

## ABSTRACT

Global and local perceptions of early childhood development (ECD) have shifted in recent decades, with increasing emphasis placed on the importance of the early years and on caregiver-child interactions for the healthy development and growth of individuals. In the extensive literature in the area of ECD, there is a notable absence of literature on caregivers' perceptions and experiences of ECD, particularly in an under-resourced community setting. As caregivers' perceptions and experiences of ECD influence the manner in which they interact with children and the type of care provided; this was deemed an important aspect to investigate further. As a result, this inquiry attempted to understand these perceptions and experiences within the bio-ecological framework. The study utilised a social constructivist interpretivist paradigm that was both descriptive and exploratory in nature. Data was collected by means of individual interviews and later analysed by means of thematic content analysis. Applying the bio-ecological framework, the caregivers' individual, home, work and community contexts were highlighted. The findings yielded four main themes; the caregiver in the ECD centre, caregivers' perceptions of ECD, caregivers' experiences of ECD as it manifests in barriers to providing appropriate child care, and finally the risk and protective factors impacting on ECD in the South African context. The strength of the study lies in the addition of new insights on caregivers and their personal accounts of experiences related to ECD.

*Keywords: Early childhood development (ECD), perceptions and experiences, under-resourced, daycare, caregivers*