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Pandemic parenting: Stories of ordinary experiences in an extraordinary time.

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Educational Psychology) in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2023

Supervised by Hayley Haynes-Rolando

Non-medical clearance: MEDPSYC/22/09

Declaration

I declare that this Master's thesis is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Education in Educational Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.

Signed: 

Date: 7 July 2023

Abstract

The study sought to give voice to parents of children who display ADHD traits including hyperactivity, impulsivity and inattentiveness during the covid-19 pandemic. The aim was to explore their experiences of parenting during this unprecedented time in history. Qualitative data were gathered through narrative interviews from ten parents (seven mothers and three fathers) from middle-class backgrounds, living in Johannesburg. Photo elicitation was used as a tool to gather parents' stories and reflections of their pandemic parenting experiences in a creative, self-directed manner. The qualitative data were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis that generated four key themes: (1) Adjusting to an upside-down world; (2) Experiences of wearing too many hats; (3) Parents' (re)views of how their children's ADHD traits affected their learning at home; (4) Covid, a mixed bag of losses and treasures. A social constructionist lens for data analysis allowed for the exploration of how the covid-19 pandemic disrupted discourses and systems that shape parents' embodied experiences. Possibilities for new understandings of parents and as well as their children who display ADHD traits were considered. The findings can help to deepen our understanding of middle-class family life, challenge gendered relations, reconsider children's play and learning, transform schooling practices, foster meaningful parent-teacher interactions, encourage community-building, and prompt a re-evaluation of our understanding of "disorderly" children and their unique learning needs. By embracing these insights, we can pave the way for more inclusive and effective approaches to supporting families and children in navigating the complexities of education and well-being in times of crisis.

Acknowledgment

It is only by God's grace that this study is put forward. Thank you Father for walking this journey with me. Philippians 4 13

I will always be grateful to the parents who shared their stories so generously with me. Their openness and thoughtful engagement throughout the process contributed richly to this study.

To my parents, thank you for your unwavering support throughout this research journey and for your encouragement throughout my years of study. I am forever grateful for the opportunities you have afforded me.

Thank you to my supervisor for your guidance and patience. Thank you for challenging me and inspiring me to always be curious about new possibilities.

Dedication

To all the parents who generously shared their stories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (covid-19) that began spreading rapidly around the world in late 2019 has had an immense global impact. The virus outbreak has had significant health, social, and economic consequences for individuals and families (Bryant et al., 2020; Calvano et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021). In an effort to slow the spread of the Covid-19 virus, governments around the world imposed social-distancing restrictions and enforced strict lockdowns which had serious implications for daily living. Schools were closed, workplaces were shut and many lives as well as livelihoods were lost. The magnitude of the unexpected changes during this time have raised concern amongst clinical practitioners, researchers, and major health organisations about the significant increases in family stress (Adams et al., 2021).

With schools closed, parents had to take on the responsibility for supporting their children's learning via online learning platforms, by working through materials provided by schools, or by keeping children safe while they did not have access to formal learning opportunities. Parental stress during the pandemic soared (Adams et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2022; Wu & Xu, 2020) as parents juggled home schooling or no schooling, with their own work demands or worries about job insecurity, and the stress of intense family interactions without access to the social support from teachers, extended family, friends and other important cultural structures that they would otherwise have access to (Bryant et al., 2020; Wu & Xu, 2020).

Research has identified various factors that appear to have predisposed certain groups of parents to experience elevated parental stress and decreased wellbeing. Some of these factors include financial stress (Low & Mounts, 2022), restricted access to emotional and practical support (Chen et al., 2022), being parents of children younger than 11 years (Li et al., 2022), single parenthood (Li et al., 2022), and unemployment (Garcia et al., 2022). Notably, studies

conducted since the start of the pandemic have also indicated that parents of children with special educational needs or neurodevelopmental conditions suffered higher levels of parenting stress and symptoms of anxiety and depression than parents of typically developing children (Chung et al., 2020; Waite et al., 2020). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is among the most prevalent of childhood neurodevelopmental disorders (Willcutt, 2012). A meta-analysis by Theule et al. (2013) found that parents of children diagnosed with ADHD experience significantly more parenting stress than parents of children without the diagnosis. It is therefore possible that parents of children who display ADHD traits might have experienced great difficulty during the covid period, however no studies have explored the experiences of parents of children who display ADHD traits during the covid-19 pandemic yet. Some research has been conducted to investigate the parenting experiences of children with developmental disorders more broadly (e.g., Chan & Fung, 2021), and there is growing research exploring parenting experiences of parenting children with autism spectrum disorder (e.g., Bozkus-Genc & Sani-Bozkurt, 2022), but an exploration into the experiences of parents of children with ADHD over this time has yet to be conducted. Some initial research emerging out of the pandemic has shown that parents reported varied effects on the behaviour and adjustment of their children with ADHD (e.g., Bobo et al., 2020), but little is known about the impact the pandemic has had on parents of children with ADHD.

1.1 Rationale

Parents play and important buffering role in regulating their children's emotions and so maintaining parental mental health is of great importance for supporting healthy family functioning amidst crises, such as the covid-19 pandemic (Chu et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020). A comprehensive understanding of the various effects that the covid-19 pandemic has had on parents, children, and family systems will be useful for the development and successful implementation of future family-centered crisis interventions.

Children experienced the pandemic in a variety of ways. Their experiences were largely influenced by their family circumstances and their access to resources during this period. A comprehensive, non-systematic search of four data bases on research investigating the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on children and adolescents' mental health by Marques de Miranda et al. (2020) concluded that there are certain groups of children whose needs and vulnerabilities positioned them at an even greater risk than most children of the adverse effects associated with the pandemic. Groups of children who were likely to have been disproportionately affected by the covid-19 pandemic were those whose families were socio-economically disadvantaged and those who were living in conditions of poverty with limited access to resources. Those not connected to the internet faced exclusion during the pandemic as connectivity has become necessary for survival in a digital world (De' et al., 2020). Limited or no access to information and communication technology during the pandemic reinforced and, in many instances, exacerbated social inequalities, especially in relation to children's education in developing countries (De' et al., 2020; Dube, 2020). Given the digital divide that exists, it is necessary to explore the impact of connectivity on children and families to understand how it can enhance opportunities for development and to inform efforts that promote digital inclusion (De' et al., 2020). However, this study explores experiences of those who had access to information and communication technology during the pandemic.

A Chinese study by Zhang et al. (2020) that investigated the mental health of children with ADHD during the ecovid-19 pandemic by collecting data from 241 parents of diagnosed children revealed that children diagnosed with neurodevelopmental conditions and special learning needs were disproportionately affected by the adverse effects of the pandemic. Evidence in the literature emanating from the covid-19 period has suggested that children who display impulsive, hyperactive and inattentive traits typically associated with ADHD were particularly vulnerable to the negative social and emotional consequences of the pandemic

(Zhang et al., 2020). It has been suggested that these ADHD traits may be exacerbated by the conditions associated with the disruptions to families' daily routines, the exposure to environmental stress, and the pervasive uncertainty that was characteristic of the covid-19 pandemic (Kavoor & Mitra, 2021; Marques de Miranda et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2020). Children exhibiting ADHD traits include those who have received official diagnoses of ADHD and those children who are not diagnosed but who present with hyperactive, inattentive, and impulsive traits. With regards to the consequences of the pandemic for children who display ADHD traits, the emerging literature reports mixed findings of both challenges and opportunities. A systematic review of literature by Behrmann et al. (2022) reported elevated ADHD symptoms and increased psychological difficulties during the covid-19 pandemic, while most parents in a French anonymous survey of 538 parents by Bobo et al. (2020) reported improvements in their children's anxiety and self-esteem due to the increased flexibility allowed to suit their needs and a reduction in negative social feedback when schooled at home.

Considering the sensitivity associated with the developmental period of childhood and the role that parents play in moderating the negative impact of the threats, changes and uncertainty associated with the pandemic on children's wellbeing (Prime et al., 2020), it is valuable to consider how parents have experienced this time. When confronted with stress, the presence and dependability of parents are important for supporting children's capacity for emotional regulation (Gunnar, 2017). Therefore, an investigation into parenting experiences during this stressful period would be useful to understand the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on children's wellbeing. Accordingly, in this study, focus is placed on parents' experiences of the covid-19 pandemic, particularly parents of children who present with ADHD traits. This offers insight into how these parents made sense of their experiences during an unprecedented time in world history. Parents play a crucial role in shaping children's developmental outcomes and so it is valuable to shine a light on their stories of this time (Shum et al., 2023). Parents'

ordinary stories of this time may give insight into larger social functioning and discourse that shapes parenting experiences. It is useful to give voice to parents of children who present with ADHD traits in order to illuminate the challenges and opportunities that they have experienced, which will contribute to an understanding of the full range of families' well-being needs. An exploration of the experiences of parents will add to the body of research that is accumulating which captures the nuances of lived experiences during the covid-19 pandemic. Chu et al. (2021) highlight the urgency for the generation of new qualitative studies to capture people's experiences during this time because the detail of qualitative data may potentially offer new insights that could assist in explaining or offering context that may enrich the interpretation of quantitative data collected during this period.

This study illuminates the ordinary experiences of middle-class parents living in Johannesburg, South Africa during the covid-19 pandemic. It is necessary to situate this study within this context and to emphasize that the covid-19 pandemic is just one of various crises that South Africans have encountered. The country's dark history of apartheid continues to cast long shadows over the new South Africa (Durrheim et al., 2011). South Africa is regarded as one of the world's most divided countries regarding the distribution of resources (Seekings & Nattrass, 2008). The nation also continues to be dramatically polarized along divisions of race and class (Durrheim et al., 2011). Political freedom has not brought about improved standards of living for the majority of South Africans for whom conditions of poverty, unemployment and difficulty accessing services, like quality health care, housing and education, prevail (Alexander, 2013).

It is necessary to locate this study specifically within the context of South Africa's fragile, unequal education system. Soudien et al. (2022) draw attention to the negative impact that the pandemic had on an already vulnerable education system due to the legacy of injustice left by the apartheid government. Access to quality education remains unequally distributed

across the country and the pandemic exacerbated this inequality (Soudien et al., 2022). Whilst a fraction of South African learners who attended well-resourced public schools and independent schools transitioned to home schooling and online learning, the large majority of South African were unable to learn from home as a consequence of their socio-economic circumstances (Dube, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). The disparity in access to learning opportunities over the course of 2020 widened the educational inequality gap for South African learners (Le Grange, 2021). Therefore, it is acknowledged that this study explores the experiences of a very small part of the population of South African parents and that there is another set of parenting experiences that does not include home schooling or online learning.

South Africans have encountered and continue to encounter multiple macro-level stressors or crises beyond the covid-19 pandemic, such as country-wide load shedding of electricity, governmental corruption, looting, and gender-based violence. The economic and class divide that continues to plague South African society impacts on the way in which families are able to navigate these stressors (Durrheim et al., 2011). Those with access to resources are better able to navigate some of these challenges. For example, by installing solar panels or generators to overcome load shedding power outages or sending their children to high fee-paying schools to ensure their children's continued access to formal education. Therefore, this study of middle-class parents' experiences during this time affords insight into the ways in which a small group of parents with privileged access to valuable resources navigated this crisis. Understanding the nuances in the experiences of a particular group of parents may offer some understanding of the kinds of impacts that the pandemic has had on parents and families facing huge financial constraints in under-resourced environments.

1.2 Research Aims

The study's aims are outlined below:

- To explore the experiences of parents of children with ADHD traits during the covid-19 pandemic.
- To 'give voice' to parents by affording them an opportunity to share their personal experiences of parenting during this unprecedented time in history in a creative and self-directed manner.
- To understand parents' emotional responses to their experiences during the covid-19 pandemic.
- To explore how parents understand their experiences of family interactions and (online) learning during the pandemic.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What were the experiences of parents of children who display ADHD traits during the covid-19 period?
2. How do parents of children who display ADHD traits perceive the experiences that they had during the pandemic?

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

The literature begins by providing a grounding of the project in social constructionism, culture, and context after which consideration is given to narrative identity. Then, an exploration of the pandemic context is presented in relation to families where particular attention is given the multiple and complex losses, as well as the changes and challenges that families faced during this time. The literature on parental stress emanating from the pandemic is then explored in relation to family systems. Special consideration is given to what is known about the experiences of parents of children who present with ADHD. Finally, findings relating to some of the silver linings identified in the research are presented.

2.1 Social constructionism, culture and context

Social constructionism is a theory that is concerned with the development of shared knowledge, more specifically how particular meanings are assigned to certain objects, events, and phenomena to create a constructed reality (Burr & Dick, 2017). The influences of language, culture, time, discourse, power, and relativism on shaping understandings of the world are central tenets of social constructionism (Burr & Dick, 2017). From this perspective, knowledge is produced through thought, social interactions, and language within specific contexts rather than by observable external realities (Burr & Dick, 2017). Meanings are, therefore, created or constructed rather than existing independently from thought or social engagement. Constructed meanings are elaborated and reinforced through dialogue to form dominant discourses which reciprocally shape and are shaped by the experiences of individuals within a particular society (Wyness, 2018). Over time, discourses establish shared assumptions of reality which permeate across major spheres of the socio-political environment (Burr & Dick, 2017). Vygotsky (1962/2016) argued that language shapes learning experiences, logic, and reasoning. Vygotsky (1962/2016) suggested that not only is language responsible for mediating social learning, but it also is involved in cognitive developmental processes. Since language is the mode by which

individuals can engage with others and with the world, it is useful to recognise how language is a powerful mediator of development, how it supports the generation of discourses, and how it contributes to the establishment of identities (Burr & Dick, 2017).

Discourses of parenthood and of the roles of caregivers are of particular interest for this study. Parenting practices differ across cultures and across generations and so understandings of parenthood need to be considered in close relation to culture, context, and time (Burman, 2016). Notions of what it means to be a parent within a given cultural and historical context have implications for parental identity and the narratives constructed about the self, which in turn shape parental experiences (Crossley, 2000). Parents, for the purpose of this study, are defined as immediate caregivers who are responsible for the care of children through the satisfaction of children's physical, psychological, and emotional developmental needs.

Parenthood is steeped in culturally loaded expectations, roles and responsibilities deemed necessary for caring for and raising children in alignment with social scripts for mothers and fathers (Wyness, 2018). For example, mothers are typically assigned most of the caregiving and home-keeping responsibilities associated with raising a child, while fathers are responsible for the provision of practical and financial resources (Burman, 2016). Until relatively recently the term 'caregiver' almost exclusively referred to mothers (Burman, 2016). The scrutiny of parenting practices has a long history; however, it is typically mothers who receive praise or blame for the outcomes of their children. In this way, mothers have traditionally been positioned as having the most influence over their children's development (Shaw, 2008). This socially evaluated and pressured role of mothers has encouraged a dominant discourse of 'intensive mothering' to emerge whereby mothers are encouraged to dedicate themselves to satisfying the developmental needs of their children (Shaw, 2008). Notably, in more recent decades, fathers have also attracted scrutiny as the expectations of their involvement in children's upbringing have gradually increased. Research into absent fathers

and the implications of divorce on children's development has encouraged fathers' more active involvement in the parenting of their children (Shaw, 2008). Historically, the positioning of mothers as primary caregivers has significantly restricted women's participation in the market economy (Burman, 2016). What is dominant in the literature on mothering across time is what Hays (1996) identified in her seminal work as the pressure to be the 'ideal mother'. Hays (1996) outlines that 'ideal mothers' are totally self-sacrificing, caring, and readily available to their children. These beliefs about the roles of mothers have, over time, become institutionalised and internalised by mothers, fathers, policy makers and employers. For example, the rights, responsibilities, and expectations of mothers are circulated and reinforced by social institutions such as the media, governments, and religious establishments to the extent that motherhood can be perceived as having been institutionalised. Social institutions have organised frameworks to regulate and monitor different aspects of motherhood such as governments' terms of legal maternity leave for working mothers and through the medicalisation of the birth process by medical institutions. Whilst these perceptions of motherhood are not reflective of all mothers' experiences, it is useful to consider the wider social structures and systems that curate the role of mothers within societies.

Burman (2016) outlines that from its earliest roots, the discipline of Psychology has been preoccupied with evaluating child development and providing parenting advice. The introduction of Attachment Theory in the late 1950s by John Bowlby that was later advanced by Mary Ainsworth played a significant role in establishing the view that children's healthy emotional development is dependent on the quality of the parent-child relationship, placing the responsibility for children's developmental outcomes squarely on parents, particularly mothers (Burman, 2016). In western contexts the erosion of extended family involvement in childrearing as well as a modern shift towards trusting the expertise of professionals for the prescription of guidelines for raising children, has created an eager market for psychologised

parenting advice (Burman, 2016). However, the same trend is not necessarily true in the South African context where for many families, extended family members, particularly aunts and grandmothers, are often children's primary caregivers. Once again, the role that context plays in informing discourses of parenthood and parenting practices is emphasised.

In her book titled Deconstructing Developmental Psychology, Erica Burman (2016) presents compelling challenges to widespread discourses of parenting and childhood. Developmental Psychology set out to track and document general trends in human development across the lifespan, however, over time, the normal trends observed have become standards by which development, particularly the development of children, is evaluated. Those whose development does not conform to the milestone windows deemed acceptable, are considered to be abnormal or maladjusted. The pressure on 'ideal' parents supports discourses of locating children's 'difficulties' or 'abnormal development' in the parent or in the parent-child relationship. Themes of parent guilt, blame and inadequacy create and maintain a culture of anxiety amongst parents who then look to the expertise of professionals for parenting guidance and support rather than relying on their own intuition or the local wisdom of their own parents (Burman, 2016). It is these conditions which make it easy to understand why certain parents and certain children are pathologized by social systems and the discourses that inform them.

Discourses of parenthood permeate boundaries of the family and the state. The familiar assumptions that are held about childhood have major implications for not only the roles of parents but also for policies and social institutions, such as schools, which govern the lives of children and parents (Burman, 2016). The systematic reinforcement of these assumptions has consequences for the lived, embodied experiences of children and their parents (Wyness, 2018). Perhaps the consequences of such are most obvious where children's and parents' outcomes do not conform to the expectations ascribed within their context. These children who

fail to develop along favourable trajectories and parents who parent in unconventional ways, are marginalised and problematised in ways that can set them at odds with themselves and their societies (Burman, 2016).

Perhaps a clear example of children whose behaviour is classed as unfavourable, and problematic within western societies are those who present with traits commonly associated with the diagnosis of ADHD. Burman (2016) suggests that perhaps it is in the best interests of the state and of pharmaceutical companies to locate the problems associated with this 'disorderly' presentation within the child, within the parent-child relationships, or even family backgrounds rather than exploring the roles that institutions such as schools or the state have had in systematically positioning certain groups of children and parents as being deviant and socially disruptive within capitalist societies. ADHD traits such as impulsiveness, hyperactivity and inattentiveness are problematic in highly regulated schooling and work environments that expect orderly, predictable behaviour from children and adults from their earliest entrances into these spaces (Graham, 2008). The problematization of certain childhood behaviours and the severity of the consequences for intervention, such as medication, raises questions around whose best interests are being served through the labelling of disorders, such as ADHD (Hinshaw, 2018). Wyness (2018) emphasizes the various ways that we understand childhood reflects the socio, political and economic contexts in which children live.

In accordance with questions raised by Burman (2016), Timimi (2010) argues that ADHD is most aptly understood as a cultural construct. He supports the notion that the apparent rise in ADHD diagnoses is best accounted for by society's increasing intolerance of behaviour that fails to conform to that which is deemed acceptable within particular social contexts. More specifically, he states that whilst immaturity is biologically defined in children, the way in which different groups of people understand and ascribe meaning to children's development is a function of culture. Capitalist, neo-liberal market cultures are unforgiving in their demands

of children and parents who live and develop in a social environment where efficiency, competition and individualism are valued and encouraged, often at the expense of psychosocial wellbeing (Timimi, 2010; Wyness, 2018). Timimi (2010) argues that it is these cultural conditions which play a significant role in the medicalisation of certain normal childhood behaviours that do not satisfy the cultural expectations of optimal development in children. It is this cultural value system that reinforces the medical model's conceptualisation of ADHD, which locates the disorder within the child rather than the pathology-producing systems that operate within cultures and communities which are motivated by the financial rewards of a capitalist, market economy (Timimi, 2010, 2017a; Timimi & Taylor, 2004). Graham (2008) considers the implications of ADHD diagnosis on parents and 'inclusive education'. Firstly, she suggests that the diagnosis offers parents a 'label of forgiveness' as it relieves them of parental responsibility for their children's 'disorderly behaviour'. Secondly, she questions if the diagnosis of ADHD is educationally helpful. Graham (2008) suggests that rather than locating the disruption within the child, these 'disorderly children' highlight problems within dysfunctional, perhaps even pathological, 'inclusive' mass schooling systems.

