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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND,
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The Adverse Childhood Experiences of Immigrant University Students

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Date: November 2024

A research report submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Arts in Community-Based Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities.

Declaration

I, Stephen Griffin, hereby declare the following:

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Abstract

This study investigated the interplay between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and migration. The focus was on immigrant university students in South Africa who had immigrated in their childhood. Migration is a challenging process, which often exposes migrant children to further adversity. With the use of family systems theory, the study examined how ACEs impact the migrant children, their acculturation, cultural identity, mental health and family dynamics. A qualitative research design, which employed thematic analysis to gain insights into the semi-structured interviews with the sample of nine participants who had immigrated to South Africa between the ages of 8 and 16 years, was used. Key themes identified in this process included motivations for migration, exposure of child migrants to ACEs, process of acculturation, their mental health and well-being, and intergenerational differences related to migration and acculturation. Education emerged as a central motivation for migration and families tended to view it as an investment in their child's future. The participants reported exposure to various ACEs, including bullying, social rejection and xenophobia, which significantly compounded acculturation challenges. The findings highlight the pivotal role of social support structures in mitigating ACEs and fostering resilience among migrant children. Furthermore, the study reveals the dynamics of intergenerational differences in acculturation, which lead to tension and role renegotiation.

Keywords: adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), migration, acculturation, family systems theory, child migrants

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The formative years of one's childhood are shaped by the experiences encountered. These experiences can shape the trajectories of one's adulthood. Furthermore, these experiences may influence an individual's physical and mental health, relationships and overall outcomes in life. Experiences are linked to the context of the world, which has become interconnected through various means. As migration affects the world, it is imperative to ask what the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in children who migrate in their youth is. How do these potential adversities shape an individual's life and the journey of migration and acculturation?

Felitti et al.'s (1998) seminal research is integral in understanding the relationship between ACEs and adult health risk behaviours. Felitti et al. (1998) explored "basic causes of morbidity and mortality in adult life", (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 246). Understanding the essential aspects of mortality and the anguish one endures is a natural phenomenon of existence. Frankl (2006) noted that "life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks to which it constantly sets for each individual" (Frankl, 2006, p. 85). Within Africa, South Africa is a major migration destination with the highest number of migrants on the continent (United Nations, 2020, 2022). Migrants to South Africa often seek safety, education, prospects and economic stability. However, when integrating into South African society, the adversities migrants face includes xenophobia, systemic inequality and language barriers, which can each increase the

stress of migration (Vaughn et al., 2017; Tummala-Narra, 2019). These adversities mirror the broader challenges of migration.

Global migration has increased in recent years. Although millions of families and individuals emigrate for better prospects, migration and the subsequent acculturation to a new country are not without challenges (Batalova et al., 2020; United Nations, 2019). Migration is a particularly stressful and potentially traumatic event for children. They are removed from a familiar environment and placed in a new culture (Berry, 1997; Schapiro et al., 2021). Migration also affects the family as a whole and these changes may also impact children's well-being (Goldenberg et al., 2016). The challenges faced can have a profound effect on the child's development and mental health (Hughes et al., 2017; Felitti et al., 1998). Accordingly, the aim of the present study was to critically examine the interplay between migration and ACEs, highlighting the effects this had on the participants overall well-being, mental health and acculturation into the host country. The focus was on immigrant university students who had experienced migration during their childhood.

An overview of the theories of migrant acculturation, with a specific focus on ACEs, how these could affect the process of migrant acculturation and the current perspective of the students who endured this challenging process is presented (Berry, 1997; Felitti et al., 1998; Portes & Rivas, 2011). These aspects are considered in light of the family systems theory theoretical framework, which provides a lens through which to explore the interconnected experiences of migrant children within their families and broader social systems (Goldenberg et al., 2016). By highlighting the systemic influences, the aim of the study was to address a

critical gap in understanding how ACEs shape migration, mental health, well-being, and acculturation experiences (Vaughn et al., 2017; Schapiro et al., 2021).

Rationale for the Study

The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) model, as developed by Felitti et al. (1998), posits that potential traumatic events experienced in childhood are directly proportional to the future effects on the individual as an adult. ACEs include the following experiences: household dysfunction, physical abuse, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, childhood sexual abuse, witnessing community violence, experiencing natural disasters, being bullied or socially rejected, living in poverty or economic hardship and discrimination or racism (Felitti et al., 1998; Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Hughes et al. (2017) found that ACEs can have a lasting impact on an individual's physical and mental health, which can increase the risk of chronic diseases, substance abuse and suicide, due to the challenges in achieving social and emotional stability.

Migrant families navigate a wide variety of challenges, ranging from differing cultural norms to language barriers. Each of these factors can increase the risk of migrant children experiencing ACEs, which are often associated with negative mental health outcomes and compromised well-being. (Stoltenborgh et al., 2013). Varying cultural differences in parental styles may also be at odds with the norms of the host nation and may even be perceived as illegal practices such as corporal punishment (Durrant & Ensom, 2012). The unique stressors migrant families encounter highlight the importance of considering the interconnectedness of migration and ACEs, particularly when considering that the cultural and systemic disparities may further compound these challenges.

Although research has emphasised the prevalence of ACEs, only a few studies have considered these in the context of migrant families. Berry (1997) noted that although there is a range of literature related to North America, Australia and Europe, studies in the Global South are minimal, which may lead to biased and selective interpretation. The scarcity of research in the Global South has a created a considerable gap in understanding how cultural, social and systemic factors shape the experiences of migrant children.

Immigrants are situated in a context that is fundamental to understanding their lived experiences and the nature of ACEs (Vaughn et al., 2017), which could reveal relevant cultural circumstances. Stoltenborgh et al. (2013) noted that cross-cultural research is desperately needed, especially in Africa and South America. It is imperative for policymakers and law enforcement to understand immigrants' circumstances, including their current and past contexts and what they deem appropriate for child-rearing. In addition, community psychologists and social scientists are interested in understanding the lived experiences of immigrant communities, families and individuals.

The significance of this study is related to its ability to contribute to the paucity of literature on migrants' experiences of ACEs in the Global South and particularly, South Africa. The study provides crucial insights into how ACEs and the acculturation process affect child migrants in various domains, including but not limited to mental health, identity, social systems and changes in the family systems. This is fundamental as South Africa has the highest number of migrants in Africa and a range of socio-political challenges that affect the migrant population. By exploring the experiences of migrants, the study sought to provide insights that can inform culturally sensitive policies, community-based interventions and

support systems that are specific to the needs of migrant families and children who have encountered ACEs.

Chapters Overview

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background information about the phenomenon being studied, context of the study and rationale behind the study was provided in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Chapter 2, a comprehensive literature review, highlighting aspects regarding migration and ACEs is presented. The phenomenon of migration in the global context and how this influences the current global political, economic and conflictual atmosphere are considered. Furthermore, the role of individuals and families in the migration decision-making process is examined to provide a greater perspective of migrant expectations during acculturation and adaptation. In addition, the concept of acculturation, which includes acculturation strategies and the challenges that individuals face when entering a new society are discussed at length, with particular attention to the mental health challenges and the impact on well-being during this process. A fundamental consideration in this chapter is the phenomenon of ACEs, which are explored in detail to understand the difficulties children face and why these are relevant when considering immigration. Acknowledging ACEs is essential when considering the tribulations one may face during the immigration process as a child. These are linked to various issues relating to immigration, which are relevant to ACEs. The prevalence of ACEs globally, in Africa and in South Africa are also considered, providing context for the value of the current study.

The literature review further explores the theoretical background of systems theory. The theory posits that the individual is a part of the greater system and various aspects of how the individual behaves within the system. These systems, particularly familial and social systems, are instrumental in shaping mental health and well-being, especially in the context of ACEs and migration. Different behaviours are attributed to the family system and are linked to ACEs. In addition, the cycle of deterioration fosters a deeper understanding of the concepts and difficulties that both migrant children and parents may face. An understanding of how these aspects interact in relation to the social construct and how acculturation is a fundamental of the study is imperative.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology that was utilised during the research process is discussed in Chapter 3. A qualitative, interpretivist approach was employed because of the exploratory nature of the study. The research design and methodology, including how participants were recruited, the procedure behind the data collection and the data analysis techniques, namely Braun and Clarke (2006), were outlined. Furthermore, the ethical considerations and the processes that were implemented to ensure the rigor and quality of the study are explained. A consideration on reflexivity was also integrated to shed light on the role and influence of the researcher throughout research process.

Chapter 4: Findings

The themes that emerged during the data analysis collected using semi-structured interviews are presented in Chapter 4. Five themes were identified: motivations for migration, exposure to ACEs as a child migrant, the process of acculturation, the impact on mental

health and well-being, and changes in family dynamics and intergenerational relationships. Verbatim quotes are presented to support the themes. The themes and subthemes highlight the general understanding of the interviews and how the participants experienced migration, acculturation and ACEs.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The themes and subthemes are discussed with reference to existing theory and the family systems theoretical framework. In essence, in this chapter, there is an attempt to answer the research questions posed at the beginning of the study and reflect on whether migration per se can be considered an ACE

Chapter 6: Conclusions

A concise summary of the key findings of the research along with the implications of these findings is discussed in this chapter. The limitations of the study are outlined to understand how future research can be improved to acquire further insights. In addition, recommendations on how this research can be extended or developed to sustain future research are outlined.

Appendices

The appendices provide all the documentation necessary for this study. These include the ethical clearance certificates, participant information sheet, consent form and signed forms relevant for the completion of the study. In addition, there are figures that represent the frameworks highlighted in the literature review and a graphically representation of migration patterns.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

As a global phenomenon, migration has garnered considerable scholarly attention due to its profound impact on individuals and societies worldwide (Berry, 1997; United Nations, 2019). Migrant university students represent a unique group of migrants because they grapple with a myriad of challenges and experiences as they navigate higher education in a new cultural environment (Portes & Rivas, 2011). In this chapter, a comprehensive exploration of the possible adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) faced by university students who migrated during their childhood and the consequential effects on their academic achievement, mental health and overall well-being is presented.

ACEs refer to a spectrum of adverse experiences during childhood, including abuse, neglect and household dysfunction, which hold significant implications for an individual's physical, emotional and psychological development (Felitti et al., 1998). Understanding the prevalence of ACEs among migrant populations is pivotal for discerning the nuanced challenges these students encounter in adapting to a new country and its higher education system (Schapiro et al., 2021). Moreover, the interplay of immigrant status with additional factors such as socioeconomic disparities, discrimination and social isolation further compounds the complexities of their experiences and shapes their educational trajectories (Portes & Rivas, 2011).

Drawing insights from diverse case studies and best practices throughout the world, the possible effective interventions tailored to meet the unique needs of migrants struggling with ACEs in higher education settings is also highlighted in this chapter.

In this literature review, migration, emigration and immigration are defined. Subsequently, the factors that lead to the final decision to migrate are considered. Global migration trends and patterns, which afford an indication of the necessity of research on migration and the experiences of this process, are discussed. An understanding of acculturation regarding the strategies used and the key factors of how acculturation is shaped are also examined (Berry & Sam, 2016). Thereafter, an understanding of the various types of ACEs are explored. The prevalence of ACEs on a global, African and South African level is then highlighted, followed by the interplay of migration and ACEs. Finally, systems theory as the underlying theoretical framework of the research is discussed.

Migration

The Phenomenon of Migration

As a growing area of global research, migration reflects the increasing patterns of human movement worldwide. The United Nations report (2019) indicates a wide range of migration patterns worldwide (Batalova et al., 2020; United Nations, 2019). In recent years, migration into South Africa has also reflected this global pattern. As this phenomenon continues to grow, efforts to understand the processes underlying the decisions to migrate to a new country have increased. These factors, which occur for various reasons, are often divided into push and pull factors (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Hatton & Williamson, 2001). While push factors are considerations that compel migrants to leave their country of origin, pull

factors lead migrants to choose another country to reside in due to its potentially attractive features (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Hatton & Williamson, 2001). Both the positive and negative motivations within the push and pull factors have a range of complexities that shape the experiences migrants may face before, during and after the migration journey. It was fundamental to the present study to consider the challenges migrants confront to understand their migration dynamics.

Defining Migration, Immigration and Emigration

Migration refers to the broad concept of the movement of individuals or groups, either within a country or internationally, from one location to another (De Haas, 2014; De Haas et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2019; Toney & Bailey, 2014). Although this individual movement has various drivers that lead individuals or groups to migrate voluntarily, the drivers may also force the migration (Toney & Bailey, 2014; see Appendix A). The depiction of migration seeks to account for the structural aspects and migrants' agency in the process (Carling, 2017; Carling & Talleraas, 2016). Emigration is the process of an individual leaving their home country to permanently reside in another (Toney & Bailey, 2014). While emigration may assist in relieving population pressures on the home country, it potentially has the effect of losing skilled labour to other countries that may appear to have more favourable living conditions (De Haas et al., 2019; Toney & Bailey, 2014). Alternatively, individuals or groups who enter a new country with the intention of residing there permanently are defined as immigrants (Toney & Bailey, 2014). With an inflow of population, the receiving country's economy may strengthen or weaken due to various factors (Toney & Bailey, 2014). The combination of emigration and immigration in calculating the number of individuals leaving

or entering is known as the net flows of migration (United Nations, 2020). This is the calculation of the number of emigrants and immigrants for a specific country and determines the increase or decrease in population.

Immigration trends in South Africa

From 1995 until 2019, the number of immigrants who moved to South Africa increased by 300% (Batalova et al., 2020; United Nations, 2019, 2020, 2022; see Appendix B). Countries in the Global South are battling to develop economically and may experience political instability and various social challenges (Koehn, 2019). Migration to countries that are perceived to improve the quality of health care and development is considered a critical issue (Koehn, 2019). Furthermore, migration is fundamental in the global context due to deteriorating economic conditions, political circumstances and conflicts (Al-Khanbashi, 2020).

Migration patterns, which reveal that the primary movement of African migrants is to South Africa, with over four million migrants currently living in South Africa are highlighted in United Nations data (United Nations, 2020, 2022). The data indicate that while there was a 42% increase in emigration between 2010 and 2020 in Sub-Saharan Africa, the growth for other regions in the rest of the world was between 22 and 28% (United Nations, 2020, 2022). This reveals that Africa has a much higher increase of emigrants than the rest of the world. Furthermore, the United Nations (2019) reported that in 2015, nearly 32% of the international immigrant population into South Africa were refugees. This figure indicates how forced displacement due to conflict, persecution and other severe circumstances can significantly impact the number of immigrants moving between countries. From 1990 to 2019, there was a

4% increase in migrants as a share of the total population, which equates to approximately three million more migrants over that period in South Africa (Batalova et al., 2020; United Nations, 2019). Hatton and Williamson (2001) found that due to instability in their homes, poverty and/or economic hardship, migrants perceived South Africa as a favourable destination. While Hatton and Williamson (2001) noted specific countries of origin, there has been a general consideration of African and Southern African migration to South Africa.

The United Nations (2019) international migration flows capture the number of emigrants and immigrants during a specific period. In 2019, the data captured by the United Nations Statistical Division revealed that the four million immigrants that had entered South Africa were primarily from a general bracket named “Other South” (United Nations, 2019, 2022). Approximately 21% of the migrants who came from this bracket were from the southern hemisphere and did not have a specific origin country. The “Other North” as well as the following countries constituted nearly 60% or 2.5 million of the total number of migrants into South Africa: Mozambique (17%), Zimbabwe (9%), Lesotho (8%), Other North (7%), Namibia (4%), United Kingdom (3%), Malawi (3%), Germany (2%), Zambia (2%), Eswatini (2%), Botswana (2%) and Angola (2%) (United Nations, 2019, 2020, 2022).

Highlighting the prominence of the South African Development Community (SADC) as fundamental to the origins of the immigrants to South Africa, approximately 49% (2 million) of immigrants are from this region (United Nations, 2019, 2020, 2022). The other origin countries are notably the “Other North” category, United Kingdom and Germany, which constitute over half a million migrants into South Africa (United Nations, 2019, 2020, 2022).

Understanding the Factors that Shape Migration

Why people choose to emigrate to a new country depends on several factors. These factors can be divided into push and pull factors (Hatton & Williamson, 2001). While negative aspects in the origin country that compel individuals to leave are considered push factors, attractive aspects in the destination country that motivate individuals to immigrate are pull factors (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Hatton & Williamson, 2001).

Global Migration Patterns and Trends

The study of migration has come to the forefront of research due to the increased global pattern of migration (Tummala-Narra, 2019, 2020). The United Nations estimates that there were 271 million migrants in 2019 (Batalova et al., 2020; United Nations, 2019, 2020, 2022). The reasons individuals and families migrate vary (Jensen, 2020). De Haas (2014) considered migration as a "rite of passage in being modern" (De Haas, 2014, p. 34) due to the knowledge and experience gained in the world, which incites sophistication. However, in Africa, South America and Asia, immigration is considered the right of elite individuals who possess the financial means, education and needed visas (De Haas, 2014). Those without the financial backing and necessary documents are pushed into different directions of irregular migration, illegal migration or become refugees (De Haas, 2014). Immigrant "root causes [and] drivers" (Carling & Talleraas, 2016, p. 6) are noteworthy in European policy in relation to creating a deeper understanding of the relevant patterns as to why individuals and families migrate from Africa. "Root causes" (Carling & Talleraas, 2016, p. 6) of migration include social and political conditions that influence the decision to emigrate. The inclusive term of migration "drivers" (Carling & Talleraas, 2016, p. 6) involves the mechanisms of information

access and social networks, which are not necessarily the root causes of migration. Rather, these are synonymous with push and pull factors, highlighting their importance in European policy.

Push Factors: Challenges in Home Countries

The push factors vary for every individual and family that considers emigration. Push factors are relevant to an individual's contextual factors such as the economic, political and environmental circumstances of the origin country (Carling & Talleraas, 2016). This implies that push factors are considered relative to the Global North or South, with many low-income and middle-income countries having unfavourable economic opportunities, poverty, political instability, lack of safety and security, lack of access to essential services, and social and cultural factors such as discrimination and racism (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Tummala-Narra, 2019). Furthermore, persecution and conflict due to race, religion, tribe and political affiliation can be significant push factors when considering emigration and, in severe circumstances, may lead individuals to seek safety and security as refugees (Tummala-Narra, 2019).

