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Wong , Caitlyn

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Research Report

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Breaking the Chains of Intergenerational Childhood Poverty: A Narrative Retrospective Study of Resilience

By

Caitlyn Wong

Student Number: 1884632

Supervisor: Dr Sahba Besharati

Co-supervisor: Dr Vinitha Jithoo

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Dedications

To my beloved family, both here with me and those who have departed this world, I dedicate my research report to you. Your unwavering love, support, and memories continue to inspire and shape me every day.

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To my parents George and Jolene, brother Matthew, grandmother My Doll, and aunts Winnie and Melissa. Thank you for your love, support, belief in me, and encouragement. You have each helped hold me up and keep me strong and been sources of comfort when I needed it. You all helped me get to this point of reaching my dreams. I would not be here without you. I love you all, too much and forever. Thank you, Prof Bernstein, for believing in me and becoming like family.

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Abstract

The experience of poverty is well-documented, however, there is a notable gap in the existing research concerning the unique narratives of university students who have undergone experiences of poverty during childhood. These students have been successful in gaining admission into university despite facing major financial hardships stemming from their experiences of intergenerational childhood poverty. These university students identified with having experiences of childhood poverty as well as resilience, thus becoming an important and under-researched sample. This qualitative study aims to explore these students' narratives of childhood impoverishment, with an emphasis on the identification and understanding of resilience within these experiences. This topic was investigated through the utilisation of the resilience theoretical framework. The study employed a Narrative Analysis (NA) to assess the experiential and retrospective narrative accounts of emerging adults within the university student demographic using semi-structured interviews. Three overarching themes were identified: (1) *narratives within the living environment*; (2) *the nexus of poverty, education, and opportunity*; and (3) *participants' constructions of resilience*. The results illustrated that the narrative experience of childhood poverty contained great levels of experienced difficulties within the home and schooling environment, and with emotional implications of poverty resulting in difficulties with coping and social exclusion. However among this plethora of hardship, participants constructions of resilience related to motivation, strength, acceptance, adaptation, and rewriting the narrative towards positive meaning-making. Therefore this study provided further subjective insight into the topic of poverty and resilience by way of presenting the data as experienced by the research participants, as well as having made recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Childhood, Poverty, Resilience, Narrative experiences, University students.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter examines the significance of studying the impact of childhood adversity and poverty on the lived experiences of students enrolled in South African universities. People go through a process of development in which they transition into various life stages until they reach adulthood (Black et al., 2021; Evans & De France, 2022). A study conducted by Evans and De France (2022) investigated the mediating role of exposure to cumulative risk. This quantitative investigation was made up of 341 participants between the ages of 8 and 9, with follow-up data being collected when participants were 13, 17, and 24 years old. Evans and De France highlight that the detriments of growing up in poverty are evident throughout developmental outcomes. This study found that this impact was evident throughout each life stage and that support was essential to work toward mitigating psychological distress. The experience of nurture and support is essential for positive development as nurturance is found to mitigate risks associated with adversity (Black et al., 2021; Daelmans et al., 2017).

However, not all children receive this support and navigate these transitions seamlessly, as certain adversities can delay their development, leading them into a period of emerging adulthood before adulthood is fully achieved (Berzin & De Marco, 2010; Vosylis & Klimstra, 2022). This delay in one's transition into adulthood is often accompanied by various academic and personal achievement gaps, as well as an increased risk of facing psychological difficulties and chronic physical disease (Evans & Cassells, 2014). Given the integral role of lived experiences, this study aims to explore these aspects, addressing identified gaps in research. This chapter outlines the focus of the study and presents a rationale addressing the importance of this study and the specified topic. This chapter lastly provides an overview of the report structure.

1.1 Focus of study

The focus of this study is placed on the creation and identification of resilience within the context of childhood adversity, specifically focusing on childhood poverty and socio-economic disadvantage. Although there are many conceptualisations of resilience (Iflaifel et al., 2020), for the purpose of this study, resilience is understood as being related to inner strength and the ability to be resourceful and bounce back from adversity or trauma (Aranda et al., 2012). The literature has converged to argue that resilience becomes important as it acts as a motivator and an ability to get through hardships such as childhood adversities (Aranda et al., 2012). It speaks to the ability one has to push past the hurdles and difficulties of the inequalities being faced.

Experiences of childhood poverty have been found to have a great impact on childhood experiences (Attanasio et al., 2022) as well as further increasing the potential risks of physical and mental health outcomes (Lee et al., 2021) in adulthood and various social barriers in adolescence (Green et al., 2018). Poverty is a multidimensional concept and refers to multiple disadvantages clustering together and therefore becoming a risk and threat to a child's access to resources (education, food, shelter, etc.), safety, health, and development (Acquah et al., 2017; Duncan et al., 2013; Gamboa et al., 2020). A large body of existing research shows strong associations with childhood poverty and potential negative future adulthood outcomes (Attanasio et al., 2022; Evans & Cassells, 2014; Green et al., 2018; Hughes & Tucker, 2018; Lee et al., 2021).

Furthermore, poverty predisposes children to unreliable housing, food insecurity, inadequate health care, inconsistent childcare, and stressed caregivers which leaves a child ill-prepared for school and for life (Evans & Cassells, 2014). Such an environment increases the likelihood of physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and academic problems, with such

adversity often extending into adulthood (Evans & Cassells, 2014; Hughes & Tucker, 2018). University students provide a unique sample to study and understand these potential outcomes, as a student population typically consists of persons in the developmental period of late adolescence or emerging adulthood who have achieved a high level of educational attainment.

Van Breda (2018) conducted a study which highlights the need to study resilience in South Africa, with a specific focus on this student demographic. This study investigated the resiliency identified by students who faced great vulnerabilities, including high levels of poverty and experienced great inequality. Van Breda's study investigated this topic in relation to a sample of 232 undergraduate students and found that relational resources were drawn upon for the creation of resilience, as well as a love for academics being a protective factor. As such, the focus of this paper is to also investigate resilience within the student context within South Africa by way of focusing on understanding the lived experiences of students currently enrolled in South African universities and exploring their understanding and creation of resilience despite being in spaces of poverty and disadvantage during their childhood.

1.2 Rationale

Most of the research to date has focused on identifying predictors of poor mental and physical health outcomes following childhood adversity. However, these studies of adaptation failure alone fail to highlight long-term adjustment following stressful early life experiences. Despite exposure to potentially severe forms of adversity, many children demonstrate remarkable resilience, managing to avoid negative health consequences and develop into competent and well-adjusted adults. The resilience and motivation to try and break this cycle of poverty that has affected families for generations. Poverty and economic inequality are

adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that are often understood as being intergenerational realities. Children who live within low-income backgrounds are found to access less stimulation and basic investment which leads to the emergence of both cognitive and physical deficits (Attanasio et al., 2022). These deficits are found to be key drivers of inequality and propagate the transmission of poverty intergenerationally (Attanasio et al., 2022). It is these stories and narratives that need to be heard and understood to truly paint a picture of how resilience can emerge in such contexts.

The presence of poverty within the world is alarmingly high and further increased by the COVID-19 pandemic leading to the addition of about one hundred million people into impoverished social positions, of which half are projected to be children (The World Bank, 2021). The prevalence of economic inequality further highlights major socio-economic imbalances that have become an intrinsic factor in South African society, as this imbalance dangerously widens the gap between the rich and poor population and the continued perpetuation of racialised capitalism (Machika & Johnson, 2015; Mayer, 2010; Sime & Sheridan, 2014; Virdee, 2019). Racialised capitalism speaks to the labour or workforce being dominated by Black South Africans, whilst the White South African demographic maintain a social position of power and financial dominance (Virdee, 2019). This unequal distribution of capital began in the era of colonialism and slavery, as well as the Apartheid regime.

The presence of poverty is seen on a global scale and has been highly researched worldwide. There is a vast array of quantitative poverty studies (e.g., Cavendish, 1999; Davis & Baulch, 2011; Lawson & McKay, 2002), however, much of it focuses on assessing adults living in poverty, whilst there is less research on childhood poverty. There is an even greater scarcity of qualitative childhood poverty research within the context of South Africa.

Child poverty has clear serious health risk factors as the management of stress is worsened, and exposure to structural inequalities and adverse circumstances is increased (Brown et al., 2020). ACEs research is growing and is proven to be an important focus of childhood, familial, and academic studies (Graber et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2011; Wills & Hofmeyr, 2018). Research often connects poverty to work-related factors, intergenerational adversity, and the remaining legacy of past oppressive histories such as the Apartheid regime (Bhana, 2014). It is known and established that poverty has more negative consequences on educational motivation and performance if students do not have adequate access to resources (Brown et al., 2020; Heberle & Carter, 2015).

A large portion of poverty studies have been conducted quantitatively that are needed to describe trends and associated factors. However, qualitative depth and insight are lacking within the broader scope of research (Firfirey & Caroissen, 2010). There is arguably a need to study student experiences of poverty qualitatively to enrich our understanding of the multifaceted impact of the experiences of poverty. Understanding childhood poverty retrospectively of emerging adults has the potential to study how students in tertiary education experience these childhood adversities and the coping resources that serve to buffer them against the generational cycles of adversity. It is argued that people know more about statistics about poverty rather than what it means or feels like to be poor (Engel, 2017). It is for this reason that this topic was chosen as the focus of this study, to add to existing research and deepen an understanding, thus making child inequality and ACEs research more holistic. This type of research has the potential to uncover narrative data that assists in adding to knowledge from a resilience perspective.

This type of research is extremely important because it has the potential to provide a deeper understanding of this specific disadvantaged population. Understanding the stories of

their lived experiences allows one to understand how childhood inequalities shape and impact one's future in terms of thoughts, feelings, and the transition through emerging adulthood and into adulthood. South Africa has an extremely high poverty rate, as 49.2% of the adult population lives below the poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

Poverty lines stipulate the minimum level of income that an individual is required to meet, to secure and to access daily life necessities (Sekhampu, 2013). Galal (2021) indicates that the most recent poverty line assessed shows that those who earn below R890 monthly, are poor and those who make below R624 monthly are below the poverty line. The pertinence of this figure further increases the need to empirically study poverty within South Africa, but also to contribute to qualitative poverty studies. Current South African-based research that investigates resilience exists, such as the works of Van Breda (2018) and others that will be explored within this paper. As such, this paper seeks to add insight into childhood poverty and resilience research thus adding to the database of knowledge as well as bridging the identified gaps in research.

1.3 Research aims

This study aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions of growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and how these experiences shape their constructions of resilience to poverty. The study will explore resilience from the students' perspective, enabling them to share their experiences within their social context, including schooling and university experiences.

1.4 Research questions

1. What are students' narratives of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantaged context?

2. How do students construct resilience to poverty?

1.5 Structure of the report

Chapter 1 introduces the research, addressing the study's focus on childhood impoverishment, adverse childhood experiences, and resilience. It also presents the rationale behind the choice of topic and research questions. Chapter 2 comprises the literature review, incorporating pre-existing research relevant to the study's themes and providing conceptual information crucial to the research process.

Chapter 3 details the research method, discussing the research design, conceptual framework, participant criteria, recruitment, data collection, methods of analysis, and ethical considerations. Trustworthiness and reflexivity as a researcher are also addressed. Chapter 4 presents the research results which are further engaged with in Chapter 5 which provides an extensive discussion, employing a Narrative Analysis approach to illustrate participants' retrospective narrative experiences.