By casting light on the critique of the medicalisation of ADHD traits, the intention is not to dismiss the difficulties that these children and their parents face nor to dismiss the existence of these traits, but rather to consider what causes difficulty for these children and their parents, and what structures make it challenging for parents to alleviate these difficulties without encountering further negative consequences through the labelling and stigmatization of their children. ADHD is the most commonly diagnosed disorder in child psychiatry (Timimi, 2017b) and so it is important for such considerations to be brought to the fore. In light of the above, I have chosen to rather investigate the experiences of parents of children who present with ADHD traits rather than those who have been formally diagnosed. Many children who present with ADHD traits have not been formally assessed for various reasons, including

parental preference, and therefore I did not want to limit the exploration to only those parents who have had their children's ADHD traits formally assessed and clinically diagnosed. Furthermore, it is useful to consider the perceptions of a broader range of parents of children who present with ADHD traits in an effort to offer a more nuanced understanding of their experiences of the presentation. Fay (1996) outlines that who you are and how you understand your social roles shapes how you perceive your experiences in the world. Therefore, how parents perceive their parenting experiences is shaped by their parental identity and their relationship to the multiple roles they are expected to occupy in line with their parental identity.

2.2 Narrative identity

Individuals' identities are influenced by the socio-cultural environment in which they live, and so parental identities should be considered in light of relevant contextual factors. Fay (1996) explains that our experiences are informed by our interpretive assumptions including our personal characteristics, expectations, memories, wishes, and cultural beliefs. Individuals' identities intersect to shape the way in which they engage with their social environment and in turn their identities are shaped by their experiences within their context.

For parents, the birth of a child can initiate a powerful shift in the way that they think about themselves and how they are perceived by others. The construct of identity has been construed in a variety of ways by different theoretical and research traditions over the years (Pleck & Stueve, 2004). In more recent decades, identity in a certain role, such as parenthood, has more commonly been conceptualized from a narrative approach which regards identity as the 'story' that one tells oneself and others about that particular role. The understanding of human experiences through the medium of narrative has become increasingly popular across the social science disciplines because it offers so many possibilities for understanding the multidimensional, nuanced and changing ways in which it is possible to be in the world (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Ricoeur (1991) describes how life is lived and stories are told. He suggests that culture proposes plots and narratives that individuals assume, modify, and reject. Characters in the proposed cultural plots are used as models or schema for the development of the multidimensional self-concept. In this way, people make sense of themselves in terms of the stories they hear and tell over the lifespan and so narratives are central to the subjective process and product of identity development (Fay, 1996). It is through narrative identity that individuals present who they are in the present, understand how they came to be that way, and predict where they envision their lives to be in the future. Over time, stories of one's life are told, retold, reimagined, and are assessed in terms of cultural factors which cumulatively inform the establishment of a cohesive identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narratives are born from dynamically recollected experiences; this understanding is of critical value to the study.

Research into parental identities has tended to explore the identities of mothers and fathers separately for the purpose of better understanding how these identities shape parent-child relationships. Despite the gradual generational shift away from the notion of the nuclear family and associated traditional parental roles, notions of parenthood and parental identity emerge in relation to conceptualisations of childhood (Burman, 2016). Childhood has been conceptualized in a myriad of ways over time and it continues to be an area of debate (Wyness, 2018). What is clear is that the conceptualization of childhood is a function, not only of the time in history, but also of various social, political, and cultural forces which are systematically imposed by adults (Haring et al., 2019; Wyness, 2018). Rather than simply being a biological fact, childhood, like parenthood, can be understood as a social phenomenon constructed by the social and political forces within a modern society (Wyness, 2018). For centuries children were considered to be immature adults who were devoid of knowledge, which positioned children as being unsophisticated and empty minded, and therefore in need of intervention by adults in

the form of mass schooling and discipline in order to prepare them for life as active adult citizens within a capitalist economy (Wyness, 2018). This in turn had significant consequences for the roles of parents who were tasked with preparing their children to cope with the cognitive and social demands of mass schooling. In contemporary contexts, schooling is accepted as an essential feature of modern childhood (Wyness, 2018). By enforcing compulsory mass schooling, relationships between children and their parents were disrupted and parents' roles as educators as well as the knowledge that they imparted was devalued relative to the skills developed in children through mass schooling (Burman, 2016; Wyness, 2018).

Burman, (2016) offers various reflections on notions of childhood and how they relate to parent identities. She notes how children, by the nature of their immaturity in relation to adults, are positioned through social discourses of children's 'needs' as being passive and helpless and largely in need of the service and protection of parents and other authoritative adults, like teachers, rather than as active participants who have agency to determine their own outcomes (Burman, 2016). This social narrative positions parents as being responsible for meeting their children's needs for the betterment of the larger capitalist society. Implicit cultural pressures to be good enough parents give rise to parental anxiety when parents feel at risk of not fulfilling their socially determined parental responsibilities (Burman, 2016).

Another of Burman's reflections centers around the notion of 'childhood' as being a universal experience. Just as there is no universal experience of childhood, there is no universal experience of parenthood. Instead, Burman (2016) argues that standardized models of childhood and development are based on narrow, western conceptualisations of the ideal child and ideal parents and that these models do not consider the cultural and economic diversity of childhoods and parenthoods that exist across the world. Thus, it is important to be cognizant of the way in which children and childhoods are considered as there are relevant consequences for how we view and value parent identities in different contexts. This consideration becomes

very important in instances where it may be tempting to evaluate children's development and parenting practices in majority world countries by the models and milestones developed in western contexts (Burman, 2016). Popular child-centered approaches to education tend to locate dysfunction in the child's background when a child is unsuccessful. When a child is successful, success is typically attributed to their exposure to appropriate schooling. Therefore, this notion positions parents squarely as the site of both evaluation and intervention regarding children's developmental shortcomings (Burman, 2016). These ideas are relevant to how we understand parenting within the context of the covid-19 pandemic where the spread of the virus and efforts to contain it triggered various disruptions to family systems, school systems, healthcare systems, economic systems and social support systems. As mentioned in the introduction, South Africans are familiar with large-scale disruptions. How parents and families cope in times of change or when confronted with crisis is informed by their previous experiences of crisis. Therefore, this study may offer insights into how parents navigate through times of stress by exploring the kinds of narratives they construct about their experiences.

Ricoeur (1991, p.30) describes that man becomes "entangled in stories" and this idea may be extended to include families too. Families' identities are shaped by meaning making processes that family members engage in and importantly by the way the family engages with society Families and the narratives of families are collaboratively entangled with the stories of the time. The relationality of identity within and across families is emphasised for the purposes of this research. The way that family members, such as parents, plot their own narratives can be informed by their role within the family, the stories told about the family within the family, and by outsiders' narratives of the family. In this way, it may be impossible to disentangle narrative identities as they are, by their very nature, highly relational. In accordance with this

notion, Fay (1996, p.11) articulates this idea clearly, “everyone’s identity is importantly a functioning of the social and cultural world in which they live.”

2.3 Families in the covid-19 context

To date, a total of 755 million confirmed cases of covid-19 have been recorded internationally (World Health Organization, 2023). The virus outbreak had significant health, social, and economic consequences for individuals and family systems (Bryant et al., 2020; Calvano et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021). By the end of March 2020, most countries around the world, including South Africa, implemented travel restrictions, and introduced strict national lockdowns in an unprecedented global effort to limit the spread of the infectious respiratory virus. This meant that schools were shut, workplaces were closed, some employees were forced to work from home, congregations were prohibited from gathering at places of worship, and recreational events were cancelled or postponed indefinitely. The pandemic disrupted almost every aspect of people’s lives from work and learning to health and social interactions. The devastating loss of lives and livelihoods played a major part in perpetuating the mental health crisis linked to the health pandemic (Xiong et al., 2020). The financial, emotional and health strains that families around the world endured since the start of the pandemic were tremendous (Garcia et al., 2022). Given the complex and interactional nature of the stressors associated with the pandemic, it is likely that a more comprehensive appreciation of the true magnitude of the psychosocial consequences of the pandemic on families may only become clear in years to come (Chu et al., 2021; Prime et al., 2020).

2.3.1 Multiple and complex losses associated with the covid-19 pandemic

Research on the pandemic has emphasized the impact that loss experiences have had on individuals and family systems (Zhai & Du, 2020). The covid-19 health and economic crises have been characterised by a pervasive sense of loss and uncertainty with families facing

unprecedented, complex, and traumatic losses (Fukumura et al., 2021). The following excerpt lifted from Walsh (2020, p.899) captures the multiple and compounding loss experiences that have been triggered by the pandemic:

> …the tragic deaths and threatened loss of loved ones; the loss of physical contact with family members and social networks; the loss of jobs, financial security, and livelihoods; the loss of pre-crisis ways of life and threatened loss of hopes and dreams for the future; and the loss of a sense of normalcy in shattered assumptions about our lives and connections with the world around us.

Primary and secondary losses have been encountered on a large scale. Significant losses or major life changes are considered to be primary losses and secondary losses are consequential to primary losses (Zhai & Du, 2020). For example, the primary loss of a loved one may be associated with several secondary losses such as a loss in a family role or a loss of a companion or breadwinner.

Health care systems around the world struggled to cope with multiple pressures driven by the pandemic. Healthcare workers were stretched to the limit as they prioritized caring for covid-19 patients whilst risking exposing themselves to the virus (Shaukat et al., 2020). Whilst covid-19 directly increased the death toll, it also indirectly lead to an increase in non-covid deaths as treatments and operations of people with other life-threatening conditions were postponed and others in need of medical care avoided visiting hospitals and doctors out of fear of being infected with covid-19 (Eisma et al., 2020).

One of the themes emerging out of loss research of the covid-19 period is the loss that people experienced due to social distancing rules where family members were prohibited from being with their loved ones who were sick or dying in the acute phases of the pandemic (Walsh,

2020). Being unable to provide support and to say their last goodbyes has complicated and prolonged grief processes during this time (Walsh, 2020). Attendance at funeral gatherings was also restricted and many funeral practices and traditional burial rites had to be adjusted in line with rules set to limit the spread of the covid-19 virus, for example no open caskets or home cleansing rituals of the body in preparation for the funeral (Bank & Sharpley, 2022; Omonisi, 2020). Typically, African funerals are elaborate and are usually attended by large numbers of friends, family and community members which is very different from western funerals which tend to be more private (Omonisi, 2020). Disruptions in mourning traditions, especially funerals, disturb mourners' meaning making processes (Bank & Sharpley, 2022). Increased likelihood of grief complications has been found in those bereaved by covid-19 death compared to deaths by other natural causes (Eisma et al., 2021). Traditional African communities have voiced their distress about the number of 'improper' funerals and burials that took place during the height of the pandemic and concerns about the impact that compromised ceremonies have on community members' spiritual wellness has been noted (Bank & Sharpley, 2022). A rapid review of studies investigating the impact of funeral practices on bereaved relatives' mental health and grief outcomes concluded that the benefit of post-death rituals, such as funerals, depend on the mourner's ability to shape those rituals and pay respect to the deceased in a ways that are meaningful to them and whether, in their view, the ritual displays adequate social support for the bereaved (Burrell & Selman, 2022). These findings within the context of the covid-19 pandemic suggest that limitations on funeral practices, such as limited attendance or online funerals, do not necessarily lead to negative outcomes for the bereaved (Burrell & Selman, 2022). In line with Walsh's (2020) assertion that meaning making is essential for fostering hope in the face of difficulty related to the pandemic, Burrell and Selman (2022) argue that it is not the number of attendees or the mode of conducting the funeral that shapes how supportive the funeral is, but rather it is how meaningful the experience is for the mourners

and whether the experience supports mourners in feeling connected to the deceased and to one another. In addition to the losses that families encountered, the pandemic initiated multiple challenges and changes that called for families to make various adjustments to their lives.

2.3.2 Families' encounters with challenges and changes related to the pandemic

Beyond the healthcare crisis that circulated, families struggled to keep abreast of major life changes in the midst of the death or risk of death of family members, food and housing insecurity, as well as devastating financial losses (Liu & Doan, 2020). The literature suggests that the extended periods spent at home together during lockdowns were associated with positive and negative outcomes for families. The opening line of Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities captures the divide reported in the literature on families' experiences appropriately, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times" (Dickens, 2012, p.1). Reviewing the literature reports of the many different experiences of this time highlighted the multiple layers of meaning which can be explored through narrative approaches to inquiry, as described by Ricoeur (1981). Long periods of time spent together led to a reported increase in marital conflict and intimate partner violence since the start of the pandemic (M. Evans et al., 2020; Wu & Xu, 2020). More intense parent-child relationships were also reported along with an increase in child maltreatment (Katz & Fallon, 2022; Wu & Xu, 2020). Children with special educational needs were at higher risk of maltreatment during the covid-19 pandemic than they were prior to the pandemic (Tso et al., 2022). On the other hand, where families were able to draw on their strengths and coping skills, they reported positive outcomes such as strengthened family relationships (S. Evans et al., 2020). Although, it must be noted that a review of the existing literature suggests that the negative impacts that the pandemic had on families tended to dominate.

During periods of lockdown, homes were transformed into multi-functional spaces. Prior to the pandemic, homes had typically served as domestic dormitories for personal use

whereby most family members would go out to places of work or learning during the day (Signorelli et al., 2020). In different social contexts, the reorganisation of spaces during the pandemic varied depending on the needs of family members and the space available. Some research suggests that in well-resourced environments where access to information and communication technology was secured, homes were creatively reorganized to accommodate family members' work and educational needs (Chu et al., 2021; Michelson et al., 2021). For example, dining room tables served as school desks and bedrooms hosted business meetings (Michelson et al., 2021). The sharing and negotiation of home spaces increased demands on family relationships in new ways that families may not otherwise have encountered (Prime et al., 2020). Parents in Chu et al.'s (2021) study reflected that there was no personal space and that an absence of quiet time was notable as family members shared home spaces for extended periods.

Being confined at home for extended periods also stimulated major changes in family routines and rituals (Chu et al., 2021; Michelson et al., 2021). Families reported that the sudden changes and lack of structure in their daily lives when lockdowns were implemented were disruptive and stressful to family functioning (Gayatri & Irawaty, 2022). The results of an American longitudinal study of family stress and wellbeing by Bates et al. (2021) indicate that family routines were difficult to maintain within the context of covid, however, where families were able to maintain them, routines were associated with better well-being, for individuals and for families. A longitudinal study of 433 American parents by Adams et al. (2021) reported that a change in children's routines was the most commonly identified factor that influenced parenting during the pandemic. The majority of parents in Adams et al.'s (2021) study indicated that implementing a daily routine for their children was effective in managing parenting difficulties in the early stages of lockdown and over time, more and more parents indicated the same, which suggests that this strategy became increasingly useful as the pandemic progressed.

Not only does the predictability of a routine benefit children, but it also benefits parents by increasing their sense of organization and control which in turn, elevates experiences of parental competence and lowers parental stress (Fiese et al., 2002).

With the sudden closure of schools, parents were thrust into supporting and facilitating their children's home learning during periods of the pandemic, it is therefore a prominent topic in the literature. School closures around the world meant that millions of children were abruptly cut off from their usual face-to-face education (Lee et al., 2021) and parents were responsible for supporting their remote education, where their children had privileged access to continued learning opportunities. Most of what is known about online learning strategies and experiences emanates from experiences during non-crisis times. Research emerging from the pandemic has pointed to the close guidance and scaffolding that children needed from their parents in order to engage in remote learning (Michelson et al., 2021). Parents indicated that teachers and schools underestimated the amount of parental involvement required for supporting children's use of technology for online learning (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). Parents reported that they had to be on standby to help their children login to virtual classrooms via various links and using different login codes (Michelson et al., 2021). Children have not yet adequately developed the problem-solving skills and technological experience to successfully troubleshoot technical difficulties independently (Michelson et al., 2021). Parents also reported difficulties with uploading their children's work onto the required platforms (Michelson et al., 2021). Different schools and different teachers adopted varying approaches to online learning with some running online classes for most of the day, with others doing about an hour of instructional time, leaving parents to facilitate their children completing exercises independently of their teachers. Parents found the latter approach to be very demanding of their time and they reported to feel ill-equipped with the skills to adequately teach their children as

expected as children were largely unable to self-direct their learning (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021).

Beyond the technical support that children required for online learning, parents reported that they had to monitor their children during online lessons, with children with special educational needs requiring significant facilitation and support from parents, as some engagement needs could not be adequately met by teachers virtually (Michelson et al., 2021). In particular, Becker et al. (2020) reported that parents of children with ADHD experienced significant difficulty with remote learning during the pandemic. Bobo et al. (2020) described that during the pandemic, parents became more aware of the impact of their child's inattention and ADHD symptoms on their barriers to learning. This suggests that parents found their support of their children's home schooling to be an enlightening experience. Parents reported to have greatest difficulty sustaining their children's attention during remote learning (Nayir & Sari, 2021). Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) reported that parents were concerned that teachers were unable to cater for the individual learning needs of children online and that children simply did not receive the amount of interaction with their teacher that they required. Children required close parental support over and above the input from their teachers when learning remotely (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). An article posted by the Gulf News stated, "Parents have to play teacher's aide, hall monitor, counsellor, and cafeteria worker – all while trying to do their own jobs under extraordinary circumstances" (Harris, 2020).

Lockdown policies meant that many workplaces were closed for business. For those who were able to keep their jobs, adjusted work functioning or working from home became a reality. An early study that examined the sentiments of English tweets that were posted worldwide between March and April of 2020 found that most mentions (73%) about working from home were positive (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020). However other studies which considered experiences during the wider pandemic period emphasized the difficulties that employees faced

because of the blurring between their work and private spheres of life when working from home (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Research emanating from the pandemic has consistently found that working mothers faced increased difficulty in maintaining work-family balance, with mothers typically performing more housework and childcare responsibilities than fathers despite their presence in the home during lockdowns (O'Reilly, 2020; Spinelli et al., 2021). This finding suggests that the heightened caregiving demands on 'ideal mothers' as outlined by Hays (1996) may have prevailed and perhaps even been exacerbated during the covid-19 pandemic. As parental demands increased with the closure of schools, working parents reported that working from home led to experiences of burnout (Hayes et al., 2021) and stress (Galanti et al., 2021). More than half of the participants in an Italian online survey study by Bolisani et al. (2020) indicated that they worked longer hours than they would usually when working from home during the pandemic. Michelson et al. (2021) reported that American parents in their study described how juggling various demands meant that they could not focus adequately on their own work during working hours due to interruptions and so they found that working in the evenings, once their children were asleep, to be the only solution to meeting their work demands, but it left them feeling tired and emotionally drained. This developed into a "vicious cycle" for parents (Michelson et al., 2021). However, despite the challenges associated with working from home identified in the literature, there is evidence that after having the experience, many employees have indicated their preference to continue working from home, or at least split their time between the office and their home (Fukumura et al., 2021).

The theme of parents having to uphold multiple roles and responsibilities during the pandemic was reported by several studies (e.g., Dawes et al., 2021; Harth & Mitte, 2020; Michelson et al., 2021; Shum et al., 2023) which suggests that it was a dominant experience for parents. Demands on parents were high as childcare, children's education, work, parental, domestic responsibilities converged. In particular, parents reported to have most difficulty

balancing the demands of work and childcare (Shum et al., 2023; Weaver & Swank, 2021). This left them feeling mentally exhausted (Shum et al., 2023) and as though they were ‘stretched thin’ (Chu et al., 2021). Dawes et al. (2021) reported that some mothers, but mostly fathers reported difficulties in meeting their work responsibilities whilst simultaneously caring for their children at home. The act of prioritizing work and childcare or children’s education weighed heavily on parents’ shoulders and this tension reportedly gave rise to feelings of guilt and stress (Dawes et al., 2021). It appears that mothers felt particularly burdened by the emotional ‘load’ of caregiving of their children (Chu et al., 2021; Harth & Mitte, 2020; O’Reilly, 2020).

Parents of young children and children with special needs in Shum et al.'s (2023) study reported that they had to make sacrifices in their work in order to support their children during the pandemic. This involved engaging managers in difficult conversations and in some instances, parents decided to reduce their work capacity by working half-day, part-time, or they left their jobs entirely (Shum et al., 2023). The literature suggests parents felt overwhelmed by the multiple demands they faced and that they oftentimes did not perceive that they had the capacity to successfully meet these demands, giving rise to experiences of parental stress (Kandula & Wake, 2022).

2.3.3 Parental stress and family systems

The American Psychological Association (2020) reported elevated stress in parents compared to non-parents during the pandemic (APA, 2020). Parental stress arises when a parent perceives that the demands exerted on them exceed their resources for meeting with them (Deater-Deckard, 1998). Parental stress rose significantly during the pandemic (Brown et al., 2020; Calvano et al., 2021; Kandula & Wake, 2022; Spinelli et al., 2021). Abidin's (1995) model of parental stress outlines that parenting stress emerges from two domains: the domain

of the child whereby parental stress can be directly related to the characteristic of the child, or from the domain of the parent whereby stress is associated with the functioning of the parent.