Pull Factors: Opportunities in Destination Countries

Pull factors are the positive attributes of a destination country that may motivate potential migrants (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Hatton & Williamson, 2001). Pull factors may include economic opportunities, a higher standard of living, access to healthcare and education, political stability, safety and security, service delivery and social, religious and/or cultural freedoms (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Hatton & Williamson, 2001; Tummala-Narra, 2019). South Africa is widely considered a strong economy with a relatively stable economy

and infrastructure (US International Trade Administration, 2024). Consequently, South Africa may be considered to be a desirable destination. In addition, the perception of greater personal freedoms and opportunities can be a powerful pull factor for prospective migrants (Carling & Talleraas, 2016).

Multilevel Analysis of Migration Patterns

Jensen (2020) offered an alternate understanding of migration patterns in which there are three migrant decision-making levels: macrolevel, mesolevel and microlevel. Macrolevel decision-making involves situational factors such as personal values, characteristics of the destination country and country of origin, an accurate perception of the destination as well as accurate and objective constraints that include the cost of relocation, social approval, government policies and family obligations (Jensen, 2020). Mesolevel decision-making involves the entire family system because of the added benefit of the whole family migrating (Hagen-Zanker, 2008, as cited in Jensen, 2020). Key factors in these decisions that encapsulate the entire family system include gender, age, cultural norms and personality (risk-taking and adaptability), social expectations, economics and opportunities (Jensen, 2020). Individual or microlevel decision-making may be investigated through a critical lens. The United Kingdom Household Panel Survey revealed that less than 10% of couples migrate if only the male counterpart is considering migrating. This demonstrates the mesolevel dynamics in migration, where it is often a family strategy to mitigate risks and ensure the family's survival (Jensen, 2020). Montenero (1977, as cited in Jensen, 2020) interviewed 400 immigrants to Canada and found various reasons individuals consider before migrating, including multiple aspects such as the need to move, individuals wanting to renew their lives,

change they deem necessary in their circumstances, searching for sustained safety and security, and the pursuit of financial stability (employment). Additional reasons included the economic issues and notable over-population in the participants' home country. Having an anchor migrant who previously migrated and sent funding for other individuals to follow was a factor that influenced these individuals. The latter is similar to the pull factor of already migrated family members. Furthermore, the pull factor of better-quality education is linked to a tied migrant, specifically an individual who migrated as a minor and had no choice (Montenero, 1977, as cited in Jensen, 2020).

Acculturation

Acculturation Strategies

The seminal research conducted by Berry in the 20th century highlights the importance of understanding the experiences of migrants when entering a new country (Berry, 1970, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2019; Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry & Sam, 2016). The anthropological lens of acculturation re-emphasises the need for cross-cultural psychology in culturally plural societies (Berry, 2001, 2006; see Appendix C). Portes and Rivas (2011) described the two theoretical perspectives of child acculturation and specifically considered migrant children. While culturalists emphasise the cultural and linguistic life of the country of destination, structuralists highlight the socioeconomic hierarchy (Portes & Rivas, 2011). The culturalist and structuralist perspectives were conceptualised by Hall (1980). The middle ground of acculturation notes that relatively impoverished immigrant families face more significant difficulties due to financial, educational, societal and linguistic issues (Portes & Rivas, 2011).

The consequences of acculturation are variable (Berry, 1997, 2001; Berry & Sam, 2016). Social and personal variables in the country-of-origin, issues encountered in the society of settlement, inherent cultural phenomena and complications that arise during acculturation all have varying psychological consequences (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2016). Three different levels of difficulty have been identified for psychological acculturation: behavioural shifts, acculturative stress and psychopathology (Berry, 1997). Behavioural shifts include learning new behavioural norms that are congruent with the destination society and adhering to their standards in a consistent manner (Berry, 1997). Besides difficulties in psychological acculturation, individuals may encounter "culture shock" (Berry, 1997, p. 13). Berry (1970, as cited in Berry, 2006, p. 287) preferred the term "acculturative stress" because of its relation to environmental stressors. In addition, the term "shock" (Berry, 1997, p. 13) suggests negative responses and experiences. Third, when significant psychological acculturation difficulties are experienced, there are cultural contexts that exceed the individual's ability to cope because of aspects such as the magnitude or speed of change, which leads to the "psychopathology" perspective (Berry, 1997, p. 13). Acculturation involves the long-term changes an individual or group encounters (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2016). Ward and Kennedy (1993) distinguished between two varieties of adaptation: sociocultural and psychological. While sociocultural adaptation includes coping with daily problems such as work, community and school, psychological adaptation comprises personal satisfaction, good mental health and a sense of personal and cultural identity (Berry, 1997, 2006; Ward & Kennedy, 1993).

Key Factors Shaping Acculturation

Acculturation has often been considered to be synonymous with assimilation (Berry & Sam, 2016). As noted by Berry and Sam (2016), assimilation is incorrectly applied as acculturation because of the unidirectional influence on the process, unlike that of acculturation which is bidirectional. Assimilation is considered within the acculturation framework as one of four strategies, which also include integration, separation and marginalisation (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2016; see Appendix D). While integration refers to balancing and maintaining both cultural identities (Berry & Sam, 2016), separation occurs when individuals retain their original culture and avoid interaction with the new culture (Berry & Sam, 2016). Marginalisation involves losing a connection with both the original and new cultures (Berry & Sam, 2016). These strategies indicate how acculturation occurs (Berry & Sam, 2016).

Each strategy is noted by the intersection of preferences of three scenarios: power, cultural continuity and contact (Berry & Sam, 2016). Power involves the choice of the nondominant group and their preference towards the two scenarios of either assimilation or separation (Berry & Sam, 2016). Cultural continuity, which is the preference for maintaining the original culture, and contact, which is the preference for participation in the destination culture, are both relative to the power the nondominant group of migrants has in the acculturation scenario and their preferences (Berry & Sam, 2016). The assimilation of a group incorporates the power of the nondominant group's choice to embrace the destination culture and abandon their original culture (Berry, 1997, 2001; Berry & Sam, 2016). In contrast, the separation strategy preserves the original culture and rejects the destination

culture (Berry, 1997, 2001; Berry & Sam, 2016). The rejection of both the destination and original cultures may lead to the marginalisation of a group (Berry, 1997, 2001; Berry & Sam, 2016). Finally, integration is the nondominant group's interest in maintaining the original culture as well as embracing the destination culture (Berry, 1997, 2001; Berry & Sam, 2016). Empirical evidence has shown that the children of such families can overcome these upward mobility obstacles "through learning the language and culture of the host society while preserving their home country language, values and customs" (Portes & Rivas, 2011, p. 219). Notably, Berry (1997) found that there is a variation in the strategies, depending on time and context. The greater societal context of the dominant destination group affects the strategy due to either the individualistic or multicultural nature of the society (Berry, 1997). Strategies vary during the process until individuals or groups consider the strategy as satisfying their needs.

Unique Stressors Faced by Child Migrants

Although adapting to a new environment is generally difficult, child migrants face specific challenges during this period (Schapiro et al., 2021). Difficulties with social integration and academic progress can lead to feelings of isolation and frustration (Schapiro et al., 2021). Child migrants who have to manage the challenge of language barriers may feel the effects academically and socially (Schapiro et al., 2021). Schapiro et al. (2021) found that cultural differences and language barriers led to an increased risk of discrimination, bullying and social exclusion in migrant children and further revealed that the inability to communicate effectively had a direct impact on their relationships and capacity to participate in school. In addition, the new educational system the child has to navigate may create

significant stress, potentially impacting their academic performance (Portes & Rivas, 2011). The cumulative effect of these stressors and the loss of the support network of friends, extended family and their community ties may leave a child feeling lonely, disconnected and insecure (Schapiro et al., 2021). Cultural norms, expectations and values may lead to identity confusion, which is particularly difficult for adolescents to manage with the additional inherent task of attempting to understand their sense of self (Berry, 1997, 2001, 2006).

Migration's Impact on Family Relationships

Migration can have a profound influence on the relationships between adults and children (Schapiro et al., 2021). The disruption of traditional hierarchies in a family system due to role reversal creates a shift in dynamics for the adult and child. Children may need to assume new roles such as translating for their parents or navigating administrative systems (Schapiro et al., 2021). The stress of unemployment, discrimination and/or acculturation may also affect parents' capacity to manage the household and their emotional availability to assist their children effectively (Zetino et al., 2020). Moreover, communication difficulties may emanate from cultural misunderstandings between parent and child, which may hinder the effective communication and mutual understanding needed during the migration (Schapiro et al., 2021). During migration, parents and children may be separated, which can have lasting psychological effects on both the adults and children.

Longitudinal Effects of Childhood Migration on Adult Functioning

Migration may influence various aspects of well-being and functioning (Betancourt et al., 2017; Portes & Rivas, 2011; Tummala-Narra, 2019). Betancourt et al. (2017) noted that the risk of developing mental health conditions in adulthood such as anxiety or depression

may increase due to migration experiences. The process and experiences of migration can have an impact on a child's identity formation (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2016). Migration influences the individual's sense of cultural belonging, self-esteem and overall well-being (Berry, 1997; Berry & Sam, 2016). In addition, migration is often considered from the perspective of adults in relation to their occupation and career trajectory. However, the impact of migration on a child's educational and occupational attainment can also be affected (Portes & Rivas, 2011). It is imperative to acknowledge that migration experiences may also foster resilience, adaptability and coping mechanisms that may have positive effects in adulthood (Tummala-Narra, 2019).

Navigating the Multiple Challenges of Acculturation

According to Sluzki (1979), the migration process can exacerbate existing stresses and potentially trigger mental health issues. Sluzki's (1979) five stages of migration, highlight the continuum of the process of migration. The five stages comprise the preparatory stage, act of migration, period of overcompensation, period of decompensation and transgenerational phenomena (Sluzki, 1979). Families experience heightened stress as they transition through these stages, while also navigating varying coping mechanisms for each stage (Sluzki, 1979; Schapiro et al., 2021). This stress is compounded by factors migrants may experience such as low socioeconomic status, which involves low-income employment and inferior education (Vaughn et al., 2017). The stress associated with such increases the risk of adverse childhood experiences, particularly household dysfunction, physical neglect and emotional neglect (Alink et al., 2013, as cited in Vaughn et al., 2017). In addition, devastating economic consequences have been linked to child abuse; research has shown an

immediate increase in Google searches for phrases linked to child abuse and neglect (D. J. Bryant et al., 2020; R. A. Bryant, 2021). Furthermore, Panchal et al. (2021) noted major disruptions in routine, including school closures, social isolation, loss of employment and income insecurity, which may lead to an increase in risk for substance abuse problems and parental mental health problems. Further challenges such as parents' or caregivers' extended separation from their children may lead to a greater disruption in family life and increase the risk of ACEs and mental health difficulties (Bennett et al., 2015). Moreover, children who are separated from their caregivers may be more vulnerable to a range of alternate ACEs such as discrimination, persecution due to the prospect of migration, physical neglect and abuse (Bennett et al., 2015). The interconnectedness of the individual to the family and how ACEs can profoundly impact a child's development highlights the importance of understanding the general system (Suppes, 2022). This interwoven dynamic between the individual and family implies that ACEs may interfere with the various familial aspects of communication, attachment, support structures, role functioning, trust and overall well-being.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Categorising Adverse Childhood Experiences

ACEs encompass a range of traumatic events that a child may encounter (Felitti et al., 1998; Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). These experiences may have lasting and profound effects on an individual's biopsychosocial well-being throughout their lifespan. Felitti et al. (1998) noted six major categories of ACEs: household dysfunction, physical neglect, emotional neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and other adversity. It is imperative to consider the distinct features of each category and how these may have life-

altering consequences. Household dysfunction can have a disruptive effect on a child's sense of security, which may lead to attachment and various other complications due to the potential exposure to substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence and divorce or separation (Felitti et al., 1998). Abuse encompasses three major sub-categories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, each of which inflicts unique forms of harm on a child's development (Felitti et al., 1998). The penultimate, but equally severe subcategory of ACEs, is physical and emotional neglect. Other Adversity was considered in further detail by Hays-Grudo and Morris (2020). This category included witnessing community violence, experiencing natural disasters, being bullied or socially rejected, living in poverty or economic hardship and suffering discrimination and/or racism (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). These ACEs may be considered a failure to provide for a child's physical and emotional needs, hindering their ability to meet appropriate developmental milestones and, therefore, their healthy growth (Felitti et al., 1998; Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Understanding these distinct types of ACEs is fundamental in comprehending the complex challenges faced by individuals, particularly immigrant children and adults, who may have been exposed to a wide range of these ACEs before, during and after the immigration process.

a) The Impact of Household Dysfunction

Household dysfunction often encompasses unstable and unpredictable ACEs in the familial environment (Felitti et al., 1998). The factors underlying household dysfunction include substance abuse, mental illness, incarceration, intimate partner violence and divorce or separation (Felitti et al., 1998). These factors may have lasting effects on children and remain with them as adolescents and throughout their adulthood (Vaughn et al., 2017). The

variability of a household during immigration, with the stressors faced during this time and through the process of acculturation, could compound issues such as economic hardship, social isolation and familial conflict and subsequently, lead to a range of subcategories under household dysfunction (Vaughn et al., 2017).

Substance Abuse within the Household. Substance abuse and witnessing parents or caregivers abusing substances have far-reaching consequences, beyond the child's initial experience of the scenario (Anda et al., 2006; Dube et al., 2002; Edwards et al., 2003; Felitti et al., 1998). Exposure to substance abuse can lead to physical and emotional neglect because caregivers may prioritise their addiction over their child's needs (Anda et al., 2006). The stressors faced by immigrant families may exacerbate the substance abuse, with it becoming a maladaptive coping mechanism (Anda et al., 2006; Venta et al., 2024).

Parental Mental Illness and its Effects. The children of caregivers with mental illness may experience inconsistent parenting, including general caregiving, emotional instability, exposure to irregular behaviour and potential exposure to conflict and stress (Radke-Yarrow, 2009). Mental illness in the household can create an unpredictable environment with disruptive family behaviour and routines, leading to feelings of insecurity, detachment from the caregiver and insecure attachment styles (Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Radke-Yarrow, 2009). Flouri and Buchanan (2003) suggested that the absence of a parental figure or their unintentional absence due to hospitalisation, intense treatment periods or the incapacitating effects of the illness itself can increase the risk of negative outcomes for a child. These risks of adverse outcomes for children include lower educational attainment and personal mental health problems (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). The stressors of migration,

acculturation and potential trauma prior to, during and/or after the migration process may exacerbate the caregiver's current mental illness issues (Radke-Yarrow, 2009; Vaughn et al., 2017). In addition, excessive stress may trigger new issues or mental illnesses, further impacting the well-being of the family (Vaughn et al., 2017). Furthermore, the broader challenges immigrant families encounter includes barriers to accessing health services and particularly, mental health services due to a range of factors such as language barriers, cultural and mental illness stigma and lack of knowledge about available resources (Venta et al., 2024). Mental illness that is untreated for extended periods and exacerbated by the stressors faced in the immigration process could escalate, leading to involvement with the criminal justice system and, in severe cases, incarceration, thus creating further trauma and disruption for the children of these families.

Consequence of Parental Incarceration. Parental incarceration is a significant form of household dysfunction. Children of incarcerated parents often experience forms of shame, stigma and social isolation (Murray & Farrington, 2005). Economic hardship can create instability in the family and insecurity regarding potential basic needs (Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Migrant families with a parent or both parents incarcerated can be particularly devastating. The loss of the parent to incarceration may facilitate a wide range of unique challenges related to aspects of immigrating such as legal status, access to resources and even potential deportation. In addition, the separation may emphasise the stressors the child and family have experienced during migration, particularly in the acculturation process (Wildeman et al., 2014). These factors may have a compounding effect that may significantly increase the risk of ACEs and have several long-term negative outcomes for immigrant

children such as delinquency, mental health problems and forming lasting, healthy relationships (Murray & Farrington, 2005; Turney & Goodsell, 2018).

Witnessing Intimate Partner Violence. Even if a child is not physically harmed, exposure to a traumatic experience, particularly intimate partner violence, can lead to severe emotional distress, behavioural problems, attachment issues and general difficulties in forming healthy relationships (Evans et al., 2008; Holt et al., 2008). Furthermore, children who have been exposed to intimate partner violence may experience feelings of fear, helplessness and guilt (Holt et al., 2008). An environment of fear and instability may negatively affect a child's security, attachment and development, resulting in lasting repercussions (Holt et al., 2008). Further complications are found in situations related to immigrants and intimate partner violence, including cultural factors that discourage seeking outside assistance, language barriers limiting access to information and resources, and fear of legal repercussions and incarceration (Vaughn et al., 2017). These considerations may create a problematic environment for migrant families to navigate and exacerbate intimate partner violence. The challenges faced by migrant families may be compounded by any further breakdowns in the family structure through divorce or separation, adding an additional stressor to the children in the family and possible ACEs.

Family Disruption: Divorce and Separation. A disruption in a child's entire lifestyle may occur with a change in living arrangements, school environments and overall social contexts, creating further disruptions in their stability (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Divorce or separation can add additional layers of complexity to migrant children's acculturation process, including navigating different cultural expectations and norms during this family

restructure and the relationship dynamics in the family (Bennett et al., 2015; Tummala-Narra, 2019). In addition, pre-existing vulnerabilities related to ACEs may be exacerbated, which may lead to severe mental health and behavioural problems (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Neglect is a particularly pervasive and depriving form of adversity characterised by the absence of or inadequate essential care and support (Slack et al., 2004). Although the lack of action is different to the presence of harm, it is just as detrimental to a child and potentially more difficult to detect or address (Slack et al., 2004). Neglect becomes a higher risk when divorce or separation of the caregivers is taking place (Slack et al., 2004).

b) Abuse: The Maltreatment and Violation of Children

Child abuse is a major public health concern that has lasting and devastating consequences for society, families and particularly children (Ports et al., 2020). There are several different types of child abuse that are all extremely harmful (Ports et al., 2020), including include physical, sexual and emotional abuse. A plethora of research has been conducted to understand these forms of child abuse and how they affect an individual's physical and mental health, relational and personality structures, and emotional well-being (Brown et al., 2024; Felitti et al., 1998).

