qualify to loan devices and receive data in circumstances where online teaching is implemented.

Open communication among the school management, teachers and caregivers or families of learner is of utmost importance and should be embraced. This will allow for early detection of challenges and early intervention by the appropriate professional persons or relevant organisations to ensure the well-being of the learners.

5.4.3 Recommendations for caregivers

Caregivers must take the initiative and confidence to engage with the school system if they notice anything that indicates that the child is experiencing challenges at home or at school that hinders them personally or in their academic performance and progress.

5.4.4 Recommendations for further research

The following are recommendations on future research studies:

- Research studies to investigate and assess the readiness of the township secondary schools in Gauteng Province to deal with unforeseen incidences like pandemics to ensure that the education process is not adversely disrupted.
- Research studies to establish how online teaching and learning should be customise to be effective in township secondary schools in Gauteng Province.
- Research studies to determine the main challenges of learners living in low socioeconomic communities and developing action and intervention plans in collaboration with community members to address these challenges in the community.

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Participants' information sheet (PIS)

Title of the study: Caregiver's perception on the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus area

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Slindile Alicia Mqadi. I am a Master student in School Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Profs. Edmarie Pretorius and Jennifer Watermeyer. I am conducting a research study about the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of secondary school learners as experienced by the learner's caregivers.

The objectives of the proposed study are as follows:

v. To establish caregivers' perspectives on the main factors that influence and contribute to secondary school learners' well-being.
vi. To explore caregivers' perceptions of the challenges secondary school learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic that influenced their well-being
vii. To explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' academic progress.
viii. To explore caregivers' perceptions on how the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the well-being of secondary school learners' might shape their futures.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last about one hour. I will be conducting home visit for the purpose of the interview.

With your permission, I would like to do an audio record of the interview. This data will be stored in my computer drive and will also be on my research report for a maximum of 5 years and will be deleted after 5 years. The researcher and her supervisor's will have access to the data and if there is a need to publish it you will be approached first.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including information of your experiences regarding the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of the secondary school student you are staying with.

The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers

may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You do not have to take part. You can stop being in the study at any time. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits or rights you would normally have if you decide not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life. OR Some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at Vosloorus Comprehensive, from Miss. Ntombi Mdlalose contact number (0662914711) who is the social worker for the Department of Social Development working for the school in the Vosloorus area.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Slindile Alicia Mqadi

Researcher:
Full name: Slindile Alicia Mqadi
Email address: 2515872@students.wits.ac.za
Contact number: 0662636855

Supervisor:
Full name: Prof Edmarie Pretorius
Email address: Edmarie.Pretorius@wits.ac.za
Wits phone number: 0117174476

Supervisor:
Full name: Prof Jennifer Watermeyer
Email address: Jennifer.Watermeyer@wits.ac.za
Wits phone number: 0117174578

APPENDIX B

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Consent Form

Title of project: *Caregiver's perception on the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus area*

Name of researcher: Slindile Alicia Mqadi

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

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

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

APPENDIX B

…… (contact number)

…… (signature)
Slindile Alicial Mqadi (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (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** **2023/450**
Name of Researcher:	**Mqadi S.A**
Address of Researcher:	**14764 Leubane street** **Ext 31 Vosloorus** **Boksburg**
Telephone Number:	**0662636855**
Email address:	**2515872@students.wits.ac.za**
Research Topic:	**Caregiver's perception on the influence of 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	**Ekurhuleni North**

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: SW23/01/03**

PROJECT TITLE Caregivers' perceptions of the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus area, Gauteng, South Africa.

INVESTIGATOR	**SLINDILE MQADI**
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SOCIAL WORK
DATE CONSIDERED	19 March 2023
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	MINIMAL RISK
EXPIRY DATE	20 March 2026

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 22 March 2023 **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** 30/05/2023

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview details:

Name of interviewee: _____

Time and date of the interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Audio recording: YES/NO

Confirmation of signed consent forms: YES / NO

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Personal background

- Please tell me about yourself and your relationship with the learner

ix. **Objective 1:** To establish caregivers' perspectives on the main factors that influence and contribute to secondary school learners' well-being.
   - What change came with COVID-19 in the learner's life?
   - What in your opinion are the factors that contributed to the learner's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?

x. **Objective 2**: To explore caregivers' perceptions of the challenges secondary school learners faced during the COVID-19 pandemic that influenced their well-being
   - What challenges was the learner facing during the COVID-19 pandemic?
   - How was the learners' well-being impacted or affected as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?

xi. **Objective 3:** To explore caregivers' perceptions of the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school learners' academic progress.

- How would you say the COVID-19 pandemic influenced to the learner's academic progress?
- What were the measures taken to cover the gap opened by the school closure and in your opinion were these measures good enough?

xii. **Objective 4:** To explore caregivers' perceptions on how the COVID-19 pandemic's influence on the well-being of secondary school learners' might shape their futures.

- How do you think the influence of COVID-19 on the learner's well-being might affect the learner going forward?
- In your opinion, how do you think a pandemic of this magnitude can be dealt with in a way that minimises the influence on the learner's well-being?

APPENDIX F

VOSLOORUS COMPREHENSIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL
4221 MBATHA STREET PRIVATE BAG 12128 CELL: 082483 8439
VOSLOORUS RUSLOO 1475 TEL: 011 853 4004

CENTER NUMBER: 162099

To: Mrs. Slindile Mqadi
Vosloorus Comprehensive Secondary school
23 February 2023

Re-request for permission to conduct research at Vosloorus Comprehensive school

Good day Mrs. Slindile Mqadi

The school acknowledges your request to conduct research at our school with the caregivers on the title "Caregivers perception of the influence of COVID-19 pandemic on the well-being of secondary school learners in the Vosloorus area, Gauteng, South Africa" and we are please to inform you that permission has been granted.

VOSLOORUS COMP
22 FEB 2023

Kind Regards
Mr. T.S Ramabolane
HOD

Principal : Mnisi J.G. Deputy Principal Gr 1:Futsshant B.S

HODs :African Language: POKI PT; EAL:Moroke P S.; LO: Ramabulana TS; Maths, Maths Lit, Physical Science, Tech Maths, Tech Science: Mashe M, Socio Sciences: Nkabinde; Technology, NS, Life Sciences: Xulu PS; Tech Eval:Ntuli ML; commerce: Khanye