Findings from some studies conducted during the pandemic draw attention to the relevance of parental stress because of its association with outcomes related to children, such as emotional and behavioural problems (Calvano et al., 2021; Spinelli et al., 2020), and parent-child closeness (Chung et al., 2020). This further points to the social construction of the modern child that is vulnerable and in need of protection by functional parents who are ultimately responsible for their child's development (Burman, 2016; Wyness, 2018). As reported by Alonzo et al., 2022 in their study of 330 parents in Guataemala, high levels of parental stress during the pandemic have been linked to an increase in harsh parenting in low-income countries and an alarming rise in adverse childhood experiences including domestic violence, child abuse and child neglect have been reported around the world according to a review by a group of international child abuse and neglect researchers (Katz & Fallon, 2022). A Hong Kong study by Tso et al. (2022) offered an insight into the mental wellbeing and risk of maltreatment of children with special educational needs during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study reported significantly poorer quality of life of children with special educational needs during this period.

Numerous studies (e.g., Wiener et al., 2016; Yousefia et al., 2011) and a comprehensive meta-analysis by Theule et al. (2013) concluded that parents of children diagnosed with ADHD experience greater parental stress than parents of typically developing children and that the severity of children's ADHD symptoms such as hyperactivity is associated with parental stress. In line with these reports, some recent studies have also identified that parents of children with special educational needs and developmental disorders, such as ADHD, experienced higher than usual levels of parenting stress during the pandemic (e.g., Chan & Fung, 2021; Waite et al., 2020). The findings from some preliminary research have revealed that the pandemic and the associated national lockdowns have had varied impacts on children with ADHD and their

families (Bobo et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021). Notably, research has tended to investigate the experiences of children and adolescents with ADHD through parent surveys and interviews (e.g., Tessarollo et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). Parental reports of children's worsening ADHD traits during the covid pandemic are dominant in the literature (Shah et al., 2021). A systematic review of the impact of the pandemic on the mental health outcomes of individuals with ADHD by Behrmann et al. (2022) concluded that the pandemic has been associated with elevated ADHD symptoms (including increased activity levels, inattentiveness, and impulsivity as well as disruptive behavior) and increases in psychological difficulties (including depressed mood, anxiety, and loneliness). With regards to parents' perceptions of their ADHD children's wellbeing, a French study by Bobo et al. (2020) reported that 34,7% of parents observed a decline, 34,3% of parents observed no changes, and 30,9% of parents reported improvements. Parents in the same study reported improvements in their children's anxiety. Parents linked improvements to less school-related strain and flexible schedules that better suited their children's rhythms (Bobo et al., 2020). Additionally, parents reported their observations of their children's improved self-esteem as a consequence of less school-based interactions and therefore less negative feedback (Bobo et al., 2020).

A study by Becker et al. (2020) provided initial evidence that ADHD-affected adolescents and their parents have experienced greater difficulties with remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic than adolescents who are not affected by ADHD and their parents. Becker et al. (2020) also raised concern that many children who had been receiving counselling, therapy or tutoring prior to the school closures did not continue with these interventions and support processes during the pandemic when remote learning was introduced. Becker et al. (2020) suggest that the disruption of access to these sources of support to children with ADHD traits and their families contributed to declines in children's mental health and educational performance.

Parents have provided useful insights into their children's functioning and outcomes related to the pandemic, but to date, no investigation has qualitatively explored the experiences of parents of children with ADHD during the pandemic to gain insight into what this period was like for them. Investigations into the parenting experiences of children with other neurodevelopmental conditions, like autism spectrum disorder, have been undertaken (e.g., Bozkus-Genc & Sani-Bozkurt, 2022) and the same would be useful for parents of ADHD children. These insights will inform therapeutic interventions to support families of children with ADHD traits and can be used to inform protocols for supporting families in future crises. Research conducted prior to the pandemic (Gupta, 2007; Leitch et al., 2019; Podolski & Nigg, 2001; Theule et al., 2013; Yousefia et al., 2011) and research conducted during the pandemic (Chan & Fung, 2021; Waite et al., 2020) has indicated that parents of children with neurodevelopmental disorders, including ADHD, experience increased stress and poorer mental health than parents of typically developing children. Qualitative investigations into parental experiences, particularly in covid times, is lacking and therefore worthy of investigation.

Calvano et al. (2021) suggest that parental stress is a good indicator for understanding the impact of the pandemic on family systems given how closely linked it is to parents' and children's wellbeing. Brown et al. (2020) demonstrated in their American study that an accumulation of stressors elevated reports of perceived parental stress. However, the authors suggested that not all parents exposed to multiple, cumulative stressors associated with the pandemic were at higher risk of parental stress or poor parenting practices because of the role that protective factors played in building coping skills that mitigated the adversity of covid-19 on parents and family systems. Similarly, Prime et al. (2020) propose a conceptual model informed by systemic models of human development and functioning families for understanding the non-linear and bidirectional influences of various factors that operate within

and around family systems to influence a range of outcomes for families. Prime et al. (2020) emphasise the cascading effects that the social disruptions caused by the covid-19 pandemic had on families and child adjustment. Their proposed model is constructed by combining key concepts of the following theories: family systems theory, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, the family stress model, and developmental systems theory (Prime et al., 2020). They emphasise that experiences of hardship, parental wellbeing, family health and the adjustment of children are all linked within a sensitive system whereby relationships and outcomes are mutually reinforcing of one another. As such, they argue that disruption in one domain of the system has direct and indirect effects on other domains within the system. Prime et al. (2020) consider how pre-existing vulnerabilities and strengths within family systems contribute to family outcomes as either stressors or protective factors.

With an appreciation of the cascading processes outlined by Prime et al. (2020), it is therefore possible to understand how parental wellbeing can serve as a funnel by which the pandemic-related disruptions permeate the functioning of family systems through changes to parent-child relationships, marital relationships and sibling relationships (Prime et al., 2020). Zhang et al.'s (2022) study of 3471 Chinese parent-child dyads demonstrated that within the context of the pandemic, parental psychological distress (including anxiety and depression) significantly predicted their children's distress. Similarly, Uy et al. (2022) reported that parents' fear of the covid-19 virus positively predicted their young children's fear of the virus. These findings highlight the interconnectedness and sensitivity of family systems and therefore the risks of transmission of negative parental outcomes onto their children. However, research has also highlighted the important buffering role that parents can play in protecting family systems and children against the adverse impact of the pandemic (Chu et al., 2021; Gayatri & Irawaty, 2022; Prime et al., 2020; Y. Zhang et al., 2022). Parents can effectively mediate children's distress by supporting children's emotional regulation processes (Chu et al., 2021).

In other words, parents serve as gatekeepers to children's wellbeing amidst the pandemic. Notably, there was considerable variation in the ways in which families were affected by the pandemic, with some being more vulnerable to negative consequences due to pre-existing risk factors, such as economic insecurity, poor mental health and underdeveloped coping skills, while others coped and experienced minimal negative consequences of the pandemic, and perhaps some families may also have enjoyed post-traumatic growth (Prime et al., 2020).

Various factors that promote family coping have been identified in the literature stemming from the covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, Prime et al. (2020) outlined that building and maintaining family relationships can serve as an important buffer against multiple sources of adversity. Secondly, family belief systems can help families to make sense of and understand events associated with the pandemic in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them (Prime et al., 2020; Walsh, 2020). Thirdly, hope is recognised as a powerful counterforce for adversity, uncertainty and despair (Walsh, 2020). Fourthly, gratitude as a daily family-practice has consistently emerged in the literature as being useful in the face of challenges (Chu et al., 2021; Gayatri & Irawaty, 2022).

2.3.4 Current research on parents' experiences of the covid-19 pandemic

Qualitative research has tended to focus on parenting experiences in the early phases of the pandemic of parents of children younger than 12 (e.g., Dawes et al., 2021). Previous studies focused on understanding the impact of parenting in the context of the pandemic on parents' mental health, rather than exploring parents' experiences of caring for children in the pandemic (e.g., Chu et al., 2021). The findings highlight the need to support parents in times of crisis to promote family well-being, particularly parents of children with neurodevelopmental conditions and special learning needs. Two qualitative studies, with similar aims as the present study, sought to qualitatively explore parenting experiences during the pandemic. The first, a study by Weaver and Swank (2021) investigated the experiences of 11 American parents in the

early stages of the pandemic (April – May 2020). The interviews were conducted via Zoom and were analysed by means of a phenomenological analysis. Weaver and Swank (2021) reported eight themes: educational experiences, navigating roles and responsibilities, spousal relationship, letting go of expectations, recognizing privilege, routine, monitoring and communication about covid-19, vacillating emotions, connection, and meaningful experiences. The second, a recent study by Shum et al. (2023) explored parents' experiences during the pandemic. They held interviews with 18 parents from diverse backgrounds in the United Kingdom and they interviewed ten professionals who work with children and families to expand their understanding of parents' experiences. The data were analysed using a reflexive thematic analysis and four key themes were identified: worries and uncertainties, mental exhaustion, resources available to cope with the challenges, and finding the positives. The findings from these relevant studies contribute to a growing understanding of the complexities of parenting during this period.

Despite the numerous challenges, changes, and losses that parents and families have reported, various studies reported parents' positive experiences. Qualitative reports of silver linings identified by parents in studies from around the world create a more balanced impression of parents' experiences during the pandemic. Parents frequently reported a slower pace of life and increased family time as being the primary benefits of the lockdowns associated with covid-19 (Calvano et al., 2021; Shum et al., 2023). Strengthened family relationships was identified as a positive outcome for families as a consequence of spending more time together (Calvano et al., 2021; Chu et al., 2021). Shum et al. (2023) described that parents in their study reportedly felt closer to their children. Dawes et al. (2021) and Shum et al. (2023) reported that fathers in particular described that increased time and communication with their children allowed for a greater understanding of their children's needs. Reports also indicated that parents observed a strengthening of their children's sibling relationship over the course of the

pandemic (Chu et al., 2021; Dawes et al., 2021). Shum et al. (2023) reported that parents enjoyed having more time to play with their children and do activities that they may not otherwise have had the capacity to do in their busy lives.

Shum et al. (2023) reported on the theme of ‘hopes for the future’ that parents in their study raised. These parents described their hope that the children of this generation would develop important life skills and coping mechanisms and be able to hold on to positive memories of this time to look back on in years to come (Shum et al., 2023). Parents in Chu et al.'s (2021) study identified perspective taking and gratitude as gifts borne of the pandemic and this supported a similar finding by Calvano et al. (2021). Parents in Chu et al.'s (2021) study reflected on how grateful they were to have had access to the resources to cope with the challenges that they faced relating to the pandemic. They also offered their appreciation for the more mundane or ordinary aspects of life that they may take for granted otherwise, such as having outdoor space at home or being part of a supportive community. Community support has proven to be a source of strength for families during the covid-19 pandemic (Stevenson et al., 2021). A cross-sectional study of neighbour support by Jones et al. (2020) described that the respondents in their study reported being more involved in neighbourhood life during the pandemic and that they were interested in being further involved in the future. Notably in this study no significant differences were noted in the characteristics of support between respondents in areas of higher and lower socio-economic deprivation.

To conclude this section on positives emanating from the pandemic, it is relevant to outline Walsh's (2020) concept of ‘bouncing forward’ that she proposes as a means for successfully adapting to a changed world. Walsh describes that it is not possible to ‘bounce back’ to life before the pandemic or to return to pre-pandemic functioning as the magnitude of the pandemic has had profound changes for the state of our world and the way in which people have established new ways of functioning. Therefore, she proposes that to be build strength to

withstand adversity in the context of the pandemic, ‘bounding forward’ is required. This involves making meaning of what has passed, reflecting on existing assumptions about ourselves and our world, and mindfully establishing new patterns through recalibrating lives and family processes to cope with any unexpected challenges that lie ahead (Walsh, 2020). By striving to ‘bounce forward’ parents and families can maximize opportunities to cope despite adversity.

Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter will begin by outlining the methodological approach that was employed. Consideration will be given to the advantages of these approaches and motivation for why these are appropriate to be used in this study will be put forward. The recruitment strategy that was used will be explained followed by an outline of the participants' profiles. The chapter will then present the method of data collection: individual interviews. Then, the data analysis process will be outlined. A Reflexive Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the transcribed interviews. Lastly, ethical considerations and an exploration of reflexivity will be presented as these relate to the analysis.

3.1 Methodological approach

The research is located in the social constructionist framework, therefore, an exploratory, qualitative design was employed to study parents' subjective experiences. The study is interpretivist in orientation, in keeping with the phenomenological paradigm, so to give voice to participants and spotlight their experiences as far as possible. Data in the form of rich, in-depth accounts of experiences and perceptions were rendered through one-on-one interviews that were transcribed. To encourage narration and the sharing of stories, photo elicitation was employed in the interviews. Photo elicitation as a tool was useful for allowing the parent participants to direct the interviews. This design invited parents to voice their stories and share their insights on their terms. Whilst this study did not set out to undertake a narrative analysis of participants' experiences, the principles of a narrative inquiry were employed to guide the data collection process.

3.1.1 Narrative Inquiry

As natural storytellers, humans make sense of themselves, others and their environments in narrative forms during the course of life (Andrews et al., 2013). Narrative research focuses on the experiences of individuals and groups and narrative researchers collect

and reflect on these narratives in an effort to capture and make meaning of people's experiences. This brings awareness to the way that narrators are positioned within their contexts (Moen, 2006). Narrative inquiry as a method is well suited to the proposed study as it allows for a nuanced inquiry from a constructionist lens into the meaning that individuals give to their 'real-world' stories of human experience. An exploration of narratives and identity makes it possible to reveal the multiple layers of meaning that exist within people's lives and experiences (Andrews et al., 2013). Within the narrative framework it is possible to consider both the individual and their context (Moen, 2006). Narrative theory accepts that socially constructed realities shape and are shaped by the individual and it is this reciprocal relationship that mediates personal development (Moen, 2006).

Narrative inquiry offers a sophisticated approach for making sense of multiple layers of meaning that often contradict one another (Andrews et al., 2013). The ability of the narrative approach to tolerate ambiguities that arise in the data makes it a useful framework for the consideration of multiple layers and perspectives of parenting children with ADHD traits during this time in history that is characterised by uncertainty.

A defining feature of this mode of inquiry is the collaboration that occurs between participants and the researcher as the researcher engages in a non-directive manner in the storytelling process of the participants (Butina, 2015). The notion that participant storytellers are valuable collaborators in the co-construction of meaning disrupts traditional power dynamics within psychological research (Moen, 2006). According to Butina (2015), there are three major benefits of the narrative approach. Firstly, people are natural storytellers which makes the narration of experiences an accessible way to gain insight into people's inner worlds. Secondly, narratives are inherently steeped in rich descriptions which are useful for understanding personal experiences. Thirdly, storytelling reveals the unique construction of meaning made by the participants.

Bradbury (2017) highlights that it is common for participants in narrative research to find the process of talking about themselves or reflecting on their experiences to be a somewhat cathartic encounter. She further encourages the use of visual components in the elicitation of narratives as they can assist with the externalisation of the meaning-making process. Accordingly, the study afforded participants an opportunity to make meaning of their experiences of the pandemic through the process of gathering and telling stories about their experiences.

3.1.2 Photo elicitation

Photo elicitation is a data-collection method that uses photographs as visual stimuli within an interview to prompt participants to talk about the phenomena under study. The photographs elicit emotional connections to participants' memories and so help narrators connect to the emotional dimensions of memories within an interview (Bates et al., 2017). When participants take photographs and bring them to an interview the typical power dynamic that exists between a researcher and a participant is partially disrupted (Bates et al., 2017). This method was employed because it allowed the researcher an opportunity to try to understand the experiences, emotions, thoughts and feelings of the participants without directly imposing her agenda on the topic. The images that the participants brought to the interview served as a springboard into the interview dialogue. The use of photographs allowed participants to visually explore the links between their psychological, physical and social environments (Bates et al., 2017).

It has been argued that photo elicitation, a non-directive tool, is especially well-suited to supporting interviews where storied experiences are shared by participants because the photographs engage the participants in a manner that does not lead or limit their responses (Bates et al., 2017; Epstein et al., 2006). By encouraging participants to bring their own pictures into the interview, the parameters of the discussion were self-determined and therefore the

participants were more likely to feel at ease. The choice of photographs and the depth of self-disclosure was at the discretion of the participants (Bates et al., 2017). This prioritisation of participants' agency facilitated the building of trust and rapport between the researcher and the participants (Meo, 2010).

The use of photographic stimuli in the interviews provided a form of structure (Harper, 2002). The centralisation of photographs in the interview allowed participants to describe aspects of their lives and experiences that may have been challenging to talk about without illustration (Bradbury, 2017). Not only did the photographs stimulate participants' memory through encouraging the use of symbolic representation, but they also encouraged the participants to take the lead in the interviews, which allowed for the emergence of new insights (Bates et al., 2017; Harper, 2002; Meo, 2010).

3.2 Participants

A voluntary response, non-probability sampling strategy was employed whereby participation in the study was advertised in the weekly communication letter circulated by a private remedial school in Midrand, Johannesburg. The principal of the school gave permission for the study advert to be circulated amongst parents at the school. See Appendix A to view the letter of permission and Appendix B to view the research advertisement. The advertisement outlined that parents who met the inclusion criterion could elect to participate in the research study. The inclusion criterion was that individuals must be the caregiver of a child who displays at least one of the following ADHD traits: inattentiveness, hyperactivity, or impulsivity. One of the benefits of a voluntary sample is that participants who have elected to participate often have a keen interest in the topic and are willing to share rich insights. A voluntary sampling strategy can broaden the variety of people included in the participant pool and therefore the potential range of experiences shared with the researcher is increased (Morse, 1991). A total of seven parents made contact with me after seeing the advertisement and elected to participate

in the study. After completing seven interviews, I felt that it would be useful to gain more depth to the exploration by conducting more interviews and so more parents who I met the inclusion criterion were invited to participate using a purposive sampling approach. Three more parents elected to participate after being approached and invited. After a total of ten interviews were conducted the study advertisement was discontinued to conclude the sampling procedure. The concept of data saturation was not useful for determining the conclusion of the data collection process for this study as every parent offers new, unique stories from their unique experiences of parenthood during this time and so more and more stories could have been collected without ever reaching a point of data saturation. Rather, the ten participants offered "rich and thick" enough data (Dibley, 2011) whereby they each cast many points of light to illuminate parenting experiences during the covid-19 pandemic. It was decided that there was enough data that provided sufficient depth to adequately address the research questions (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

The participant pool comprised of ten parents: seven females and three males whose ages ranged between 41 and 55 years. Nine participants were biological parents while one participant was a step-father to at least one child who displays ADHD traits. Children of the participants either attended the private remedial school where the study advertisement was circulated, other private schools, or ex-model C schools, and one participant's children were home-schooled by preference prior to the pandemic. It is reasonable to conclude that the participants in the study all maintained middle-class lifestyles although questions to indicate economic status were not explicitly asked as part of the Participant Basic Information Questionnaire. The heteronormative, nuclear family structure of the families that the participants represent is noted. Table 1 summarises participants' relevant demographic details.

Table 1

Summary of participant profiles

	Name	Parenting role	Age	Race[1]	Field of work	Number of people living in the home	Number of children	Number of children with ADHD-traits	Children and their respective ages
1	Mary	Mother	41	White	Education	4	2	1	Luke, 12 Mandy, 15
2	Thandi	Mother	43	Black	Business	3	2	1	Mpho, 12
3	Thabo	Father	47	Black	Business	4	2	2	Nceba, 12 Lucky, 16
4	Martha	Mother	49	Coloured	Housewife	7	3	1	Robbie, 11
5	Ana	Mother	48	White	Education	5	2	1	Matt, 10 Mia, 13
6	Jolene	Mother	51	White	Education	3	1	1	Bianca, 11
7	Andrew	Step-father	55	White	Social Care	3	1	1	Bianca, 11
8	Leigh	Mother	51	White	Journalism	3	1	1	Kayla, 11
9	John	Father	44	White	Banker	4	2	2	Annie, 9 Rachel, 9
10	Fiona	Mother	44	Black	Business	7	2	1	Prince, 10 Siya, 8

[1] There is a disproportionate number of white participants in the participant group. Participants elected to participate in the study, so selection of participants based on race took place. Whilst the number of white participants is skewed in terms of the wider South African population, the diversity and proportion of race groups who comprise the group are probably representative of the diversity amongst children and families at private schools in middle-class suburbs in Johannesburg. The study's findings are not intended to be generalized to the larger South African population.