Physical Abuse. Physical aggression towards a child by a parent, caregiver or any other individual is considered physical abuse (Hughes et al., 2017). Physical aggression and acts of violence may range from minor physical harm such as slapping and shoving to severe injuries, which may include bruises, fractures, burns and head trauma (Stoltenborgh et al., 2013, 2015). Research has revealed that punishment that was once considered the norm such as corporal punishment may have lasting and detrimental effects. Although corporal

punishment was employed with the intention of disciplining children, it has been shown to be associated with various negative outcomes, including mental health problems, slower cognitive development, increased aggression and future intimate partner violence in adulthood (Durrant & Ensom, 2012). Ports et al. (2020) noted that physical abuse is the most reported form of child maltreatment in many countries. Physically abused children may be more likely to develop behavioural problems, depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse disorders, low self-esteem and personality disorders (Hughes et al., 2017). Furthermore, a child's cognitive development may be impaired due to the physical trauma or the stress and trauma of the abuse, thus potentially affecting their academic performance, social capacity and overall well-being throughout their lives (Hughes et al., 2017). Developing secure attachment styles can be disrupted by the chronic stress and trauma associated with physical abuse, which may lead to further difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships throughout one's life (Stoltenborgh et al., 2013). Sheffler et al. (2020), in an attempt to understand the outcomes of children that have experienced these ACEs, revealed that later in life the child who was once abused may follow this pattern and abuse others in their own capacity as an adult. Fundamentally, understanding the changes during the immigration process and acculturation phase may create further challenges for families, potentially increasing the risk of abuse (Vaughn et al., 2017).

Sexual Abuse. Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is a deeply harmful form of child maltreatment with significant and lasting consequences (Putnam, 2003). This form of abuse occurs when a child under the age of consent is subjected to sexual activity (Pereda et al., 2009). This may include but is not limited to sexual intercourse, exploitation, exhibitionism,

touching and fondling (Pereda et al., 2009). The difficulties involved in forming lasting relationships due to the fundamental disruption in the child's sense of safety, trust, bodily autonomy and attachment is of particular concern in the child's development (Putnam, 2003). These factors may lead to various psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance abuse disorders, behavioural issues and personality disorders (Felitti et al., 1998). A range of health issues have been noted, including chronic pain, gastrointestinal problems and gynaecological issues in CSA (Putnam, 2003). Massetti et al (2020) found that migrant children may be at further risk understanding and reporting abuse in any form, particularly CSA. This may be the result of language barriers, cultural differences and/or social isolation due to immigration or acculturation (Massetti et al., 2020).

Emotional Abuse. The behaviours associated with emotional abuse may harm a child's emotional and psychological development (Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). Emotionally abused children are subject to situations where they may be under constant criticism, rejection, humiliation, shame, verbal aggression and threats (Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). Emotional abuse is difficult to detect and therefore, overlooked as it leaves no physical scars such as the other forms of abuse (Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). The development of a child's cognitive abilities may also be hindered, including their academic achievement (Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). Furthermore, the abuse can have an impact on other facets and impair factors such as the child's memory, attention and problem-solving skills (Greene et al., 2020; Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). The subsequent effects of this are that the child is at an increased risk of suffering mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and personality disorders. Furthermore, the development of a child's sense of self-worth or ego

development may be thwarted (Greene et al., 2020). Due to different parenting practices and cultures, migrants may have an erratic understanding of what appropriate behaviour entails (Greene et al., 2020; Lippard & Nemeroff, 2020). Communication styles may potentially be interpreted as emotional abuse and alternatively misinterpreted as innocent communication. Understanding these differences and the stressors faced during the immigration process may assist in determining emotional abuse relative to the culture and context of the family and child.

c) Neglect: The Deprivation of Needs

This category signifies a failure to provide for a child's physical and emotional needs (Felitti et al., 1998). While physical neglect may be defined as not providing food, clothing, security and/or shelter, emotional neglect may be characterised by a lack of affection, attention and emotional support (Dahake et al., 2018). Neglect can have a severe effect on a child's health and development, which may lead to long-term consequences for their physical, emotional and psychological well-being (Dahake et al., 2018; Felitti et al., 1998).

Physical Neglect. The Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) defined physical neglect as the failure of a parent or caregiver to provide for a child's basic needs, which includes food, clothing, shelter, supervision and medical care (Sedlak et al., 2010). Dahake et al. (2018) further noted that there is a correlation between developmental delays, poor hygiene and inadequate clothing when the physical neglect of a child is considered. Malnutrition, impaired growth and increased susceptibility to illness and injury are some of the significant consequences of physical neglect (Slack et al., 2004). Physical neglect can be exacerbated by poverty (Slack et al., 2004). In the context of migrant

families, lack of access to resources and language barriers, with potential economic hardships when migrating, may make it difficult for parents or caregivers to adequately provide for their children's needs (Slack et al., 2004). In addition, the chronic stress associated with physical neglect may have a direct effect on the development of secure attachments, which may lead to long-term emotional and psychological difficulties in adulthood (Mathews & Martin, 2016).

Emotional Neglect. A pervasive form of ACEs, emotional neglect, refers to the failure of a parent or caregiver to provide for a child's emotional needs (Sedlak et al., 2010; van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994; Wright et al., 2009). Emotional neglect includes a broad spectrum of emotional needs, including lack of affection, attention, emotional support, soothing, comfort and guidance (van der Kolk & Fisler, 1994). Children that have been exposed to emotional neglect may struggle with forming secure attachments, emotional regulation and developing a positive sense of self (French et al., 2022; Wright et al., 2009). Managing these may become increasingly difficult, leading to feelings of loneliness and alienation (Petersen et al., 2014). In addition, the development of healthy coping mechanisms may be disrupted by the absence of a secure parental figure (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020; Wright et al., 2009). This may further hinder their ability to adapt and form new relationships due to the stress and potential trauma associated with migration and acculturation (Sharabany & Israeli, 2008; Tummala-Narra, 2019). Wright et al. (2009) found that childhood emotional neglect was significantly associated with psychological distress as a young adult. The symptoms noted included anxiety, depression and dissociation.

d) Other Adversity: Expanding the Scope of Adversity

Felitti et al. (1998) did not explicitly define "other adversity" as a subcategory of ACEs. However, they noted that the list they produced was not exhaustive. The scope of the ACEs framework has subsequently been broadened through further research to include experiences such as witnessing community violence, experiencing natural disasters, being bullied or socially rejected, living in poverty or economic hardship and suffering discrimination and/or racism (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). These additions are understood to have similar lasting impacts on physical and psychological health and well-being (Hughes et al., 2017). Hays-Grudo and Morris, (2020) stated that ACEs have been considered primarily through the lens that they occur within the family system. Yet, these additional considerations indicate that ACEs encompass adversity that is external to the family system.

Social rejection and bullying are adversities a child may face from a range of individuals (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Both their peers and adults can socially reject and bully a child, highlighting the understanding that this is not family-specific (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). The feelings of isolation and low self-esteem linked to these types of adversities may increase vulnerability to mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Similarly, poverty and economic hardship can disrupt a child's sense of safety and security due to issues such as unstable housing, food insecurity and limited access to resources (Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020). Accordingly, a child may experience difficulties in school, impaired social relationships and a heightened risk of chronic health conditions (Edwards et al., 2003; Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020; Hughes et al., 2017). Furthermore, feelings of shame, embarrassment and inadequacy after experiencing

various forms of discrimination and racism can compound the noted impacts on a child's mental and physical health (Edwards et al., 2003; Hays-Grudo & Morris, 2020; Hughes et al., 2017). Although this category is broad, understanding a child's wider social and economic context is vital to understanding their needs.

Examining the Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences

Understanding the extent of ACEs is a global public health concern (Hughes et al., 2017). Although the prevalence of ACEs varies widely across regions and countries, research has shown that a substantial portion of individuals worldwide have experienced at least one ACE during their childhood (Hughes et al., 2017; Merrick et al., 2020). Hughes et al. (2017) and Merrick et al. (2020) have both revealed a strong association between ACEs and negative health outcomes, including mental health problems and chronic diseases. The Adverse Childhood Experiences International Questionnaire (ACE-IQ), developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), is an assessment employed to understand ACEs across different cultural contexts (Pace et al., 2022). The purpose of Pace et al.'s (2022) systematic review of the ACE-IQ was to understand the intrafamily ACEs more than the external considerations. Although this research was conducted in communities in the Global North, Asia and areas in Africa, challenges related to translating and adapting these measures to ensure cultural relevance and sensitivity remain, particularly in the Global South and low-income and low-resource settings (Ceccarelli et al., 2022).

Global Prevalence: The Global Burden of ACEs

Research has often centred on the Global North as have studies on ACEs (Hughes et al., 2017; Massetti et al., 2020). Several of these studies have revealed that physical violence

and witnessing community violence are particularly prevalent globally (Amene et al., 2024; Asmundson & Afifi, 2020; Brown et al., 2024). Pace et al.'s (2022) systematic review and Hughes et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis revealed the prevalence of ACEs in the 21 countries noted in their analyses. ACEs were prevalent in 57% of the approximately 128,000 participants (Hughes et al., 2017). Approximately 13% of these participants had experienced at least four ACEs (Hughes et al., 2017). Furthermore, Pace et al. (2022), in their systematic review, found that of the 63 documents included in this research, "on average, more than 75% of community low-risk populations experienced at least one potentially traumatic adversity during life" (Pace et al., 2022, p. 14). Furthermore, Pace et al. (2022) revealed that on average, the respondents experienced two ACEs, primarily emotional abuse and bullying. Contrary to the primary types of ACEs noted, Brown et al. (2024) revealed that while community violence was the most prevalent among males (55%), experiencing physical violence was the most prevalent among females (36.5%).

The NIS-4 found that the most common form of endangerment standard maltreatment is physical neglect, which has affected nearly 1.2million children throughout the United States (Sedlak et al., 2010). Manly et al. (2001, as cited in Burton et al., 2015) revealed that approximately 16,3% of children in Europe and North America have suffered a form of neglect. This emphasises the possible prevalence of neglect in South Africa and the need for further research as it was also noted that "studies of neglect from low- and middle-income countries are rare: all the data thus far comes from Europe and North America" (Burton et al., 2015, p. 15). Emotional neglect has been identified as the second most common form of child maltreatment, affecting approximately 1.2 million children in the United States (Sedlak et al.,

2010). A disproportionate increase in the rate of emotional neglect in Black and Hispanic children was found by NIS-4, creating concerns for potential disparities in various communities and the recognition and/or response to this issue (Sedlak et al., 2010).

ACEs in Africa: The pervasiveness of ACEs in Africa

Recent research has shifted attention to not only target the Global North, but also focus on the Global South, utilising more representative data at a global scale (Amene et al., 2024; Nazareth et al., 2022; Pace et al., 2022). The research related to the Violence Against Children and Youth Surveys (VACS) highlighted the prevalence and impact of ACEs in the Global South (Amene et al., 2024). This suggests research has shifted focus to Africa with countries such as Cote d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa all having conducted some research on ACEs to understand the phenomenon and how this may affect various communities and different cultures (Amene et al., 2024; Asmundson & Afifi, 2020; Brown et al., 2024). It is noteworthy that the prevalence of ACEs in Africa is higher than that of the Global North (Amene et al., 2024). As noted previously, Hughes et al. (2017) revealed there was a prevalence of 57% in the Global North. Amene et al. (2024) found that between 68.8% and 78.6% of females and 79.6% and 87.1% of males had experienced at least one ACE. These prevalence figures, from an African multi-country analysis, were not specific to South Africa. Burton et al. (2015), in a study on the range of ACEs that young people in South Africa may have faced, revealed the following: Sexual abuse (19.8%), physical abuse (34.4%), emotional abuse (16.1%), emotional and physical neglect (21.3%), family violence (23.1%), bullying (19.7%), threatened with violence (21.4%), attacked with (15.9%) and without (19.2%) a weapon and robbed (26.2%). While each of these ACEs was

reported separately, the overall percentage thereof is unknown, thus emphasising the importance of this research in the Global South.

ACEs in South Africa: A Deep Dive into the South African Context

The prevalence of ACEs in South Africa concurs with that of the country's sub-Saharan counterparts. Furthermore, the prevalence of these appears to be higher in that of young adults. Manyema and Richter (2019) found that 88% of young adults had experienced at least one ACE in their lifetime. Economic hardship and household dysfunction were the most prevalent in their sample (Manyema & Richter, 2019). In addition, Craig et al. (2022) revealed that approximately 40% of South African adults experienced some form of emotional neglect before the age of 18 years. Further research has demonstrated that approximately 45% of South African adults have experienced parental divorce or separation (Manyema & Richter, 2019). Moreover, over half of South African adults have been exposed to ACEs (Craig et al., 2022). The Optimus Study on Child Abuse, Violence and Neglect in South Africa found that 21.3% of young people reported experiencing some form of neglect (Burton et al., 2015). Burton et al. (2015) also revealed that 16.1% of young people in South Africa have experienced emotional abuse or neglect. However, girls were more likely to report such than boys. In the household surveys, 19.6% and 12.8% of girls and boys, respectively reported this (Burton et al., 2015). The NIS-4 found that the incidence of physical neglect in rural communities was higher than in urban areas, suggesting that the geographic location of the family and potentially where the family is in the migration process may also play a pivotal role in the prevalence of physical neglect (Sedlak et al., 2010).

The revised ACEs and the original list of 10 ACEs noted by Felitti et al. (1998) were considered through a South African lens by Manyema and Richter (2019) who emphasised the importance of other factors. Manyema and Richter (2019) found the added factors of community violence, a caregiver's poverty and unemployment, household instability, exposure to HIV/AIDS-related family issues, chronic illness and lack of access to healthcare had a relevant prevalence of 43% in the South African context. Jewkes et al. (2010) revealed a range of various ACEs, which varied between genders in rural South Africa. They found that both men and women experienced the following ACEs, respectively: physical hardship (65.8% and 46.8%), physical punishment (89.3% and 94.4%), sexual abuse (39.1% and 16.7%), emotional abuse (54.7% and 56.4%) and emotional neglect (41.6% and 39.6%).

These findings emphasise the unique challenges faced by the South African population. The prevalence indicates that South Africans encounter a higher prevalence of ACEs than other sub-Saharan countries and a notably higher prevalence than the Global North. As yet, the reasons underlying the increased prevalence in South Africa and the Global South are not clearly understood.

The Interplay of Migration and ACEs

The metaphorical 'migration' through life stages can be viewed as the adaptations and potential negative outcomes accompanying these 'migrations' (Sharabany & Israeli, 2008). The familiar space to which a child was accustomed in their young lives contrasts with the unfamiliar changes of adolescence or the anxiety-inducing challenges of a new country, culture and value system that families face when migrating. Whether a life-stage transition or the transition of migrating to a new country, both can be regarded as migrating and

navigating a new environment (Sharabany & Israeli, 2008). Adapting to a new country is a difficult rite of passage and complications may arise related to the emotional separation to who one was attached (Sharabany & Israeli, 2008). Separation from the familiar is part of the migration experience. Furthermore, the possibility of migrant populations experiencing racial, cultural and xenophobic marginalisation is high (Tummala-Narra, 2020). Tummala-Narra (2020, p. 50) noted, "It further reflects the inevitable loss and disappointment, traumatic stress and shifts in identity produced in an immigrant's adjustment to living in the new, adoptive country."

A disruption of family structures and routines can increase stress and conflict (Panchal et al., 2021). This disruption can exacerbate the risk of ACEs, particularly household dysfunction and neglect (Panchal et al., 2021). Migrants move through the grieving process of losing their homeland, which Sharabany and Israeli (2008) compared to grieving for the loss of a loved one. Stages of numbing, yearning, disorganisation and despair can hamper adult caregivers' ability to manage their family's experiences and accordingly, ACEs emerge as household dysfunction, physical neglect, emotional abuse and emotional neglect (Sharabany & Israeli, 2008). The accrued responsibility of acculturating and adapting to the new country, culture and value system with the added negative sentiment toward migrants creates an anxiety-inducing, challenging environment for families and adult caregivers to navigate (Akhtar, 2010).

By highlighting household dysfunction and emotional and physical neglect, Bennet et al. (2015) discussed the typical behaviours immigrant parents in South Africa display. Bennett et al. (2015) stated that migrant parents in South Africa are highly unlikely to include

their children in the initial move to the destination, but rather children only migrate years after their parents and only 11% of children are included in the initial move. The initial family member is viewed as an anchor in the destination country and only later does the child join this family member (Montenero, 1977, as cited in Jensen, 2020). While household dysfunction as an ACE has been noted through the separation of parents, Bennett et al. (2015) explained that children are often left with alternate family members as caregivers. Furthermore, Bennett et al. (2015) found that low-income migrant families who immigrated with their children were more likely to live in informal housing and were unlikely to have access to water, sanitation, electricity and refuse removal. Hughes et al. (2017) stated that children who are exposed to multiple ACEs are at increased risk for negative outcomes in their adulthood due to the disruption in their development and overall well-being.

Systems Theory and Family Systems Theory

The theoretical framework that was employed in the current study uses a group of associated statements that assist in understanding the concepts relevant to the topic and research questions (Fain, 2013). Systems theory, particularly family systems theory, has been used as the fundamental consideration in understanding the intricacies of families and migration. These theories highlight the interplay of interpersonal relationships, family dynamics and general systems as suitable frameworks. The concepts of general systems theory and the origins thereof are considered first. Subsequently, the perspective of how family systems and the relationships are as crucial as the individuals themselves is explored.

General Systems Theory

In World War II, the mathematical construct of general systems theory was developed to facilitate predictability (Suppes, 2022). This was later adapted in the social sciences as it gained popularity during the 1950s and 1960s (Suppes, 2022). It provided a new perspective on understanding complex systems such as a family and that these systems all have a level of commonality in structure and organisation (Suppes, 2022). Fundamentally, a system is defined as a set of interdependent components that form a whole when considered together (Galvin et al., 2006). A central feature of this theory is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Becvar & Becvar, 2014; Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). This concept leads to the ideal that when attempting to understand the system as a whole, the relationships between the parts must be examined with the same consideration as the individual components (Becvar & Becvar, 2014; Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Von Bertalanffy, 1972). Systems are relevant on various levels: the individual level, community level and macrolevel (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Migration and ACEs have the capacity to infiltrate multiple system levels such as family, education, work, finances, recreation and government (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). These various systems may have an effect on migrants and must be considered when understanding migrants' experiences.