Chapter 6 serves as the conclusion, offering study recommendations, discussing the research strengths and limitations, and providing an overall conclusion for the report. The document concludes with a reference list and appendices.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides insight into the study's focus, importance, aims, and research questions. It highlights the impact of impoverishment, emphasising the increased risk of barriers and mental health difficulties. The conceptualisation of poverty is introduced, with the next chapter aimed at deepening this conceptual understanding. The chapter also outlines the report's structure, providing readers with a roadmap for what to expect in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Both poverty and resilience have been found to lack a standardised definition as poverty is highly multidimensional and resilience has a multitude of conceptual definitions which leads to the concept itself being contested. This literature review seeks to create an understanding and conceptual definition of these concepts as well as other imperative concepts such as adverse childhood experiences, and intergenerational inequality. As such, one must begin by exploring the origins of the resilience theory and exploring the theory itself. What must then follow to allow for these concepts to be deeply understood is their contextualisation within the South African context. It is thereafter more possible to understand the university student demographic within this study in terms of their experiences leading to their transition through emerging adulthood and into adulthood, accessibility to higher education, and their subsequent adjustment.

2.1 The resilience theory: Origins and current understanding

The study of psychological resilience and resilience theory started being a topic of focus in research during the 1950s and 1960s (Aranda et al., 2012; Graber et al., 2015). Pioneering researchers of resilience theory and research include Norman Garmezy, Lois Murphy, Michael Rutter, and Emily Werner who each sought to understand how some children who grew up within extremely disadvantaged settings managed to emerge from these seeming unscathed (Graber et al., 2015; Toland & Carrigan, 2011; Yates et al., 2015). Research focused on resilience was said to inspire a deficit-based model of intervention that considers both protective and risk factors (Yates et al., 2015).

Risk factors are associated with negative outcomes in that an individual is at greater risk of facing a negative experience, whereas protective factors may be resource-based and internal and work to enhance the potential of positive outcomes (Yates et al., 2015). Risk

factors may accumulate which results in increased instability in people's lives, homes, stress, and within other avenues which each strains supportive networks and increases one's vulnerability to illness (Yates et al., 2015). It is the purpose of the resilience theory to understand how one can overcome such adversities and risk factors, as well as looking into what protective factors may be required to enable people to come out of these experiences unscathed (Graber et al., 2015; Yates et al., 2015).

In the early stages of conceptualising resilience, it was first established as being "a personality trait permitting positive outcomes under extreme hardship" (Graber et al., 2015, p. 7). As such, resilience theory first emerged within the field of traumatology of adults, and the developmental psychology of children (Aranda et al., 2012; Graber et al., 2015). Earlier resilience within traumatological research was primarily focused on identifying the factors that led to people being able to avoid traumatic stress despite being within potentially traumatizing and adverse contexts (Aranda et al., 2012; Graber et al., 2015; Toland & Carrigan, 2011).

Child developmental research was more focused on investigating personal qualities within children who positively adapted to their adverse upbringing compared to those who were unable to (Aranda et al., 2012; Graber et al., 2015; Toland & Carrigan, 2011). As such, developmental studies focused on understanding personal qualities such as a child's self-esteem. Research has indicated that limitations were present within the earlier conceptualisation of resilience and its research. As such, limitations included that resilience was becoming crystalised as a "magical" personality trait that was only attainable by extraordinary children (Graber et al., 2015). Due to this, resilience was perpetuated as an exclusive trait that would be unattainable to ordinary or mundane people. A second limitation

is seen in that early research oversimplified adult reactions to trauma and considered the absence of a pathology to be indicative of positive functioning (Graber et al., 2015).

Consequently, the 1980s introduced additional facets to further develop resilience research. In addition to there being an absence of psychopathology, resilience research started incorporating the cultural context, social relations, changes over their lifespan, and neurobiological processes (Graber et al., 2015). It was now argued that resilience is found within protective factors rooted in personality traits as well as within culture, community, and relationships. Child resilience was expanded into adolescent resilience which became an amalgamation of individual characteristics, social support, and resources that were available (Graber et al., 2015). Researching the marginalised in a cross-cultural manner now became important for the development of resilience research. Resilience research has incorporated various definitions from different researchers to inform a working definition. Such as resilient systems being focused on anticipation, monitoring, and learning from adversity, whilst others argue for an ability to be robust, plan, and adapt to return to a state of equilibrium (Iflaifel et al., 2020).

The expansion of resilience research led to the offering of an altered definition which posits that resilience is rather a process one undergoes where the above-mentioned factors act together (Graber et al., 2015). As such, resilience research was now focused on understanding the different levels of interaction between these factors. The expansion of resilience research allowed for the interactions and intersections with traumatology, developmental studies, neurobiological psychology, health psychology, humanistic psychology, and positive psychology to be found (Graber et al., 2015).

Resilience has been researched for over 50 years and findings converge on a set of protective factors (Askeland et al., 2020; Yates et al., 2015). In a chapter written by Yates and colleagues (2014), children are discussed to cope more with adversity when protective factors are present within their relationships such as within their parental or familial. Theron (2023) presents a social-ecological systems theory of resilience, based on her pioneering work on resilience in South African communities and contexts. Within this theory of resilience, it is proposed that resilience is a dynamic process, and positive outcomes are achieved through the interaction of systems, protective factors, and support. In a related study, Theron & Theron (2010) sought to provide a critical review of resilience literature and highlighted a variable-focused approach to resilience. This approach focuses on studying protective factors and results in the understanding that resilience is a product of a harmony of protective factors. As such, protective factors that are typically found to be instrumental in coping with adversity include people's relationships with others, as well as an individual's internal regulatory and relational flexibility, and community-level supportive structures.

Resilience research has developed and evolved, leading to our current understanding of resilience theory, which posits that resilience is a lifelong and dynamic process of adaptation to adversity (Graber et al., 2015; Suslovic & Lett, 2023; Toland & Carrigan, 2011). Resilience refers to the ability to bounce back or work through adversity by making use of one's inner strength, resourcefulness, and protective factors (Aranda et al., 2012). Rather than resilience being a personality trait, it is known to be the result of exposure to trauma and the amalgamation of protective factors that enables people to adapt to adversity and cope with stressors and traumas (Graber et al., 2015; Suslovic & Lett, 2023; Yates et al., 2015). Resilience being a developmental process further highlights that one's childhood and adolescence are crucial periods of development and are integral in functioning as an adult and

their ability to cope with stressors and trauma (Graber et al., 2015). Within this working conceptualisation of resilience, extensive work has been done on South African youth and their conceptualisation of resilience (Theron et al., 2015; Theron, 2016). This pioneering work argues that researchers need to also understand how youth and communities contextualise and understand resilience to place resilience research within various cultural and community contexts.as such, a multisystemic approach is engaged with.

The South African context of resilience research highlights the need for contextual considerations to be made (Theron et al., 2015; Theron, 2016; Zulu, 2019). Ncamisile Zulu conducted a study in 2019 where resilience was investigated amongst black women who did not have fathers. This qualitative study worked with 5 black women found that resilience was largely demonstrated by their ability to learn from and accept their experiences. this study further demonstrated the value of contextual considerations as it allowed for both protective and promotive factors of resilience to be found. This work contributed to the development of resilience research as it further contributed to South African research and highlighted that a multisystemic and contextually sensitive approach is integral to the development of the resilience theory. The idea of a multisystemic approach to resilience posits the understanding that there is an interaction between various systems that are at play for an individual (Wernli et al., 2021). Resilience is nuanced and is impacted by the interaction of various systems and experiences which allows for resilience to develop.

Additionally, Van Breda (2018) highlights that resilience can be understood and developed within the context of relational factors and academic perception or experience. As such, Van Breda finds that the relationships that university students have with others (specifically familial relationships) as well as how their perception of university is positive, has direct implications for the identification and development of resilience. It is argued that

both factors are important for the protection and resilience of students facing immense poverty and inequality. Thus adding an additional facet of the resilience theory as relational and academic perception is introduced. Therefore the multisystemic approach is further engaged with by incorporating additional systems such as interpersonal relations and the academic environment which are both part of the microsystem according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Perron, 2017). South African multisystemic research is further supported by international researchers such as Masten and Cicchetti amongst others.

Ann Masten and Dante Cicchetti are both internationally recognised resilience-focused researchers. In 2016, they published a study together where they investigated the development and transformation of the resilience theory. Within their paper, they highlight a multisystemic approach and explains that relational developments are increasingly gaining traction within research. This is due to there being an increased presence of resilience found in social contexts, especially where family, school, and culture are concerned. As such, Masten and Cicchetti speak to the relational developmental systems theory of resilience. They argue that this becomes an important theory of resilience especially in spaced where children are the focus because the family system and social context are found to be a key protective factor of resiliency development.

Resilience manifests as a complex interaction between individual, communal, and structural mechanisms that facilitate a level of support (Graber et al., 2015). The process is further facilitated through resource- and process-focused techniques (Theron & Theron, 2010; Yates et al., 2015). Resource-focused techniques involve primary preventative efforts to combat adversity, including the support received during one's childhood within family, friends, and community structures (Yates et al., 2015). The techniques focus on leveraging available resources to mitigate the negative impact of experienced adversity. Conversely,

process-focused techniques aim to protect and activate basic adaptive systems, including attachment-focused strategies that provide safe and supportive figures in individuals' lives (Fisher & Law, 2021; Yates et al., 2015). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) can be understood as an amalgamation of risk factors. As such, how one manages adverse childhood experiences becomes an important focus of this study.

2.2 Defining Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) encompass various forms of childhood adversities, with childhood poverty playing a significant role in South Africa. Childhood poverty is strongly associated with adverse health experiences and ACEs more broadly, including a diminished ability to cope with stress, and increased exposure to social inequalities and challenging circumstances (Brown et al., 2020).

Although there is a lot of debate in the literature on the differences between inequality and poverty (Ravallion, 2003), for this thesis it is important to note that poverty is considered to include inequality, reflecting unequal access to resources such as food, housing, healthcare, education, and finances. The constrained availability of educational resources often results in poorer children being relegated to lower quality educational environments (Brown et al., 2020). Therefore allowing the trajectory of a child's academic journey being influenced to potentially hinder future academic prospects or opportunities (Brown et al., 2020). Education is deemed essential as it offers an opportunity to escape the inter-generational inequality that children face (Cui et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2018). A child raised in poverty will also have a weakened ability to cope in certain stressful situations which can result in mental health and physical health issues, as stressors lead to overwhelming people's adaptive capacities, thus indicating why resilience is important in the management and overcoming of adversity

(Brown et al., 2020). It is first imperative that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and poverty be defined and understood.

To understand the concepts of adverse childhood experience (ACEs) and poverty, it is crucial to have a working definition of these multifaceted constructs. ACEs can be understood as a harmful experience occurring in early childhood that affects the health of the individual experiencing it (Agbaje et al., 2021). ACEs can take the form of neglect; emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; economic hardships and childhood poverty; and parental separation, amongst others (Agbaje et al., 2021; Crouch et al., 2020; Naicker et al., 2021). Numerous studies have shown and proven that ACEs can lead to long-term health, mental and behavioural problems such as heart and chronic disease, depression, and health risky behaviour such as substance abuse, etc., (Crouch et al., 2020, Finkelhor, 2020). Notably, an individual may have more than one ACE at a time, and when there are multiple present, the individual will have worsened physical and mental health, and development due to the body being unable to buffer the incoming stresses adequately (Crouch et al., 2020). The more ACEs present, the more at risk an individual is at compromising health-related factors.