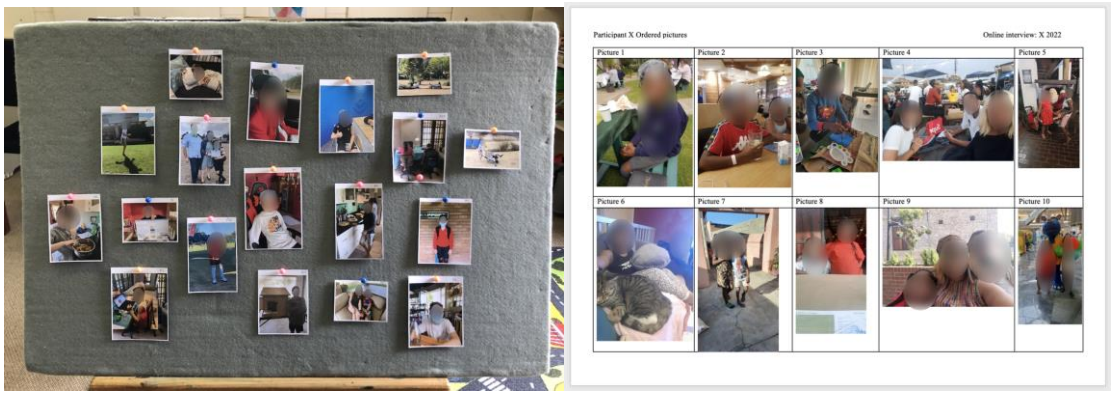
3.3 Data collection procedure

I contacted parents who elected to participate in the study via telephone. Once they had confirmed that they wished to participate, I asked them to gather about 10 or so photographs that they felt captured some aspect of their parenting experience during the covid-19 pandemic. Participants then sent their photographs to me via WhatsApp or via email at a time that was convenient for them. Once I had the photographs, appointments were made to conduct the individual interviews. Five interviews were conducted in person at my office at my internship site, and permission by the head of the organisation was granted for this. The other five interviews were conducted online via Teams. Four participants were outside of Johannesburg at the time of data collection and so were unable to attend interviews in person and one participant indicated that they would only participate if the interview could be done online to avoid lost time due to travel during their workday.

In preparation for each interview, I prepared a board (either a physical pinboard or a virtual pinboard) to display all of the photographs provided by the participant. See Figure 1 for examples of these boards. Each photograph was labelled with a number. For the in-person interviews the pinboard was placed on an easel that was easily accessible from the seats for myself and the participant. For the online interviews, the virtual pinboard was screenshared so that the photographs were visible to both the participant and myself on the Teams virtual meeting. It is noted that some participants shared only a few photographs while others shared more than the 10 photographs requested. Each picture presented on the board was labelled with a randomly assigned picture number for ease of reference in the interview.

Figure 1

Examples of photograph boards used in the interviews



Note. The board on the left was used for face-to-face interviews and the board on the right was used for online interviews.

Once the participant arrived at the meeting, I collected some basic background information about each participant by completing the Basic Information Questionnaire (Appendix C). Thereafter I began each interview by offering the following prompt: *"You are welcome to look at the board of photographs and share any stories that come to mind. I am curious about what it was like to be a parent during the covid-19 pandemic."* Participants shared stories about their experiences and offered their insights, reflections and feelings through their accounts. I made sure not to guide the interview towards any specific agendas, however I did ask some probing questions and at times asked participants to elaborate on some points that they raised. In this way, I acknowledge my active participation in the data collection process. These interviews each lasted about an hour long. At the end of each in-person interview, I offered for the participants to take home the printed photographs that were used for the elicitation of their stories. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Initial codes were generated and more participants were included in the study until data saturation had been

reached. On completion of the interview and transcription process, the transcripts were analysed for the Findings and Discussion chapter presented in this report.

3.4 Data Analysis

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed orthographically. As far as possible, the transcription process aimed to represent all the spoken words, hesitations, sounds, laughter, cut-offs in speech, and emphasis in speech to capture the quality of the interactions in the interviews. Braun and Clarke's (2012, 2019, 2022) contemporary approach to thematic analysis, reflective thematic analysis, was used as the method for data analysis due to the experiential and exploratory nature of the research question and data collection method employed (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Reflexive thematic analysis is a theoretically flexible approach for analysing qualitative data that allows for the systematic identification, development and analysis of themes across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Reflexive thematic analysis is recognised as one of a number of methods for conducting thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). This approach foregrounds the active role that the researcher plays in the production of knowledge throughout the analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2023). The researcher engages in the analysis process with the understanding that their reflexivity and the thoughtful application of their skills contribute to the unique themes generated, and therefore the findings of the study (Bryant et al., 2020). Braun and Clarke (2019) explain that a reflexive thematic analysis requires the researcher to interpret the space where the data, the theoretical assumptions and the analytical skills of the researcher intersect. The researcher's subjectivity is considered to be a "primary tool" for the purpose of the analysis along with reflexivity and creativity (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022, 2023). Reflexivity is the praxis of "bend[ing] back upon oneself" whereby the researcher engages in the analysis process thoughtfully and with self-awareness to illuminate

the subjective dance of negotiating meaning between the researcher and the data (Sparkes & Smith, 2013, p. 20).

Reflexive thematic analysis is an appropriate analysis method for this study as it allowed for the systematic study of participants' subjective accounts whilst also embracing the reflexive influence of my own interpretations as a co-constructor of the findings presented. This study's reflexive thematic analysis was underpinned by four theoretical assumptions. Firstly, the research questions were addressed within a constructivism framework. To this end, it was important for me to represent the parents' accounts of their experiences, feelings and attitudes as dutifully as possible, whilst simultaneously accounting for the reflexive influence of my own insights and interpretations on the findings.

Secondly, I adopted a constructionist epistemological lens/stance for understanding the data. Therefore, I understood that participants' knowledge and understandings of their experiences that formed the basis of the interview were informed by their social experiences in the world and that their sharing of their knowledge was shaped by their unique interactions with me as the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, when constructing the themes, the meaningfulness ascribed by the participants to their experiences was considered, not only was the volume or frequency of common information deemed to be important (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Of course the meaningfulness of the information in its relationship to the research question was also carefully considered in the construction of the themes in accordance with the constructionist stance adopted.

Thirdly, an experiential orientation rather than a critical orientation was adopted in the analysis of the data. An experiential orientation allowed me to prioritise exploration into how the covid-19 phenomenon may have been experienced by the parent participants. In this way, the meanings ascribed to the pandemic by the parents as well as their thoughts, feelings and

stories of that time were accepted as reflections of their internal states (Bryant et al., 2020). Therefore, this experiential orientation allowed me to "give voice" to parent's understandings of their experiences as though their stories offered a window into their worlds (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This orientation further promoted the meanings and meaningfulness that parents ascribed to their experiences and therefore, this aligned with the research question which sought to examine parents' experiences.

Fourthly, I adopted a predominantly inductive, or data-driven approach to the analysis whereby codes and themes were generated to reflect the content, not in relation to any pre-planned, theory-driven coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Bryant et al., 2020). This approach allowed for the meanings communicated by the parent participants to be prioritised. However, it is arguably not possible to conduct a purely inductive analysis as the researcher's regard of what content is relevant for the exploration of the research question and their assumptions are ever-present in the analysis process, and is essential in a reflexive thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2022). Therefore, participant or data-based meaning was prioritised over any theory-driven meanings in order to 'ground' the analysis in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013) outlined six phases of a reflexive analysis through which I progressed in a non-linear fashion during the analysis process. They offer these phases as 'tools' to guide an iterative, recurrent process whereby each phase builds on a previous phase, but where movement back and forth between phases is expected and encouraged (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The analysis process began by taking time to familiarise myself with the data. I immersed myself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts numerous times as well as revisiting the audio recordings of the interviews. I took note of some initial observations and questions that I asked myself as I read the transcripts over. This close engagement helped me to gain an intimate understanding of the data. I allowed sufficient time for this reflective

process as Braun & Clarke (2022, p.16) note that, “Good quality coding and themes result from dual processes of immersion or depth of engagement, and distancing, allowing time and space for reflection and for insight and inspiration to develop.” In this initial process I read, reflected, questioned, imagined, wondered, retreated and returned to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2020). During this initial phase I could dwell with the data and reflect on my own process of thinking. Once I felt adequately familiar with the data I then began to generate codes, which formed the building blocks for my analysis. I worked systematically through the data set, coding each transcript line by line noting down succinct labels, either descriptive or interpretive, to reflect the information that were relevant to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I recognised my interpretive role as the researcher in the subjective coding process. As I coded the data, new code labels were generated, some codes were split, and others were collapsed in an organic, data-driven process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Some preliminary codes were recoded as necessary when earlier transcripts were revisited. Both semantic and latent approaches to coding were utilised. This allowed for the reflection of semantic meanings ascribed to the information by the participant as well as for my latent interpretations of the information as the researcher. This approach aligned with the theoretical assumptions outlined earlier whereby constructed and communicated meanings were considered in the interpretive process. Therefore, some lines were dually coded to reflect both latent and semantic meanings. Once coding of all the data was complete, the codes for each transcript were organised in categories which were used to generate themes. I searched for patterns in the data and organised these patterns to reflect underlying concepts. After much reflection and organisation of patterns of codes, a number of distinct potential themes and subthemes were identified. Each theme that was constructed reflected something important about the dataset in relation to the research question. Potential themes were reviewed both in relation to the coded data but also in relation to the total data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). After engaging in a recursive review process, I

defined and named each theme and subtheme. I was careful to not label themes as topic summaries, but rather I labelled each theme as a ‘meaning-based interpretive story’ (Braun & Clarke, 2023). As part of the phase where themes were defined and named, I identified multiple extracts from across the dataset which illustrated or exemplified the range of expressions relating to a theme or subtheme. Not only did these extracts demonstrate the variety and breadth of coverage within a theme but also they justified the construction of the themes driven by patterns identified across the dataset. These extracts not only demonstrated the variety and breadth of coverage within a theme but also justified the construction of the themes driven by patterns identified across the dataset. In this report, extracts were presented a) to illustrate descriptions of what participants shared in the interviews and b) to interrogate what is meaningful to interpret about what participants shared by discussing the information in relation to the relevant literature (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Bryant et al., 2020). When producing the report, consideration was given to the logical order of the themes to present a convincing story about the data. When writing up the themes, an effort was made to link each theme to the research question, relevant literature, and an important conceptual framework. Where appropriate, pictures that did not compromise the confidentiality of the participants were included to illustrate the ideas, stories, and themes. These pictures are not necessary for the analysis, but simply enrich the reading experience of the analysis. In line with the recommendations made by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013), the analysis and discussion of the themes are presented together in this report.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Prior to the commencement of the study, the project was granted ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC, Non-Medical). Additionally, permission to advertise participation in the study at a private remedial school was granted by the school principal (See Appendix A).

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and parents could self-select to take part after seeing the study advertisement. The study invited only adult parents to participate, therefore they were over the age of 18 and could provide their informed consent. Each participant signed an informed consent form regarding their voluntary participation (See Appendix D) as well as a consent form to indicate their consent for the interviews to be audio recorded (See Appendix E) before the interviews were conducted. Participants were provided a Participant Information Sheet that outlined the study's aims and what participation would involve (See Appendix F). I also ensured that prior to participants signing the informed consent form that I gave a thorough explanation of what participation in the study would involve and participants were also given ample opportunity to ask me any questions they may have had. Participants were made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. I also made clear to prospective participants that there would be no advantages to participants who elected to participate and no disadvantages for not participating.

Many of the pictures shared by the parents included images of people's faces and depicted home spaces. To maintain participants' privacy and to ensure confidentiality, any faces that appear in the pictures used as illustrations in the write up of the findings were blurred thoroughly. Anonymity was not possible because the interviews were conducted in-person or online with cameras switched on to allow both the researcher and the participant to benefit from visual cues in their interactions. The identities of the participants and their children have been protected through the use of pseudonyms. Pseudonyms were introduced in the transcription process and so participants' names are absent from the transcripts and other written notes. Any other identifying data that was not useful to the study was excluded. Given the participant centered, non-directive approach employed, participants were at liberty to share only what they felt comfortable to share about their experiences. Whilst direct quotes from the interviews have been included in the report, I was careful to exclude any information that may

be used to identify a particular participant. The audio recordings and transcripts are stored in a password protected file on my laptop. Only my supervisor and I have access to the audio recording and transcripts. Printed hard copies of the transcripts that were used in the coding process are stored in a locked cabinet.

Finally, the contact details of free counselling services were provided to the participants on the Participant Information Sheet (See Appendix F) in the event that any of the participants felt that they would benefit from debriefing after their participation in the study. In addition, I contacted the participants two days after their interview was conducted as a follow-up measure to encourage participants to contact me should they wish to ask any further questions, seek support, or withdraw from the study. None of the participants felt it necessary to do so.

3.6 Reflexivity

I acknowledge the role that my position as the researcher and various other elements of my identity had on shaping the research. In addition, my subjective contributions to the research procedures have also played a pivotal role in development and presentation of the research findings. By reflecting on these contributions I add to the rigour of the research.

Firstly, I am not a parent and therefore I was a natural outsider to the world of the parent participants. The interviews aimed to lift parents' experiences in order for me to ultimately come to know what parents' experiences were like. Fay (1996, p.27) stated that knowledge lies not in the experience itself but in "grasping the sense of this experience." Thus, he argues that likeliness is not a requirement for understanding. In fact, as a non-parent, I could position myself comfortably as a naïve and curious inquirer during the interviews, which gave me the chance to ask clarifying questions and therefore delve deeper into participants' constructed meanings (Morrow, 2005).

Some parents who participated were familiar with my position as an Intern Psychologist (counsellor and assessor) at the school where participation was advertised and so some participants related to me more as a therapist than they may have otherwise if the study had been advertised in another setting. During some of the interviews, I felt that parents spoke about their experiences of parenting a child with ADHD traits openly because they assumed that because of my special interest or background working at a remedial school, I would understand them and perhaps empathise with them.

Topics of neurodiversity, accommodations relevant in education and indeed in parenting approaches of children who present with ADHD traits is an area of personal interest for me. It is my view that ADHD as a diagnosis is a double-edged sword. Whilst the debate is nuanced, I tend to lean towards the view that ADHD-traits and indeed the ADHD presentation in general should not be medicalised, as I believe it is better understood as a manifestation of normal childhood. I also acknowledge that many of the symptoms associated with the diagnosis overlap with several other diagnoses, such as Anxiety disorder. Whilst I recognise the value of diagnosis in some cases, it is my view that the harm done by incorrect diagnosis or overdiagnosis is to be avoided. I was careful not to share my personal views on the usefulness of the diagnosis in my engagements with the participants. This is also a reason why I was careful to include ‘parents of children who display ADHD traits’ as an inclusion criterion rather than ‘parents of children with an ADHD diagnosis’.

I also acknowledge that my own experiences of the covid-19 pandemic served as a lens through which I related to the participants and their stories. For example, I lived alone and was isolated from my family in another province during the acute stages of the pandemic and so participants’ stories of isolation and the emotional impact of being cut-off from social support were familiar to me.

Finally, it is useful to reflect on the power dynamics that are inherent in the researcher-participant relationship. Asymmetries in the share of power exist between participants and the interviewer by the fact that the researcher outlines the topic, arranges the tone of the engagements and organises the interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Central to the negotiation of power in an interview, especially interviews which are in-depth and have minimal structure, is the power that lies in knowledge: who holds the valuable knowledge? Over the course of interviews balances of power shift between researcher and participant. Factors such as experience, age, class, gender and race are all dimensions of social status which play a role in mediating power relations in interview engagements (Edwards & Holland, 2013). In an effort to minimize the effect that the researcher's inherent power had on the interactions in the interview, I tried to make the interviews as participant-centred as possible. I wanted to give voice to their experiences whilst also acknowledging my role as a co-contributor to the sharing of their stories. An effort was made to establish a welcoming and non-threatening interview space where participants could feel at ease to willingly share their experiences (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). By designing the research to incorporate photo elicitation as a springboard for the sharing of stories in the interviews, I was able to get closer to participants' actual experiences than if I had prepared a schedule of specific questions because participants had the control to bring whichever pictures represented what they believed to be significant to them. This design choice also afforded the participants agency to share what they wished to share with me and what they were comfortable to share with me. In the interviews, parents could determine the level of depth they were willing to reveal by telling stories of their experiences. They could determine which experiences to raise in an order that made most sense to them. It also allowed for the establishment and building of rapport between me and the participants as the open-ended nature of the interview afforded us space to engage in conversation freely without the pressure to cover any predetermined topics.

3.7 Contextual grounding

Understanding the meanings constructed by the participants depends on various factors such as context, culture and rapport (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2013). In order to understand the meanings that the parents' made of their experiences during the pandemic, it is essential to undertake a contextual grounding.

Most restrictions that imposed the largest disruptions to people's lives in South Africa were lifted with the downgrade to Alert Level One in October 2021 and the National State of Disaster was lifted in early May 2022. The interviews were conducted between July and October of 2022 and so participants' stories were shared after most of the disruptions caused by the pandemic had dissipated and once the threat that covid-19 posed to lives and livelihoods had declined significantly. This distance in time from the acute phases of the pandemic when disruptions were rife afforded the participants space to think through and process their experiences. Notably, no guidance was given to the participants about which period of the covid-19 pandemic they should focus on in their interviews, parents were free to share any experiences that they deemed to be relevant. The reality is that we will be living with the covid-19 virus in the long term.

With regards to rapport, I perceived that rapport was easily established with participants. I was acutely aware of this factor, especially with those interviews that were conducted online. I believed that the process of explaining the study to the participants, seeking their consent and then engaging with them regarding the sharing of the photographs ahead of the interviews afforded useful opportunities for rapport building. For those participants who elected to participate based on their exposure to the advertisement circulated at their child's school, I experienced that they felt a sense of trust and familiarity with me due to my connection to an establishment that they already trusted. This facilitated the rapport building process further.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Interviews that used photographs for eliciting stories of parents' experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown were conducted. The interviews rendered rich qualitative data, mainly in the form of recounts of episodes that were inspired by the pictures that the participants chose to bring to the interview. In this chapter, data from the interviews were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. An exploration into parents' ordinary, personal experiences during this extra-ordinary time allows insight into the macro-level societal influences that shape discourses and govern social systems. Given the qualitative nature of the data, a combined approach whereby findings are presented and discussed was deemed appropriate. This structure is effective because it allows for an in-depth exploration of parents' experiences in relation to the relevant literature. Braun and Clarke (2013) advocate for the synthesis of the presentation of the findings with a discussion as being appropriate for the reporting of a Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Byrne, 2021).

Four key themes were identified: 1) Adjusting to an upside-down world 2) Experiences of wearing too many hats 3) Parents' (re)views of how their children's ADHD traits affected their learning at home 4) Covid, a mixed bag of losses and treasures. These four themes were strung together in this order in an effort to create a coherent narrative experience for the reader. I acknowledge my creative input in weaving together stories, pictures and links to the literature so to convey the range of diverse experiences shared by participants. The first theme captures the changes and challenges that participants encountered, especially in the acute initial stages of the pandemic, and it seeks to give voice to participants' emotional reactions to their experiences. This first theme is then followed by the second theme which highlights that despite the challenges and changes and emotionality of the time, participants needed to be flexible and juggle their many roles and responsibilities. The excerpts included in this theme

offer valuable learnings about participants' identities and roles in relation to societal expectations. One of these expectations is about 'good enough parenting' and this has significant implications for parents of children who society casts as being 'disorderly'. In the third theme, participants' particular reflections of how their children's ADHD traits shaped their home-based schooling during the pandemic is explored. The fourth and final theme is included last because it is more reflective in nature than the first three themes. Participants' experiences of hope and endings are presented as a collection in this final theme. Topics of perceived losses and opportunities and new perspectives since the end of stringent national lockdowns offer valuable retrospective learnings that contribute to the breadth of the study's findings.

4.1 Theme 1: Adjusting to an upside-down world

During interviews participants described how the pandemic introduced tremendous change into their lives. Their stories and reflections offered rich insight into the way in which difficulties were experienced and the kinds of dilemmas participants found themselves in as they adjusted to life in the context of covid-19. Ana aptly expressed the bizarre, unprecedented disruptions caused by Covid-19 when she stated that it felt as though, *"the whole world was in an upside-down position"*. Her words illustrated the impression that various participants gave that life during that period felt foreign, unpredictable, and somewhat out of control. Participants in this study reported largely negative feelings around their experiences of adjustment– which they framed as being "difficult", "tough" and "frustrating". Their stories of their experiences tended to be infused with emotionally-loaded sentiment. This theme explores the practical and emotional consequences of the pandemic that participants reported.

4.1.1 Beginning of lockdown

Participants identified that the implementation of the national lockdown was the most significant catalyst of change in their lives. Participants reported that the start of lockdown was

particularly memorable and meaningful. For example, Andrew said, *"I felt it was a rather momentous day. It was the 27th of March… It was the first day of enforced isolation"*. Thabo described how he sat with his family and watched the news as the lockdown was announced on television:

> *"I mean we were following that was being reported. I remember when the actual lockdown was announced, we were all there watching it together. Then we were told that the soldiers were going to be deployed in townships and whatever area and we were quite tense, you know, it was quite a tense time because we all didn't know what to expect and we were all struggling with the same thing. We needed to find ways and of course there are too many people sharing a lot of information quite irresponsibly, not factual. It quite irritates me when people just forward things and share things without really a basis of anything. I mean remember at some point there was just rumours that actually this thing is airborne and you could do this and get that and we started trying to say, "Okay, what is Covid? How do we protect ourselves? What is the best thing we can do?" Of course sanitizing and masks, all those things became part of our daily lives and of course, the limitation in terms of lockdown, meaning we were actually locked inside the house. It was frustrating,"*

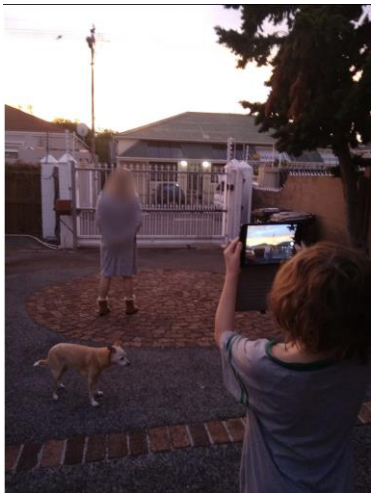
Thabo highlighted how covid-19 and the lockdown captured his attention. The words he used point to the fearfulness that many, particularly black, South Africans experienced in relation to the news of the soldiers being deployed to manage the emergency in the acute stages of the initial lockdown. His statement, "Then we were told that the soldiers were going to be deployed in townships and whatever area and we were quite tense," would resonate with deep fear for many South Africans who lived through states of political emergency under the apartheid state where soldiers were deployed in townships to violently enforce the racist laws

of the time. Thabo's insight highlights that the way in which people make sense of crises is informed by their previous experiences. The covid-19 lockdown incited tremendous fear among citizens, particularly in a country like South Africa, given its political history.