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory followed general systems theory (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Applying systems theory to the family meant that the family was viewed as a whole (Goldenberg et al., 2016). This unique approach to the family was an endeavour to

understand the interacting relationships within the family in unison with understanding the individual members (Goldenberg et al., 2016). The notion that communication between family members forms, maintains and transforms these relationships is a central consideration in family systems theory (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). Distinct patterns of communication emerge within family systems, which play a fundamental role (Goldenberg et al., 2016).

a) Circular influence

Circular influence replaces the traditional cause and effect model and considers circular causation as a fundamental notion (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). Circular causation emphasises that behaviours are not isolated, but rather occur in response to patterns of interaction. One behaviour may be considered as both the trigger and response to a second behaviour (Galvin et al., 2006). This is linked to the notion that there is a continuous feedback loop and that behaviours are fundamentally interdependent, highlighting the interplay of family dynamics (Galvin et al., 2006). These loops help systems maintain balance or lead to changes over time (Watzlawick et al., 1980).

b) Boundaries

Boundaries in family systems theory indicate the level of permeability between a system and the external environment (Mehta et al., 2009; Minuchin, 1974). Families lie on a continuum between rigid and permeable boundaries. While rigid boundaries limit the interaction between external systems, permeable boundaries afford a greater level of interaction (Mehta et al., 2009). A permeable system is considered an open system that allows the flow of information between systems and within the system itself (Goldenberg et al., 2016). These boundaries shape how individuals and the family interact with each other

and external systems such as schools and communities, which, in turn, has an effect on the family's adaptability (Goldenberg et al., 2016).

c) Differentiation of the Self

Bowen (1978) highlighted the key concept of differentiation. This concept relates to how an individual has the ability to maintain a sense of autonomy while balancing the emotional connections with the family (Bowen, 1978). Differentiated individuals can maintain their autonomy and their interconnectedness with the family system simultaneously (Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Schweer-Collins et al., 2017). Differentiation, which is fundamental to healthy family dynamics, highlights the importance of individuality and necessary emotional support with relationships (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Schweer-Collins et al., 2017). On the contrary, poorly differentiated individuals have difficulty with emotional fusion and become emotionally reactive and dependent on the responses of others in the system.

d) Homeostasis

The basis of homeostasis on family systems theory occurs when a family encounters internal or external stress and it is still able to maintain balance (Archer, 2013; Carlson & Dermer, 2017). The family system tends to return to familiar patterns of behaviour, which may happen unconsciously (Carlson & Dermer, 2017). Although this may sound as though the family is maintaining stability, there are circumstances in which it perpetuates dysfunctional behaviour (Carlson & Dermer, 2017). Families who resist change from unhealthy patterns may create further dysfunctional patterns. The process of recognising homeostasis is central to family therapy (Goldenberg et al., 2016). This identification assists with understanding certain behaviours and interactions, which maintain and/or reinforce

support or hinderances related to family functioning (Carlson & Dermer, 2017; Goldenberg et al., 2016).

e) Family Structures

The roles, interactional patterns and traditions of a family system are central to family structures. The roles in a family system are the specific responsibilities of individuals that they must fulfil (Suppes, 2022). Suppes (2022) noted several common roles within the family: cheerleader, hero, lost child, rescuer, scapegoat, clown and mediator. These roles shape how individuals interact within the family system (Lebow et al., 2019). Stress within the system may occur when there is role ambiguity, expectations are incompatible or unclear, roles are redefined or renegotiated and too many expectations are placed on an individual family member (Lebow et al., 2019; Schweer-Collins et al., 2017). The interactional patterns of a family are broadly considered to be the underlying rules of a family (Dallos & Draper, 2015). Implicit and explicit rules are communicated through different channels. While implicit rules are based on family dynamics, including who supports different family members during an argument, explicit rules are clearly communicated rules such as household chores (Dallos & Draper, 2015). The interactional patterns regulate the behaviour of the family in an attempt to ensure that the system remains stable and predictable. Family traditions or rituals reinforce family bonds and provide a sense of continuity (Lebow, 2020a; Prime et al., 2020). These traditions create a space to contribute to the overall emotional well-being of the family system and often hold a symbolic significance for a family. When these roles, interactional patterns and traditions are disrupted through migration and acculturation,

stress can result, which require families to adapt and renegotiate their family system (Suppes, 2022).

f) Family Life Cycle

The family life cycle draws inspiration from Erikson's seminal work on life stages (McGoldrick et al., 2016). While Erikson's life cycle (1963, 1968, 1982) affords understanding, this notion of the life cycle does not take into account relational issues. Erikson's developmental stages (1963, 1968, 1982) are also considered too linear in comparison to the family life cycle (McGoldrick et al., 2016). McGoldrick et al. (2016) highlighted how internal and external factors such as births, deaths and divorce may influence how families move through various stages. The stages of the family life cycle are as follows: emerging young adults, couple formation (the joining of families), families with young children, families with adolescents, launching children and moving on at midlife, families in late middle age and families nearing the end of life (McGoldrick et al., 2016). In addition, because the family life cycle encompasses an understanding of the relational aspects of individuals and systems moving through stages, different perspectives are considered. The perspectives may include women and men's perspectives, social class, economic standing, migration and the family life cycle (McGoldrick et al., 2016). Although transitioning into different stages can cause stress, it is imperative to consider the stress of where individuals and families are in relation to other systems and society as a whole (McGoldrick et al., 2016). Understanding migration and the effect it can have on the family life cycle is a fundamental consideration when examining the life cycle events (McGoldrick et al., 2016). The transition between stages often causes stress because of the adjustment to new roles and interactional

patterns (Suppes, 2022). Navigating the family life cycle requires adaptability and a willingness to renegotiate relationships at each stage.

g) Family Resilience

Resilience refers to the ability to withstand and recover from significant stressors (Walsh, 1996, 2003). Family resilience is an extension of this and the significant stressors in the form of illness, financial hardship and migration may be considered as examples (Walsh, 2003). Resilient families are able to adapt to stressors by maintaining strong communication, providing emotional support and being flexible in their roles (Masten, 2021). Furthermore, resilient families tend to view stressors as opportunities to improve relationships and form stronger coping mechanisms (Prime et al., 2020). Characteristics that help with this include problem-solving, fostering a positive outlook and maintaining a sense of togetherness (Walsh, 2003), which assist in thriving despite difficulties.

Conclusion

In this literature review, factors that shape the experiences of migrant children and families have been explored, specifically. the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) of immigrants. Global migration trends were highlighted with South Africa as a focus country and the immigrants' countries-of-origin. The various types of ACEs were examined in depth. The prevalence of ACEs was considered globally and in countries in which research has been conducted, predominantly in the Global North. The fundamental consideration of how a family is interconnected, yet individually differentiated, assisted in acknowledging the complexities of family systems and immigration. The aim of the literature review was to understand immigration, ACEs and family systems. The complexities of family dynamics and

individual experiences in the broader social context were highlighted. Understanding these considerations and the intricacies of immigration, ACEs and family systems theory ensured a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to exploring the research questions.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter the methodology used in this study is described. First, the research aims, questions and design are outlined. Subsequently, details of the sampling procedures and necessary information about the participants for contextual purposes are provided. Thereafter, the data collection process and process of thematic analysis are detailed. The steps of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis, which was employed to analyse the data, are described. The quality of the research in consideration of the credibility guidelines as noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are then evaluated. Elliot et al.'s (1999) seven guidelines in conjunction with the overlapping seven guidelines of Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) are noted so as to fully grasp the importance of credible research. The ethical considerations underlying the research process are also described. Finally, there is a section on reflexivity to indicate that I, as the researcher, acknowledged and understood my role in the context of the research.

Research Aims

The aim of the study was to acquire some understanding of the lived experiences of university students who migrated to South Africa in their youth. The specific role that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) may have played in their process of acculturation into the new host culture and impact thereof on their mental health and well-being were also explored.

Research Questions

1. What ACEs do migrant children experience prior to, during and after immigration?
2. How did migrants experience migration to South Africa as children?
3. How do ACEs impact child migrants' acculturation, specifically their mental health and well-being, into a new country?

Research Design

I employed a qualitative, interpretivist and exploratory research design. Exploratory research seeks to investigate a topic to provide insights into underlying patterns, relationships and experiences that are not already widely researched (Ponelis, 2015). The approach emphasises flexibility and an openness to investigate underlying patterns, relationships and experiences without a predefined hypothesis (Ponelis, 2015). The exploratory nature of the research design was appropriate given the limited research on child migrants, their experiences of ACEs and their journey through the acculturation process. Exploratory research is well-suited to examine topics with limited existing knowledge as it allows researchers to acquire preliminary insights, identify patterns and set foundations for further study (Ponelis, 2015). Qualitative research aims to acquire a richer understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Kallio et al., 2016). The focus of a qualitative study is the subjective experiences of the participants. Qualitative research aims to create an opportunity for flexibility, depth and detail in the interpretations of the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Having chosen the interpretivist research design meant that I had to incorporate a central empathetic attitude due to the understanding that this design considers the origin of

"thoughts, feelings, and experiences" to be that of the participants who were interviewed (Terre Blanche et al., 2006, p. 278).

Socially constructed behaviour is based on language, which is fundamental to the interpretation of the data (May, 2002). This qualitative research design created meaning from the data recorded during the interviews. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm incorporated universality into the data. However, I also arrived at interpretations while understanding and interpreting the data. During the research, rigorous data collection was imperative to ensure the process reflected the participants' experiences (Kallio et al., 2016). The study's exploratory nature utilised an inductive approach, which assisted in understanding the participants' individual contexts when considering their context and answers during the interview.

Data collection

Participants and Sampling

The data were gathered using semi-structured interviews throughout the 2022 academic year at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). The sample comprised students over 18 years of age who had immigrated to South Africa as children between the ages of eight and sixteen years. I chose this age range as I deemed it had given the students a reasonable amount of time to begin the acculturation process and consider the effects of any ACEs they may have faced in their childhood or during their immigration. Non-probability, convenience and snowball sampling were used. Non-probability sampling involves selecting participants in accordance with previously decided criteria, often focussing on accessibility (Given, 2008; Mason, 2002). Convenience sampling is a practical option to use when

gathering qualitative data (Bhardwaj, 2019) in that participants that are readily available and willing to participate are selected (Bhardwaj, 2019). In snowball sampling, the initial participants assist with recruiting additional participants from their own networks (Bhardwaj, 2019; Robinson, 2014). These forms of sampling work in unison to gradually increase the sample size while attempting to create as broad a narrative as possible from the qualitative data gathered (Bhardwaj, 2019; Given, 2008; Mason, 2002; Robinson, 2014). Social media, such as Instagram and Facebook, were used to identify suitable participants. Social media posts were created, and I asked various individuals from within the student contingent to post these and assist with gathering participants. The flyer created was shared through multiple WhatsApp groups and subsequently shared again after engaging with a few participants. They wanted to spread the opportunity to as many people as possible. Students are generally active on social media and WhatsApp groups, which ensured the process was seamless as more individuals shared the information through their platforms. Through these avenues, nine participants were identified and interviewed.

Participant Information

In this section, some background information on each of the participants in the study is provided. A table in Appendix F contains demographic information about the nine participants. The participants were all given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. The names used below and in Appendix F are the randomly assigned pseudonyms.

Participant One: Ben

Ben, a 24-year-old white male, emigrated from Zambia to South Africa at 13 years of age to attend a boarding school. His parents stayed in Zambia, and he spent time outside

school with his close grandparents, older siblings and friends. His family prioritised education in South Africa due to its perceived higher standards and English was his first language. At the time of the study, he was studying for a Bachelor of Arts.

Participant Two: Aisha

Aisha, a 23-year-old black female, moved from Namibia to South Africa when she was 13 years of age, seeking a fresh start and better educational opportunities. She had family in South Africa and visited her parents on occasion as well. The decision was driven due to the academic opportunities available in South Africa by her parents and herself. Her parents were initially hesitant because of her young age, but they felt this factor was outweighed by the opportunity to enjoy a better education. They ultimately agreed, believing in the superior education system in South Africa. She continued her education with a Bachelor of Business Science and completed her honours in economics. English had always been her first language.

Participant Three: Rachel

Rachel, a 22-year-old white female, relocated from Zimbabwe to South Africa when she was eight years old due to the political and economic instability in her home country. Her parents' decision to come to South Africa was based on what they perceived was best for the family. Her father was offered an employment opportunity and accordingly, the move became practical choice. She lived with her parents when they immigrated to South Africa. During her tertiary education, she moved out of her parents' house and into her own accommodation. At the time of the interviews, she was completing her MBCHB degree. English was her first language.

Participant Four: David

David, a 27-year-old white male, emigrated from Tanzania to South Africa when he was 12 years old. David, his parents and brother arrived at a mutual decision, driven by the desire for a better education and sporting opportunities. He resided with his grandparents when he first moved to South Africa. At the time of the study, he was completing a second degree and a Bachelor of Arts. Although his first language was French, when he immigrated to South Africa, he considered his English proficiency to be at an intermediate level.

Participant Five: Pierre

Pierre, a 20-year-old white male, moved from Madagascar to South Africa when he was nine years of age due to the limited educational opportunities in his home country. His parents had given him and his brother three choices: homeschooling in Madagascar, returning to Belgium to live with their grandparents or attending boarding school in South Africa. They chose South Africa, influenced by their cousin who was already there and the appeal of learning English. His first language was French and at the time of immigrating, his English proficiency was that of a beginner. He was studying for a Bachelor of Commerce at the time of the study.

Participant Six: Kamau

Kamau, a 24-year-old white male, left Kenya for South Africa at the age of 12, seeking lower costs for better educational and sporting opportunities. His parents' primary decision to emigrate was because of a lack of good schools with a strong sporting focus in his rural Kenyan hometown. He spent most of his time with his grandparents outside school and

occasionally with friends. His first language was English, and he spoke Swahili fluently. He was studying for a Bachelor of Arts.

Participant Seven: Minji

Minji, a 23-year-old Asian female, emigrated from South Korea to South Africa at the age of 16, initially accompanying her brother, who was sent to the country to escape negative influences. They resided with their aunt and uncle. When they immigrated, they had limited English comprehension. At the time of the study, Minji's English proficiency was advanced, and she was enrolled for a Bachelor of Veterinary Science.

Participant Eight: Alessandro

Alessandro, a 21-year-old mixed-race male, relocated from Italy to Seychelles and South Africa at 12 years of age to attend boarding school and gain international experience. The decision was made with his parents, who had moved to Seychelles. South Africa was chosen over England and India due to its affordability and proximity to Seychelles. At the time of immigrating to South Africa, Italian was his first language, he was fluent in French and his proficiency in English was intermediate. He was studying for a Bachelor of Commerce in Economics.

Participant Nine: Adesuwa

Adesuwa, a 23-year-old black female, moved from Nigeria to South Africa at nine years of age as her father had been transferred. Her parents had sought a stable environment for their children and believed South Africa offered better opportunities for education and development. She lived with her parents throughout her school years and at the time of the

study, lived in her own accommodation. She was completing her MBCHB degree and English was her first language.

Data Collection Procedure

I employed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix E) to interview the participants and gathered as much information as possible during the 45-minute interview period. Semi-structured interviews balance structure and flexibility, enabling in-depth exploration of participant insights (Mason, 2002). This interview structure allows for data collection that adapts the questions based on responses, which, in turn, creates a deeper understanding of the social contexts (Mason, 2002). This ensures the interviews are particularly effective in qualitative research due to the guided conversations that foster authentic insights that move past the prescribed questions (Mason, 2002). An integral advantage of semi-structured interviews is that they assist in creating rapport between the participant and interviewer (Kallio et al., 2016). This was notable as the participants quickly became at ease and were willing to share their stories freely. Forming this rapport also allowed me to use various follow-up questions and prompts to further the understanding of specific questions (Kallio et al., 2016). The participants were more than willing to be interviewed for longer than the prescribed 45 minutes and share their stories and experiences before, during and after the migration. They were also willing to share experiences related to their acculturation process. The interviews were primarily conducted over Teams as this was deemed the most convenient way to interact and fit into the participants' schedules.

After finding a comprehensive group of participants, the data were easily noted to be more than sufficient. Understanding when data are sufficient is discerning saturation (Guest

et al., 2020). Saturation occurs when no new themes or information emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2020). This indicates that further data collection will not produce additional insights, ensuring the findings' robustness (Guest et al., 2020). The participants shared information that shed light on multiple different aspects. It was noted that more participants were interviewed than necessary when the data were gathered. It was important not to have too many participants for the information to become too saturated or redundant. Although repetition of some information was notable with nine participants, it did not oversaturate the data but assisted with identifying patterns and themes that emerged.

Data Analysis

I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework as well as an inductive approach to analyse the responses to the open-ended questions in the interviews. They were employed in unison to categorise, compare and group the data. The inductive approach assisted in understanding the participants' individual contexts, informed the theory through the systematic approach of understanding the data and assisted in creating the themes. Thematic analysis, which is a flexible approach to analysing data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), assisted in finding the patterns in the text-based data set. The latter was derived from the data corpus, creating a thorough analysis that was considered through the lens of the theoretical framework. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of analysis structured how I conducted the thematic analysis throughout the understanding of the data. This structured approach facilitated with identifying the relevant themes and subthemes to inform the study and create a considered discussion.

Phase 1: Familiarising oneself with Data

After the interviews, I ensured that each interview was correctly recorded before I transcribed the entire interview. The transcripts were fundamental to the process, and I listened to the recordings repeatedly to guarantee that no words were misheard and recorded incorrectly. I subsequently read the transcripts again to acquire a deeper understanding and then re-read them to consider what had been asked and noted by the participants. Thereafter, I listened to specific sections of the recordings to ensure that I had not misinterpreted what had been said. I also considered the tone and underlying connotations of what had been said. Initial ideas were noted during this phase of the familiarisation process. I immersed myself in the data, which flowed with considerations concerning immigration, acculturation and ACEs as well as how this was directly linked to these students who had immigrated in their childhood. The themes were considered and driven during this time, which is fundamental to the principles of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Initial coding ensued in a systematic fashion across the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial thoughts were written down when reviewing the transcripts to generate the initial codes. This process of generating codes was conducted by understanding the familiar patterns within each transcript and highlighting anything that may have been useful for the research. Different coloured highlighting within the transcripts was used so as not to compromise context. With this process, comments were made that coded each highlighted aspect so as to understand to what the code referred. The codes were simple yet informative. These codes were documented to ensure consistency throughout each transcript.