Much of the existing ACEs literature has focused largely on familial dynamics, disruptions, and tensions, whilst factors related to economic adversity have only more recently been the focus (Braveman et al., 2017; et al., 2019). The focus on one's socio-economic position allows one to see how socio-political and environmental factors that are out of one's control, constitute feelings of great adversity which may increase the stress of the caregivers and child (Walsh et al., 2019). In other words, being faced with the adversity of poverty and inequality may intensify other present adversities that result in an increased level of stress, lack of coping and resilience, as well as becoming harmful to the child's development (Walsh et al., 2019). This idea is known as the cumulative risk – assessing how

multiple ACEs and the presence of poverty may intensify and worsen the lived experience of the child (Walsh et al., 2019).

2.3 Defining poverty

Poverty is multidimensional and refers to multiple disadvantages clustering together and therefore becoming a risk and threat to a child's access to resources (education, food, shelter, etc.), safety, health, and development (Acquah et al., 2017; Duncan et al., 2013; Gamboa et al., 2020). Despite its prevalence, poverty lacks a standardised definition (Nyasulu, 2010), leading to various interpretations. Nyasulu (2010) provides a working definition of poverty which speaks to poverty being placed into a state of disempowerment which makes meeting basic human needs impossible. Poverty thus positions people into circumstances they want to escape but lack the resources and power to do so. Absolute poverty is understood as lacking resources to meet more basic needs, whilst relative poverty speaks to having a low income or monetary resources in comparison to the average within society (Jansen et al., 2015; Knight, 2017).

Childhood is understood as being an especially vulnerable period in one's life and the presence of poverty impacts every aspect of a child's life (Lyndon, 2019). It impacts a child's economic, social, and relational life (Ridge, 2011). Children who grow up in households deeply embedded in inequalities often have multiple factors present in their living environments such as there being a level of unemployment in the family, restricted or limited access to different forms of transport and medical resources, as well as overcrowding within the household (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). Evidence provided by Manhica and colleagues (2021), quantitively found that children who experienced poverty throughout their childhoods are at an increased risk of health complications, psychological and psychiatric disorders, and illegal behaviour.

The relationship and support between a child and the parent/caregiver have proven to have the ability to negate or disperse adversities experienced by the child, however, poverty and associated factors lead to stress straining the parent-child relationship (Sime & Sheridan, 2014). This relationship strain can also be attributed to the fact that when there is child poverty, there is often (not definitively) a level of child maltreatment which illustrates how serious of an adversity poverty is for a child (Yona & Nadan, 2021). In a study conducted by Yona and Nadan with a sample of 35 parents and 15 social workers based in an impoverished neighbourhood in Israel, they found that poverty is considered as a risk factor and creates obstacles to a child receiving appropriate care. As such, the results found that poor families were less able to provide their children with a safe environment, therefore impacting their mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing.

A child's mental health is significantly influenced by socio-economic and environmental factors present where they are born and raised (Evans & Kim, 2013; Knifton & Inglis 2020), with impoverished families in South Africa exhibiting less responsive and supportive parenting styles, increased conflict, tension, and the use of corporal punishment (Evan & Kim, 2013). In an article written by Evan and Kim, they found that children born into poverty have limited access to toys, skill-building educational resources, and leisure activities, and may have fewer positive interactions with their parents.

Poverty has been defined as a multidimensional hardship, so it is important to consider the narratives of poverty that exist within society. While much research has focused on the creation of poverty reduction programs (Ciuffetelli Parker & Craig, 2017; Gamboa et al., 2020; Hickel, 2016). Knight (2017) argues that such programs fail because structural explanations of poverty are disregarded, leading society to blame the impoverished for their

hardships. It has been argued that popular media perpetuates this narrative to continue to isolate, alienate, and exclude this demographic.

Molotsky and Handa (2020) argue that poverty persists due to decisions being made by the impoverished being more myopic as the focus is on meeting immediate needs rather than future planning. However, Misturelli and Heffernan (2011) argue against this as this narrative casts a level of blame onto the poor. As such, Misturelli and Heffernan rather introduce a narrative that speaks to poverty often being portrayed as a more permanent state of being, and further argue that the reality of poverty is more complex and may not be reduced to experiences of simply lacking resources. In their work, they emphasise the importance of understanding poverty from the perspectives of the impoverished Therefore, taken together different poverty narratives exist within the literature as well as varying conceptualisations, this research seeks to uncover and understand narratives of poverty through retrospective accounts of individuals who experienced it first-hand.

Intergenerational poverty pertains to the transmission of abilities, behaviours, and living outcomes to the child, from the parents (Ward et al., 2015), this transmission is also seen in educational attainment, financial income, life decisions, and wealth (Ward et al., 2015). Poverty becomes part of an intergenerational cycle when the experience of poverty remains unchecked or uncorrected, which then results in that person's offspring being born into the same impoverished circumstances which ultimately continues to impact the proceeding lineage (Ward et al., 2015). The intergenerational transmission of poverty and inequalities becomes entrapping for a family within a cycle of disadvantage (Bird, 2013; Cui et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2018; Zhu, 2019).

2.4 Defining inequality

As mentioned above, although for the purpose of this study, poverty includes inequality, the relationship and distinctions between the two is discussed here. Thus far it is evident that poverty is characterised by a lack of sufficient resources and having lesser access to resources that are required for a minimally socially acceptable standard of living (Yang, 2017). As such, poverty speaks to the significant lack of basic resources and needs fulfilment (Acquah et al., 2017; Duncan et al., 2013; Gamboa et al., 2020). However, inequality is a relative concept that highlights differences in the quality of life experienced by members of a society (Yang, 2017). As such, Yang explains, inequality is present when there is an uneven distribution of resources and opportunities among people within a population, society, group, or country. Therefore, the presence of inequality leads to members of a community or society having less access to resources such as money. Therefore, inequality is often found in spaces where poverty is present, thus making the duality of concepts important.

Intergenerational poverty includes ideas of intergenerational inequality which is related to occupational and educational opportunities (Crawford et al., 2016; Yang, 2017). This draws one's attention to social mobility as a method of transitioning from one social class into another (Bottero, 2013). The ease and implementation of this transition is directly influenced by occupation and education (Crawford et al., 2016; Yang, 2017). For example, when parents experience greater educational and occupational barriers, the transition is hindered, thus impacting their children as well (Bird, 2013; Cui et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2018; Hughes & Tucker, 2018; Zhu, 2019). Therefore when a pre-existing lack of monetary resources is present, it hinders one's opportunities to seek formal education, thus impacting their future careers.

The pre-existing lack of financial resources hinders opportunities for formal education, thus impacting future careers (Bird, 2013; Cui et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2018; Zhu, 2019) and arguably leading to a cycle of entrapment, where earning is contingent upon education, and education is reliant on available funds. The impact extends to the next generation, where the child's access to resources is directly influenced by the inequalities experienced by their parents (Bird, 2013; Cui et al., 2020; Duarte et al., 2018). Financial insecurity within the family unit becomes a significant source of stress as spaces, where financial security is apparent, are associated with allowing children to thrive (Hughes & Tucker). This arguably leads to a cycle of entrapment due to the intersection of poverty and inequality, where making money depends on one's education whilst one's education relies on the funds available, which is limited by unequal access to resources (Yang, 2017). This cycle becomes entrapping, where the child's potential quality of life is kept within the boundaries of inequality. Inequality is not a clear causal relationship, nor is it a pre-determining factor of what life that child will have. This is because the presence of intergenerational inequality and poverty often motivates and encourages individuals to go against this cycle, as they often see education as a way of breaking this cycle (Duarte et al., 2018). However, whilst resiliency or motivation is promoted in this way, it does not take away from the fact that poverty is a major issue of which governmental structures are responsible for and are urged and required to address. The lack of governmental support in addressing poverty often leads to people needing to address it individually, by way of finding a way to escape poverty (Addae-Korankye, 2014). An example of this is seen in how impoverished people view higher education.

Obtaining a degree at a higher education institution often represents a chance and opportunity for an individual to escape the inequality of their upbringing and past (Duarte et

al., 2018; Yang, 2017). This drive towards escaping intergenerational poverty and inequality is a complicated process that is further impacted by the South African context (Maile, 2013). The economic conditions under which individuals live contribute to impacting academic success (Machika & Johnson, 2015). The opportunity to change one's economic position is thus challenged by the economic conditions that shape one's educational journey, adding layers of complexity to the pursuit of breaking the cycle of intergenerational inequality (Machika & Johnson, 2015).

2.5 Social exclusion and shame

An aspect of poverty that is often overlooked is social exclusion (Samuel et al., 2018). Social exclusion refers to a process where certain groups within society are marginalised and deprived (Jansen et al., 2015), or a process that creates barriers to society so that people are unable to fully engage in their social, economic, political, and cultural environments and lives (Birchall, 2019; Samiyeva, 2022). While poverty introduces social exclusion, the existence of social exclusion can deepen the challenges of impoverishment (Jansen et al., 2015). Children whose access to education, health, and other social services is restricted or denied have an increased risk of facing social exclusion in their lifetime (Birchall, 2019).

Social exclusion manifests in many forms, such as the perception of the homeless as 'invisible citizens' who are 'less than' others, which often results in them falling below the radars of policymakers (Halkos & Aslanidis, 2023). The homeless embody the most extreme form of absolute impoverishment poverty and are at immense risk of developing psychological challenges. Halkos and Aslanidis (2023) highlight that extreme economic differences give rise to aporophobia which is understood to impact both those who are and are not impoverished, as it speaks to fear towards the poor, the vulnerable, and poverty itself

– a phobia that perpetuates social discrimination towards the impoverished and those facing great inequality.

Cumulative disadvantage theory suggests that inequalities experienced during early life or childhood shape different life trajectories, emphasising the impact of social exclusion (Bäckman & Nilsson, 2011). Social exclusion takes on various forms, one being bullying, which involves the systematic abuse of power leading to feelings of being outcasted and socially excluded (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). In a study on the long-term effects of bullying, Wolke and Lereya demonstrate that experiencing bullying in childhood, indirectly (through aggressive behaviour) or directly (through physical abuse) increases the risk of internalising issues or problems, being diagnosed with depressive or anxiety disorders. Thus negatively impacting general health, and potentially leading to suicidal ideation and attempts.

The experience of social exclusion or isolation is understood to be an overwhelming experience and burden (Samuel et al., 2018), and individuals experiencing it often grapple with feelings of shame. Shame is closely aligned with a lack of belonging, alienation, and embarrassment (Engel, 2017; Samuel et al., 2018; Walker & Chase, 2014; Yang & Walker, 2020). The impoverished often feel shame due to societal stigmatisation for being unable to meet social expectations or aspirations due to resource limitations (Walker & Chase, 2014).

Shame, which is prevalent in various societies, is argued to be detrimental to social cohesion and the functioning of society (Engel, 2017). Shame is a structural force that divides society, creating restrictions, barriers, and tension (Engel, 2017; Walker & Chase, 2014; Yang & Walker, 2020). The presence of shame can act as a major barrier to the development of self-esteem and self-worth and can lead to isolation and a decrease in social capital (Walker & Chase, 2014; Yang & Walker, 2020). Consequently, shame has significant potential to

impact socialisation and the experience of being within society, affecting individuals from childhood to emerging adulthood and beyond.