The uncertainty that saturated other participants' stories of this time is also reflected in Thabo's quote. These experiences coincided with findings by Satici et al. (2022) who reported that intolerance of uncertainty fuelled declines in mental wellbeing during the pandemic in their study of Turkish participants. News about the virus occupied much space in people's minds during that time. Reports of covid-19 dominated the news and fearful, often misleading messages about covid circulated on social media, causing what has been termed by the World Health Organisation as an 'infodemic' (Hua & Shaw, 2020). Thabo described his frustration in trying to navigate through the rumours about covid-19 as he tried to determine what he could do to understand the pandemic in order to keep his family safe. The rapid spread of news about Covid-19, some of it false and unfounded, via social media fuelled waves of uncertainty around the world. A systematic review by Rocha et al. (2021) determined that the spread of misinformation about covid-19 led to the increase of psychological distress and emotional overload. The dangers of inciting fear and confusion in this manner during this period have been widely reported (Ghaddar et al., 2022; Olagoke et al., 2020; Rocha et al., 2021). Notably, Thabo's perception of feeling "locked in" during the lockdown was voiced by several other participants. Figure 2 is a picture shared by one of the participants to illustrate their sense of feeling locked into one's own home and how foreign and threatening this felt to them. This image paradoxically emphasizes the peculiar measures of (in)security that are commonly accepted in middle-class South African suburbs.

Figure 2

Locked in behind the gates



Whilst many participants described their fear of the unknown at the beginning of the national lockdown as being a dominant experience, two participants acknowledged the initial relief they felt when the national lockdown was introduced:

> *"I think when Covid started, you know, it was quite interesting. We thought, yes! It's going to be lekker. We are going to be at home; there's no travelling involved, you know, that hectic mornings of getting up and getting – preparing the child for school and getting to school. I think that element was a bit of a relief"* (Martha)

Andrew kept a diary of his experiences during lockdown and reflected on his first diary entry as follows:

> *"I guess now that journaling is a way of being in control when things seem so chaotic um and I mean, the first day I started to write it at 9:00am and I said, 'The whole world has gone quiet. RSA is on lockdown. It feels like the breathing space we all needed is here. It is strange thing to say, I know, there*

> *are no cars outside our house or moving on the roads. The birds, you could hear the birds; it's quiet and the fact that I did housework,' and so in a state of chaos I'm able to carry on with sort of fairly ordinary stuff."*

These two excerpts illustrate how Martha and Andrew perceived there to be an early silver lining amidst the "chaos" of the start of lockdown. They welcomed the slower pace in life. The two excerpts suggest that they perceived that the lockdown protected them from the busy-ness and strain of their ordinary lives over and above protecting them from covid-19. Calvano et al. (2021) and Kowalski et al. (2022) also reported that their participants acknowledged a slower pace of life to be a benefit of the pandemic in relation to enforced lockdowns. However, Kowalski et al. (2022) did reflect on the role that positive reframing played during the pandemic, a period whereby participants looked to find silver linings in times of hardship as a way of coping with the discomfort. The lockdown disrupted the patterns of life that society had come to accept as ordinary. These excerpts suggest that the participants perceived the changes initially to be a threat to their security but some, over time, began to enjoy the disruption to their pressured routines of mass schooling and demanding workplaces motivated by capitalist agendas (Wyness, 2018).

4.1.2 Reorganisation of spaces in the home

Participants' stories illustrated that the boundaries between school or work and home spaces collapsed. The distinction between public and private spheres of participants' lives were blurred during this period. Participants shared stories around reorganising home spaces to accommodate the various activities that family members had to engage in. Signorelli et al., (2020) described how prior to national lockdowns, homes had served as dormitories whereby occupants would sleep and perform personal activities, but with the implementation of lockdowns around the world, homes hosted multiple daytime functions. Fiona said, *"Now everything happens here at home"*. The lockdown necessitated that children and parents stay

at home, and as far as possible continue learning or working. All of the participants' children were able to continue learning from home during lockdown, unlike the majority of South African children whose education was discontinued or whose access to quality education was significantly hampered during the pandemic (Dube, 2020; Soudien et al., 2022). Similarly, the majority of the parents in this study were able to adjust their work activities to work from home, which signifies the privilege that they enjoyed relative to the hardship experienced by many other South African workers.

Lockdown necessitated that roles typically fulfilled by other societal institutions, such as schools, shifted to take place in home spaces. Wyness (2018) outlines that the introduction of enforced mass schooling disrupted children's engagements with their parents by necessitating that children spend several hours each day outside of the home at school, not only to equip them with the skills to one day contribute to the workforce, but also to allow parents to spend uninterrupted hours in the workplace each day. Therefore, covid-19 fundamentally disrupted this social organisation of spaces with the implementation of lockdowns and in turn, it brought children and parents back together into home spaces for extended periods and this had consequences for the ways family members engaged with one another.

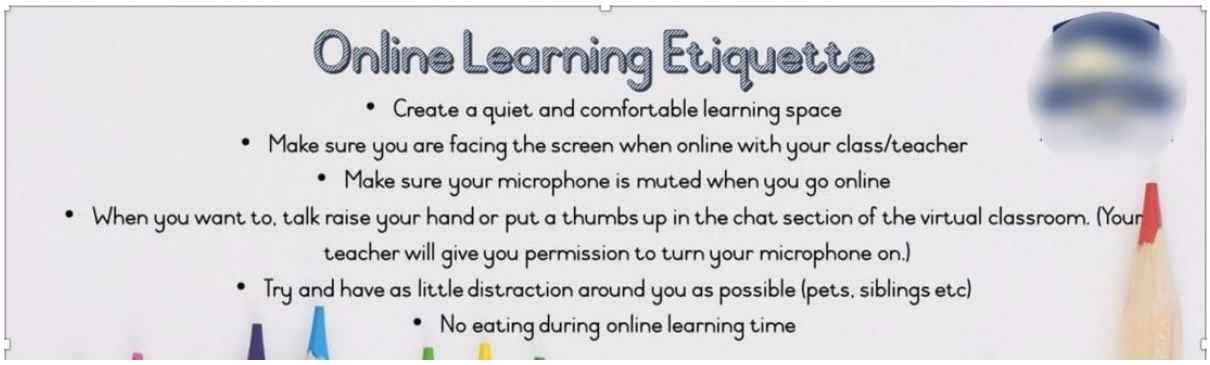
> *"Yes, so it was a lot of distractions because a lot of us were at home… there was a lot of traffic and people had to concentrate… Yes, so the traffic in the house was quite hectic."* (Martha)

Martha's words highlight how busy home spaces became during the pandemic. She articulated how the "traffic" was distracting for those performing their activities at home. Other participants in the study shared stories of how the "hectic traffic" described by Martha caused tension and frustration to build up between family members. This adjustment required family members to be considerate of one another in ways they may not have had to be previously, in

line with a similar consideration outlined by Prime et al. (2020). Furthermore, John's excerpt relating to Figure 3, a poster shared by his daughter's school, illustrates how sharing spaces was not always practical.

Figure 3

A guideline for online etiquette



> *"I'll give you an example, 'Create a quiet and comfortable learning space.' So, that was very difficult if you're all in the same house, in the same room. I'm on a meeting call or Teams meeting, a lot of the time she'd say, "I can't concentrate, it's too loud!" or "You're talking too loud!" and there's nothing I can do. I'd have to mute myself and say, "I'm in a meeting, I'm in a meeting"...I must have said it hundreds of times because that was me trying to say like, "I've got something else that I'm responsible for", I have to because that's my job to put food on the table."* (John)

His story emphasises how disruptive the change of sharing a space with Annie was for both of them. Whilst sharing the space with Annie was necessary for facilitating her learning, he reflected that it impeded both of their abilities to apply themselves properly to their activities and that this caused tension and frustration to arise. The urgency in his voice as he recounted the story communicated the stress and pressure he felt to perform his work tasks under stressful, strange circumstances. Prime et al. (2020) describe how having to negotiate the use of shared

spaces is an example of a topic that parents and children may not have had to engage in prior to the pandemic. These engagements, as described by John, put strain on the parent-child relationship during this time by increasing the demands of their relationship. Later in his interview John reflected, *"I still don't have the same relationship, especially with Annie that I had before COVID. We still fight more than we would have... I think one can't expect 2022 dynamics to be the same as 2019*". In line with Prime et al.'s (2020) framework, the pressure that John was under to attend his work meetings under unusual, shared working conditions impeded Annie's functioning and the negative feedback that their interactions maintained ultimately reduced the quality of their parent-child relationship.

Whist some participants spoke of the disruption of having to share spaces at home to perform work, schooling and housekeeping activities and perhaps the strain that sharing spaces placed on relationships, others noted that sharing spaces allowed family members to gain a deeper understanding and respect of one another, and this was perceived to be a positive consequence of the pandemic. Not only did parents gain insight into their children's schooling activities, but children also gained insight into the nature of their parents' work. For example, Leigh shared the following about her daughter:

> *"She also got to see what we do. She has a much better understanding of what dad and mum do. Yes, she used to come to my office, but she had no idea how many meetings I'm on, or that I write. Now she knows I write. She doesn't know why but that I'm a writer, what it takes…. In just understanding our world. Maybe a world she never had insight into and may not have ever had sight into if covid never ever happened."*

4.1.3 Work changes

The Covid-19 pandemic posed many challenges for workers in various industries. There was a need for many businesses and workers to make sudden changes to the way they conducted their work in the climate of the pandemic and enforced lockdowns. Working parents shared about their experience of having to make sudden, "massive" adjustments to transition to working online. An excerpt from Jolene's story illustrates the urgency with which she had to adjust her work to perform her function:

> *"I am working as an academic and we were given, let me just tell you, that day that the university closed down, it was a Monday and as I went into the office, it was 10 o'clock when, well around there, when the message went out: 'Everybody out!' you know 'Drop tools! Go!' 'Put everything online' My [postgraduate] class was at lunchtime that day, 2 hours' time. I had to put everything onto [the university online platform] and lecture on [online]…Ya, it was very hard. It was really very hard" (Jolene)*

The tone of her story gave the impression that she experienced the changes to be similar to an emergency. She was required to make drastic changes to her lecture delivery with very little notice. She experienced the changes to be "very hard" which emphasized the difficulties associated with making sudden and significant work changes. Fiona shared about how she was responsible for automating processes that have always been done on paper. This was a "huge transition" for her over and above her responsibility for ensuring that her team had the necessary technology to conduct their work from home, such as WIFI connections and laptop devices. Others complained about how the change to working from home meant that they spent more time than usual performing work tasks during lockdown. Participants described, as illustrated in the excerpts below, how the boundaries between time for work and time for leisure

at home were blurred and that this had a negative impact on their quality of life. This finding echoes a finding by Carnevale & Hatak (2020).

> *"There was no such thing as work time and home time…that's a lasting impression that I still have of Covid. You never switched off."* (Jolene)

> *"Now that we have transitioned to working from home, the work doesn't end. I think we can't win (laughing) because I work right through till the evening."* (Fiona)

> *"I worked a lot more…I mean I was spending - I counted – probably about 14 to 16 hours a day in front of the computer"* (John)

From their stories it is evident that participants who worked longer hours than usual felt that remote work caused an intrusion into their personal lives, which corroborates similar reports by parents in a study by Bolisani et al. (2020). In fact, some participants raised that they ended up having to do much of their work in the evenings to attend to their work demands fully and this consequently led to poorer sleep. This finding echoes reports by parents in a study by Michelson et al. (2021) who similarly explained that they had to complete their work after hours, once their children were asleep and that that led to 'vicious cycle' of feeling tired and emotionally drained.

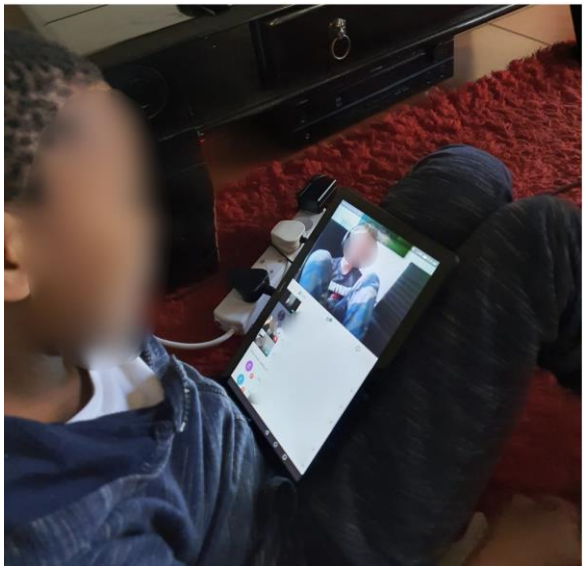
4.1.4 Adjusting to parenting in an online world

With the closure of schools, parents in this study highlighted the challenge of managing their children's use of devices that they encountered, more than they had prior to the pandemic. Children were expected to use devices to connect to their online learning platforms and social media became a covid-safe way for them to connect with their peers as captured visually in Figure 4. Parents in this study reported feeling torn about their children's use of devices and

that they experienced feelings of guilt and shame around their permission of these devices during this period.

Figure 4

Child connecting with peers in an online class



Firstly, In keeping with emergent literature, participants identified the challenge of online home-schooling as a result of school closures as being a major stressor (Bhamani et al., 2020). Parents described how online learning cost them time and money. This included sharing or repurposing existing or purchasing new devices so that children could connect to their online lessons. Parents incurred costs associated with printing volumes of worksheets and other learning material for their children where they were fortunate to have access to a printer. In line with similar findings by Michelson et al. (2021), parents also described having to help their children to connect to their various online learning classes by accessing links and passwords which was demanding of their time. Most children have not yet developed the problem-solving skills nor technological experience to troubleshoot technical difficulties independently (Michelson et al., 2021).

Furthermore, parents spoke about how they struggled to support their children in engaging with their lessons on screens. This supports the finding by Bhamani et al. (2020) where parents outlined that without the physical presence of a teacher and the lack of routines, children struggled to apply themselves seriously to their schoolwork. Mary remarked, *"Getting an ADHD child, at home, in his familiar environment, sitting in front of a computer – huh – it wasn't that easy!"* From parents' stories, it seemed as though children, particularly children who struggle to sustain their attention, battled to learn online from home and needed their parents' close support to meaningfully engage with online schooling. Leigh explained, *"There's not many pictures of her sitting at her computer working because I didn't think to take pictures of her sitting in a computer working because those were anguish times."* Leigh's words really emphasized how difficult the adjustment to online learning was for her and her daughter. The way she framed her reflection suggested her desire to forget or erase those "anguish" times. The exploration of parenting experiences during home schooling amid the pandemic has shed light on an important finding: children with special learning needs often required engagement that was challenging for teachers to address through a screen (Michelson et al., 2021). As a result, parents played a crucial role in facilitating their children's learning and offering emotional support when online learning posed difficulties for the children (Michelson et al., 2021).

Secondly, in accordance with concerns raised in the literature about a significant rise in children's digital media use (Eyimaya & Irmak, 2021; Moore et al., 2020; Nagata et al., 2020; Shutzman & Gershy, 2023), parents in this study shared stories which shed light on their experiences managing their children's use of devices for uses beyond education. Parents typically expressed feeling torn about their children's use of devices for socialising and entertainment. They recognised the inherent risks and dangers of allowing their children to connect with peers online whilst they also empathised with their children who had been

abruptly cut off from their usual opportunities for socialising and entertainment with the closure of schools. This finding corroborates a finding by Shum et al. (2023) whereby parents in their study found it difficult to 'strike the right balance' with children's online gaming as a social outlet. Underlying parents' mixed feelings about their children's device use was fear and an acute awareness of the risks. For example, Mary shared the following:

> *"We had to navigate that very carefully… That was hectic because it was new territory. The whole world wide web thing is enough to make your hair curl…that was, for us, major navigation and major research and I put every parental control under the sun on that laptop that I could… letting your child go onto the internet is like giving them a loaded gun. It's just so dangerous and you don't know."*

Mary's choice of words like 'hectic', 'loaded gun' and 'dangerous' emphasise the threat that she believed online gaming and chatting to friends online posed to her 11-year-old son. Her explanation alluded to me that she felt ill-equipped with the practical parenting skills for managing her son's safe socialising online – a "new territory" for her and her son. Mary's story was not unique, with many participants raising similar concerns. Participants explained how during times of stress, particularly when they were under pressure to perform work tasks, they allowed and sometimes even encouraged their children to spend extended periods of time on devices as a form of easily accessible entertainment. When children were entertained on their iPads, participants felt free to apply themselves to their work tasks. In contrast to the finding by Eyimaya and Irmak (2021) who reported that increased screen time was associated with children of families with lower socio-economic status, reports by participants in the current study, who were all from relatively privileged socio-economic backgrounds, indicated that time spend on devices was high and the consequences were significant.

> *"I have to admit, I let her go on her iPad. You know, when I had to work, I would leave the Google Classroom and let her go on the iPad and so in retrospect, that was a huge mistake but it's complicated. It was a huge mistake… It really changed my parenting style. I, in many ways, dropped a lot of boundaries – I'll be honest. The iPad did become a sense of entertainment for when I was working. I shouldn't have but then what was I supposed to do? I had to do my work. … I am the only one working, if I don't bring in money, what will happen to us? Seriously!... I am a breadwinner so really there is that responsibility but there is his huuuuuge emotional dilemma of – I've got to earn the money, but she is more important than my work, but my work is important, but she is more important, but, but, but. So that you find yourself completely torn"* (Jolene)

Jolene's story communicates her guilty feelings and the extent of her inner conflict around compromising her usual boundaries around her daughter's device use. She explained the conflicting feelings she experienced as her responsibilities as a mother and as the breadwinner clashed, forcing her to find a practical solution to help her to cope. The tone of her story expresses the intensity of her emotions as she contemplated her dilemma. She went on, as did various other parents, to express regret and self-blame about the increased device use that she allowed during the pandemic. As parents like Jolene shared about their self-blame and shaming perceptions of being 'bad' parents for relaxing boundaries in order to cope, I was struck by how they had put themselves under pressure to live up to western standards of intense parenting, which under the conditions of a pandemic, were far from realistic. It appears that discourses of parenthood and 'ideal parenting' that are culturally loaded continued, as outlined by Hays (1996) and Burman (2016), to dominate during the covid period and contributed

unnecessarily to parental stress. Pressure to be the 'ideal parent' shaped parents' embodied experiences and how they perceived their functioning as being undesirable during this time.

4.1.5 Participants' anxious encounters with uncertainty

In line with findings by Reizer et al. (2021) and Şimşir et al. (2022), participants in this study shared stories that suggested that uncertainty and fear contributed to their experiences of psychological distress. Some stories suggested that parents felt elevated anxiety when their ordinary, daily activities were disrupted and this further highlighted how covid-19 challenged socially-determined scripts and routines in profound ways for families. Figure 5 and the following excerpts from John's interview provide insight into how he perceived the disruption of his grocery shopping, an ordinary activity, during the acute phases of the pandemic in early 2020.

Figure 5

John's trip to the grocery shop



John: *… that's basically me standing in the queue at Woolworths. It was one of the normal days…You had to drive around with a shopping list to prove you're going shopping and then you'd get to Woolies, and you're allowed just 10 or 20 people in so you'd get there and no one is talking to each other. There's a very somber mood. Some people have lost their jobs. Everyone's got masks on, so you're standing in a queue thinking like, "Is this the last time I am coming shopping with a salary?" because you don't know what's going to happen. Everyone was uncertain. People thought they would be retrenchments…But you always think to yourself like 'anything can happen' and so that's me standing in the queue at Woolworths, waiting to go in, so I took a photo because it was the most bizarre feeling, and everyone was just quiet. No one spoke like the normal joking way because you don't know - people might have a sick family member at home and they're standing in a queue just getting food.*

Researcher: You felt very vulnerable

John: *Everyone did.*

Researcher: It was a strange time. You said it was bizarre?