Subsequently, the colour-coded frameworks were collated and a document with separate sections for each code was created. The codes and documents were reviewed to ensure they accurately reflected the contents of the data and transcripts. The colours indicated a range of codes that led to the next phase of the thematic analysis.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

After creating and collating a list of codes, I sorted them into broader themes. I first familiarised myself with the content captured during the coding process to understand the data excerpts in greater detail. Accordingly, there was a need to derive the patterns and connections within the codes on a broader level. This was achieved by grouping codes into broader sections. These groups of codes were again reviewed and merged into potential themes. I wrote down the initial themes that were considered and put in the codes that fell under these themes accordingly. With these themes and groupings of the codes that had been identified, I examined the data to ensure that these formed a coherent pattern. When I considered the themes again, it was deemed necessary to merge several of them as they were too similar to create any deeper meaning for the research and would not assist with the narrative. Consequently, they were considered redundant in answering the research questions.

In addition, during this phase, themes that were too general were broken down into more specific themes, creating greater clarity. Tables assisted with ensuring that there was no confusion or overlap of themes. These tables were essential in understanding the themes and subthemes, guaranteeing no connections were overlooked in the process. Furthermore, underlying considerations of the codes and themes were noted. Once these tables were organised accordingly, they were considered within the frame of the research questions. Once

satisfied that the research questions were answered, I described each theme in detail, including the theme, why it was interesting and necessary, and how it related to various other themes in the research. During this process, I was aware that no codes or data were to be discarded. All the codes were placed under various themes and subthemes.

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes

Phase four of the thematic analysis took place through two levels: checking for coherence and evaluating the validity of each theme.

The initial consideration during this phase was the coherence of the patterns identified under each theme. Coded extracts were understood and considered in the context of the theme, which led to merging, separating or discarding unnecessary codes. The theme was then verified to consistently capture the essence of the coded data, ensuring that all aspects of the theme were related to the theme's central concept. Once completed, I compared the various themes. This ensured that the themes were distinct. Although minimal overlap was noted, it was still relevant to the research questions and aim. This confirmed that the various themes collectively included all significant aspects of the dataset with no notable unrepresented areas. I then considered whether all the themes related to each other and collectively addressed the research questions.

Following this procedure, iterations of the themes were considered. This included refining the definitions of the themes and adjusting any excerpts. I then considered the theme names to confirm that the themes were clear, concise and descriptive, conveying the essence of the theme. During this process, I identified any themes that may have needed more data excerpts to support what the theme considered. Fundamentally, this assisted in organising the

themes hierarchically. I was then able to compare the themes and underlying codes to reflect the original data set accurately. This process and the final themes were thoroughly reviewed in light of the research questions. It was noted that these answered the research questions accurately and comprehensively.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

The themes were reviewed to ensure they were distinct and clearly defined. I examined the data extracts associated with each theme to determine if they represented the theme's essence before writing a comprehensive analysis and describing each theme's relevance to the research questions. This clarified the themes to ensure a mutually exclusive and comprehensive thematic understanding of the data. Felitti et al.'s (1998) category of ACEs, literature on acculturation and migration patterns were also used to clearly define and contextualise the themes in relation to the research questions. In addition, the theoretical framework of General Systems Theory, particularly Family Systems Theory, provided a foundational understanding of the data to assist with the themes and further relate them to the research aims and questions.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

I proceeded to produce the final analysis and report. This included using the hierarchy of the themes as well as a well-defined and comprehensive understanding of each theme. I considered the themes together to ensure the narrative flowed logically and connected these to provide a cohesive experience. The themes were presented by starting with a clear description and definition. Each theme was substantiated by a sufficient number of quotes from the data that demonstrated the prevalence of the themes. The discussion of the themes

focussed on their relevance to the research questions and aim of the research. Direct quotes from the participants were used to reinforce themes and illustrate their experiences and perspectives.

Evaluating the Quality of the Research

Evaluating the quality of research is essential to ensure credibility, rigour and relevance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Willig, 2008). This process ensures that the research is trustworthy and transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Willig, 2008). Credibility checks throughout the process assist in maintaining objectivity and the integrity of the research (Elliott et al., 1999; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). Credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are the fundamental aspects that must be considered and widely accepted for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ensuring the study's trustworthiness reinforces the validity of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research is created by maintaining various checks that assist in verifying the findings (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creating a framework in which the findings, discussion and overall conclusion are verified ensures that the research is credible (Elliott et al., 1999). Several strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness by following Elliot et al. (1999) and Henwood and Pidgeon's (1992) guidelines. I submitted the interviews and analysis to my supervisor to ensure these concurred with the participants' expressions. This process added a layer of critical reflection to the analysis and ensured that the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis was followed. I also asked an external reader to review the work. They were not involved in

the research process and were asked to verify and examine whether the research and findings were aligned appropriately. Participant anonymity was maintained throughout this process. The impartial perspective of an external reader added a thorough investigation into the consistency of the interpretations made, which assisted in minimising any bias. This further confirmed that the findings were coherently linked to the data. In addition, credibility was achieved through reflexivity (Shenton, 2004). I continuously reflected on my position as a researcher and the influence my background and assumptions may have had on the research process. During the thematic analysis of the interviews, I reviewed the transcripts numerous times with a concerted effort to remain aware of my role when interpreting these interviews.

Dependability

A foundational notion in research is the integration of theory. This implies that the theory must be clearly defined and the analysis of the data should coherently correlate with this theory (Elliott et al., 1999; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). This was realised by understanding the interview protocol as an integral part of this process and ensuring a thorough literature review. This, in turn, assisted in creating a comprehensive narrative of the participants' experiences. In addition, the notion that there is enough detail about the research process is crucial for future researchers to replicate the study (Shenton, 2004). I ensured that there was always a reliable structure to the qualitative research, highlighting the study's trustworthiness throughout the process (Kallio et al., 2016).

The emphasis on always using concrete examples to illustrate findings is fundamental in any research (Elliott et al., 1999). The transparency between these extracts from the interviews and my interpretations affords the reader insight into assessing the validity of the

research. The description of the research process and ensuring that the data are reflected effectively, and interpretations are grounded in actual data are central to dependability. The intent was to create section on objective findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability was central to the research process. This concept may be defined by how a concerted effort from the researcher to ensure that they have represented the data and how the participants expressed their views during the interview is imperative (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), particularly when considering that the findings are genuinely shaped by the participants' experiences and not researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This ensures that clarification and insight into the topic allow for objective understanding and appreciation for the participants' experiences that were explored during the research (Elliott et al., 1999). Highlighting the specific excerpts from the interviews after multiple readings thereof in conjunction with understanding the participants' context and tone was central to ensuring the participants' intentions were captured accordingly. It is crucial that the researcher ensures that the findings are compelling, understandable and valuable to readers (Elliott et al., 1999). I reflected on this process throughout Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. The aspects noted by Elliott et al. (1999) of research that is grounded in examples emphasised that I had to ensure that I used relevant examples from the data to highlight and elaborate on the various interpretations. This accentuated how there was always a transparent interpretation flow between the theory and data. Furthermore, admitting personal beliefs and assumptions and the reflexive practice of understanding my own history and identity was crucial in maintaining credibility (Shenton, 2004). The openly acknowledged and continued

reflexivity regarding the sampling procedure, interview protocol and how the data were interpreted could be affected by myself as the researcher emphasised the continued understanding of credibility.

Transferability

Transferability is the process of applying the research findings to other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results, interpretations and discussions should be appropriately contextualised to ensure that the setting of the study is completely understood (Elliott et al., 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The in-depth explanation of the phenomena being studied, sampling strategy and cohort exemplify this. It is imperative that the researcher is responsible for explaining these aspects to emphasise the contextual setting of the research (Shenton, 2004). In addition, the research aims and questions highlight the transferability from the onset of the study. Having a cohort that migrated to South Africa and literature that has indicated that research is predominantly from the Global North emphasises how this is applicable in many countries, specifically in the Global South. Research has highlighted how migration, acculturation and ACEs are global phenomena that must be addressed. Furthermore, the educational setting on which the immigrants' experiences were focused highlights an additional layer of transferability. The ideals of this research reveal how the research was contextualised by considering the application of the study to different settings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues and preventing unethical practices are central to research. Ethical procedures aim to avoid harm in any form, uphold integrity throughout the research process and actively promote good (Orb et al., 2001). Resnik (2015) noted that various codes of

ethics address a range of general principles, including honesty, objectivity, integrity, carefulness, openness, confidentiality and social responsibility.

Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Human and Community Development Ethics Committee, constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical). Clearance was granted on 13 May 2022 (Protocol Number: MACC/22/04) (see Appendix G). The study was deemed to be 'low risk' and approved unconditionally. Various ethical considerations are thus highlighted to indicate how these potential threats were mitigated.

Beneficence

Orb et al. (2001) stated that the purpose of this principle was to avoid harming others while maximising the potential positive outcomes that could be achieved. This study included discussing adverse childhood experiences individuals may have faced, which had the potential to elicit distressing memories and make the participants distressed. The participants were made aware of the safe space they were entering to be able to discuss such issues. They were also debriefed after the interview and reminded that they had the opportunity to receive free counselling. The telephone numbers of the Counselling and Careers Development Unit and the South African Depression and Anxiety Group were provided to them.

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent for research is crucial to ensure ethical standards are upheld. The participants were reminded of their right to either accept or refuse to participate in the study at any point, which concurs with the ethical considerations outlined by Orb et al.

(2001). In addition, the participants were always treated with the understanding that they were autonomous and capable of making their own informed decisions (Orb et al., 2001).

Those potential participants who showed an interest in participating in the study were provided with a participant information sheet (see Appendix I). This information sheet outlined the research aims and all ethical information. Furthermore, the importance of confidentiality was highlighted in the information sheet by assuring the participants that their data would be kept confidential, and they would be anonymised by using pseudonyms. Of paramount importance, in the information sheet, the participants were made aware that they could end the interview without repercussions. Finally, they were informed that the interviews were to be recorded and that although recordings could be used for future research, all personal and identifying information would be removed. Finally, the participants were given a consent form (see Appendix J). Signing the consent form, indicated that they fully understood the study's aims, the risks and benefits thereof, their rights to participate or withdraw at any time and that they knowingly consented to participate.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are central considerations in research. Confidentiality has been noted as one of the main principles to be adhered to in research (Coffelt, 2017; Resnik, 2015). Anonymity is the concept of ensuring that no information is identified during the data collection process, as shown in the research (Coffelt, 2017). The effects of breaching confidentiality and anonymity may have a profound impact on participants. This may make them feel embarrassed and/or ashamed, open them to discrimination and/or severe harm, and affect their familial relationships and/or occupation (Coffelt, 2017).

Anonymity could not be upheld as I, as the researcher, conducted the interviews. The participants shared their contact information, and the interviews were conducted by means of video calls. To ensure no other breach of anonymity, all the participants were given pseudonyms, and information was not identified in the research. Confidentiality was of the utmost importance as another crucial aspect of ethical considerations. All recordings were only voice recordings and not video recordings in accordance with the ethical board's approval. This assisted with the participants' confidentiality. All recordings, transcripts and any data analysis are stored on my password-protected computer.

Reflexivity

A fundamental consideration in research is for the researcher to acknowledge and understand their role in the context of the research (Elliott et al., 1999; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). The researcher's own history and identity play a role in the focus of their research, the protocol used for interviewing participants, the selection of the participants and how the data are interpreted (Elliott et al., 1999; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

Understanding this fundamental aspect of the research motivated me to understand why I chose this topic. This was primarily influenced by my experiences as a child, growing up, living in a boarding school with individuals who were migrants and schooling in South Africa for various reasons. I went to boarding school from a young age, which meant I was often friends with children from other countries. Reflecting on this, I felt I had an opportunity to work with a population I connected with after hearing about their difficulties being so far from their parents and home. This was always a challenge for me to comprehend.

Consequently, I was always interested in their experiences and how they managed these experiences with little family support due to the distance separating them.

Choosing participants and working through this process meant that with a sample that was brought together through convenience and snowball sampling, there was potential for bias in gathering participants in a similar setting as my own. It was crucial to acknowledge my own part played in this process. I actively worked against only using personal contacts to gather participants. Working with students from the University of the Witwatersrand and their contacts meant that the sample comprised a wide range of individuals from various backgrounds and cultures.

I actively engaged in reflexivity throughout the research as I considered how my background would play a role during the recruitment and interviewing process. As a South African interviewing a range of immigrants from across the world meant I had little knowledge of their cultural practices and the background from which they came. This discrepancy in what I knew about their culture and the intersection of my own culture was always at the forefront of my mind when interviewing and during the data analysis. I continuously checked and rechecked my understanding and interpretation by reviewing the interviews to ensure I captured what they were attempting to portray. This was also relevant when considering South Africa's history with apartheid and the fact that I am a white male who was trying to acquire insight into a range of individuals who may have had preconceived ideas about the type of individual I am. This may have affected their willingness to share. As the researcher, I was also in a position of power when I asked the participants to self-disclose even though I was not obliged to disclose anything about myself. In addition, as this is a

master's research report for a professional degree as a counselling psychologist, I was placed in a particularly privileged position as I was part of a highly educated group of students. However, the participants were also students, which may have helped to counterbalance this position and promote greater parity.

I needed to acknowledge the assumptions I had made about immigrants and the experiences they had faced. Although I related it to my upbringing and boarding school, I quickly found that their experiences had layers I had never considered. I always assumed that there was a lack of a support structure and that these immigrants would be able to work through their adverse experiences themselves. These assumptions were a significant consideration in formulating the research aims and questions, namely, to understand the experiences that immigrant children face when they enter the country.

With these considerations at the forefront of the research, it was imperative to regard the situation as an individual in search of understanding the participants' perspectives and experiences. The impact of reflexivity is pivotal in qualitative research, with each researcher having various ideals and values that they consider fundamental to themselves but that could have a lasting influence on the data and interpretations thereof.

Conclusion

In this chapter, how the research process was conducted is detailed. Specific notes of the research aim, questions and design were considered to highlight the purpose of the study. The sampling process, data collection process and data analysis were subsequently outlined. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed to perform the data analysis during which each step was noted. An essential aspect of this chapter was evaluating the

credibility and trustworthiness of the research and highlighting fundamental ethical considerations in research. In the following chapter, findings from the data analysis are presented in the form of the identified themes and subthemes, which inform the interpretations in the discussion chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, the key themes that were identified in the data analysis are presented. The data analysis highlighted the complex experiences of the participants during their migration as children, including their motivations for migration, ACEs, and the impact of acculturation. The identified themes highlight the psychological and social dimensions of childhood migration. The participants emphasised various factors that shaped their individual experiences.

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which assisted in identifying the multifaceted nature of the experiences these immigrants encountered. The themes are as follows:

1. Motivations for migration
2. Exposure to ACEs as child migrants
3. The process of acculturation
4. The impact on mental health and well-being
5. Changes in family dynamics and intergenerational relationships

The motivations of the family and how these were considered are discussed first. The exposure to ACEs as child migrants theme revealed specific ACEs and the difference in schooling systems. The process of acculturation is a notable theme. The penultimate theme highlighted the mental health and well-being of the participants. The final theme explored the changes in family dynamics and the impact migration had on intergenerational relationships.

The themes and subthemes are illustrated in the table below:

Theme	Subtheme
Motivations for Migration	Pursuit of Quality Education
	Family Reunification, Connection and Stability
	Escape from Economic Hardship and Socio-Political Instability
Exposure to ACEs as Child Migrants	Social Rejection and Family Separation
	Racism, Discrimination and Community Violence
The Process of Acculturation	Entering a New Country
	Adjusting to Educational Systems and Social Support Structures
	Adapting to New Cultural Norms and Social Expectations
	Child Migrants and Their Cultural Identity
	Hybrid Cultural Identities
The Impact on Mental Health and Well-being	Impact of ACEs on the Mental Health of Child Migrants
	Resilience, Coping Mechanisms, and Help-seeking Strategies
Changes in Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Relationships	Impact of Migration on Family Relationships
	Intergenerational Differences in Acculturation and Identity

Motivations for Migration

This theme concerns the factors that motivated families to migrate from their country-of-origin. These motivations included various push and pull factors.

Pursuit of Quality Education

Pursuing better and more affordable education specifically for children was a primary factor in the migration decision. Education in the participants' countries-of-origin was often viewed as inadequate and the quality of education they sought was often too expensive in alternative schooling options. These considerations from the participants' and their parents' perspectives highlight education as a central consideration in their motivations for migration. Eight participants reported this as a motivating factor behind their migration. Kamau directly illustrated the pull factor of better education in the destination country. Although Kamau's

parents made the decision, she recognised it as the best route to better her education: "*The choice had kind of been made for us in that that was the only option for me to get a really good education*."

Participants noted that this decision was not necessarily theirs because of their young age but rather a family decision. Ben specifically highlighted how their "*... family saw that the level of high school education ... was not up to the standard that they were looking for*." Another reason behind Ben's migration was related to his parents' view of ensuring a good education based on his siblings' previous experiences. He noted: "*They've decided, based on my brother's education, it was best for me to do the same education in South Africa.*" This emphasises how both the participants and their parents searched for a better education. Pierre also explained: "*I think it was mostly because of the education system was not at the level which was expected by my parents*."

Minji highlighted another pull factor when her family considered their options for immigration when she said:

> *My main motivation was actually to learn English because it felt like I might have much more opportunity and options and also freedom to go anywhere in the world if I can speak English.*

This indicates a link between the benefits of a better education and language proficiency and the opportunities it may afford one.

Starting anew can also be perceived as an opportunity. David shared that he "…*was very excited to, like, go to a new country like a nice school and it was very sporty.*"

Family Reunification, Connection and Stability

Family support structures emerged as a critical pull factor in the migration decision for the majority of the participants.

Pierre had a family member in South Africa who acted as a supportive factor in his family's decision to migrate. He explained: "*We chose the South African option because we had our cousin that was already there.*" This illustrates the pull effect of a family already residing in the destination country. In addition, Minji reported that she also had family in South Africa, which was a specific reason for her migration. She said: "*Uncle and aunt were living here (South Africa), so they thought, 'OK, that would be the easiest way to get him (her brother) away from bad influences'*" The supportive environment available and the possibility for reunification were both pull factors in the decision-making process. Ben reiterated this when he said: "*I probably would have still come from a young age because my brother had gone to [school here]*."