2.6 Socio-economic disadvantage in South Africa

Emerging adults who have faced poverty and attend higher education institutions (HEIs) may experience lower productivity rates and academic motivation, often leading to withdrawing from the academic year (Rariden et al., 2021). Poverty significantly impacts students' academic performance, potentially accelerating the end of their tertiary education (Machika & Johnson, 2015; Ruswa & Gore, 2021).

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds typically grapple with financial constraints, affecting their ability to break the chain of intergenerational inequality (Zhu, 2019). Socio-political representations of fighting to break these chains can be seen in the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, which called for free de-colonised education (Papageorgiou & Callaghan, 2020). More awareness was brought to the reality of inadequate and under-funded higher education, which contributed to the continuation of socio-economic gaps being reinforced, as not having access to education is fundamentally detrimental to an individual's ability and opportunities to rise above the poverty line (Papageorgiou & Callaghan, 2020).

There are current organisations and government grants that work towards alleviating the gap caused by economic hardship and higher education, such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (Machika & Johnson, 2015; Ruswa & Gore, 2021). Students who continue to struggle with poverty often seek to make use of this financial aid as well as options, however, students are often unaware of how limited this funding may be which forces them to terminate their studies due to not being able to pay fees (Machika & Johnson, 2015; Ruswa & Gore, 2021). The South African government has implemented financial aid

schemes other than NSFAS, however, it is arguably not enough to truly assist the poor student population, as seen in the presence of the #FeesMustFall movement (Papageorgiou & Callaghan, 2020).

There is a presence of differential treatment towards those who benefit from others' inequalities, and those who suffer from inequality; thus the economically secure population becomes protected against inequalities of housing, access to food, education, and money (Assari, 2018; Heberle & Carter, 2015). Differential treatment ultimately restricts this disadvantaged student population from escaping poverty. Although the South African democracy has facilitated a racial transformation of the student body, the educational or teaching staff remains largely unchanged which has an impact on student's academic adjustment into an institution (Papageorgiou & Callaghan, 2020).

Academic adjustment is a key concept that denotes one's academic performance and ultimately academic success, especially when predicting student retention and graduation (Papageorgiou & Callaghan, 2020). Using results from a large survey study and using advanced structural modelling, Papageorgiou & Callaghan argue that student motivation is fundamental to academic adjustment, be it to perform well academically or to ultimately escape poverty. Their results showed that individuals with high levels of motivation typically performed at a high level academically. Papageorgiou & Callaghan highlight that the application of this motivation to realised or actual effort is important and speaks to how the presence of motivational factors enhances and allows for positive academic performance and improvement. Performance denotes the efficacy of academic effort; however, Papageorgiou & Callaghan caution that a student's socio-economic identity may introduce multiple barriers and constraints to academic achievement.

South Africa's history of racism, slavery, and the Apartheid regime continues to impact the educational environment. Racism remains pervasive within South African universities (Bhana, 2014), affecting students' identities and perpetuating a racialised legacy that coincides with class, symbolizing a continuation of Apartheid's history of marginalisation, discrimination, and separation. Bhana suggests that there is a defining role of race in identity formation that demarcates individuals into social, race, and class positions from which it is difficult to escape.

2.7 The nexus between poverty and crime

South Africa is a context in which exposure to crime is a common condition of living (Bhana et al., 2021; Cheteni et al., 2018). Bhana et al., (2021), highlight that various research indicates that gender-based violence, sexual violence, aggressiveness, toxic masculinity, and female subordination are more prevalent and experienced more harshly in schools that are in impoverished communities. It is a reality that children are exposed directly and indirectly to dangerous situations, crime, and situations that are not conducive to a positive and healthy upbringing of a child (Finklehor et al., 2015). A particularly vulnerable subset of the child demographic to this exposure is the impoverished child (Finklehor et al., 2015).

Children in impoverished contexts are found to lack necessities and rely on the aid of others or government grants, contributing to the spread of poverty and potentially increasing the appeal of crime to obtain essential resources (Bhana et al., 2021; Cheteni et al., 2018; Manhica et al., 2021). There is a belief that the longer a young person experiences poverty, the more likely they are to engage in criminal activities. Other factors that influence engagement in crime are educational and economic status (Cheteni et al., 2018).

The state of poverty in South Africa can be seen as a legacy of the historical inequalities introduced during the Apartheid regime. The era of Apartheid entrenched socio-economic segregation and a deep level of impoverishment, with many people being forcibly placed into impoverished conditions (Bhana et al., 2021). The restrictions and reforms implemented during Apartheid, including limitations on access to education, further deepened these inequalities. Post-Apartheid reforms – including those focused on democratising the educational system – have aimed to address historical inequalities (Bhana et al., 2021; Ngobeni et al., 2022). However, despite such reform efforts, challenges persist and the Apartheid legacy continues to impact current school environments, with unequal access to resources and opportunities being ongoing (Ngobeni et al., 2022). Additionally, the parenting and familial space is important to be considered as such challenges may impact the familial and home environment. The South African context is unique. As such, it is first important to consider what the family system encompasses within this context.

2.8 Parenting and familial dynamics of the impoverished

South Africa is a context that provides an alternative perspective of what a family unit or system looks like. As such, South African families do not always appear aligned with the idea of a nuclear family. Mkhize (2006) local research conducted in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, highlights that family systems within society are often incomplete or nuanced due to various reasons (economic, social, death, separation, migration etc.) of which he argues to be exhilarated by the presence of poverty. Looking at parenting within South Africa, ideas around fatherhood and motherhood are considered through sociocultural lenses where a a parent is not bound or determined by shared genetics (Mkhize, 2006; Muthukrishna & Ebrahim, 2014). As such, it is important to establish that within South Africa, children are not

necessarily raised by a biological parent as they may be raised by a caregiver, extended family member, external party, etc.

Parenting is an important aspect of a child's social, emotional, and physical development. If a child is raised within a supportive home environment where the parent or caregiver provides a level of care and nurturance and does not engage in any violence including physical discipline, that child has an increased likelihood of reaching their developmental potential, learning important skills, and being able to be a meaningful presence within their society (Lachman et al., 2016). Just as more inconsistent and abusive forms of parenting contribute to maladaptive behaviour in children and negative impacts on adolescence, emerging adulthood, and adulthood that speak to their social and emotional development and experience (Lachman et al., 2016; Sherr et al., 2017). How a child is disciplined is also found to correlate directly with long-lasting negative impacts on emotional and educational well-being and experiences (Sherr et al., 2017).

Children within impoverished living environments are at greater risk of being raised by abusive, violent, and neglectful parents or caregivers (Lachman et al., 2016). The impoverished environment in itself is understandably a stressful environment for the child, as well as the parent. As such, this environment has also been found to impact the parent's or caregiver's mental health as well (Sherr et al., 2017). Subsequently, when a parent has depression, anxiety, etc., it also has a direct impact on the parenting style used with the child (Sherr et al., 2017). Parenting is understood to have implications on the personal development of children as they transition into their various life periods. An integral life period, especially within the context of this paper, is that understood as 'emerging adulthood'.

2.9 Emerging adulthood and transitioning into adulthood

The concept of emerging adulthood, introduced by Jeffrey Arnett in 2000, defines a life period occurring between the ages of 18 and 25, when individuals are transitioning into adulthood (Arnett, 2007; Gilmore, 2019). This life period is characterised by extensive changes in various aspects of one's life, including psychological, emotional, and physical developments, highlighting the heterogeneity of this period (Gilmore, 2019; Vosylis & Klimstra, 2022).

Emerging adulthood is considered a period after adolescence, and during which individuals gradually attain adulthood. Arnett (2007) identifies five distinct features of emerging adulthood: identity and exploration; instability; self-focus; feeling in-between; and possibilities. A key aspect of adulthood is financial independence, involving the acceptance of responsibility, independence in decision-making, and freedom from familial or parental support (Arnett, 2007; Vosylis & Klimstra, 2022). The movement toward financial independence is an important feature of emerging adulthood, especially in the context of this study. Achieving financial independence often involves methods such as saving, controlling spending, and obtaining part-time or multiple jobs (Vosylis & Klimstra, 2022).

A study conducted by Vosylis and Klimstra (2022), revealed that saving money, controlling spending, and obtaining a source of income allows for greater subjective well-being. Additionally, the attainment of money impacts one's perception of financial matters as how one who relies on grants or funding may differ compared to one who successfully achieved employment. This also impacts how financial matters are perceived, with individuals who achieve a level of financial independence developing a more positive perception of money. At times, however, negative perceptions can also develop due to the stresses associated with gaining financial independence. The study also found that saving

money led to a decrease in self-focus and feelings of being in-between, while the act of monitoring one's cash flow led to an increase in perceived possibilities (Vosylis & Klimstra, 2020).

Childhood and familial poverty delay the transition into adulthood, thus prolonging the emerging adulthood period, directly impacting critical markers such as financial independence and workforce entry (Berzin & De Marco, 2010; Vosylis & Klimstra, 2022). This in turn delays other key life events such as leaving one's childhood home, getting married, planning a family, advancing one's socio-economic status, obtaining a sense of job security, or having access to higher-paying jobs (Berzin & De Marco, 2010). The economic and human costs of childhood poverty are substantial, contributing to academic and personal achievement gaps, psychological distress, chronic physical disease, and untimely mortality (Evans & Cassells, 2014).

Early pregnancies and marriages, common in impoverished environments, may lead to negative consequences such as dropping out of high school or university, having less access to opportunities, and strain on physical, mental, and emotional health (Berzin & De Marco, 2010). The impact of growing up in poverty and economically disadvantaged environments results in delayed transitions into adulthood and pervasive challenges throughout this period.

True or fully realised adulthood can be characterised by independence, job security, and often romantic relationships and some level of education (Schneider et al., 2016). Fully functioning adults are those over 18, living independently without parental support (Schneider et al., 2016). Therefore this transition into adulthood is time-sensitive and impacted by real-life events (Berzin & De Marco, 2010). Understanding the transition from

childhood adversity to emerging adulthood and adulthood thereafter, involves considering the timing and sequencing of critical life events, emphasising the time-sensitive nature of this stage.

2.10 The working class university student

Students who have experienced childhood poverty often face the reality of falling within the working-class and lower-class social categories due to their experiences of having limited access to resources, particularly money. This class distinction often highlights a rift between other university students who are within the upper class and have greater access to resources. This often leads to students needing to find their social position and identity within the university environment (Veldman et al., 2019), which may cause difficulty to arise when trying to integrate themselves within the university itself and with the other students. This transition and adaptation have been said to be most difficult for students whose parents did not obtain a degree or did not attend a higher educational institution (Veldman et al., 2019).

A quantitative study conducted by Veldman and colleagues studying the social-class achievement gap, with a sample of 674 first-year university students, found that first-generation university students often face lower levels of achievement and higher chances of dropping out which further perpetuates social barriers to society which have already been present in their lives. In other words, social inequalities, and barriers to escaping poverty are further strengthened by educational inequalities. Additionally, they highlight an irony as higher education is meant to help one erode their experienced social inequalities however in reality it may act to further perpetuate inequalities.

A study by Mallman (2017) found that these inequalities and other sources of disadvantage become a matter of which students negotiate with their desired university

identity. Here lies the conflict that students face when entering a higher educational environment in which their past and personal identity becomes challenged by their new student and possible future identity. This conflict becomes challenging for students to face and overcome as Mallman's study also highlighted that students who have unequal access to resources often struggle with developing their self-hood and cultural capital.