John: *Absolutely bizarre…it was quite nerve wracking because like you think to yourself, "Who here in this queue has Covid?" We used to spray everything we bought. We'd get home and then spray it down in the garage with sanitizer because you don't know. Most of this was pre-vaccine so you don't know like if you get COVID, even though you*

might be healthy, are you going to make it through? because we had to.

John's anxious tone is noteworthy because it communicates the multiple threats he perceived during this time. He described the ordinary activity as being dangerous in the context of the pandemic. His excerpt highlights the unusual dangers, such as law enforcement officers checking for shopping lists and other masked citizens queuing to enter a shop, that he had to navigate within the context of the covid crisis. His use of the word "bizarre" in this context signaled how unusual the experience felt to him; an ordinary task felt foreign under the pandemic context. A somber tone emerged as he articulated a flurry of questions that his experience in the queue evoked in him. His questions illustrated the extent of his worried, uncertain feelings. In hearing and reading his reflections about his feelings of uncertainty, such as "*you don't know what's going to happen" and "anything can happen,"* a tone of desperation is communicated. His sense of feeling out of control amidst the uncertainty reminded me of insights offered by other parents in the study: *"I didn't know if the world was going to come to an end or if we'd make it out alive"* (Andrew) and, *"It was quite scary because you didn't know what to expect…we didn't really know how to deal with it"* (Thabo). These insights offered by fathers alluded to their feelings of being somewhat helpless in the face of the covid-19 threat. Their accounts suggested that they felt insecure in their ability to protect their loved ones. Whilst this experience may not have been exclusive to fathers, it is noteworthy that it was fathers in this study who expressed these concerns. The pandemic seemed to disrupt the fathers' sense of security in their roles as protectors and providers. Peteet (2020) explained that the covid-19 pandemic evoked experiences of deep-rooted, existential anxiety as the disruptions it caused challenged one's sense of identity, one's sense of place in the world, and in what or who one can place their trust.

Several studies have reported elevated psychological distress and clinically significant levels of anxiety in adults (e.g., Xiong et al., 2020), particularly parents (e.g., Adams et al., 2021; Brown et al., 2020; Li et al., 2022) during the covid-19 pandemic. The overwhelming response from participants in this study was that their experience of the pandemic was largely negative and that they experienced elevated anxiety. For some, the pandemic triggered the re-emergence or heightening of existing anxiety symptoms, but for others the pandemic initiated their first encounters with anxiety. Some participants emphasised how their anxiety seemed to be all-consuming, to the extent that it eclipsed their capacity for attending to their children's anxiety, which gave rise to guilty feelings associated with their perception of inadequate parenting. This pressure to be emotionally available parents to children consistently amidst the stressors was perceived as being an unrealistic, internalised expectation for parents.

For most participants, avoidance dominated as a strategy for managing their covid-19 related anxiety. Mary's excerpt below illustrates how she identified the incessant news surrounding the pandemic to be an anxiety trigger that threatened to overwhelm her. Greater exposure to covid-19-related media, such as news, has been proven to be associated with elevated psychological distress as the news coverage typically heightened viewers' perception of the threat of the covid-19 virus (Stainback et al., 2020).

> *"So, I made a choice not to engage with the news and to read the stats because of my own anxiety and worry. Ya, I did go through patches, as did Duncan (husband), where it was just all too much and I'd find myself walking the garden and saying, 'I just need a time-out,' or finding myself in my room just crying my eyes out and going, 'This is too much!' or once they're in bed just, you know, we are there and I'm just crying my eyes out with him and he's just as frustrated. 'When is this going to stop?'; 'This is so scary!' And me having*

> *to come back to work, leaving them – it was awful…So surreal. The waves of worry and the waves of stress and then a new thing would come in."* (Mary)

Mary's story illustrates participants' anguish and distress in response to the multiple stressors that seemed to be relentless in their disturbances of family functioning. Like John's story, she described how she perceived the *'waves of worry'* as an onslaught of difficulties. Her story also depicts how she tried to protect her children from seeing the extent to which she was distressed by crying profusely in private. Burman (2016) writes about how women's identities can be absorbed into their maternal identities. Mary's efforts to protect her children from being witness to her distress reveals a tension between the responsibility she felt as a mother and her embodied experience within her identity as a woman facing hardship. Her use of the word 'surreal' alerted me to her experience of disbelief which echoed John's "bizarre" experience in the queue highlighting just how disruptive the covid pandemic was for participants' sense of agency and security.

Overall, it is evident that participants in this study described how they experienced significant feelings of uncertainty, fear and anxiety which not only had a detrimental impact on their own wellbeing but had negative consequences for the functioning of their families and their children's mental health. Prime et al.'s (2020) model clearly outlines that stressors which reduce the functioning of any one family member lead to changes in the functioning of the family system and therefore the other family members. Parents' anxiety during the pandemic has been found to positively predict children's anxiety (Zhang et al., 2022). This finding supports the significant concern for family wellbeing in the wake of covid voiced by researchers, clinicians, and public health organisations (Adams et al., 2021).

4.2 Theme 2: Experiences of wearing too many hats

In line with research into parenting experiences, participants described feeling stretched thin as they dedicated their energy and emotional resources to attending to the various roles and responsibilities that they suddenly had to juggle at the start of the pandemic. This gave rise to experiences of mental exhaustion (Shum et al., 2023) and declines in parental mental health (Chen et al., 2022).

4.2.1 Juggling roles and responsibilities

Participants in this study described how they were thrust into managing various activities within the confinement of their home at short notice and how this caused distress and a reduced capacity for empathetic parenting. This finding supports similar themes around juggling identified in multiple studies (Chu et al., 2021; Dawes et al., 2021; Michelson et al., 2021; Shum et al., 2023; Weaver & Swank, 2021). For example, Figure 6 was an image shared by a mother to depict how she arranged her dining room table as a functional station so that she could attend to her work demands whilst also closely supporting her daughter's home schooling.

Figure 6

Mother attending to multiple demands



This subtheme corroborates reports in the literature of parents feeling ‘stretched thin’ as their responsibilities in various domains converged (Chu et al., 2021). Increases in harsh parenting around the world have been reported as it appears that the circumstances of the covid pandemic have tended to make parents less tolerant of their children’s behaviour (Sari et al., 2022).

> *“We also had to cook, give snacks, empty the dishwasher, load the dishwasher, run the house, do the laundry. So, we wore very few clothes during that time because the laundry was a nightmare as well. That’s why your capacity changed: you were an employee, teacher, gardener, domestic worker. So many different hats and it’s very difficult to shift from, for example, in a very serious business meeting, sometimes with clients even to shift then to being a nurturing parent to a child to get that child, because you become impatient thinking, “I’ve got a meeting in 3 minutes. You haven't done your work that's due in 3 minutes.”* (John)

John’s excerpt revealed how he and his wife struggled to keep up with housekeeping chores, such as laundry, during the lockdown due to the increased demands he was under. He clearly articulated the various roles he perceived he had to occupy during this time: *“employee, teacher, gardener, domestic worker”,* and the strain it put him under to switch quickly between these roles daily. John, along with other parents, hinted at the notion that the challenges they faced in balancing household chores, typically taken care of by domestic helpers or gardeners, alongside their work and parenting duties, led to a newfound appreciation for the crucial support and care provided by domestic helpers within families and their homes. These helpers, often overlooked, play an integral role in maintaining the household environment.

This father's story of juggling multiple demands to meet the needs of his family disrupts long standing roles and demands typically ascribed to mothers within the home (Burman, 2016; Hays, 1996). His words further suggest his difficulty performing tasks delegated to people in relatively lower positions of power such as domestic workers and gardeners. He reflected that he found it challenging to be patient with his child as he switched from his role as a businessman coming out of a client meeting to his duty as an empathetic parent facilitating her learning at home. Prime et al. (2020) explain that when parents experience high stress levels, their capacity to access their emotional resources become limited, which can result in parents often relying on less effective approaches to parenting, such as being unusually harsh in their interactions with their children. John's insight aligns with a finding by Dawes et al. (2021) that fathers, more frequently than mothers, described difficulties in being able to meet their work and childcare responsibilities concurrently. The prioritization of work or childcare weighed heavily on parents during this time and gave rise to feelings of guilt and stress (Dawes et al., 2021). Stories such as John's echo Burman's (2016) notion of 'intensive' parenting that parents, typically mothers, are expected to do as they stimulate their children. Other parents emphasized how switching between roles in an effort to meet demands was exhausting and difficult to execute. This finding corroborates the theme of 'mental exhaustion' identified by Shum et al. (2023).

> *"It was really difficult… so it would be managing the schooling kind of getting her on the Zoom because she doesn't know how to access [Google] Classroom…so getting her on there and settling her down, trying to come back to work for 15 minutes or 20 minutes if you're lucky. Dad locks himself in the study, that's great. And then going back [to work], moving her on to the next one, settling her down, going back for 10 or 15 minutes…but it's just the sheer exhaustion of trying to keep it all together."* (Leigh)

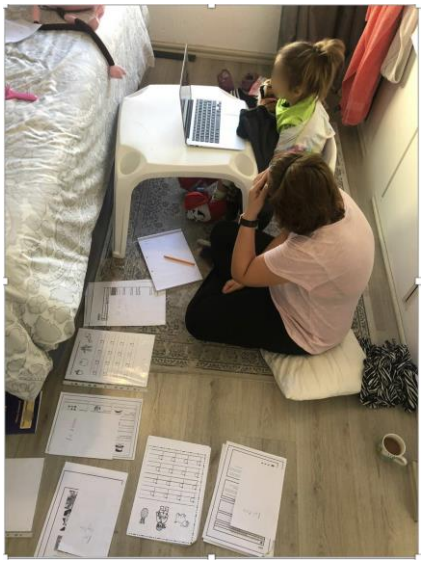
Leigh goes beyond providing insight into the constant juggling that parents in this study and the literature described. She speaks to the expectation that 'ideal' mothers should be responsible for meeting children's developmental needs as outlined by Burman (2016) and Hays (1996) when she stated, *"Dad locks himself in the study, that's great."* The tone of her comment suggests a sense of frustration, as she implies that the ability to distance oneself from their child's learning demands in order to focus on personal work demands is not as readily available to her as it is for her husband. Findings indicate that the demands of parenting under these circumstances were exhausting for mothers and fathers. However, these two excerpts illuminate two different experiences of parent couples, one where parents seemed to share the juggling of childcare responsibilities or as Burman (2016) says, "sharing the care" and the other where the mother assumed responsibility for juggling her child's needs while her husband was more free to attend to his primary concern, work.

4.2.2 Parents as learning facilitators

During interviews the majority of participants shared how difficult facilitating their children's learning was, which coincides with findings by Becker et al. (2020). For example Martha said, *"you have to physically take his body and put it in front of the screen"* and Leigh described how her daughter *"didn't work independently… so we had to oversee a lot of the work."* Figure 7 exemplifies the scenes described by parents who had to closely facilitate their children's learning. Reflecting on her experience of home schooling her daughter who displays largely inattentive ADHD traits Jolene stated, *"It was an absolute nightmare... I was pulling out my hair."* Many participants communicated stories that illustrated their experiences of frustration and a sense of inadequacy. For example, Martha said, *"It was really frustrating"* and Jolene stated, *"I really thought, "I am a total failure."*

Figure 7

A mother closely facilitating her daughter's online learning



The majority of participants reflected that they experienced their role in teaching their child as being unpleasant and emotionally draining: *"Having a child during that time and having to do the online classes during Covid was the most horrible time ever. I must tell you. Not only because of the child with ADHD, it's like, you had to educate this child and basically feeling like I'm educating the child myself…it was quite a lot for me to do for him"* (Martha). Martha's excerpt also highlights how she felt alone in her efforts to support her son's schooling which speaks to the discourse around compulsory mass schooling (Wyness, 2018) and the pressures on parents to stimulate their children's development (Burman, 2016). Half of the parents in the study emphasized how they felt ill-equipped to teach their children. The following two excerpts illustrate how parents felt as though they were unprepared and inadequately skilled to fulfil the educational role into which they were thrust. This finding corroborates reports by parents in the study by Fontenelle-Tereshchuk (2021) who voiced that they were inadequately prepared to take on the responsibilities of teaching their children.

> *"Taking into account that you now have to become a teacher overnight. In order to protect the children, the children started studying from home… The challenges were that you are dealing with a child that has learning difficulties and there's a certain style of teaching which – I'm not a teacher, so I'm not really equipped to deal with such."* (Fiona)

In some instances, parents described how their children rejected them as proxy teachers which put strain on their parent-child relationship. For example:

> *"She would burst into tears saying, "No mommy, that's not the way we do it at school," and I'm saying, "That's the only way to do it. That is the only way to do it!" and she is saying, "That's not the way to do it!" and so I ended up on the stairs crying and she ended up in her bedroom crying and it was kind of this impasse … I decided. I had made an executive decision that I couldn't do this, we'd have to hire somebody."* (Jolene)

Jolene's statement illustrates how she found herself in a situation with her daughter where neither of them believed there to be a solution to their difficult, strange circumstances – a deadlock. This sense of being in an 'impasse' adequately encapsulates a sentiment experienced by most participants. It seemed as though participants felt at a loss when their usual ways of navigating crises ceased to be effective. This was unsettling for parents and children alike. Covid-19 challenged traditional roles within families, such as parents as teachers, and seemed to crack open a vulnerability in parents that lurked beneath the sense of security they had enjoyed in the predictability of every-day life prior to the pandemic. Jolene's conclusion that she would resign from her role as proxy teacher and hire somebody to take over her home-schooling responsibility is an example of the kind of resources that she has at her

disposal as a middle-class, white, working mother of one child within the racialised, class society.

It seems that home schooling disrupted children's way of relating to their parents as caregivers when parents occupied roles as learning facilitators. This had implications for parent-child relationships during this time. This finding also shines a light on how children's learning from their parents has been systematically devalued with the introduction of mass-schooling (Wyness, 2018). Participants described how they felt as though their children were unable to apply themselves to their schoolwork if they did not have a parent mediating their learning experience and this contributed heavily to parents' experiences of frustration and fatigue. Parents viewed their children as being highly dependent on them during this time (Wyness, 2018). Participants in Michelson et al.'s (2021) study similarly reported that children needed parental support to reinforce instructions, guide their progression through tasks and maintain children's attention on the tasks. A number of parents explained how their children were simply not able to meet the expectations outlined by their teachers. Parents therefore took it upon themselves to adjust their children's workload or adjust their children's work tasks to make the learning opportunities more accessible to them.

> *"We would go, 'Alright you've done a few examples of that, just leave it,' we would make decisions. We would determine for ourselves how much work she was going to do and so that's how it changed for me to be able to become more accepting."* (Andrew)

Andrew's words give insight into how parents struggled through tasks alongside their children but when they took control of adjusting the tasks appropriately, they were able to be more accepting of their child. Like Andrew, some parents recognised that schooling at home under the circumstances of the pandemic called for flexibility and empathy to avoid the buildup

of frustration for parents and children. This suggests that the physical context of schools maintains a sense of order and that these spaces are associated with a set of behavioural expectations that are distinct from home-learning environments. This has implications for how we conceptualize schooling as spaces demanding or instilling desirable behaviour in future citizens.

4.2.3 Finding ways to cope with the increased demands

Many stories that participants told centred around the disruptions they faced due to the challenges that the pandemic caused in their lives. Whilst some participants were stuck in their stories of difficulty, others offered explanations and reflections about how they coped with the challenges they perceived. The variety of coping strategies offered by the participants can be understood in terms of Walsh's (2015) conceptualisation of family processes and the three strategies that she proposes to aid coping: communication, organisation and belief systems.

Firstly, some participants shared that open communication which facilitated collaborative problem-solving was beneficial to maintaining their family's wellbeing.

> *"We used to have family meetings once or twice a week to just share, to talk about how you feel or just to talk about what is going on in your life."* (Thabo)

Thabo's excerpt demonstrates how participants were able to give their children the space to ask questions and to express their concerns during a time of great uncertainty. They could tolerate their children's concerns and feelings and this ultimately supported the functioning of their family systems. Intolerance of uncertainty around the covid-19 pandemic has been positively associated with declines in mental well-being (Satici et al., 2022). Prime et al. (2020) emphasize how important it was to provide children with clear information during the pandemic and to offer them opportunities for emotional sharing. Parents had to carefully contain their children's anxiety about covid-19 by having responsible, age-appropriate

conversations around the dangers of the pandemic. For example, Figure 8 is a picture shared by a mother who explained that her daughter's worries about covid-19 developed and became quite alarming, especially when they manifested in her play as illustrated in her role play as the 'Covid Police' checking the grocery shopping for germs.

Figure 8

The 'Covid Police'

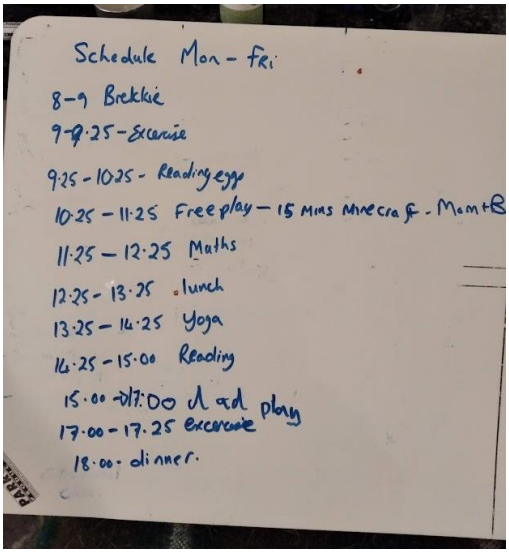


Secondly, most participants shared how they organised their lives to support the various activities and responsibilities that family members needed to attend to during the pandemic. As did participants in Bhamani et al.'s (2020) study, participants described the schedules that they drew up to structure their days during lockdown. Participants repeatedly emphasised that they believed that their children and others in the home who displayed ADHD traits would benefit from structured schedules: *"it's important that he has structure"* (Fiona); *"we thought would give some structure to our day and that was really, really useful because out of the five of us, five of us have the traits of some kind of labels: ADHD, ADD, OCD and who knows whatever hasn't been discovered yet"* (Ana); "*knowing from the past that she needed structure, the first thing I did was put her school program onto a page"* (Leigh); *"I think the structure is*

important. The need to know that at this is the time that this happens, that's the time that happens" (John). Children who display ADHD traits feel more secure, are better organised, and are better able to apply themselves more consistently when they are guided by structures and routines (Cortese et al., 2020; Tessarollo et al., 2022), although arguably the same could be recommended for typically developing children (Graham, 2008). Although, participants reported mixed feelings about the usefulness of the schedules that they drew up, such as the one depicted in Figure 9 below, with many concluding that the schedules they had created were unrealistic and unsustainable. For example Jolene shared: *it was a lovely thought…but I couldn't do that structure. I couldn't keep it going. I wanted to. I thought it looked good, but I just didn't have the time, didn't have the space, didn't have the headspace."* Participants' stories of creating unrealistic expectations for themselves and their children can be understood in light of Burman's (2016) exploration of the pressure parents are under to nurture the development of their children, at whatever cost to themselves.

Figure 9

Daily schedule



Thirdly, participants shared how their belief systems or meaning making processes supported them in coping with the challenges that they encountered.

> *"A big time of reflection and a lot of time of spiritual reflection and prayer as well for us as a family of just being together because that's what got us through. Being able to know that although we as in our human beings were suffering, there will be, God will make a plan for us. There is a purpose. We don't know what it is, we can't see it, but we will be alright because He is not going to let us down."* (Mary)

Like others in the study, Mary and her family leaned into their faith as a source of comfort amidst the time of suffering. They made peace with their discomfort by trusting that the struggles they faced were part of a larger plan overseen by a higher power. Her excerpt illustrates how she and her family made sense of the pandemic by assessing their experiences in terms of their faith-centered world view. Within their family system, this kind of thinking promoted feelings of hope and safety. Walsh (2020) emphasizes that transcendent values and spiritual meaning-making are important resources that can promote adaptation supporting families to endure hardship. This ultimately helps to strengthen families to help them cope with stressors that threaten the wellbeing of the family system (Prime et al., 2020).

4.3 Theme 3: Parents' (re)views of how their children's ADHD traits affected their learning at home

The stories shared by the participants provided valuable insights into their perceptions of how their children's ADHD traits influenced their educational experiences in a home-based learning environment. Participants tended to report that their children required close, consistent support as they were unable to sustain their attention on any given task for very long, particularly because of the increased distractions within the home environment, such as pets

and siblings. Participants who had children with and without ADHD traits suggested that their children with ADHD traits had higher support needs that demanded their attention more so than their children without such traits. Consistent with Burman's (2016) concept of attributing systemic issues to 'disorderly' children, the participants framed their children's challenges with home schooling or online learning as originating from the child themselves, rather than from the emergency schooling system and the educational approach that imposed specific demands on the children. With reference to Figure 10 Jolene stated, *"I put this on Facebook with the quote "Home schooling!" because this is what it was like. She would work then she would roll on the floor, then she'd do this. It would be one sentence in an hour, and I was incredibly frustrated."*

Figure 10

Home schooling!