Minji reported how her parents agreed to send her to South Africa to learn English as they felt this would benefit her future. Still, the predominant reason was to protect her brother from influences in Korea. Minji explained:

> *It was mostly because my brother, like, wasn't really in a good place in Korea, so like it felt like we needed to break him away from like certain group of friends and things like that.*

Escape from Economic Hardship and Socio-Political Instability

Economic hardship in the country-of-origin countries was revealed as a reason for many families' migration decision. Rachel noted the political unrest, food shortages and lack of basic amenities in her country-of-origin as factors:

> *It was not a great place politically … we had a lot of food shortages, a lot of issues with electricity and water. I even remember that we would have weeks of no power before we left.*

Adesuwa's family decided to migrate because of similar concerns about stability and opportunities in their country-of-origin. Her father's previous experiences in South Africa made him feel that "*…it would have been a better place for us to continue building our foundation.*" Prior knowledge of the destination country assisted in the decision-making process.

Exposure to ACEs as Child Migrants

The ACEs directly encountered by the participants in their childhood are considered in this theme. Examples of the ACEs that the participants noted comprise social rejection, alienation, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, bullying and physical abuse. More than half of the participants reported that they encountered various ACEs during their childhood after they migrated to South Africa.

Social Rejection and Family Separation

Three participants reported experiences of social rejection and family separation. The social rejection, which was an aspect of the language barrier Minji experienced and the lack

of forthcoming school orientation, were an example of an ACE. She explained: "*I really didn't feel the need to reach out. If there's like any student transferring from our side … then I became the foreigner and the … transfer student… and [the other students had] already formed like a friend group*" This led to her feeling this social rejection. She used her own example of how she behaved towards foreigners or transfer students.

Aisha highlighted the social rejection that she experienced as a child migrant when she explained: "*With Black South Africans, they are always able to tell if you aren't a black South African person… [they would] come to me and be like 'where are you from?* "". She highlights the social rejection of not even having the capacity to speak in one of the 11 official languages due to this social rejection: "*I didn't really get to experience or … speak to people that were Xhosa or Zulu or Sepedi or other black, African, South African people.*"

Kamau reported the experience of family separation due to financial constraints: "*They (his parents) didn't have the money to just come down to South Africa every five seconds.*" Additionally, he noted how he was notably separate from his peers: "*Being in a pool of other kids or other folk that come from a completely different background or walk of life was daunting for me.*"

Racism, Discrimination and Community Violence

Two participants reported their experiences of racism and discrimination. Aisha emphasised this racial exclusion when reflecting on her schooling experience: "*For me, race is a really big thing. I was literally the only Black girl in a grade of 125 people.*" In addition to this shock of segregation, she felt "… *that [the racial divide] was quite a big thing. And adjusting to that and how to navigate in that sort of space.*"

An experience of the extent of community violence was highlighted when Aisha reflected on the xenophobic attacks throughout South Africa:

> *There was this time when I was genuinely petrified. Like really, really petrified. And just because of ... all of these xenophobic attacks. And I noticed predominantly in areas like the township. I was really, really scared. Like I was really scared because people were getting ... tyres being lit and put on them and I thought that was honestly petrifying.*

Adesuwa highlighted the lingering effects of Apartheid in comparison to Nigeria. While there are layers with the surface seemingly inconspicuous but a deeper layer within these racial and discriminatory difficulties that the historical background of a country can accentuate.

> *In Nigeria … there isn't any animosity. There aren't any hard feelings towards people of other colours. Like in Nigeria, people don't care … there isn't that heavy animosity towards people of other like races in South Africa. I was first of all shocked to see so many different races. When I came, I thought it was like actually really cool. But then you look deeper and the animosity between racial groups [that is] fuelled by Apartheid.*

An additional comparison between Nigeria and South Africa that Adesuwa made revealed the extent of gender-based violence in South Africa relative to Nigeria: "*In Nigeria, gender-based violence is not as … pronounced as it is here. And also, Nigeria is dangerous, but it's not as unnecessarily dangerous and violent as South Africa is*."

Bullying

David described significant challenges when entering the South African schooling system. These included the ACEs of bullying from older students:

> *I had a really rough go at school for the first couple of years ... I got pretty severely bullied ... there was a bit of physical abuse going on ... it was a bit of a rough go at first ... I must say it was really, really rough.*

These experiences affected his mental health when he had to contend with "*...really, really, really low lows.*" He further elaborated on feelings of social rejection and a lack of support: "*I felt angry and lost and alone.*"

The Process of Acculturation

Challenges encountered concerning the school systems, school environment, acculturation and cultural identity of migrants were fundamental to the participants' experiences. The theme investigates the adjustment to South African culture and the challenges of navigating these new norms, values and expectations. Furthermore, this theme explores the acculturative stress the participants experienced.

Entering a New Country

The subtheme reflects participants' emotional and psychological responses to their thoughts about the migration and when they initially arrived in South Africa.

Five participants felt a sense of apprehension and fear of the unknown regarding the migration. Alessandro thus expressed his fear of being separated from his family in an unknown place: "*It was all scary being alone in a different country far away from home.*"

David noted how he felt that he was "*... just nervous.*" On the contrary, Kamau acknowledged that there was a sense that "*... it was all quite daunting.*" Aisha highlighted this fear by saying: "*... this is a little bit scary.*"

Pierre shared how he feared being in a different country, away from his home, knowing little about the country, the language barrier he faced and warnings from his parents about the history of South Africa and the remnants of this:

> *I was nervous because I didn't know what to expect because the new country has never been to before. I couldn't speak the language. And on top of that, my parents said that in some places there are still traces of Apartheid and stuff like that. So, we were a bit scared.*

Four of the nine participants experienced positive emotions when they initially understood that they would migrate to South Africa. Aisha's eagerness was presented through the possibility of a new start to begin this new phase of her life. She explained how she was: "*... very excited to just kind of have like a blank slate, go somewhere new.*" In addition,

Pierre expressed his eagerness to broaden his horizons and explore what awaited him in South Africa: "*I was excited for the new things ... it was mostly like excitement*."

Adjusting to Educational Systems and Social Support Structures

Most participants expressed how the schooling system in South Africa differed from that of their country-of-origin. These differences included the system's overall structure, rigidity, discipline and the integration of extracurricular activities.

David shared his enthusiasm for attending a new school with sporting activities and new experiences: "*I was very excited to, like, go to a new country like a nice school, and it was very sporty.*"

Alessandro highlighted how teacher and student relationships differed significantly from his experience in the Seychelles. He reported how the teachers "…*were much younger compared to Seychelles. So, you have a much different relationship, much closer, much more human, not cold.*"

Pierre appreciated the inclusion of extracurricular activities in South African schools. His previous school experience focused on academics, and school life ended abruptly after his classes. He explained that his new schooling system "… *finishes at three and then had compulsory sports, which was something different to what I had experienced before.*"

Minji also experienced relief from the intense pressure of her previous schooling in South Korea. She also shared it was what she had been looking forward to:

> *I sort of wanted to run away from the environment where it's like overpopulated, it's like too competitive. Like, I'm like you're not doing well if you're not getting like 90. Actually, like if you get 90%, they're asking where's your 100%?*

Aisha thus spoke about her experience of adapting to a new school environment: "*In terms of education … they were really helpful … and also navigating the whole process [of integrating into a new school]*." Her remark highlights institutional support's importance in creating a "…*net positive experience.*"

Kamau valued the opportunity to "… *learn to be with people, the outdoors and sports, and of course the academics. That whole package was really important.*"

Alessandro's relationships formed at school were a notable positive:

> *The bonds that you create are like vastly more connected in that sense like you spend so much time, really so much time, with your friends that you actually get so close with each other. So that's incredibly nice.*

Ben found support through friendships, sharing that "*I was lucky in the sense that the people that were around me when I was acclimatising were all pretty nice people.*"

Adesuwa shared a different perspective. She noted how the discipline of the schooling system was different. She felt the discipline in Nigeria was strict in comparison to that in South Africa:

> *In Nigeria at the time, I was there, there was corporal punishment ... but that didn't exist here. I felt like there was, maybe a lack of discipline in the schools, compared to what I was coming from.*

Adapting to New Cultural Norms and Social Expectations

Adapting to a new country involves navigating unfamiliar norms, values and expectations. The participants encountered differing communication styles, behavioural expectations and cultural practices in South Africa.

Rachel highlighted how there was a "… *culture shock of social media"* in her new peer group. Ben also acknowledged the need for an "*… adjustment period…*" in the new society. The behavioural changes, which range from communication and relations with

authority figures to understanding the new cultural norms of constantly being part of social media, are some of the challenges migrant children face during acculturation.

Furthermore, Adesuwa thus reflected on contrasting values: "*The things that people would hold to higher value in Nigeria may not be the same here, and things that people hold to higher value here not the same in Nigeria*." This highlights the children's challenges in recognising and adapting to new social values.

Kamau also had to manage the new educational system independently as his parents did not move with him, "*Thrown in the deep end … figuring it out by myself … was suddenly a huge challenge to start with.*"

Child Migrants and Their Cultural Identity

The participants reported varied experiences in relation to their cultural identities. While a few embraced a specific cultural identity, others experienced cultural dissonance. Alessandro, Rachel, Minji, Adesuwa and David all thought that they had one easily identifiable cultural identity, unlike the other four participants, with a more complex sense of cultural belonging.

Alessandro said he directly related to the South African culture when he said: "*Definitely South African culture, like 100% ... I really feel that heritage*." Rachel specifically noted: "*I'm South African.*" Minji stated she was more inclined to the South African culture when she acknowledged: "*I actually connect more with South African culture*." She felt that her extended time in South Africa was a primary factor in this.

Contrasting the finding that the participants' cultural identity aligned with that of the destination country, a few participants highlighted how they were aligned to their country-of-

origin's cultural identity. Adesuwa reported that she "… *will always identify as a Nigerian … it doesn't feel right to introduce myself as a South African*." This highlights the possibility of embracing either culture as an immigrant, which does not necessarily have to be the destination country's culture. Similarly, David shared: "*I feel more connected to my Mauritian culture because … [South Africa's] not something that I think culturally, that I relate to.*"

Two participants, Aisha and Pierre, struggled with the complexities of conflicting cultural values, expectations and identity. These two participants emphasised that this led to alienation, isolation, confusion and lack of belonging. Still, they may also have positive attributes of understanding and appreciating the various cultures in more depth.

Aisha thus illustrated her hybrid cultural identities and difficulties with alienation and isolation from the cultures and her feelings of a lack of belonging to either culture:

> *I know I'm Namibian, but I also don't feel like I'm recognised as one either. So, it's just, it's like a weird kind of like push and pull and like weird where I really fit in, but also grateful to have ... like been able to have the experience of feeling kind of like both.*

This is a direct example of navigating the challenge of dual cultural identities.

Pierre also exemplified the hybrid cultural identities by highlighting his connection to where he initially grew up as well as the South African culture when he immigrated to South Africa:

I think I'm connected to all of them at the moment, like I'm connected to the Madagascan culture because I lived there, my parents lived there … I studied in France, so I have the French culture as well that I have to adapt to, and I still keep … the South African culture depending on the situation.

This highlights Pierre's sense of navigating multiple cultural identities, which led to confusion and complexity.

The Impact on Mental Health and Well-being

The mental health and well-being of migrant university students were central to the participants' experiences of migration and ACEs during their youth. This theme evaluates the impact of ACEs and migration on their mental health and resilience, coping mechanisms, and help-seeking strategies.

Impact of ACEs on the Mental Health of Child Migrants

Two participants spoke extensively about their mental health difficulties and symptoms such as depressive symptoms, anxiety and symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). These were considered regarding the ACEs they experienced before and after migration.

Adesuwa reported mental health conditions that she felt were prominent in her adolescence after she had migrated and that had worsened more recently at university. She noted: "*There's been a touch of depression here and there.*" She subsequently explained the mental health concerns she managed in greater detail:

I have anxiety, I have OCD traits and like all of those things and I like being in control of things and all of these things we started developing at least like in high school, they have become more apparent towards the end of varsity.

David detailed his experiences with ACEs and the effect this had had on his mental health:

I got pretty severely bullied … it was really, really rough. Very mentally challenging and sometimes physically challenging as well, because there was a bit of a physical abuse going on … [with] really, really, really low lows. … So, it was a bit confusing, and I felt angry and lost and alone … [it was] emotionally shattering.

He also described how his mood and demeanour had changed, which others had also noticed:

People would always say that I was overly happy and overly enthusiastic, and I went from being that person to someone that was constantly sad and constantly confused … It was like sort of demoralising because I was so excited and then bam, I hit a wall, and I was just completely depressed.

Resilience, Coping Mechanisms, and Help-seeking Strategies

Despite migration challenges, the participants displayed resilience and developed skills to manage their experiences where necessary. Kamau found a way to immerse himself in the new culture to create a sense of belonging: "*When you're trying to adapt and settle in*

and find your way, I think naturally it's extremely or much easier to be drawn into a way of life and a culture for a sense of belonging."

David explained how he had navigated a difficult period and looked back at it with a sense of resilience. He stated: "*I am where I am today because I've been through what I've been through.*" This was explicit regarding the difficulties he had experienced when he first immigrated and had been physically abused.

Adesuwa reflected that the interview process encouraged her to discuss mental health more openly, a practice that was uncommon in her country-of-origin: "*Right now it's just like I'm kind of like reminiscing … I don't often talk about this unless I'm like in therapy. Psychology is not really a thing in Nigeria.*" She had opened avenues for herself and embraced what she perceived was a South African trait: "*If I didn't live in South Africa, I don't think I would ever admit to myself that I have anxiety or that I've been depressed.*"

Changes in Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Relationships

This theme explores the fundamental role family dynamics and intergenerational relationships have on the migration process and the experiences of migrant children. It highlights how influential the migration experience can be for families.

Impact of Migration on Family Relationships

The responses of two participants reveal that migration affects family relationships and changes family dynamics. Kamau reported how the separation strained his relationship with his parents, involving them all emotionally. He shared: "*They felt that they missed out on a big portion of me growing up.*"

Through a different lens, Minji had to adjust to a new living environment and set of standards set by her aunt and uncle with whom she lived:

> *That was also quite an adjustment because also the environment is different because in Korea you have more freedom to just get out. … So, I found that it was quite straining at the beginning because it feels like you don't have freedom to go anywhere*

This created a new set of norms to abide by, which she explained limited the freedom she perceived she had had in South Korea.

Intergenerational Differences in Acculturation and Identity

The participants' responses highlighted intergenerational differences in the pace of acculturation and identity formation in the new society. Adesuwa experienced tension with her parents, who maintained their traditional values from their origin country, while she desired to embrace South African culture:

> *It was a bit of a challenge for me because I'm now growing up in a South African setting with South African teenagers as my peers and they want to do all of these things. And it's not as easy for me to negotiate on my side.*

Aisha highlighted this from a different perspective. She felt that both she and her parents needed to reconcile their expectations to accommodate intergenerational differences:

> *It was like they [parents] were used to doing things a certain way and I was used to having my things done a certain way and then you kind of have to marry the two and it was just it was a little bit strange.*

Conclusion

The findings from the thematic analysis of the data collected by means of interviews with the nine immigrant university students who migrated to South Africa provide insight into the journey of childhood migration. The themes included the motivations, challenges and resilience that shape the migration process. The process was primarily driven by educational, economic and family reunification. The participants highlighted the ACEs that they had faced, including separation, discrimination, physical abuse and bullying, which intensified the challenges of migration and acculturation. Their reports on education and social encounters emphasised their resilience and identity formation. These experiences shaped the cultural identification of the participants. These findings provide insights into the migration experience and the acculturation process undertaken during an individual's formative years. The following chapter contextualises these findings within existing literature and the family systems theoretical framework, exploring the implications for childhood migration.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Introduction

The aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences of university students who migrated to South Africa in their childhood. The role of ACEs in their acculturation process into the host country and how these factors impacted their mental health and well-being were explored. The following research questions were posed:

1. What ACEs do migrant children experience prior to, during and after immigration?
2. How did migrants experience migration to South Africa as children?
3. How do ACEs impact child immigrants' acculturation, specifically their mental health and well-being, into a new country?

Migrant children face a unique set of challenges, shaped by the motivation underlying the decision to migrate, exposure to several ACEs, migration, acculturation and the effects thereof on their family's functioning (Berry, 1997; Vaughn et al., 2017). These experiences can profoundly impact their physical and mental health, educational outcomes and overall development (Felitti et al., 1998; Hughes et al., 2017). Moreover, these effects can be seen in adulthood. The stress of migration and trauma associated with ACEs may exacerbate already existing development challenges, potentially hindering their ability to integrate into new environments and form healthy relationships (Schapiro et al., 2021). The interplay between the motivations for migration, navigating individual and familial expectations against the actual experiences and the overall impact this has on the family dynamic is vital to understanding the experiences of migrant youth. As highlighted by Felitti et al. (1998) and

Hughes et al. (2017), ACEs are linked to numerous negative outcomes, including heightened risks of depression, anxiety and difficulties in forming secure attachments. In addition, the process of navigating a new cultural context often exposes migrant children to further adversity such as social rejection, racism, discrimination and bullying (Berry, 1997; Tummala-Narra, 2019). In this chapter, the intersection of ACEs and migrant children's experiences are explored. The influence of various factors on the well-being of migrant children, their educational experiences and their ability to cope with trauma, specifically in the context of South Africa are examined.

Motivations for Migration and the Pursuit of Change

Migration comprises a complex series of events driven by systemic and personal motivations. Families exploring emigration are often driven by push factors such as economic hardship and political instability as well as pull factors, including educational opportunities and family reunification (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Hatton & Williamson, 2001). Research conducted by the United Nations (2019) highlighted how regions in sub-Saharan Africa frequently prioritise safety, security and education as fundamental factors. The participants highlighted a range of push and pull factors, including the pursuit of quality education, family reunification, escape from economic hardship and socio-political instability.

Education emerged as a central theme in the motivations of the participants' families to migrate. The predominant understanding behind this factor as a motivator is that the alternate education options available in the country-of-origin were either insufficient or too costly. The participants and their parents perceived migration as an investment in their future. The South African education system was viewed as an avenue for success and economic

mobility. Enhanced educational prospects were reported on several occasions. Kamau's family believed that the South African schooling system was their only option to access a high-quality and cost-effective education for their children. This reinforces the understanding that migration is often a response to societal barriers. This concurs with Carling and Talleraas (2016) who highlighted how better educational prospects attract migrants seeking upward mobility. Systems theory emphasises how the families' responses to educational motivations are external pressures often shared in an interdependent decision-making process (Suppes, 2022). The participants' families often viewed migration as a strategy to address systemic barriers such as education and socio-political obstacles. Pierre's family prioritised reconnecting to relatives in South Africa while seeking enhanced educational opportunities for their children.