2.11 Accessing education

The presence of poverty has a major impact on people's lives and wellbeing and can result in ongoing human deprivation (Ikebude et al., 2013). In South Africa, a strong correlation is found between students' home and personal environments and their academic performance (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2018), with those experiencing poverty often looking to higher education as a means of escape (De Lannoy et al., 2015). Despite South Africa's transition to democracy, historical inequalities based on race, class, and gender persist, limiting opportunities and preventing the youth from realising their future aspirations (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Wills & Hofmeyr, 2018).

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often have higher levels of school dropouts and underemployment. Much of this is attributed to the substantial educational deficit in South Africa, where children born into poorer families have fewer opportunities and greater barriers and restrictions (et al., 2011; De Lannoy et al., 2015; Ikebude et al., 2013). In impoverished households, it is common for children to not attend school, despite education being a human right and legal obligation (Awan et al., 2011). Economic struggles thus translate to limited access to quality schooling environments, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage (De Lannoy et al., 2015; Ikebude et al., 2013).

In an article as part of the South African child gauge, De Lannoy and colleagues (2015) highlight that approximately 60% of South African youth do not have their matric certificate, emphasising the complexity of their educational experience. This illustrates that the limited access to quality schooling environments and the commonality of truancy further perpetuates this statistic. De Lannoy and colleagues continue to highlight that there are individuals who strive for higher education to secure better opportunities despite this statistic. However, De Lannoy and colleagues address that drive and ambition alone are insufficient in ensuring access to tertiary education, and the pursuit of higher education is fraught with challenges. Financial constraints can make the application process difficult, especially for those without access to electronic devices or Wi-Fi. Such obstacles can lead to feelings of hopelessness and frustration, while unsuccessful applications can take a great toll on their overall sense of wellbeing.

Education has a direct impact on poverty reduction, but the transition from student to working emerging adult becomes particularly challenging as obstacles in education and job applications mount. Despite the hurdles, education is recognised as a key tool for poverty reduction, enhancing earning potential and providing access to basic needs. Higher education is often seen as the means to break the poverty cycle, but the journey is complex and multifaceted (Awan et al., 2011).

Amidst these challenges, a study by Wills and Hofmeyr (2018) revealed the presence of academic resilience within South Africa's township and rural schooling systems, where some students, despite facing numerous barriers, achieve promising academic results. The study identified protective factors that enabled students to display academic resilience, such as socio-emotional skills including perseverance, motivation, and aspiration, as well as the presence of role models. Educational aspirations play a crucial role in developing academic

resilience, with individual characteristics like motivation and goal orientation positively influencing resilience. Moreover, they highlight that school-level support and the existence of a support system and role models contribute to the emergence of resilience.

2.12 Adjusting to university

It can be challenging for a student to establish their own identity within the university environment. Students starting their university careers face various challenges, such as moving away from home, making new friends and new choices, and adjusting to a completely different environment with a new set of pressures (Schuur et al., 2021). Adjustment is defined as a process where one must respond to the demands of their environment (Schuur et al., 2021). In a university environment, adjustment is a dynamic and interactive process that significantly influences university success (Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014).

Social-emotional adjustment plays a crucial role in this process of adjusting to a university environment and encompasses the development of meaningful relationships and personal acceptance of new circumstances (Schuur et al., 2021; Thiele & Gillespie, 2017). Thiele and Gillespie (2017) shed light on the challenges faced by lower and middle-class students in socially integrating into the university setting due to resource constraints and cultural differences. The inability to adjust sufficiently is associated with increased difficulties in coping with the demands of the new environment (Schuur et al., 2021; Thiele & Gillespie, 2017).

Resilience and the ability to adjust to adversity are identified as facilitators of the adjustment process (Bonanno & Diminich, 2013). Support systems play a crucial role in this adjustment journey, helping in negotiating personal and social identities, language barriers, cultural diversity, and educational standards (Daniels et al., 2019; Johnson & Riley, 2021;

Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014). The presence of a supportive structure, including peers, mentors, and institutional support, is essential for making the adjustment and coping processes more attainable and less daunting (Daniels et al., 2019; Johnson & Riley, 2021; Sibanyoni & Pillay, 2014).

2.13 Conclusion

The South African context, marked by the historical legacies of Apartheid, racial inequalities, and economic disparities, provides a complex backdrop for understanding the impact of childhood adversity and impoverishment on individuals' lives. The literature has illuminated the interconnectedness of various factors, including socio-economic disadvantage, educational barriers, crime, familial dynamics, and the challenges of emerging adulthood.

The nexus between poverty and crime emphasises the harsh realities experienced by individuals, especially in impoverished communities. The educational system, while attempting reforms to address historical inequalities, still grapples with limitations that hinder access and success for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The experiences of working-class university students further underscore the challenges of integrating into a higher education environment.

Parenting within impoverished settings presents additional layers of complexity, with the stressors of financial struggle impacting both parents and children. The literature highlights the role of parental mental health in influencing parenting styles, further affecting the well-being of children growing up in impoverished environments.

The concept of emerging adulthood, as proposed by Arnett (2007), offers a lens through which to understand the challenges faced by individuals between the ages of 18 and

25 as they navigate the transition through emerging adulthood and into adulthood. Childhood impoverishment introduces delays in achieving critical markers of adulthood, prolonging the emerging adulthood period and perpetuating social inequalities.

Access to education emerges as a critical factor in breaking the cycle of poverty, with the potential to increase earning potential and improve overall well-being. However, challenges in accessing higher education, compounded by the historical context of educational inequalities, present obstacles for many South African youth. Despite these challenges, there are instances of academic resilience within impoverished communities, emphasising the importance of socio-emotional skills and supportive environments.

The transition to university life represents a pivotal moment in the lives of young adults, marked by challenges in adjusting to new environments, establishing identities, and overcoming social and cultural differences. Support systems, including peers, mentors, and institutional support, play a crucial role in facilitating this adjustment process.

The literature thus provides a base of knowledge which this study seeks to work from to attain the aims of this study. Therefore the key aims of this study includes answering the research questions by exploring the narratives of how the participants perceive their childhood experiences of poverty, as well as how they have constructed resilience. Much of the existing literature presents data from a quantitative perspective or one that does not fully explore the narrative experiences of poverty as experienced by the impoverished. Thus presenting a gap in literature that this study seeks to address by working towards achieving the identified aims.

Chapter 3: Research method

How data is collected and analysed is an important aspect of this paper as well as exploring the design and conceptual framework. The study was conducted utilising an interpretivist paradigm and focused on understanding the lived experiences of the participants. The chosen sampling method made use of a snowball sampling technique which included advertisement of the study to be made visible to the public on social media, as well as through word-of-mouth. This method allowed for 12 participants to form part of this study. Data was collected via the use of semi-structured interview and later analysed through a Narrative Analysis Process (NA). This chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations made of this study as well as the trustworthiness of the data and reflexivity of the researcher.

3.1 Research design and conceptual framework

This study employed qualitative methodology that made use of meaning-making and narrative accounts. The qualitative research approach of this study enabled lived experiences to be studied as there was a focus placed on assessing lived phenomena (Gentles et al., 2015). This type of research was best suited to qualitative research designs due to its more explorative nature, as interpreting the retrospective narrative accounts of emerging adults, formed the basis of this investigation. Importance was placed on unique and individual perspectives of the world (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

This research aimed to investigate a narrative mode of inquiry of one's lived experiences and was therefore based on narrative data. This was due to participants' retrospective stories having been the focus of this study. It thus required the research design to be within the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative. The interpretivist paradigm allowed for the depth of human emotion and experiences to be investigated (Alharahsheh & Pius,

2020). The interpretivist paradigm highlights that understanding how humans create deeper personal meanings through their engagement with others and the world, is of great importance (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

Narrative research aims to explore and conceptualise human experience as it is represented in transcriptions created from interviewing participants. Narrative research allowed for a small sample of participants to be focused on to obtain an in-depth exploration of the meanings people assigned to their experiences. This ensured that the data obtained would be rich and a free-ranging discourse.

The core belief of the interpretive paradigm is that reality is intersubjectively constructed, through the use of language, consciousness, instruments, and shared experiences with other people (Gibson & Brown, 2009). This paradigm is centred on understanding a particular context as perceived by each individual and obtaining answers for research by creating multiple contexts to capture the understanding of the individual's worldview.

The focus of this study was placed on a particular group and their lived experiences, . therefore this study is arguably considered to be aligned to phenomenological research (Pietkiewicz & Smith., 2014). Phenomenological research is greatly reliant on the interpretivist paradigm which provides highly detailed and descriptive accounts of a sample's experiences, both personal and subjective (Pietkiewicz & Smith., 2014).

The crux of this investigation was participant-centric and focused on assessing how the world (personal inner experiences and outer world) is shaped and experienced by university students who experienced childhood poverty. A context-informed perspective was suitable for this study as well, as it highlighted the context behind each situation that students were placed in (Nadan & Roer-Strier, 2020). Therefore, emphasis was placed on the

participants' contextual understanding of childhood poverty as well as the context of how a sense of resilience and escapement from inequality became possible. Context is informed by a set of circumstances that took place within a situation, and thus informs how one has made meaning of a situation (Nadan & Roer-Strier, 2020).

3.2 Sample, sampling technique, and recruitment

This investigation was conducted by engaging with a sample of 12 emerging adults (aged 19 to 25 years) enrolled as university-going students, who experienced familial poverty during their childhood. The sample size of narrative studies often includes 8-10 participants or until data saturation is achieved (Aguboshim, 2021). The sample size of this study initially included 10 participants however, the sample was increased to 12 as a way of accessing additional accounts of experienced poverty and resilience as secondary interviews were held to gain more data, thus arguably reaching data saturation. This sample was based on students who self-identified with having experienced poverty during their childhood, where poverty spoke to a lack of resources and necessities. This informed important aspects that dictated the inclusion criteria. The choice to focus on the self-identification of impoverishment was made to allow for enriching personal data to be obtained and to truly highlight what impoverishment means for the sample, as such the inclusion criteria were further informed by participants being required to self-identify with a sense of resilience that they felt enabled the breaking of the inequality cycle.

Demographic details such as participants being university students in South Africa were another inclusion criterion. This study focused on narratives surrounding childhood inequality and impoverishment which allowed for students who did not experience childhood inequality to be excluded from the study. Another place of exclusion lay in participants not registered at a university. Gender did not form part of the inclusion nor exclusion criteria as

the registration at a university and the self-identification with experiencing childhood impoverishment were the key components of inclusion.

Purposive sampling is a form of non-probability sampling and was suitable for this study as it supported criterion-based sampling (Etikan et al., 2016). Participants were sought through convenience and snowball sampling, where participants were encouraged to engage with their social networks and share posters, flyers, and social media posts of the study with people they knew. The utilised poster may be found in Appendix E. Social media advertisement was a viable method of recruitment as online advertisements (posters, flyers, written announcements) were placed on social media platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and Facebook. These social media posts requested that viewers share the posts on their social media pages. Printed posters and flyers were also placed on notice boards around the Wits University campus however, students from other universities were found through social media advertisements and word-of-mouth.