Jolene's reflection provides valuable insight into how she viewed her child's behaviour during remote learning, perceiving it as a barrier that hindered her consistent engagement in her school work. It also illustrated how her slow processing resulted in a slow pace of written output which was extremely frustrating for Jolene. This suggests that Jolene felt pressured to attain the scholastic goals set out by her daughter's school and was uncomfortable when her daughter did not perform the tasks expected of her in the timeframe or manner expected of her.

When children fail to perform or develop as expected, parents – particularly mothers – find themselves at risk of evaluation (Burman, 2016). The fact that Jolene shared her experience via social media also suggests that she felt the need to express herself on a platform for other parents to see and perhaps engage with her on the topic, which points to her need for social support around her frustrating home-school experience.

Participants drew attention to their role as mediators of their children's learning particularly around the challenges that their children's impulsive behaviour posed when participating in online classes. For example:

> *"They had to learn- especially like Liam- to learn the rules and etiquette and there wasn't really any out there. They were learning as they were going. And his impulsivity was to just shout out and say, "I know the answer!" or he had to learn to wait. He couldn't read body cues because it wasn't as evident on camera and that was hard for him. So that was tricky."* (Mary)

Mary's excerpt highlights how participants had to support their children in developing important social skills for online engagement, such as having to wait one's turn and delaying gratification which, as is widely understood, is particularly challenging for many children who present with ADHD traits linked to executive functioning deficits (Colomer et al., 2017; Swanson, 2003). She suggested she needed to guide him as material to guide children's behaviour when engaging online was unavailable. This points to the expectation that she, as the mother, would fill this gap in his learning process in order to protect her son from potential negative feedback from his teachers and peers and by extension, protect herself from potential criticism should she not have guided him. Just as her son was learning these skills as he went along, so she was learning how she could support him in his learning as she went along. She

suggested that this social learning was hard for her son, but she also suggests that it was equally "tricky" for her to navigate this process.

4.3.1 Home schooling promoted parents' understanding of their children

Several participants described how supporting their children through periods of home schooling gave them a valuable opportunity to gain first-hand experience of their child's barriers. John described the lockdown period as being *"enlightening"* because family members spent an unprecedented amount of time together which grew understanding of one another, particularly parents' understandings of their children. Participants gained useful insight into their children's scholastic functioning and how they relate to their schooling. The following excerpts exemplify the kinds of reflections offered by participants:

> *"Covid really brought it together…I picked up a lot about them and how they do things differently and so on."* (Thabo)

> *"When we were working with her, we started to see what the teachers were telling us about the distraction, about the shutting down…But it was really interesting to see how she was and how she interacted with her schoolwork. That for us was a big turning point. Major!... So, that was a big change from Covid: seeing it, experiencing it, seeing what the teachers were saying in actual action and seeing the anguish she went through when she was trying to figure out something and trying to please us and trying to get dad not to shout, but also trying to just make sense of it all."* (Leigh)

These excerpts suggest that parents' eyes were opened to some of the challenges that their children face when engaging with their schoolwork. This finding corroborates the finding by Bobo et al. (2020) that during the pandemic parents became more aware of the impact of their child's inattention and ADHD symptoms on their barriers to learning. The pandemic

afforded them an opportunity to get to know their children in new ways. Leigh's reflection below suggests that the disruptiveness of the pandemic was a time of discovery for her family:

> *"There were beautiful moments and that's what we tried to show you in the pictures…I think there was a time of discovering each other and discovering ourselves and her discovering herself and also I think dad pulled back on his stringent ways with her. He's become a lot softer having experienced it."* (Leigh)

Her framing of the reflection suggests that she considered the learning opportunity to be a "beautiful", valuable experience despite the hardship they encountered. Leigh perceived that her husband's improved understanding of their daughter promoted a sense of empathy towards her and the barriers she experiences. In line with Prime et al.'s (2020) model, the newfound empathy would have strengthened family alliances or relationships which would have contributed to the greater wellbeing of the family system. Parents having a window into their children's schooling offered them a chance to know their children more completely and to therefore gain greater insight into the educational aspect of their children's holistic development, that is typically reserved for teachers. This more intimate engagement in their children's education disrupted the power that teachers and schools exert over children and their families. Perhaps it is within this window of disruption that perceptions about children with ADHD traits can be reviewed and perhaps even reimagined. As outlined by those who have laid out a constructionist view of the ADHD presentation (e.g., Burman, 2016; Graham, 2008, 2008; Timimi, 2010; Timimi & Taylor, 2004), ADHD traits are construed as being unfavourable within a schooling system that is intolerant of the full range of childhood behaviours, particularly those that are viewed as 'disorderly', like impulsivity or hyperactivity. Graham (2008) questions whether the ADHD diagnosis is educationally useful. From participants' stories, children with such diagnoses and their parents did not receive any special

or adjusted support from their teachers when learning online and thus it appears that the diagnostic label, at least when learning remotely during the covid pandemic, did not seem to be useful at all.

Ana offered a critical reflection:

> *"I think the pandemic also helped to press those buttons deeply, deeply, deeply because even the most unconscious people and parents had to come on board with the children. They had to be there for them and recognise themselves in their own children and in their naughtiness and that behaviour that they don't want to see – it's actually coming from themselves and the moment you see the mirror and when it shines very deeply into your eyes, it's painful"*

Her thoughts about how 'disruptive' children could be better understood as being reflections of parental dysfunction stimulate questions posed by Burman (2016) and Wyness (2018) around constructions of childhood and socially engineered narratives about 'good enough' parenting. In Ana's view, she regarded the pandemic as offering parents an insight, not only into their children's world, but also into their own functioning as they view their children through the lens of their own inadequacies. She proposes that parents were forced to attune to their children during the pandemic which consequently brought their own patterns of behaviour into focus and that this resulted in "painful" realisations. In Ana's review, she shifts the locus of dysfunction from 'disorderly' children onto their parents, blaming parents for children's "naughtiness" or undesirable behaviour. Her review indicates that Burman's (2016) observation that parents remain at the center of evaluation in relation to their children's development or behaviour continues to ring true. Ana's reflection suggests that parents have internalised a sense of inadequacy and that this maintains experiences of parental shame and disappointment in themselves and for their children's outcomes.

4.4 Theme 4: Covid, a mixed bag of losses and treasures

Participants shared humbling stories that illuminated their experiences of tragic loss of lives and livelihoods but they also shared stories of hope, opportunity and fun. The ways that each participant framed these experiences gave insight into their individual meaning-making processes. As they told these stories, it seemed as though the participants were unpacking a collection of memories, comprised of painful and beautiful moments, that they will continue to return to in years to come as they reflect on their covid-19 journey and the implications it had for their lives and families. Interestingly, whilst stories of the challenges and hardships of the pandemic tended to dominate in the findings of this study and the literature, it is noteworthy that every participant offered a silver lining that they perceived of their pandemic experience. In line with findings by Chu et al. (2021), gratitude underpinned participants' positive stories.

4.4.1 Strengthened family relationships

Reflections and stories describing how participants were able to spend more time with their partners and children were shared commonly in the interviews. The pandemic afforded families more time to be together which allowed family members opportunities to know one another more intimately. Participants shared how they experienced their relationships with their partners to grow stronger and that they observed sibling relationships to flourish too. These ideas are illustrated in Mary's excerpt below and in Figure 11, a picture shared by a mother to illustrate a moment she observed between her two children who spent hours together outside in the garden during lockdown.

> *"There were a lot of struggles but I'm glad that we went through lockdown as a family. I think we are a lot stronger. We are a heck of a lot closer. Their sibling relationship was a good one before but now it's an excellent one. We are very fortunate. We are actually very blessed to have children that like each other and call each other friends… it has drawn us closer to them and we are*

very fortunate, I know not many, well not all people have been, but we are very fortunate in our marriage that it also pulled us closer together" (Mary)

Figure 11

Siblings bonding



The finding that participants experienced positive growth in their relationships with their family members supports findings from other qualitative studies of parenting that reported similar themes (e.g. Dawes et al., 2021; Shum et al., 2023). Mary's report of positive growth in her children's sibling relationship coincides with similar reports by parents in studies by Chu et al. (2021) and Dawes et al. (2021). Prime at al. (2020) emphasise the development of family bonds as being a source of strength for families in times of distress.

Figure 12

Fun activities at home during lockdown



Participants identified that the pandemic gave them time to engage their children in fun activities that they would not have done otherwise, and this allowed them to grow closer together. This coincides with a similar finding by Shum et al. (2023). As depicted in the images displayed in Figure 12, participants in this study fondly described the activities that they undertook with their children such as playing outside, cooking and baking, watching movies, building Lego, having picnics in the garden, face painting, various home craft activities, and reading. Some even recognised that the slower pace reminded them to cherish the simpler daily interactions: *"We had the possibility to eat every meal together which wasn't happening before!"* (Ana). Some participants even reflected that the pandemic allowed them to slow down and enjoy some of the aspects of parenting they hadn't been able to explore in the busy lives they had been keeping up prior to the lockdown: *"With Covid I could be home 24/7 – in the morning, in the evening. Oh plus, I was the cooker! Before, I wouldn't cook. So, I became that mom. That mom that cooks, that tries recipes."* (Fiona). The pandemic disrupted patterns of

parenting focusing on being productive towards patterns that were more conducive to parents being present and attuned to the needs of their families.

4.4.2 Financial losses and career opportunities

Participants in this study shared honest stories of job losses and their experiences of being unable to perform their work functions as usual. Their stories depicted how shaken they were by the loss of the pre-pandemic certainty which they had enjoyed. What stories revealed was the resources which helped them to cope with the losses. The following two excerpts illustrate how, with the support of partners, participants were able to endure losses relating to their work functioning. Implications that these losses had for identity and family functioning are considered.

Firstly, Fiona spoke about how she unexpectedly became the breadwinner of her family when her husband was suddenly unable to conduct his business due to government-ordered restrictions. Whilst she acknowledged the added financial strain his loss of income had on the family's finances, she emphasised her worries about the impact that the loss had on his confidence and sense of identity as a father, the reliable provider for their family:

> *"My husband's business suffered, and he didn't make money and if you lose one income, it becomes a roller coaster and that impacted us, but I think as a family we were able to get through that situation…I think for me my concern was more I think him as a man and saying 'oh, you know I'm struggling. You know, I can't pay the fees this month' because he was in the property business and that kind of plummeted down and he couldn't make money at all and obviously it affected his mental state. He didn't feel good about himself, but I think for me my biggest concern was him, continuing to support him through the situation that things will get better."* (Fiona)

Her account illustrates how her husband's primary loss of his capacity to work initiated secondary losses including strain on the family finances, increased pressure on Fiona as the sole provider, and declines in her husband's mental health and self-esteem. Unemployment has been positively associated with declines in mental health and increases in psychological distress, particularly in the context of widespread job insecurity during the pandemic (Garcia et al., 2022). In capitalist societies where productivity is valued, the social affirmation that is generated from successful work performance can encourage individuals to establish their sense of self-worth in their work and this is reflected in Fiona's concerns about her husband. Covid disrupted his sense of place in the world since he could no longer function as a productive member of the workforce. One's work can be a significant component of one's constructed identity in market economies, particularly for fathers whose role as providers are socially prescribed.

On the other hand, Ana, reflected on how meaningful it was for her to carve out possibilities for her professional development despite the hardship that she encountered with a failed new business that was unable to operate under the lockdown conditions. Despite her significant loss, she consciously reframed her perception of her difficult circumstances and was able to re-orient her efforts towards carving out new career possibilities for herself.

> *"So instead of going into the drama and trauma of, 'Oh my God, what is going to happen now?' I was asking the question, 'Okay, what would it take to actually capitalize on what is happening? And how can we create something different through this whole experience without knowing where we are going, what we are doing but at least we are keeping our mind busy with something, you know, that can take us forward instead of pulling us down'... We had the capacity to actually see the possibility in the challenge instead of the drama and trauma."* (Ana)

Ana was eager to pivot away from the "drama" of the uncertainty she perceived as a threat that could pull her down. Certain conditions gave rise to Ana being able to adopt this positive, hopeful approach. Most importantly, during the lockdown period, she had practical and emotional support from her partner who would otherwise have had to go out to work every day. He could support her by taking over some of her time-consuming caregiving tasks which she was usually primarily responsible for in order to allow her to pursue new online work opportunities and to upskill herself by taking an online course. Her story represents a story of triumph despite the "trauma" she encountered and this was made possible by the internal and external resources she had available to her. Her story illustrates Walsh's (2020) concept of 'bouncing forward' whereby she was able to accept a new state of normalcy and recalibrate her life to face the unanticipated challenges that were presented to her.

4.4.3 It shouldn't have ended this way: encounters with death in a pandemic

Sadly, most participants in this study shared stories about experiences that they had had where a family member, friend, or colleague had passed away during the pandemic period. Some of these deaths were as a result of contracting covid-19 while other deaths were due to non-covid-related health concerns but where the deceased was unable to access the care they required timeously because hospitals postponed treatments to prioritise covid-19 patients or where they were turned away by doctors because the risk of contracting covid-19 while in hospital was deemed to be too high. This aligns with the report by Eisma et al. (2020) who drew attention to the ways that covid indirectly increased the death toll through postponed treatment or avoidance of health care facilities. These deaths represented jolting, complex losses for the participants and their families. With these unexpected, traumatic losses family members did not have sufficient time to prepare themselves emotionally or practically for the losses which disrupted functional grief processes (Walsh, 2020). The image in Figure 13 was originally shared in a participant's family WhatsApp group after a death in the family and was

used to prompt a story of loss in the interview space. It is included here as a symbol of this subtheme.

Figure 13

An image shared as a reminder of loss



The sudden seriousness of the threat of death was shocking for participants when a loved one contracted covid. Their stories conveyed a sense of disbelief as they struggled to comprehend the threat that this new, novel virus posed. John shared a story of how he and his wife felt hopeless and "out of the loop" upon hearing that they were unable to be at the bedside of John's father-in-law once he fell ill with covid in his residential care home. The tone of his voice as he recounted the story communicated his intense frustration and sadness at his inability to intervene or offer support as he and his wife would usually do in such instances. By being excluded from his father-in-law's care, he lost the opportunity to fulfil a care responsibility that was important to him. Being unable to provide support complicated his grief processing during this time (Walsh, 2020).

Secondly, two mothers of colour, Thandi and Martha, shared emotional stories of losing family members as they were unable to access the urgent medical care that they required. Thandi sadly lost her cousin while Martha lost her dear mother-in-law. Their accounts were

saturated by a feeling of injustice, that their loved ones' lives should not have ended as they did. Should their loved ones have fallen ill outside of the covid-19 period, they believed that they would have had better, timely access to appropriate medical care.

> *"It was during that time because they scheduled and he was due for operations, but the hospital kept on saying, 'it's not urgent'. They were taking over, taking the Covid cases seriously. "You can come in June" is what they said. So, they kept on returning him until there was an infection that developed. When he got very sick, I had to rush him to hospital... He didn't want to go to hospital, and he kept saying that they are going to return me back. But I found him in a very bad condition. I took him to hospital, and they did an operation very late and then they said that so many things had been messed up inside."* (Thandi)

> *"I was with her one evening at the hospital and the doctor actually examined her in the passage and he said to her, 'Because of your age, I can't admit you to the hospital. You are already having breathing issues, if I admit you, you are going to die because the hospitals are full of people with Covid. Where I am going to place you is a Covid ward and for you to get Covid is very likely. You are going to get infected, and you are anyway going to die from this.'.... she was very anxious, she didn't want to use these asthma pumps, you know, your Ventolin type of pumps and I remember sitting, and also, I couldn't sit with her and explain to the doctor… I remember when I was sitting in the car because you could also not sit with the patient because of the Covid. You couldn't sit in the hospital with her, you couldn't be in the waiting area, I sat in my car waiting for her and I remember her coming – sorry it makes me anxious – and then she, I remember her coming out of the hospital door,*

getting in the car and telling me, "Just take me home because these people are not going to help me and I can't breathe." (Martha)

Both of these stories highlight how they tried their utmost to support their loved ones, but they felt failed and frustrated by the lack of medical resources available to them in their time of need. Not only did they worry about accessing the care, but it seemed as though they had the added burden of instilling hope in the patients that it would be worthwhile to seek out medical attention as they had been discouraged by being turned away from hospitals previously, despite their dire conditions. Hospital resources were under immense pressure during acute phases of the pandemic (Shaukat et al., 2020). These mothers described experiences trying to access care for the loved ones at relatively well-resourced government hospitals and clinics. Their experiences help us to imagine the experiences of those less fortunate trying to access medical care in under-resourced hospitals and facilities where the option of private medical care is financially unobtainable. Both of these mothers went on to describe how traumatic it was for them to share the news with their sons that their loved ones had passed away under these circumstances. Both sons had difficulty understanding and accepting these losses as they could not comprehend why the doctors did not attend to the patients when they needed help. These reflections provided deep insight into the impact that these losses had on relationships within these families and the burden of emotional care that these mothers shouldered. Research emanating out of the pandemic has drawn attention to the gendered disparities in the burden of emotional caregiving, with mothers taking the lion's share of responsibility (O'Reilly, 2020).

4.1.4 Empty funerals

Four participants chose to share their experiences of 'empty funerals', 'empty' because quite literally, the numbers of attendants at South African funerals was legally restricted and

also because of the travel restrictions some important family members were not able to attend the funerals of loved ones. Participants spoke of the loss of not being able to include their children in family funerals and suggested that their children's absence disrupted family grief processing. The inability to provide care for sick family members and be present during the final moments of those who are dying has been recognized as a significant shared experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting people from diverse backgrounds in terms of race, class, and religion worldwide. Thabo's excerpt below offers insight into just one example of how cultural practices around paying respects to loved ones were disrupted and how this exacerbated his loss experience, leaving him feeling unfulfilled and dissatisfied. Participants' reports, such as Thabo's, coincide with findings from Burrell and Selman (2022) where the suppression of typical funeral practices interfered with mourners' meaning-making processes around the passing of a loved one.

> *"It was very different. Oh, it was different. Where you would usually have at least 100 people attending a funeral. We didn't have that because the neighbours couldn't come. The people who live in the community couldn't come. It was just family that buried him. So, it was just us which was odd in the Black community…It was quite a difficult one …I have lost a few people that I knew. Others you go to church together. It's people who I grew up under and I couldn't burry them. I was quite a sad one, really, very sad. This whole notion of giving people a good send off and paying respect in a way that you best to do it and you couldn't do it. You can't even say I'll go later because it's done, you know."* (Thabo)

The hosting of small, intimate funerals of up to fifty people in total in line with the lockdown restrictions was foreign to the South African, Black culture whereby it is customary for family members and friends of the deceased to be joined by the many members of their

local community in commemorating a death on a large scale. Sizeable attendance at funerals is culturally appropriate and important for traditional ceremonies. While the rituals of burial and the practice of grieving together hold particular significance for black families due to their strong living and ancestral communal networks, it is important to note that these aspects hold importance for all families, regardless of their racial or cultural background.

Thabo's experiences of not being able to attend the funerals of loved ones in his community can be understood in terms of Prime's conceptual framework as being a social disruption whereby changes that affected cultural practices and community-level functions impeded, through proximal processes, his wellbeing which would have, in turn, compromised the wellbeing of his family system. As highlighted by Walsh (2020), culturally-based meaning making processes and spiritual connections are important for fostering hope and strength to cope in the face of loss and adversity. Therefore, by limiting numbers at funeral gatherings to slow the spread of the airborne virus, governments indirectly impeded families' opportunities for fostering hope.

4.1.5 We are all in this together: An invigorated sense of community

Participants chose to tell stories that depicted a renewed appreciation of their community during the covid-19 pandemic. This finding coincides with a theme of gratitude identified by Chu et al.'s (2021) whereby participants identified renewed appreciation and gratitude for community relationships and support. Participants in this study described that they were motivated to help in ways that they would not have otherwise because they felt a collective sense of suffering in the pandemic. The sample of participants in this study were from middleclass backgrounds and so some of them explained that because of their fortunate position, they felt increasingly compelled to use their resources to help those less fortunate than themselves in the time of crisis. *"There was a sense of you had to help the greater community*

as well, which I don't feel now, but I did under Covid" (Jolene). Jolene's excerpt highlights that her sense of wanting to help community members was specific to the height of the covid-19 pandemic.

> *"Our neighborhood pulled together like you can't believe. Our neighbors - I got to know our neighbors! We started to celebrate each other's birthdays because we were under lockdown. We'd bake cakes for each other, bread for each other. People just down the road you know, we would check in, 'Are you alright? Here is a bowl of food.' We'd go walk our dogs together when we were allowed to do that"* (Andrew)

Andrew's excerpt highlights the strength that he perceived in his local community during the pandemic. He felt more open to connecting with his neighbours during this time than he would usually and he found these connections to be sources of strength and hope. His story communicated the idea that the pandemic slowed down the pace of his life and made community members pause and turn towards one another in the time of uncertainty. Andrew's story reveals another way in which covid-19 disrupted societal patterns of relating to one another. Covid-19 and the restrictions on travel which limited people's access to their family members and friends created conditions in which people turned to their immediate neighbourhood community to fulfil their social needs which went against the tradition of individualism introduced post-industrialisation and maintained by capitalist western influence which promotes families focussing on their own interests (Burman, 2016). Participants' stories illuded to the idea that in the sharing of food and greetings, there are glimpses of hopeful possibilities for small expressions of community that extend beyond the walls and gates.