Family reunification was also a core motivation for migration. Family systems theory also notes the strategy for cohesion and stability within the system (Goldenberg et al., 2016). This stability is evident when families intend to unite the different family members when immigrating to a new country. The pull of education and family reunification is viewed as an avenue to integrate the family, specifically the children, into the host country (Jensen, 2020). The findings revealed this when the participants reported the pull factor of family members who had already emigrated to the host country. This support network may have been viewed as a way to reduce the isolation and social rejection often linked to the migrant experience. This is in line with Berry and Sam (2016) who highlighted the importance of family and community structures in helping migrant children navigate cultural identities.

The country-of-origin's economic hardships and socio-political instability are factors that compel families to consider migration and can indirectly affect the child's experiences (Hatton & Williamson, 2001). Hatton and Williamson (2001) noted that economic challenges often compel families to consider migration. This pull factor concurs with many of the participants' reflections that noted that their country-of-origin was politically unstable with food shortages and a lack of basic amenities such as water and electricity. The motivations for migration shaped the process and influenced the challenges the participants encountered during the entire migration and acculturation process.

Navigating Hardship: Child Migrants' Exposure to ACEs

The ACEs encountered by the participants comprised social rejection, alienation, discrimination, racism, xenophobia and bullying. Hughes et al. (2017) and Merrick et al. (2020) highlighted how migrant children are particularly vulnerable to ACEs. The participants' experiences also reflected this. The prevalence of ACEs encountered by the participants supports the findings in the literature, which indicate that migrant children are at increased risk of exposure to trauma and adversity (Hughes et al., 2017; Schapiro et al., 2013, 2021). This is primarily because immigrants must navigate unfamiliar social environments such as a host country (Schapiro et al., 2021). The findings revealed that the majority of participants encountered at least one ACE.

The findings of the present study highlight how social rejection is a prevalent ACE among migrant children. Schapiro et al. (2021) noted that social rejection can lead to significant distress, fostering feelings of isolation that can affect an individual's psychological well-being. The participants' experiences related mainly to the school and

community, indicating that this ACE is a systemic issue that affects migrants' lives, compounding the challenges of migration and acculturation (Hughes et al., 2017; Merrick et al., 2020).

One participant, Kamau, reported feeling isolated and being separated from his caregivers, which may have had significant psychological consequences. This has been found to lead to insecurity and difficulty forming secure attachments (Sharabany & Israeli, 2008). Vaughn et al. (2017) indicated that familial support and isolation disruptions can adversely affect emotional regulation and attachment. As reflected in the findings, migrant children such as Kamau who are separated from their primary caregivers are particularly vulnerable, which may lead to heightened risks of mental health challenges.

Experiences of racial, cultural and xenophobic discrimination are high among migrant populations (Tummala-Narra, 2020). Aisha shared her experiences of this discrimination as a migrant, reflecting how "*Black South Africans… are always able to tell if you aren't a Black South African person and would ask, 'where are you from?'*." This example emphasises that discrimination "reflects the inevitable loss and disappointment traumatic stress, and shifts in identity produced in an immigrant's adjustment to living in the new, adoptive country" (Tummala-Narra, 2020, p. 50). Sharabany and Israeli (2008) revealed that systemic vulnerabilities in the host country such as limited access to resources, lack of social support and discrimination often compound ACEs experienced by migrant children. The social rejection and isolation can further amplify the experience of ACEs.

One of the participants, David, recounted experiences of bullying at school that led to feelings of anger, loss and loneliness. This concurs with Tummala-Narra (2020) who found

that disrupted systems contribute to isolation and hinder the acculturation process and attachment style of migrant children. This emphasises the impact of ACEs and supports research that has revealed the heightened risk of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety (Felitti et al., 1998; Hughes et al., 2017).

Both David and Adesuwa reported the lasting impacts they felt as a result of bullying. Research has highlighted the elevated risk of ACEs in migrant populations and their significant physical and psychological effects (Evans et al., 2008; Hughes et al., 2017; Stoltenborgh et al., 2013, 2015; Tummala-Narra, 2020). Family system theory illustrates these effects of the ongoing interaction of individual trauma and broader support system by framing the concept of circular influence (Galvin et al., 2006).

The ACEs that migrant children encounter affect their immediate well-being and affect their ability to acculturate significantly. Their experiences intersect with the challenges of entering a new country, adjusting to a new educational system and cultural norms, and managing their cultural identity.

The Process of Acculturation

Migrant children encounter unique challenges when entering a new country. Navigating the new cultural and social norms while maintaining one's cultural identity is a complex process. As Berry (1997, 2001) noted, acculturation involves the bidirectional interaction between individuals and their host culture, resulting in varying strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation and/or marginalisation. The participants in the present study encountered multiple barriers to acculturation, including adjusting to unfamiliar

educational systems, language barriers and pressure to conform with the host country's cultural norms.

Berry and Sam (2016) noted how integration, blending aspects of the country-of-origin and host culture, can lead to positive outcomes such as reduced stress and enhanced mental health. While adapting to South African norms, Aisha embraced a hybrid culture when she connected to her country-of-origin, Namibian culture. She explained how this dual cultural identity helped her "*navigate both worlds*" and foster a sense of belonging. This concurs with Berry's (1997) consideration that integration is often the most adaptive acculturation strategy.

The South African educational system differed vastly from the participants' countries of origin. While Ben highlighted a strong social support structure's positive role in his educational and acculturation experience, Minji noted a significantly different experience. Minji considered her experience of a lack of orientation and language barriers as leading to a sense of marginalisation: "*... had no idea where I was, and it made me feel isolated*." This emphasises Schapiro et al.'s (2021) findings that unfamiliar school environments can exacerbate acculturative stress. Furthermore, participants highlighted the school norms and cultural differences, particularly teaching styles and the dynamic between teachers and students. Alessandro noted that the teachers in South Africa seemed to be younger and he felt that they were "… *more human*" in their interactions with students.

Two participants expressed specific concerns about the language barrier. Minji shared that this was a difficult obstacle to overcome in the initial stages of acculturation. Pierre similarly expressed how he "*... couldn't speak the language ... we were a bit scared.*" This is

in accordance with research that has revealed that language barriers can affect integration and social inclusion, amplifying feelings of isolation and leading to difficulties with acculturation (Portes & Rivas, 2011; Schapiro et al., 2021).

Social support structures played a significant role in shaping the acculturation process. Family systems theory highlights the importance of robust familial, peer and broader social networks in fostering resilience and coping mechanisms during migration (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Participants like Ben benefitted from strong peer networks, which provided essential support during acculturation. In contrast, Adesuwa highlighted the differences between her acculturation and that of her parents, who she felt were holding onto their traditional cultural norms from their country-of-origin. This created a misalignment between the social structures of the peer group and the familial system, leaving Adesuwa feeling isolated. These varied experiences underscore the importance of strong and aligned social support structures and the difficulties of acculturation when encountering this misalignment.

The acculturation challenges are often exacerbated by the intergenerational differences in adopting cultural norms. Berry (1997) noted that younger generations tend to adapt to the host culture more readily than older generations. This difference in acculturation may create tension within the family system. While children often adapt faster due to peer influences and the need to belong, parents tend to retain their cultural traditions as a source of stability (Marchetti-Mercer & Roos, 2006). This can shift the family hierarchy, leading to role reversal, where the migrant children act as the cultural intermediaries for their parents. Adesuwa's experience emphasised this tension. She explained how her adaptation to the South African norms was notable but added that her parents had maintained their connection

to their country-of-origin. These intergenerational differences in acculturation highlight the complexity of the acculturation process, particularly in contexts where familial roles and expectations are disrupted.

Acculturative stress often arose from the discrepancy between the participants' cultural expectations and that of the host society. Rachel expressed the "*... culture shock*" she encountered with her peers' pervasive use of social media, highlighting the difficulty of adapting to South African norms. Kamau lacked direct parental support when he immigrated to South Africa. He noted the challenges of adjusting to the educational and social environments without parental support, which made this a more difficult process. According to Berry's (1997) framework, less adaptive acculturation strategies such as marginalisation and separation are often utilised when cultural norms diverge significantly from those of the country-of-origin.

ACEs further compounded these acculturation challenges. The participants highlighted this with their specific exposure to ACEs, specifically bullying, racism, community violence and social rejection. This led to feelings of isolation and alienation, making integrating more difficult. David's experience of bullying left him feeling "… *angry and lost and alone,*" illustrating the emotional toll and complex acculturation process he had to manage. This concurs with Berry's (1997) framework on maladaptive acculturation strategies and how acculturative stress, compounded by ACEs, can increase the likelihood of marginalisation or separation.

The interplay between ACEs and acculturation highlights the importance of robust social support systems. The participants with a strong community, family and/or peer support

group were better equipped to navigate challenges during acculturation. A fundamental consideration of acculturation is the importance of the overall system. This is highlighted by Ben's experience of creating a strong social and community foundation when arriving in South Africa, shaping his capacity to adapt to external stressors. This is due to factors such as permeable boundaries, having open systems that interact with external environments and circular influence, which highlights the interdependence of relationships in fostering resilience (Goldenberg et al., 2016).

Cultural identity formation also played a critical role in the acculturation process. While several participants strongly identified with the South African culture, others retained a firm connection to their heritage from their country-of-origin. Berry's (1997) framework includes integration, which is considered the most adaptive acculturation strategy. The hybrid identity formation of integration can mitigate acculturative stress and foster a sense of belonging (Berry & Annis, 1974; Berry & Sam, 2016). The participants who successfully embraced the multiple cultural identities reported a stronger sense of belonging and stability. Aisha accepted this integration strategy with her ability to connect to her Namibian culture alongside her adaptation to South African norms, which assisted with her capacity to navigate the dual cultures.

The process of acculturation highlights the interplay between Berry's (1997) framework on the four acculturation strategies – integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation – and the social support and identity formation of migrant children. This framework sets the foundation for understanding the impact of the migration process on migrant children.

Mental Health, Well-being and Resilience

Migration has an impact on the well-being of children. Compounding the effects of ACEs may be the challenges encountered by migrant children in adapting to unfamiliar environments, including navigating a new educational system, overcoming language barriers and managing the emotional toll of family separation and/or social exclusion. The ACEs, language barriers, new educational systems and migration were noted by the participants as stressors that affected their mental health and well-being. The findings of this study highlighted these complexities and the ramifications that followed.

Migration is not classified as an ACE by Felitti et al. (1998) nor are further adaptations of the definition of ACEs. However, migration often encompasses many of the circumstances that lead to ACEs. The participants' experiences highlight that migration was viewed as a multifaceted process. While it offered opportunities for personal growth, it also exposed children to ACEs. While Kamau discovered new opportunities to adapt and thrive in the host culture, David and Adesuwa encountered excessive bullying and community violence, respectively. This indicates that migration is not inherently an ACE as it is not the children's direct positive or negative experience but merely the catalyst that places migrant children in possible scenarios where they may be more vulnerable to ACEs, shaped by an interplay of context, support and various other external factors.

David and Adesuwa's experiences of bullying and community violence demonstrate how ACEs exacerbate the feeling of isolation and alienation. These ACEs impede the development of social support structures that are necessary for a positive acculturation process. Exposure to ACEs disrupts the ability to navigate new cultural environments

successfully, often leading to maladaptive acculturation strategies (Schapiro et al., 2021). Betancourt et al. (2017) and Hughes et al. (2017) highlighted the risk of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and PTSD among migrant children, particularly those exposed to ACEs. These factors reveal the long-term compounding impacts of ACEs and migration on the mental health of children.

The participants developed resilience as they adapted to the challenges they encountered during migration. Kamau immersed himself in the new culture to foster a sense of belonging and appreciated the host country's culture. David reviewed his past struggles during his time at school when he was severely bullied and expressed how these were formative years that strengthened his resilience and self-confidence, shaping him into a more self-assured individual. This example supports Betancourt et al. (2017) who noted that adaptive coping mechanisms are crucial for migrant well-being amid difficulties and various ACEs.

Strong social support structures serve as a stabilising factor that bolsters resilience by providing security, safety and emotional support (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). The favourable social structures of Alessandro and Ben, particularly their peer networks, school environments and family systems, highlight the necessity of creating strong social bonds to mitigate ACEs such as racism, discrimination, community violence and social rejection. Ben's experience with a strong social support structure was explicitly noted to assist with the migration and acculturation process, emphasising the protective role to which these structures contribute. These social support structures are fundamental to helping migrant children's resilience by protecting them against adversities (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Flouri and

Buchanan (2004) noted that support systems are central to fostering resilience, enabling individuals to adapt to challenging circumstances effectively.

Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Relationships

The migration process impacts family dynamics. The roles of family members often change, and relationships are impacted. Sluzki (1979) described migration as a challenge to the stability of family systems. Research has revealed that parents are often the ones who make the decision to migrate, primarily focusing on education, safety and prospects as the primary reasons for migration (Jensen, 2020; Marchetti-Mercer, 2012). Families as interdependent systems adapt to external stressors such as migration through dynamic shifts in roles and relationships (Goldenberg et al., 2016). Family systems theory illustrates how the impact of an event on an individual reverberates through the family and community systems with the concept of circular influence (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). This concept is directly linked to the effect of ACEs on migrant children and the entire family system, shaping the whole migration experience. This illustrates the connectedness of family members during significant life transitions.

Pierre and Minji's families decided to migrate to South Africa because other family members were already established in the country. The connection to other family members already residing in South Africa was considered a stabilising and security factor, demonstrating that familial networks can influence the decision to migrate. This also highlights the interdependence of the family system, which strengthens or strains the family bonds. Family systems theory suggests that external stressors can disrupt the family system and increase the family's overall vulnerability to mental health and well-being difficulties

(Vaughn et al., 2017). Kamau, whose unique migration experience involved separation from his parents, described how his parents missed significant milestones in his upbringing. These circumstances created feelings of emotional separation from his parents. Sluzki (1979) described migration as a systemic challenge that requires families to navigate the changing roles and relationships, with intergenerational differences often complicating acculturation.

Acculturation intensifies these challenges, particularly when generations acculturate at different rates (Marchetti-Mercer & Roos, 2006). Adesuwa navigated between the Nigerian and South African cultures while her parents held onto the traditional Nigerian culture to which they were accustomed. This resembles the intergenerational tension noted by Berry (1997) in which younger generations adopt the host culture more readily than older generations. As noted by the participants, this differentiation between the adoption of cultural norms creates tension and conflict in the family. However, this also poses an opportunity for growth, negotiating roles and reconsidering boundaries to maintain cohesion within the family system (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Despite these conflicts, support from the family may mitigate the impact of ACEs and the complex acculturation or migration process. Rachel's parents prioritised her safety throughout the migration process, creating a supportive environment facilitating adaptive coping within the family. Although resilience is considered an individual trait, Walsh (2003) revealed how shared coping mechanisms, strong communication and a positive outlook can enable families to navigate significant stressors such as migration collectively. Family systems theory posits that families continuously adapt, adjusting to evolving needs such as acculturation and migration (Goldenberg et al., 2016).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the experiences of migrant children who participated in this study were explored with reference to the existing literature. How ACEs, acculturation and family dynamics intersect to shape their mental health and well-being were examined. The findings revealed that migrant children encounter a range of ACEs, including social rejection, bullying, racism, discrimination and community violence. The immediate ramifications of ACEs demonstrated the psychological distress and feelings of isolation migrant children encounter, which influenced their acculturation. The ACEs were often compounded by other factors such as language barriers, which further hinder the acculturation of the child migrant. Participants such as David, Aisha, Adesuwa and Rachel illustrated how bullying, racism, discrimination, community violence and differing social norms intensify the acculturative stress of migrant children. Berry's (1997) framework on acculturation strategies provided valuable insight into possible maladaptive strategies such as marginalisation. The child migrants' experiences emphasise the importance of strong social support systems to foster resilience and create positive outcomes.

In addition, the participants' experiences highlight a fundamental consideration of whether migration should be considered an ACE. As the findings suggest, migration is not directly an adverse experience but often creates a context in which children are exposed to adverse experiences, specifically social rejection, racism and community violence. The complex interplay between migration, ACEs and family systems highlights the need for holistic support structures to assist migrant children with more effective acculturation when entering a new country. These insights provide a foundation for the concluding chapter in

which the study's broader implications, potential applications of the findings and recommendations for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Overview of the Study

In this study, the experiences of university students who migrated as children to South Africa were explored by focusing on the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) they encountered as well as the impact of migration and the acculturation process on their adult mental health. Nine participants participated in the study and shared their unique but interconnected narratives about the challenges of adjusting to a new country, the long-term effects of their early adversities and the concurrent development of resilience.

The aim of the research was to understand how ACEs intersect with the complex processes of migration and acculturation. Through thematic analysis, key themes emerged, including the motivations for migration, exposure to ACEs as child migrants, the process of acculturation, mental health and well-being, and family dynamics and intergenerational relationships. These findings demonstrate the interconnectedness of general and family systems and mental health outcomes of migrant children. The themes revealed the profound influence of personal and systemic factors on the acculturation process, including the support systems in place, the role of family in providing stability and the challenges of cultural adaptation. Specifically, the findings highlight how social support structures such as family, peers, schools and communities mediate the relationship between ACEs and acculturation.

Family systems theory provided the lens to examine the dynamic interactions between migrant children, their families and social structures to understand their influence on ACEs and migration. Berry's (1997) acculturation strategies illustrated how migrant children

navigate the dual pressures of maintaining their cultural identity while integrating into a new social environment. By exploring these strategies, the study highlights the adaptive mechanisms migrant children employ and demonstrates the coping strategies and resilience they develop to mitigate ACEs and difficulties in acculturation. The findings of the study suggest that while ACEs posed significant psychological challenges, factors such as social support structures and coping mechanisms played a crucial role in facilitating the acculturation process, with resilience developing as a response to the migration experience and ACEs. This emphasises the potential implications of supporting migrant children with systemic interventions.

Limitations

It is fundamental to understand the limitations of this study to contextualise the findings and highlight opportunities to improve future research. The limitations are subsequently outlined.

Sample Size

The sample was limited to nine participants, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of all migrant children in South Africa. While the in-depth interviews provided rich qualitative data, the small sample restricted the transferability of the findings. It is recommended that future research use a larger sample to capture a broader range of experiences and potentially reveal additional themes related to this topic.