3.3 Data collection and instruments

The data collection method involved one-on-one interviews between the primary researcher and the participants. These interviews took place primarily online (11 online and 1 in-person). Having face-to-face interviews would have been advantageous because it would allow for the participant's reactions and visual cues to be noted (Alshenqeeti, 2014), however, online interviews provided easier access to interviews despite time and locational constraints. The interview instrument was semi-structured (please see Appendix C). The questions were based on seeking insight into what poverty meant to the participants, as well as allowing them to share their stories about experiences they had of poverty during their childhood. These experiences were generally probed concerning their home and schooling environments. The second half of the interview was constructed to gain insight into how participants constructed

and displayed resilience by looking into their university-related experiences and allowing them to retrospectively reflect on their journey thus far. This semi-structured interview method of data collection was the best suited for this study because this qualitative study placed a major focus and emphasis on the thoughts, emotions, and detailed stories of the student participants (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Pertinent demographic information was queried such as age, gender, racial affiliation at the start of the interviews.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis of this study was completed using the steps of a Narrative Analysis (NA) (Riessman, 1993; Smith, 2016). The process of conducting an NA required the interviews to first be transcribed verbatim (Esin, 2011; Riessman, 1993). These transcripts were read multiple times and then underwent a process of inductive coding (Esin, 2011; Smith, 2016). Using the methodology outlined by Esin (2011) and Smith (2016) inductive coding took place because there was no predetermined list of codes that were used. Coding within an NA focuses on identifying key life events and allowing those events to form narrative blocks. The process of data collection thus involved noting the life events that were apparent with each participant which was done using a separate page on Microsoft Excel which can be seen at the bottom of the example in the appendices (see Appendix F). It is important to note that the individual's stories were kept intact and understood as a personal narrative, as individual stories were highly important (Esin, 2011; Riessman, 1993; Smith, 2016). An example of the document used during the coding process can be found in the appendices (see Appendix F).

Continuing Esin and Smith's methodology, the next step involved grouping these codes by looking at the life event codes that were generated, similarities and differences within these codes across the data set was then assessed. Structured and nested story codes

then became generated, which were structural codes within. Following this, story structures were then looked at to assess the orientation of the story, which allowed for each participant's orientation or perspectives to be understood within the context of their narrative. A comparison between each participant's story structures then took place, and finally, a report was written discussing the core narratives.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Multiple ethical issues needed to be addressed by the study. Autonomy and choice became the first issue to be addressed. The Participant Information Sheet (PIS) in full (refer to Appendix A) sought to inform the students of there being no personal gains or costs of participating in the study, as there were also no incentives being made use of. Participating was entirely voluntary and withdrawing at any stage was respected. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Witwatersrand's Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical; ethics number: MACC/22/11; please see Appendix D for ethics clearance certificate). Informed written consent was obtained by all participants (see Appendix B).

3.5.1 Informed consent

Following the acquisition of ethical clearance and requisite training, participants were subsequently recruited. Participants were required to provide written consent (see Appendix B), after having fully read the PIS (see Appendix A). Electronically and physically signed copies of the consent forms were accepted.

3.5.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

The content of the interviews was protected by confidentiality and was only made accessible to the researcher and supervisors. The rendered transcripts were password-protected and made use of the pseudonyms created for the participants, as such participant

identifying information is only found on the password-protected consent forms. Anonymity could not be guaranteed due to the face-to-face nature of the data collection as well as when participants chose to have their cameras on during the online interviews, however, all identifying information was protected using pseudonyms. No visual documentation was made of the participants, as their physical identity would only be known to the researcher due to the interview process. The audio recording of the interview was stored in a password-protected computer. These recordings and later transcripts were made accessible to the researcher and supervisor.

3.5.3 Risk

Participants were required to discuss their lived experiences and retrospective stories of their childhood experiences of poverty. This had the potential to cause feelings to arise, however, these stories having been retrospective acted as a buffer against the emergence of strong emotional reactions during the interview process. This study was focused on resilience and breaking out of the poverty cycle; therefore, a level of resilience was required to be identified by the participant as mentioned in the inclusion criteria. As such this study was categorised as being of a low-risk scale because resilience acted as a protective factor however, due to the topic of poverty being potentially sensitive and distressing, a level of risk remained.

All ethical guidelines were followed throughout the interview process. Due to the potentially sensitive aspect of this research topic, the PIS (see Appendix A) made participants aware of the services they could contact if they experienced any emotions due to the interview. This included Lifeline (+27(0) 86 132 2322) and the Wit's Crisis Line (+27(0) 800 111 331) because these organisations offer free debriefing and containment and operate 24/7.

3.5.4 Trustworthiness and reflexivity

The trustworthiness of qualitative research refers to the degree of confidence and accuracy of the data interpretation and the method used within the study (Connelly, 2016). This study addresses five key components to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accuracy and level of truth that the study is putting forward (Connelly, 2016). Because the study collected data from multiple students and was based on their narratives of their personal perspectives and experiences, the data rendered was true to them. This was done by following an interview schedule (see Appendix C), and the role of the supervisors included the results and themes to be inspected, ensuring that the data was credible.

Dependability

Dependability focuses on how stable the data will be over a period of time (Connelly, 2016). This study was arguably dependably stable, as the results of this study focused on telling retrospective stories of personal growth and resilience and the escaping of major poverty. Poverty has a large presence within South Africa, arguably maintaining the study's relevance.

Confirmability

Confirmability speaks to the replicability of the study (Connelly, 2016). This study focused on a tertiary institution within the South African context which made the sample a constant. This is because there will always be an influx or presence of students at a tertiary institution and the South African context has a high prevalence of childhood poverty as discussed earlier.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalisability of the results of this study applying to other contexts, institutions, etc. South Africa has multiple universities that have an impoverished population as part of the wider student population, thus ensuring generalisability. However, whilst the study was not university-specific, there was a clear lack of students outside of the University of the Witwatersrand.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity addresses the need for the researcher's own subjectivity to be considered as it may impact how research is conducted, data is obtained, and results are analysed (Starfield, 2013). As Starfield outlines, the researcher's positionality concerning the topic becomes important. As such, it is vital for reflexivity to be engaged with at each point prior to, during and after the data collection process, as this researcher self-examination ensures the attainment and portrayal of ethically sound data (Levitt et al., 2018). When conducting this research, it was apparent that my own experiences with financial difficulties may have been triggered and ultimately impacted how I interviewed the participants and my positionality on the topic. I needed to ensure that I was not allowing these experiences to impact how I assessed and wrote up the data or be aware of how my experiences shaped the data collection and analysis. Any biases and miscommunication of the data were managed through the supervision process as this research also underwent a process of multiple drafts being written, especially with regards to the results chapter, to ensure the work being written was a true representation of the data itself.

As mentioned, reflexivity is crucial throughout the research process. Thus reflexivity requires the researcher to consider their impact on the participants during the data collection

process (Levitt et al., 2018). In other words, how participants experienced me as the researcher may have had the potential to impact their comfort with answering the questions, their level of honesty and openness, as well as the amount of additional explanation they may felt would be required of them. My surname as well as how I physically look creates a level of assumed difference as I am of a different race, background, and upbringing, and within the context of the interviews, it was common for the participants to question why I chose this topic. It was also found that how I presented as a researcher also led to participants feeling the need to explain different things such as different forms of housing and asking me if I knew what different areas in Johannesburg looked like. As the researcher, it was my responsibility to be aware that these types of experiences may have occurred and to be open to the process with the participants. An example of openness to the process involved my needing to be honest with myself and the participants by asking for clarity when culturally traditional topics were introduced, that I did not have in-depth base prior knowledge of due to being from a different background. As such, it was also my responsibility to be respectful of the differences between myself and the participants, and how they may perceive me.

3.6 Conclusion

The methodological consideration of this study forms the very basis of how research was conducted. As such, the design of the research and the procedure followed to collect and analyse data are important aspects of this study. The sampling process is integral as it ensures the attainment of research participants. The choice of sampling method was crucial and allowed for information to be provided about the process of how participants were sampled and recruited, as well as speaking to what the study's inclusion and exclusion criteria were. This chapter then continued to speak to the important ethical considerations that had been

made such as the ethics and trustworthiness of this study as well as the generalisability of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter aims to examine the findings derived from this study. Delving deeper into the narratives articulated by each research participant regarding their childhood and their current phase of life as university students. The data collected illustrates how participants' experiences contribute to the emergence of themes and subthemes, shedding light on their narrative experiences and the construction of resilience. Employing a narrative analysis allowed for detailed themes to emerge and be explicated regarding participant quotations. The themes and subthemes generated through the completion of the analysis illuminate the narrative experience pertaining to the main research questions below:

1. What are students' narratives of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantaged context?

2. How do students construct resilience to poverty?

4.1 Participant demographics

As detailed in Table 1 below, a total of 12 participants were included in this study. All participants in the sample identified as black and nine as female. As per the study's main aim, the participants were all young adults, with the majority being 19 years old. Whilst the Research Advertisement Poster (see Appendix E) was posted across social media platforms, 8 of the 12 participants were students from the University of the Witwatersrand, and the participants were largely registered in Humanities-based degrees, specifically Bachelor of Arts (General) and Bachelor of Arts (Law).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Race	Gender	Current Degree	Institution
Rachel	25	Black	Female	Masters in Social Science	University of Cape Town
Aniyah	24	Black	Female	Masters in Social Work	University of Witwatersrand
Tina	20	Black	Female	Bachelor of Arts General	University of Witwatersrand
Patience	23	Black	Female	Bachelor of Arts General	University of Witwatersrand
Thabiso	19	Black	Male	Bachelor of Arts General	University of Witwatersrand
Philani	19	Black	Male	Bachelor of Arts General	University of Witwatersrand
Refiloe	22	Black	Female	Masters in Psychology	University of South Africa
Chantelle	19	Black	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Law)	University of Witwatersrand
Imani	19	Black	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Law)	University of Witwatersrand
Bonolo	19	Black	Female	Bachelor of Arts (Law)	University of Witwatersrand
Emanuel	25	Black	Male	Bachelor of Education	University of Venda
Mbali	25	Black	Female	Masters in Psychology	University of Pretoria