Participants' insights suggest that future crisis interventions would benefit from incorporating and promoting community-level care systems to support individuals and families in crisis. The findings coincide with some preliminary research that has pointed to the positive role that local communities and neighbourly support have had in promoting community wellbeing in the pandemic (Jones et al., 2020; Stevenson et al., 2021).

4.1.6 New perspectives on the other side

Participants outlined how their experiences, both positive and negative, had inspired them to reconsider their perspective on life and what they valued. Their reflections signify a change in their perceptions about themselves and the futures they hope for their families. This meaning-making process aligns with Walsh's (2020) writing on adopting a positive outlook and seeking transcendence to rise above one's immediate plight by finding connection and being motivated by purpose. By adopting new perspectives, participants have the opportunity to reaffirm their identities and reconsider their core social values (Walsh, 2020).

> *"I just see things differently. Before covid I worried about silly stuff but after covid or in the middle of covid I think I am more focused on being happy and not so doom and gloom. Maybe I think that is what the pictures show. I didn't realise that at the time when I was selecting the pictures"* (Fiona)

Fiona's words illustrate how, in hindsight, she recognises shifts in her perspective since the start of the pandemic. Her experiences of sickness, loss, and family drawing together to overcome challenges has encouraged her to orient towards the positives in her life. She has gained perspective about what is important to her and what she wants to dedicate her energy to. In her interview she chose to highlight positive experiences despite the numerous challenges her family encountered. When I reflected this to her, she explained that she didn't even realise

that she was now more inclined to see the positives in her life and I believe this demonstrated how firmly she had adopted her new perspective by incorporating it into her way of being.

> *"For me it was very beautiful and very special, and I think we needed it, I really do. Sickness and all the danger aside, I think all of us needed to go back to our family and reprioritize. She was always our priority but in just understanding her better, I think that that's what came from – I'm going to get all weepy – from the two years."* (Leigh)

Leigh's excerpt illustrated how emotionally-loaded participants' reflections were as they looked back and considered the impact that their experiences have had on shaping their lives. Leigh's words communicated the value she perceived in her family's journey through the highs and lows of the pandemic. The pandemic afforded her an opportunity to recognise just how important her family was to her. These new perspectives described by participants speak to what McAdams & McLean (2013, p.233) outlined as the process of carving out new narrative identities whereby reconstructing past experiences and imagining new futures can promote a sense of "unity, purpose and meaning."

In conclusion, this chapter employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis to analyse interview data, delving into the ordinary yet profound experiences of parents during the extra-ordinary covid-19 period. Through the analysis, valuable insights were gained into the broader societal influences that shape discourses and govern social systems, particularly those that govern the roles of mothers. Four key themes emerged from the thematic analysis: 1) Adjusting to an upside-down world, 2) Experiences of wearing too many hats, 3) Parents' perspectives on how their children's ADHD traits impacted their learning at home, and 4) Covid, a mixed bag of losses and treasures. These findings hold the potential to deepen our understanding of family life, challenge gendered relations, reconsider children's play and learning, transform schooling

practices, foster meaningful parent-teacher interactions, encourage community-building, and prompt a re-evaluation of our understanding of "disorderly" children and their unique learning needs. By embracing these insights, we can pave the way for more inclusive and effective approaches to supporting families and children in navigating the complexities of education and well-being in times of crisis.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The study focussed on exploring how parents experienced the covid-19 pandemic. Parents of children who display ADHD traits elected to participate in the study. Participants brought pictures to the interviews which elicited rich stories about life during the pandemic. These stories gave insight into their worlds, their understandings of the significance of this time, and of how they engaged in a meaning-making process in their reflections. Parents' stories of ordinary experiences shed light on the larger societal discourses and influences which operate to shape and maintain societal systems. It was evident from the kinds of stories that participants shared more broadly about their experiences than they did about their experiences of parenting children with ADHD traits during this time. The types of narratives that parents offered allowed for insight into their experiences as individuals with complex identities during this period. Parents stories cast light onto multiple facets of their lives and identities such as their roles a parents, workers, homemakers, children, carers, community members, and middle-class citizens in South Africa. Whilst participants did share about their experiences as parents of children who display ADHD traits, their stories allowed for much greater breadth of analysis and this needs to be acknowledged as a key finding of this work. As a result, the findings of this study offer broader contributions than simply about how parents of children who exhibit ADHD traits experienced the pandemic.

In an effort to address the study aims, research questions were posed. In conclusion of this study, these questions will be revisited and a summary of the key findings in relation to these questions will be presented.

1. *What were the experiences of parents of children who display ADHD traits during the covid-19 period?*

Parents' stories revealed experiences of sudden change that required significant adjustments to their daily lives such as reorganising spaces at home to accommodate the various activities that needed to be hosted there, recalibrating modes of work, facilitating children's emergency home schooling, and parenting in an online world - a new territory. Their stories shed light on the ways in which covid-19 disrupted ordinary experiences, such as grocery shopping, and how parents experienced these disruptions as being deeply threatening, particularly in light of some of the other crises that South Africans have encountered, including but not limited to South Africans' experiences under the apartheid state. Experiences of parental distress were acknowledged and the consequences on parental mental health and family functioning were considered. Participants voiced their experiences of difficulty and frustration around juggling multiple roles and responsibilities during the pandemic. Participants acknowledged the care and contribution to their homes that domestic helpers regularly provide. In some instances participants shared insights into how experiences of wearing too many hats resulted in their reduced capacity for empathetic parenting. Parents provided valuable insights into experiences of facilitating their children's home-based learning and the challenges that they encountered. Stories illustrated how their children's high support needs demanded much of their practical and emotional resources. Parents' insight into their children's academic functioning and a renewed awareness of their barriers relating to the mode of learning expected of them gave rise to increased understanding and empathy towards their children. Parents shared stories of both tremendous loss but also of a range of positive experiences that the pandemic initiated.

2. *How do parents of children who display ADHD traits perceive the experiences that they had during the pandemic?*

Participants perceived sudden changes to their lives as being threatening and anxiety provoking. However, in the beginning of the lockdown some parents perceived the disruptions

to their daily functioning as somewhat of a relief as they embraced a slower pace of life. Words such as “difficult” and “frustrating” were used frequently in the interviews suggesting that these were parents’ dominant perceptions of their experiences during this time. Despite the numerous challenges raised, parents reflected that the pandemic was also an “enlightening” time of discovery for them, about themselves, their partners, and their children. The intense periods of time spent together brought about a strengthening of family relationships which families were grateful for. Hope emerged as a thread that ran through each of the themes presented. Participants also shed light on how their experiences have initiated them taking on new perspectives about themselves, their children and their lives. With regards to parents’ perceptions of how their children’s ADHD traits affected their learning, parents were of the opinion that their traits exacerbated already difficult learning circumstances but that a label of ADHD was not necessarily educationally helpful, at least when learning remotely during the covid pandemic, as it did not allow them or their children access to any special supports that could have improved their experiences. Parents were of the view that their children’s traits served as a significant barrier to their learning, therefore they regarded their children as being the locus of the problem. One parent offered her review that parents are to blame for children’s undesirable behaviour. This suggests a deep-rooted internalisation of responsibility for children’s outcomes as emanating from within the home, or parent-child relationship rather than as a function of any societal discourses or structures that cast ‘disorderly’ children and their families in positions of blame.

These personal stories of ordinary experiences in an extra-ordinary time and participants’ perceptions of such afforded an opportunity to gain insight into the various disruptions that covid-19 caused to the ways that we think about parents, children – particularly those who are socially disruptive – and the ways that family systems function to maintain larger socio-economic agendas. Firstly, it seems as though mothers continue to occupy the role of

designated primary caregiver within family systems, although stories by fathers in this study suggest a disruption in the rigidity of the gendered assignment of family roles. Secondly, parents' more intimate engagement in their children's education disrupted the power that teachers and schools exert over children and their families. Perhaps it is within this window of disruption that perceptions about children with ADHD traits can begin to be reviewed and perhaps even reimagined.

As mentioned, many of the experiences raised by the parents in the interviews do not appear to be specifically related to their identities as parents of children with ADHD traits. Many of the stories that comprised the themes (e.g., juggling multiple roles, difficulties with home schooling and experiences of loss) have been discussed in the literature in relation to parents more broadly, not necessarily parents of children with ADHD. Therefore, perhaps it is more useful to consider this group of parents' experiences as comprising one part of the larger parental experience of this time. Findings from this study suggest that parents of children who present with ADHD would benefit from support in future crises, just like parents of typically developing children would benefit from the same support. It is likely that a variety of approaches will be necessary to better support families in crisis. The findings of this study indicate that parents consistently identified the closing of schools for in-person learning as being the primary challenge that caused parental distress and therefore posed the greatest threat to family wellbeing during the pandemic. Consequently, the burden that home schooling imposed on families should not be underestimated when planning for future crises. Home schooling during this time also further exacerbated inequality relating to access to education, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds being left further behind.

The findings of this study have several implications. Those responsible for planning responses for future crises should take into account the range of parental experiences and how they perceived these experiences to have affected them and their family functioning during the

covid-19 pandemic to ensure that future responses are supportive of a range of parent and family wellbeing needs. Importantly, the findings of this study have implications for children's learning and schooling that reach beyond the covid-19 crisis. It is noted that all of the participants in this study were able to provide their children with the devices and technical facilities to engage in forms of online learning that were offered by their children's well-resourced schools. This reliance on virtual learning platforms to continue children's education during the pandemic illustrates how the digital divide was exacerbated during the pandemic: those with access to resources were able to navigate the challenges they encountered better than those in less well-resourced circumstances. Children's continued access to quality learning opportunities amidst crises has direct implications for their long-term outcomes within a racialised-class society. In a country like South Africa, where access to fundamental services such as education and healthcare is not guaranteed, crises tend to exacerbate existing divisions of inequality.

In addition, the findings of this study have implications for therapists working with families, particularly those with children with neurodevelopmental conditions, such as ADHD. Parents' close engagement in their children's learning processes during the pandemic gave rise to advances in understanding their children and increased empathy. Participants' reports indicate that increased collaborative connections between parents and other important stakeholders in children's development, such as teachers or therapists, have the potential to generate improved outcomes for children and for parents. Schools and teachers should reconsider parents' roles in supporting children and work to re-establish parents as valuable contributors to children's development. In light of the findings presented above, employers should be considerate and, where possible, accommodating of working parents – both mothers and fathers – as they attend to multiple demands in an effort to promote wellbeing.

In conclusion, this study was able to capture snapshots of participants' middle-class ordinary lives in an extraordinary time. Whilst this study considered the parenting experiences of parents with children who exhibit ADHD traits, it is possible to conclude that the kinds of experiences that stood out for parents were not necessarily directly related to their children's ADHD presentations. This wider lens provided valuable learnings about how participants navigated this particular crisis. The study of this small group of ordinary parents offers glimpses of wider understandings that extend beyond their individual experiences, shedding light on broader aspects of middle-class life. It challenges our understanding of gendered relations, children's play and learning, schooling dynamics, the relationships between teachers and parents, and the importance of community connections.

5.1 Limitations of the study

The research presented has a number of limitations that need to be considered. Firstly, it is recognised that only ten interviews were conducted and so the findings of this project are by no means generalisable as reflections of the experiences of all parents of children with ADHD traits during the pandemic, however generalisability was not the aim of the study. Rather, the findings serve to provide a preliminary exploration of the parents' experiences which may be useful in generating further lines of enquiry for future research.

Notably, data saturation was reached and so the sample was deemed to be appropriately sized for the purposes of this study. Participants represent a demographic of parents who would fall into a higher socio-economic bracket and so the sample was not representative of the range of South African parenting experiences.

The active role that I played in the research process is encouraged when completing reflexive thematic analyses, however it is acknowledged that I engaged with the process with

certain preconceived notions, values and subjective views which undoubtedly shaped the conclusions of the research study. Reflexivity was imperative for illuminating the interpretive influence I have had on the results as a co-constructor of the knowledge reported. However, there are likely further blind spots that could have prevented me from being aware of further influences I had on the research process and findings.

5.2 Recommendations for further research

Whilst the participants in this study were racially diverse, they all fell within high socio-economic brackets and therefore had access to resources and opportunities that the majority of South African parents would not have had. It would be useful for future studies to explore the experiences of parents who represent a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds to gain a more comprehensive insight into the realities of parenting during the pandemic. The literature indicates that stress and harsh parenting is worse in communities with limited access to important resources. It would be useful to collect stories of parents from a range of backgrounds and economic brackets to gain insight into a wider range of parenting experiences to inform planning for future crises.

Research into children's grieving processes in the wake of the pandemic would be valuable to explore as parents in this study reported disrupted and prolonged bereavement in their children during this period.

The parents in this study shared about how gratitude in the context of adversity and strain strengthened family relations and promoted wellbeing for parents and children. This finding supports findings by Chu et al. (2021) and Sun et al. (2020) that gratitude has shown to have a stress-relieving effect in the face of covid-19 adversity. More generally, gratitude practices have proven to be efficacious as a therapeutic intervention to lower stress and support wellbeing (Bohlmeijer et al., 2021; Emmons & Stern, 2013).Whilst gratitude reflection

practices will likely be insufficient in protecting families from the immense strain associated with the pandemic or any future public health emergencies, gratitude may be useful, even if only temporarily, to promote parental wellbeing in times of stress and so it is therefore worthy of future exploration.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of permission granted by the principal of Cedarwood School

CEDARWOOD SCHOOL

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Preparatory

Prep Switchboard: 011 465 9830 / 011 467 4657
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1 April 2022

Dear Claire Yarde-Leavett

I wish you all the best with your master's degree. Your topic "The experiences of parents of children diagnosed with ADHD during the Covid-19 pandemic" would have relevance to Cedarwood and I would be interested in the outcome.

You have my permission to advertise your topic to parents from the school as well as use the school office after hours for interviews.

Kind Regards

Sudeshan Moodley
HEADMASTER : CEDARWOOD PREP

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UMALUSI ACCREDITATION
No. 17 SCH01 00304

Appendix B: Research Advertisement

Research Invitation

Parents of children between the ages of 9-12 years diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and parents of children who present with ADHD traits (such as hyperactivity, inattention and impulsivity) are invited to participate in a narrative research project. The study aims to explore parents' experiences of parenting children with ADHD traits during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participation will involve one face-to-face interview that will take place at Cedarwood School. Please contact the researcher directly if you would like to find out more about your potential participation in this study. The study has been granted full ethical clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Claire Yarde-Leavett

Wits Masters student & Intern Educational Psychologist

071 720 2203

Appendix C: Basic Information Questionnaire

Participant Number:

Date of interview:

Participant Basic Information Form

What is your full name	
Age/ DOB	
Occupation	
Work during lockdown	At home, at the workplace, hybrid, unemployed
How many children do you have?	
Marital status	
Race	

Home language	
History of mental illness?	
Family history of ADHD?	
Any major life changes occur in your life between 2020 and the present time?	

Child 1	
Name	
Age	
School	
Any diagnoses	
How would you describe your child?	

ADHD-type traits	(inattentiveness, hyperactivity, distractibility, impulsivity) None Other:
What is your relationship like with this child?	

Child 2	
Name	
Age	
School	

Any diagnoses?	
How would you describe your child?	
ADHD-type traits	(Inattentiveness, hyperactivity, distractibility, impulsivity) None Other:
What is your relationship like with this child?	

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

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PSYCHOLOGY

Participant Consent Form

Study Title: A narrative study investigating the experiences of parents of children with ADHD traits during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Researcher: Claire Yarde-Leavett

If you are satisfied that you are suitably informed about the research and would like to participate in the study, please print your name and sign in the space below. By signing this this document, you are indicating that you understand the nature of the research study and your role in the research project, and that you agree to participate.

Please consider the following points before signing; please tick to agree:

	My participation in the study is completely voluntary.
	I have been given a participant information sheet, which explains the nature and processes involved in this study.
	In the case that I experiences any distress, I will contact the researcher and reach out to the support services available.
	I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I would prefer not to.
	I am aware of my right to withdraw from the study at any time.
	I consent to the photographs that I take to be stored securely by the researcher.
	My identity will be protected in any research reports or presentations that are made available to public audiences.
	I understand that I will not be paid or rewarded for my participation.

By signing this form, I am stating that I am over 18 years of age, that I understand the above information, and give my consent to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Name of parent Telephone number

_____ _____

Signature of parent Date

Appendix E: Audio Recording Consent Form

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Informed consent for audio recording

Study Title: A narrative study investigating the experiences of parents of children with ADHD traits during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The interview session will need to be recorded in order for the researcher to transcribe them at a later stage; this requires your informed consent. By signing this document you are indicating that you permit the recording of the interview for research purposes only.

Please indicate your consent by ticking the boxes below:

	The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.
	Transcriptions will be anonymised and all identifying details removed.
	Quotations from the transcripts will be used in the final research report, but these will not be linked to the participant's identity.
	The anonymised transcripts will be stored on the researcher and her supervisor's password protected computers, and only with the participant's permission (see below) used for possible future research by the researcher and her supervisor.

By signing this form I am stating that I am over 18 years of age, and that I understand the above information and consent to my interview being audio recorded.

_____ _____

Name of parent Telephone number

_____ _____

Signature of parent Date

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet

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PSYCHOLOGY

Research Information Form

Thank you for your interest in participating in the research study titled: Parents' experiences of parenting children with ADHD traits during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research hopes to generate new insights into the challenges and opportunities that parents of children with ADHD traits have faced during this time of great change and uncertainty.

What will your participation entail?
The study is a narrative inquiry into parents' experiences that involves parents taking photographs over a period of two weeks that they feel capture their experiences of life during lockdown. Should parents wish to participate but not have access to a camera, please contact the researcher to arrange the use of a camera. Parents are also welcome to find pictures that they have taken previously that they feel are representative of their experiences of parenting during the pandemic. Ten photographs will be selected by the parents who will then send these to the researcher and arrange a time for a face-to-face interview. Interviews will take place in-person at Cedarwood School in a private office with all Covid-19 safety measures observed. These photographs will form the focus of one-on-one non-directive interviews where parents will be encouraged to tell the researcher about their photographs and why they are significant to them. The parents can choose what to share with the researcher and will be in control of the level of depth they wish to explore during the interview. The interview will be approximately one hour. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Only the verbal component of the interview will be analysed. Photographs will be used to illustrate themes.

What are the risks of being involved in the study?
The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. The study is designed in such a way that participants can share what they are comfortable to share about their experiences of parenting during the pandemic. There is a chance that if parents decide to share some of the more negative or adverse experiences that they have had during the pandemic that they might become upset, but this will be at their discretion. Appropriate support will be provided. Participants will be able to withdraw from the study at any time should they feel uncomfortable.

What are the benefits of participation for you and for society?
Parents will not be rewarded in any way for their participation. Participants may benefit from knowing that they are contributing to the body of knowledge around the Covid-19 pandemic. It is hoped that findings from this research will inform practices to better support families of children presenting with ADHD traits.

Participation is voluntary
Participants are in no way obligated participate. You may decide to withdraw from the study and discontinue involvement at any stage. Any information collected would then be discarded. You will not face any discrimination should involvement in the study be terminated.

What about confidentiality?
Interviews will be conducted in-person in a private space at Cedarwood School after school hours to ensure confidentiality. Your personal information will be treated with great caution and respect. No identifying details will be disclosed in the write up of the research project.

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Participant names will be replaced with pseudonyms. The transcribed interviews and photographs will be stored in a password protected file. Participants may have access to their transcribed data after the interview by request.

What will the audio recordings be used for?
The interview audio recordings will be used as the data as part of the researcher's masters research project. It is possible that the data may be used in conference presentations to other professionals, or it might appear in academic research journals. All Wits research is stored and showcased in a central repository, WiredSpace.

What support is available to me?
If you feel that your participation in this study has brought on any distress, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher, her supervisor or any of the free counselling services listed below.

FAMSA Gauteng Office
Thandi Mayo
0117884784
intake@familylife.co.za

SADAG: ADHD toll-free helpline
Call to speak to an available counsellor or make an ap
0800 55 44 33 or 011 234 4837
Email Zane for counselling: zane@sadag.org

LifeLine Gauteng
Counselling line: (tel.) 01117281347 or (WhatsApp) 0659899238
Email the office to make an appointment: lifeline@lifelinejhb.org.za

During the interviews, some sensitive issues may be raised. The following distress protocol will be implemented:

1. The researcher will contain the participant in the moment.
2. The researcher will discuss with the participant whether they would like to continue with the interview or not.
3. The researcher will refer the participant to free counselling services. (See above)

If you have any concern over the way the study is being conducted, please contact the Chairperson of the Non-Medical Ethics Committee, Jasper Knight, who may be contacted on (011) 717-6508 or by e-mail: jasper.knight@wits.ac.za

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Thank you for your consideration.