Homogeneity of Participants

While diverse in terms of nationality and age, the participants predominantly shared similar socioeconomic backgrounds, which could have influenced the findings. Most of the

participants came from families that prioritised education and had the resources to migrate, which may not reflect the experiences of less privileged migrant children. The selection bias towards participants with access to educational resources is typically a more privileged community. This homogeneity may have limited the study's ability to explore the full spectrum of challenges children from different socioeconomic backgrounds face.

Self-Reported Data

The reliance on self-reported data may have resulted in bias. The participants' recollections of their childhood experiences may have been subject to recall bias, personal perceptions and social desirability bias. In addition, the emotional nature of the topics discussed, such as ACEs and mental health, may have led some participants to withhold or downplay certain aspects of their experiences.

Focus on South Africa

The study focused exclusively on immigrants in South Africa, thus limiting the applicability of the findings to other contexts. The unique socio-political and economic conditions in South Africa, including the history of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and inequality, may have shaped the participants' experiences in ways that would not be applicable in other countries. It is recommended that future research compare the experiences of migrant children in South Africa with those in other countries to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different contexts influence acculturation and migration processes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in this research, several targeted areas are noted for future research, interventions and policy considerations. These recommendations could enhance the support structures for migrant children who face ACEs and acculturation challenges.

Given the significant role that family support and educational opportunities play in the acculturation process, future research is recommended to explore how different family structures and educational settings influence the experiences of immigrant children. Future research should investigate the impact of varying family structures such as single-parent households and/or extended family systems and how these affect their ability to navigate the challenges of ACEs, migration and acculturation. This could provide insights into family-based resilience factors and reveal challenges and strengths associated with differing family structures.

It is also recommended that specific coping mechanisms that migrant children develop to manage the dual stressors of ACEs and acculturation be explored. While this study highlighted resilience as a common theme, emerging through the migration process and the exposure to ACEs, there is a need to investigate further how different coping mechanisms enable migrant children to adapt to new environments. Understanding these mechanisms more comprehensively could help develop targeted interventions that bolster psychological resilience in this population.

In addition, it would be beneficial for future research to explore interventions that can support migrant children in overcoming the challenges posed by ACEs and acculturation. The role of schools and educational institutions in supporting migrant children is crucial to

understanding their overall acculturation and migration experiences. Since many participants in this study noted schooling was a central factor in their acculturation, it is recommended that research explore how schools can create more inclusive environments for migrant students. Research focusing on school-based family counselling has already provided some useful guidelines in how this could take place (Marchetti-Mercer, 2013, 2023). This could include developing school-based programmes to foster resilience, peer support networks and mental health services tailored to the needs of migrant communities.

Finally, policymakers should consider the findings of this research when designing immigration and education policies structured to meet this population's needs directly. Ensuring that migrant children have access to adequate mental health services, stable family environments and inclusive educational systems is essential for their successful integration into their host country. In addition, prioritising policies that mitigate systemic issues such as xenophobia and discrimination is imperative to foster a supportive environment for migrant families.

Fundamentally, this study highlights the importance of a systemic approach to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by migrant children and their acculturation as well as emphasising their resilience and ability to thrive in the face of adversity.

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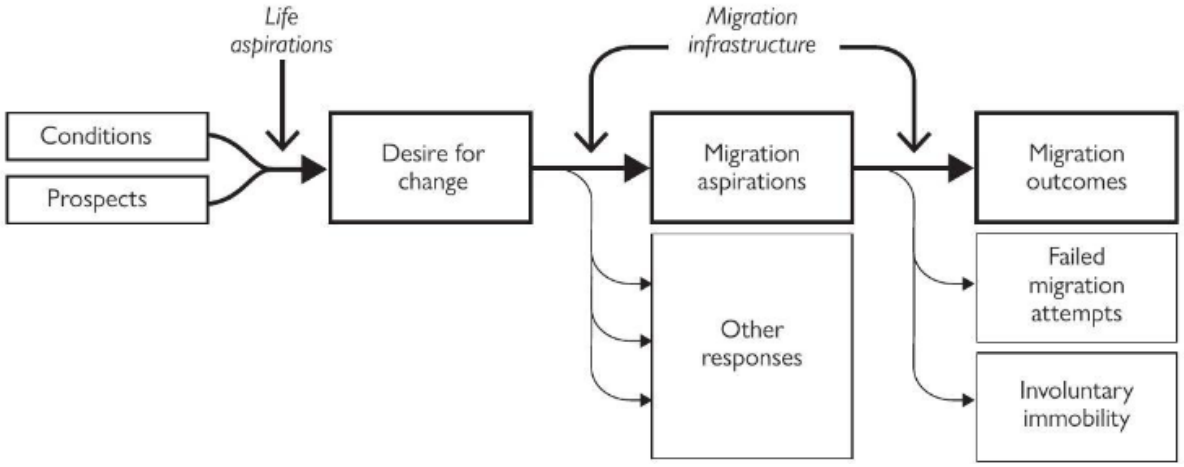
Zetino, Y. L., Galicia, B. E., & Venta, A. (2020). Adverse Childhood Experiences, Resilience, and Emotional Problems in Latinx Immigrant Youth. *Psychiatry Research*, *293*, 113450. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113450

Appendices

Appendix A

Figure 1

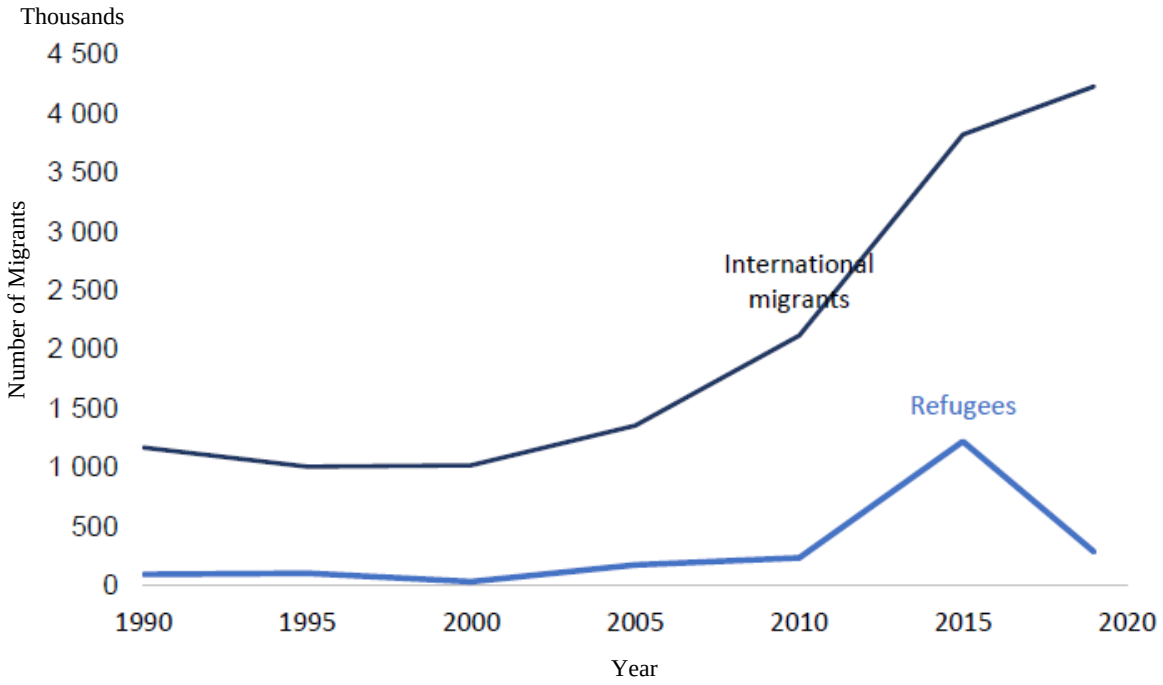
A Model of the Mechanisms that Produce Migration (Carling, 2017)



Appendix B

Figure 2

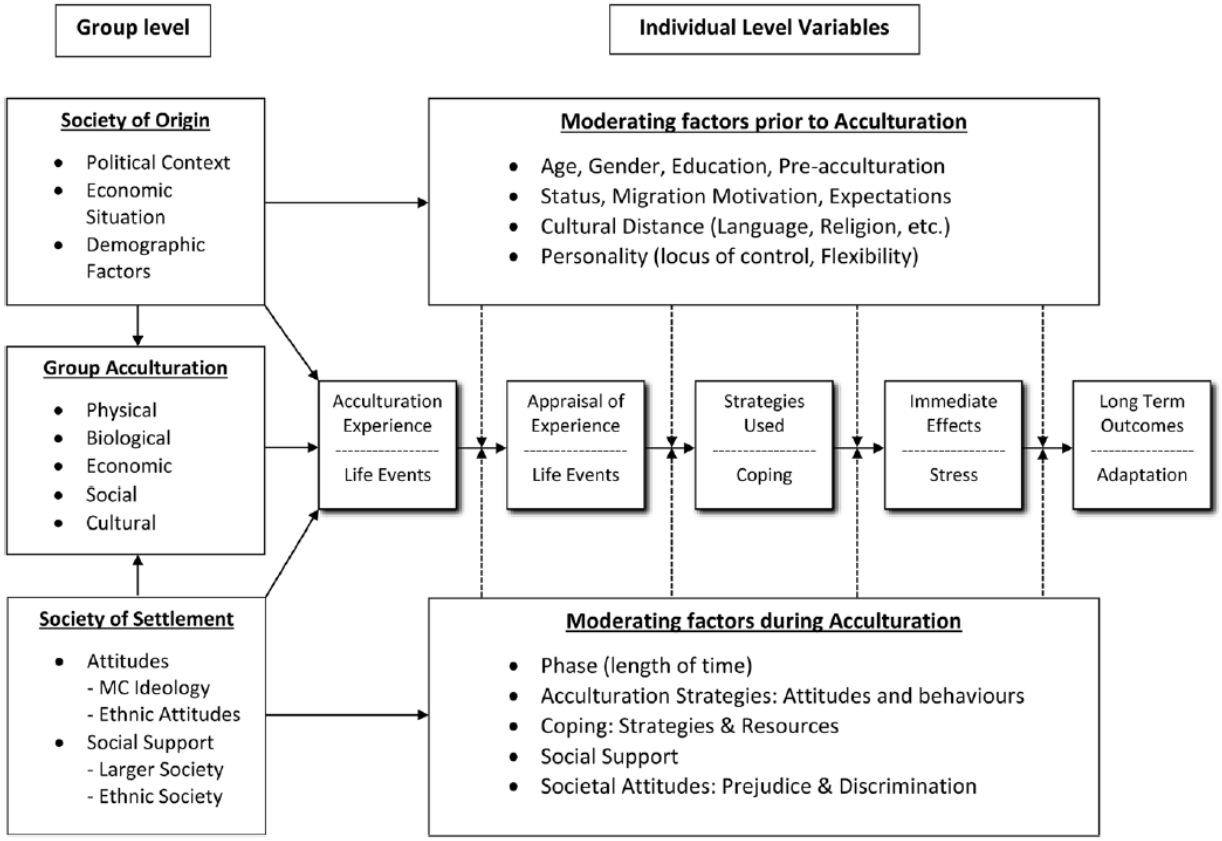
Number of International Migrants and Refugees in South Africa, 1990-2019



Appendix C

Figure 3

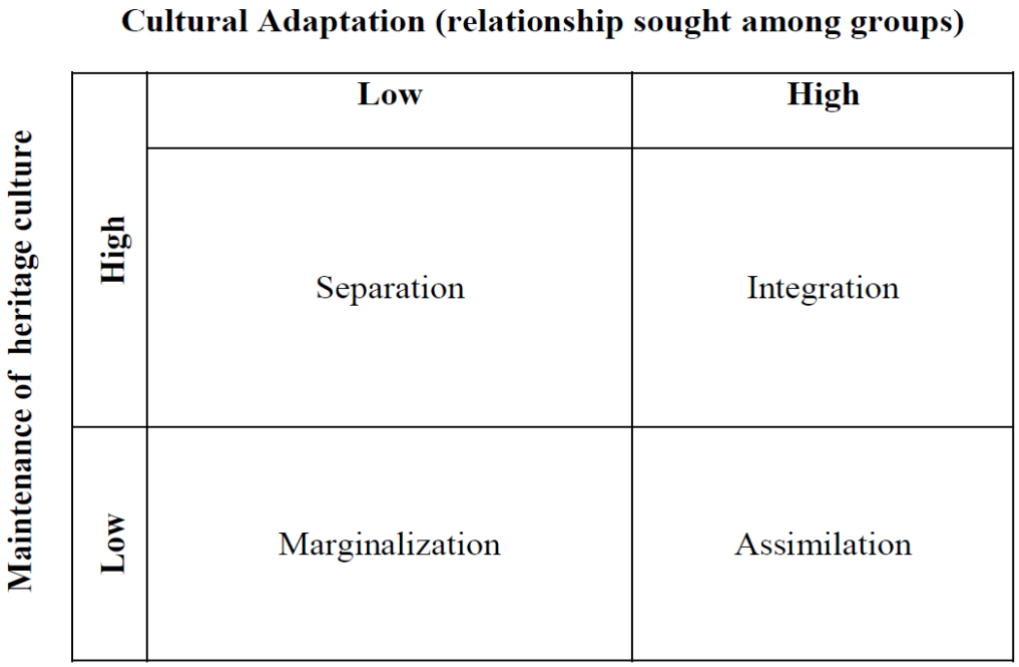
Framework for Research on Acculturation (Berry, 1997, p. 15)



Appendix D

Figure 4

The Two-dimensional Acculturation Model (Berry, 1997, p. 10)



Appendix E

Interview Schedule:

1. Name
2. Sex
3. Age
4. Race
5. Marital status
6. Current enrolment
7. Year of immigration
8. How old where you when you immigrated to South Africa?
9. Were you part of the decision to migrate? Why did your family decide to emigrate? How did you feel about the decision to emigrate / Were you given reasons when you immigrated? What were these reasons? What do you think the reasons were when you look back now?
10. How would you describe your migration experience? How did this impact your acculturation to South Africa?
11. What challenges and hardships did you/your family face?
12. What did contribute more into these challenges? (Prompts: children, family to support, language barriers, housing difficulties, employment issues, and cultural differences)
13. As a result of your experiences, do you feel more connected to South African culture, your home culture, or your family? Please explain your response.
14. Do you feel at home in South Africa? Do you still identify with your country of origin?
15. Do you tend to socialise more with SA or people from your own country?

Appendix F

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Race	Current enrolment	Year of Migration	Country-of-origin	Age at Migration	English Language proficiency
Ben	Male	24	White	Bachelor of Arts	2012	Zambia	13	Fluent
Aisha	Female	23	Black	Business Science Honours in Economics	2013	Namibia	13	Fluent
Rachel	Female	22	White	Bachelor of Medicine	2008	Zimbabwe	8	Fluent
David	Male	27	White	Bachelor of Arts	2007	Tanzania	12	Intermediate
Pierre	Male	20	White	Bachelor of Commerce	2011	Madagascar	9	Beginner
Kamau	Male	24	White	Bachelor of Arts	2012	Kenya	14	Fluent
Minji	Female	23	Asian	Bachelor of Veterinary Science	2016	South Korea	16	Beginner
Alessandro	Male	21	Mixed race	Bachelor of Commerce in Economics	2012	Seychelles	11	Intermediate
Adesuwa	Female	23	Black	Bachelor of Medicine	2008	Nigeria	9	Fluent

*Note that all names have been changed to pseudonyms to ensure anonymity

Appendix G

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: MACC/22/04**
PROJECT TITLE:	The Adverse Childhood Experiences of Immigrant University Students
INVESTIGATOR	Griffin Stephen (2496314)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	13 May 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2024

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 23 May 2022 **CHAIRPERSON** ____ (Dr Vinitha Jithoo) ____

Cc: Prof. Maria Marchetti-Mercer (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 11 August 2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix H

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Mr Stephen Robert Griffin
Unit 39 Tilbury
23 North Street
Illovo Ext 1
Johannesburg 2196
Gauteng
South Africa

Student Number: 2496314

24 May 2022

CC. Prof Maria Marchetti-Mercer

Dear Mr Stephen Robert Griffin

DECISION ON RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUBMITTED FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNITY BASED COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGY

I am pleased to advise you of the decision reached by the reader/readers of the Graduate Studies Committee on your proposal entitled: ***"The Adverse Childhood Experiences of Immigrant University Students."***

Reader's decision on proposal:

Accepted, but candidate should take note of warnings/ recommendations.

I confirm Prof Maria Marchetti-Mercer have been appointed as your supervisor.

Please take note of the information on the Criteria for submitting research for examination which is attached and ensure that the Faculty is informed of any changes of address during the year.

Kindly note that all MA and PhD candidates who would like to graduate as soon as possible must ensure that they meet the ETD requirements within six (6) weeks of receipt of the examiners' reports by the supervisor. **A student is required to remain registered in the Faculty until his/her graduation.**

Yours Sincerely

M Ntseare

Mpho Ntseare (Ms)
Faculty of Humanities
Private Bag X 3
Wits, 2050

Appendix I

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PSYCHOLOGY

Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Stephen Griffin. I am a Master's student in Community-based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. My supervisor is Prof. Maria Marchetti-Mercer. I am conducting a research study on the migration experiences of students who immigrated to South Africa as children, between the ages of 8 and 16. The study title is "The Adverse Childhood Experiences of Immigrant University Students".

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 45 minutes. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you (Teams/Zoom meetings can be arranged if preferable).

With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored on my personal secure, password protected laptop until the research has concluded and/or deleted after 5 years. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

During the research activity, I will need to ask for some personal information about you, including your name, age, race, sex, and marital status. The data will be collected during the interview and stored for the abovementioned time frame. The information will not be used for anything other than research purposes for this research.
The interview will be confidential. Anonymity will be guaranteed to the point of the researcher and supervisor, no further individuals will have access to any participants information. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you.

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 decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not receive any remuneration for taking part in this research study.

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 support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at CCDU or SADAG. The contact details for the counselling service are 011 717 9140 and 0800 567 567, respectively.

This research study will be written as a research report. 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,
Stephen Griffin

Researcher:
Stephen Griffin, 2496314@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor:
Prof. Maria Marchetti-Mercer, Maria.Marchetti-Mercer@wits.ac.za

Appendix J

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PSYCHOLOGY

Participant Consent Form

The Adverse Childhood Experiences of Immigrant University Students

Stephen Griffin

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 of participant)
_____ (name of participant)
_____ (date)

_____(signature)
_____(name of researcher/person seeking consent)
_____(date)