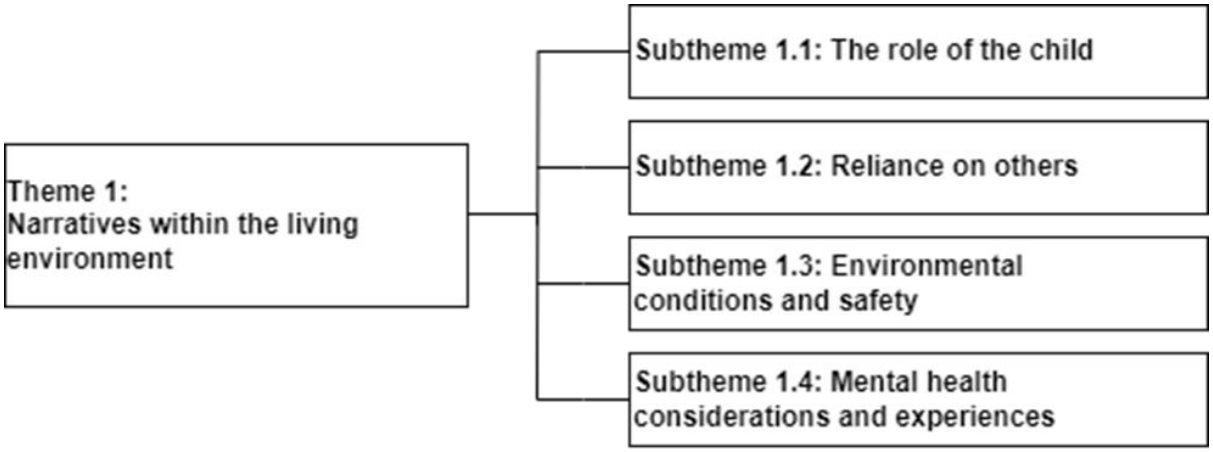
4.2 Illustration of themes

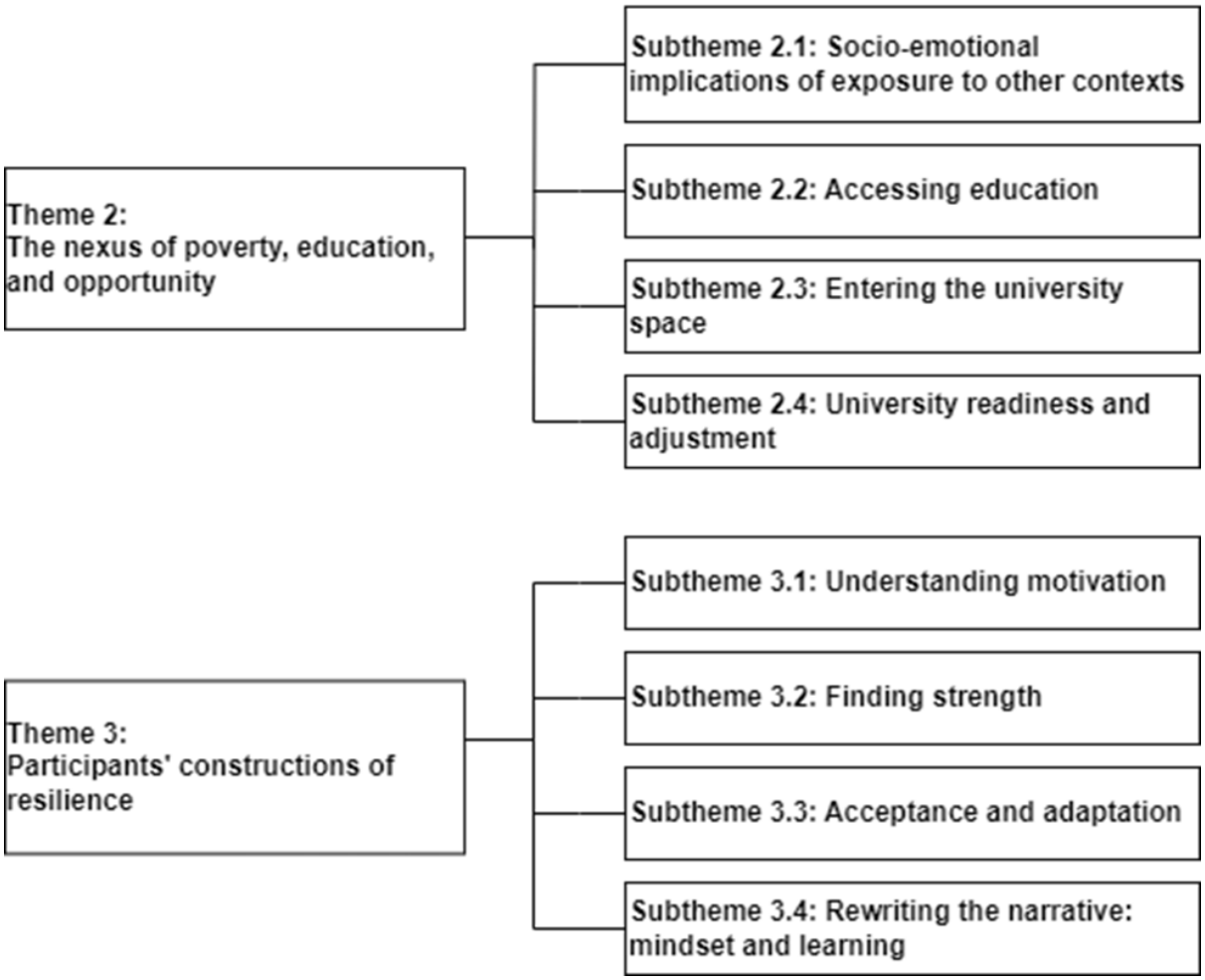
The data obtained through the completion of the interview process revealed multiple themes encapsulating the narrative experience of growing up in poverty. It is important to acknowledge that narratives are patterns of meaning that have been found across the dataset, thus providing common ideas and themes that tie each of the individual narratives together (Miller et al., 2021). However, these narratives also include variants that highlight that differences are present or that some of the data is nuanced to include aspects that may be more individualistic and personal, denoting that there are slight differences within each narrative as each participant's experience is unique and personal and cannot be truly identical to one another.

As illustrated in Figure 1 below, three main themes have emerged and are as follows: (1) *Narratives within the living environment*; (2) *the nexus of poverty, education, and opportunity*; and (3) *participants' constructions of resilience.* These themes are further divided into their respective subthemes, offering deeper insight into the constituents of these overarching themes. The first two themes and their associated subthemes have been structured to illustrate what the narrative experience entailed for each participant during their childhood and to provide a holistic understanding of the narrative experience. The third theme has been structured around how participants conceptualised resilience, thus being focused on concepts they felt were attributed to resiliency. The three themes below are broad, however, the provision of subheadings that have been presented as subthemes, serve to enhance the rigor and specificity of the results.

Figure 1

Thematic Map





Theme 1: Narratives within the living environment

The first research question investigated the narrative experience of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantaged context. Throughout all the interviews, the narratives were discussed in the context of the living environment, and the living environment itself was therefore considered crucial. It is this environment that positioned participants within socio-economic disadvantage, and subsequently informed their narrative experiences. The living environment in most interviews consisted of the physical spaces that participants live or lived within, as well as their interactions with other people. As such, the subsequent subthemes emerged from this overarching narrative that includes: (1) *Narratives within the living*

environment; (2) *the nexus of poverty, education, and opportunity*; and (3) *participants' constructions of resilience*.

Subtheme 1.1: The role of the child

This study focuses on investigating the experience of poverty during the participant's childhood. As such, investigating their role within their family unit is an important consideration. Despite being a child within the family, it was found that each participant alluded to a loss of childhood in some ways and needing to be initiated into a form of adulthood sooner. This is encompassed by experiences related to needing to fulfil responsibilities that children would not typically be expected to fulfil such as bringing a form of income into the household and taking on a level of responsibility where the child becomes a pseudo-parent for their siblings. Participants explain that:

> *"I knew that we had to work hard because we all, as a family, as all the kids, were all involved in helping out. So financially, if we didn't work at the shop or put more effort into the shop, we wouldn't have much to add to the entire family income. Um, you couldn't have any expectations, you couldn't ask for things like a bicycle" (Mbali)*
>
> *"So I was always that child that needed to take care of everything and look after everyone when they came home. So I was a slave or someone who was working for them but not getting paid. They were just giving me a place to stay and eat. So I was treated like that growing up." (Aniyah)*

Each of the above extracts highlights a level of responsibility that they needed to fulfil despite being children at the time. Whilst children performing chores or daily household tasks has often been thought of as part of constructive parenting, the responsibilities displayed in these extracts are not of the same level. This is arguably due to the level of dependence placed on the child by the rest of the family unit. In Mbali's extract, her family relied on her

and her brothers to gain a form of income for the household, just as how Aniyah had to look after everyone. In both cases, the standard role of a parent as the provider, and the child as the receiver, became upturned.

This role reversal was found to be apparent within the other participants' narratives as this level of responsibility was echoed. This increase in responsibility was also found to be related to parental absence and parental emotional unavailability. In the following extract, Imani's narrative included one of being responsible for the care of her great-grandmother despite being very young.

> *"My great-grandmother was now very sick. Even back then, she was getting sick because she had a stroke twice, so she couldn't walk and had to crawl. I was the one helping her and doing most of the things in the house. I was the one helping her from when I was in pre-school until I was in grade two" (Imani)*

At the time, Imani had been living with her great-grandmother due to her parents being absent and emotionally unavailable. Consequently, many responsibilities were left for Imani to complete as there was no one else to perform different takes and take that responsibility so that she could behave like a child. The absence of a parent was a factor that forced children into more levels of responsibility and 'adulthood' was found to be consistent with some of the participants.

> *"There were times when my mom wasn't around, for I don't know how many years, but I was still in secondary school, probably in grade six or seven. So she wasn't home, and I had to take care of my two little sisters. There was also this aspect of wanting my mom to be home with me, you know, and she wasn't. So, that was mostly where the sadness was coming from." (Rachel)*

Imani and Rachel both experienced parental absences, at least for several years during their childhood. This was found to be highly prevalent within the sample of this study, where most of the participants were not raised by their parents and had to rely on the care and nurture of other members of their families. Participants noted experiences of being raised by their grandparents, great-grandparents, and aunts, whilst experiencing difficult emotions towards their biological parents. However, in some instances, participants had one parent present but due to needing to provide for the family, the parent was often found to be emotionally unavailable. As such, the absence of a parent was found to strain the relationship to some extent between the participant and their present parent.

> *"I feel like having both parents around me would have changed my outlook on life and relationships. Especially when you look at the absent father aspect. I do feel that maybe his presence would have made a difference. It would have made a difference in such a way that my mother didn't have to work extra hard, and she would have had more time with me. She would have been able to bond with me. She now shows affection towards me, and I also try to show her affection, but then I can see the bond is lacking something, you know. Which is something we could have worked on from childhood rather than to start trying to develop it now when I'm already an adult" (Refiloe)*

In the above extract, Refiloe has a level of blame cast towards her absent father as his absence impacted her relationship with her mother. It was common for participants to express a level of resentment, blame, or judgment towards their absent parent/s due to the strain it placed on their own emotional experience and development, as well as for feelings of their requests for love not being answered.

> *When I came to Johannesburg, I was staying with my dad and my stepmother as well, but it wasn't nice because my stepmother didn't like me, I'm just assuming it was*

because I was not her child. She didn't like any of us. I have an older sister from my father's side, so we stayed together. My dad was always away because he worked in other provinces. So we would be left alone, and we had to find our own place to stay and take care of ourselves because our stepmother didn't want us. So it was that issue until I got to high school. When I was doing grade 10, I went to stay with my friends. Then I continued with school and my mom was never in the picture. I don't know, even now, she's never thought of being a mother." (Aniyah)

A minority of the participants were found to have positive relationships with their biological parents. It was found that in places where there was a level of understanding on behalf of the child regarding the economic situation and the absence of the parent, this relationship was improved over time. Within the narrative of those raised by their biological parents, it was found that when a level of support was present, it positively assisted participants with coping with the emotional experience of living within impoverishment.

"Like we're very close as a family, so we always got through it together, like the whole poverty experience. But then it was also really hard because sometimes you have school trips, and I would go to my parents and ask them to pay for the school trip and they would say they don't have money. So it was heartbreaking at those times because even like with birthdays, we couldn't have anything to celebrate. But we were okay through it all." (Bonolo)

However, this sense of support was not found to be consistent amongst all the participants who were raised by their biological parents. Notably, the participants of this study were largely raised by someone else within their family rather than their biological parents. The absence of a biological parent or both biological parents contributes to a level of strain on the child's emotional experience and their attainment of love and support. However,

it is noted that in spaces where biological parents are absent, participants look to their grandparents, great-grandparents, and aunts for love and support instead. As such, ideas around who fills the role of a parent need to be expanded and not be limited to biological parents. In spaces where participants were raised by alternative caregivers, it was found that these relationships were overall positive but did not alleviate the difficult emotions attached to the absence of the biological parent/s.

Subtheme 1.2: Reliance on others

Thus far it has been established that figures within the family unit may vary depending on the circumstances at home and the situation with parent or extended family involvement in raising the child. It is therefore understandable that children develop a sense of reliance on different people within their home environment. The results of this study indicate that a level of reliance was placed on older siblings, caregivers, neighbour and community members, and the self. Within this subtheme, reliance on religion is also important to consider. In cases where a reliance on siblings was found, it was always in the context of it being a reliance on an older sibling. In this way, the older sibling filled an almost pseudo-parent role or the role of an older support system.

> *"So I have two brothers, growing up I've always felt like they had my back, you know, whatever is happening, for example during the violent outbursts from my father. I always felt like, even though they couldn't get involved in the fight themselves, I always felt like they could get me away from that situation or remove me from that situation, you know, even for just a little bit. So, I do think my brothers had my back at all times if I needed them or whenever I needed them. So I looked at them a lot to protect me." (Rachel)*

Siblings were found to provide a level of protection and safety however, not all participants echoed this experience and rather filled the role of being the older sibling or having cousins that were like siblings to them. What was found to be more consistent with the findings of this study was the reliance placed on the participants' caregivers such as their grandparents, great-grandparents, or aunts. This reliance was found to be related to the provision of care and safety, income for the household, and resources such as food.

> *"There were times when an aunt or something wasn't happy with me. My grandparents didn't agree with what the aunt was saying. So they protected us. Now they're shouting at you. If they feel that your punishment is not fitting the action, they defend you. And as I said, they're very strong people, they always have their voices heard. So when I was with them, I never felt unsafe at all. And they were always there because they didn't work. There was never a time where they both weren't there." (Philani)*

It was found that caregivers were looked at for a sense of safety and care and some caregivers also provided a sense of academic motivation and support. Many of the participants expressed their experiences of poverty being manageable due to the amount of care received by their caregivers, especially their grandparents. Grandparents were found to provide life lessons and seemed to model a way of behaviour that inspired participants to be like them in some way. The presence of this support seemed to be connected to a level of appreciation for these figures in the participants' lives.

> *"Our grandfather loved education. Like he'd make sure you do your homework. He'd make sure, even though he might not be able to always help you all the time, but he'd make sure that you'd be done. Had it been without him, I don't think I would have passed it. I wasn't interested in a school like that. So I'd say it was good support there." (Philani)*

Within the narratives of the participants, the results also indicated that these caregivers filled the roles of being the sole breadwinners, as such, participants became reliant on these caregivers within their single-income households. The reliance on a single income was found to be a difficult experience for the participants as their access to food was directly reliant on this single income.

> *"We were like little girls, so we stayed with my aunt. She worked as a cleaner and it wasn't easy, it really wasn't easy to put food on the table, but then she managed thankfully. (Chantelle)*

Results also indicated that participants relied on others within the community for a level of support and assistance. Participant experiences were found to include accepting help and relying on members of their community or church, and their neighbours for the attainment of food and money. It was common among the participants to rely on their community for emotional or financial support. This was because within many of the narratives, the community or neighbours filled a deficit or hole that those within their home environment either did not meet or struggled to meet.

> *"And then for things like food, we'd get help from my grandparents. I remember sometimes in my childhood; we would get food from people who knew or were friends with my grandfather. So those ladies would bring us food at times because my mom was absent during that time." (Imani)*
>
> *"So my mom used to confide in our neighbours to try to explain our situation to probably. My neighbours also called my dad, they tried to scare him a little bit to come back or to take on responsibilities, which unfortunately didn't work. So our neighbours would then advise us to like, 'no, do this, or this place is too expensive, why don't you stay in a cheaper place?' So we used to rely on the community we had. So those*

neighbours next door would always help us or advise us. They would sometimes lend us money. So I could say that we depended on like our neighbours." (Tina)

Results indicated that a minority of the participants felt they had to rely on themselves as their biological parents and/or caregivers were not able to provide the level of emotional support, financial support, and overall care that they required. As such, a sense of resentment was found and a mentality of looking after the self.

Subtheme 1.3: Environmental conditions and safety

The narrative experiences of participants were found to include elements of emotional distress and stress. An additional source of stress was interestingly found to be connected to the living environment itself. This is apparent due to the communities that participants grew up in were under-resourced, being impacted by crime and other factors that contributed to living in these environments to be complex. The extracts below seek to paint a picture of what their lived environment looked like. Interestingly, some of what was expressed remained consistent and apparent across the participants.

"The place is pretty rough. No proper functioning sewage systems, which is a big problem. And there's also a big, um, landfill closer to my house. There's this big wetland, you know, with water, with lots of water there and you know, when it rains sometimes the water overflows into, um, people's houses. They're pretty just still, um, impoverished, um, community." (Rachel)

"We did not have taps. Well, just recently other community members have begun to erect those taps in their homes from their own pockets. But back then we did not have all that. We did not have lights. So the lights you use are candles or if you are lucky or maybe fortunate enough to have the funds, you buy solar lights." (Refiloe)

It is apparent that basic environmental needs were generally unmet and would at times be unhygienic, and ultimately unsuitable for a child's upbringing. Participants generally spoke of their community and environment with a level of appreciation towards their community members but a sense of dissatisfaction within their physical environment which was further impacted by the presence of crime. The results of this study indicated various levels of trauma and crime being experienced which ranged from being in an environment with crime and being a direct witness to crime. It is therefore important to consider the environmental aspect of crime.

> *"Well, you don't come back late. You need to be safe. You need to look around all the time because there's too much crime, for example, rape was high when I was in high school. So you never really feel comfortable. You need to just go straight home. So I felt like I was in jail or… I had to take care of myself because it was never safe anywhere. You can't walk alone. And you need to form relationships with other people so that you can be safe…Yeah, that's how you survive." (Aniyah)*
>
> *"There was a lot of crime around like I remember my cousin got arrested for gambling, he gambled right next to the police station… not right next to but like a block away." (Patience)*

The above extracts speak to the experience of crime within their communal environment. Interestingly, the presence of organisations such as the police station was not a deterrent to criminal behaviour. Gangsterism was also found to be present within a minority of the participants' narratives. As such, children within the community were introduced to and recruited by gangs which increases the level of violence and fear within the community which is all congruent with the below extract. Whilst the presence of gangsterism was not apparent for most of the participants, it remains of considerable importance as it further

contributes to the contextualisation of crime that the participants experienced during their childhoods.

> *"When I was doing my grade 12, there was a very high rise in gangsterism that involved just like secondary school students. It was a very violent year. I think my matric year was a very challenging year for me because I would go to school very scared. After all, now there's just this group of learners, just like small boys that are harassing communities and harassing us. So, yeah, I think the highest, biggest challenge during my high school was that. And then there was also the retaliation from the community during the same year again because they got tired of the gangs." (Rachel)*

The presence of crime and the creation of trauma was not limited to the environment itself as it is also apparent within spaces where the child became the witness or victim of crime. This was found to primarily take on the form of being the victim of abuse, be it psychological, emotional, sexual, or physical. It was found that physical punishment such as corporal punishment and discipline was interlined with participants' experiences of physical abuse, however, the presence of psychological, emotional, and physical abuse was largely attributed to being enacted by members of their family.

> *"It was just more of like your psychological or emotional abuse more than anything. I was not raised by my mom. I was raised by her sister and my grandmother. So she took out her anger on us. Or me rather. Because I was the only child who was treated differently. I still haven't figured out where was that coming from, but that led to a lot of scars because I felt like I was treated differently and also, I felt neglected by my mom. She doesn't care about us or what we eat, where we sleep." (Aniyah)*
>
> *"I think physical abuse just made me feel unsafe as a child. When I was little, I would hear about things happening here, bad things happening to other people. So we had a*

dam in my neighbourhood. And because kids would play around [the dam] quite a lot, some of them would drown in the dam and they didn't know how to swim. So every month, on average, two to five kids would drown and sometimes it would be kids that you know, or you know of. I think that was also very traumatic. Just kids dying in at midnight." (Mbali)

These experiences of psychological, emotional, sexual, and physical abuse were found to contribute to the creation and experience of trauma. This presence of trauma was also found to have lasting impacts on the participants as it was made clear that the impact of their trauma/s remains current. This was seen largely in the fact that some of the participants developed difficulties with forming healthy and long-lasting romantic relationships with others, as well as difficulties within the relationship with their family members.

"The relationship that my father had with my mom, did impact my relationships as well. Like, I avoided them, and I still do, and I still find it hard to, like, commit myself to a relationship because I'm very scared. You know, I'm very scared that things may go wrong. So yeah, I haven't been in a relationship since." (Rachel)

"Being beaten up, I think made things a bit scarier for me if that makes sense. I had to try to protect myself, so it meant I had to make sure I didn't upset my mom…I used to be very scared of my mom" (Imani)

Interestingly, Rachel witnessed abuse within her parents' relationship which caused her to experience a level of fear related to being in a relationship that has a similar dynamic to her parents' relationship. Imani had felt a sense of trauma in being 'beaten' by her mother which impacted her relationship with her. It is interesting to note that many of the impacts of trauma were found to be relational. However, it was found that not all participants were impacted by their trauma in the same way in which their traumas became scarring. It was

found that some participants had the resiliency to rewrite the trauma by way of more positive meaning-making.

> *"Well, it made me stronger. Because, if it wasn't for them or for how I was raised, I don't, I don't believe I would be here, or I don't believe I would have accomplished what I have right now. So, I took it in a positive manner rather than in a negative manner." (Aniyah)*

Subtheme 1.4: Mental health considerations and experiences

The literature suggests that poverty has a strong relationship to mental health outcomes and emotional wellbeing of the impoverished. As such, the results of this study also show that experiencing poverty had negative implications on the mental health and wellbeing of the participants. Interestingly, this impact was only seen within a retrospective lens as each participant would explain that their mental health was not a consideration during their childhood and did not form part of the discourse within their family, community and general life.

> *"I don't think there was an understanding, because especially in the household that I grew up in. In my family, in my social environment… As a child, you know, your mental health doesn't matter. Problems are only for adults, you know, stress is only for adults. So sometimes, especially when I was growing up and stuff, I never had the right to complain. I never had the right to complain. Because if I complain, I'd look as if I'm a spoiled brat, you know, I'm being inconsiderate, you know, because problems are only for adults." (Tina)*

How mental health was perceived by each participant was found to be associated with cultural or established norms of behaviour within the participants' respective communities and home environments. As such, the mentality of "*We as black people never tend to focus*

deeper into emotions" (Thabiso), was echoed. This interestingly highlighted that there seemed to be an assumed general understanding within this racial context, that encompasses mental health as being a discarded topic. This assumed perception of mental health being consistent within a racial group was found to be apparent within some of the other participants' narratives where Rachel addressed this.

> *"It made me angry because, um, you know, the setting that I was from. You can't, just like I said, you can't talk about your feelings. I can't say all black people, but like, um, well probably it's a common thing in black families, but yeah, you cannot talk about your feelings." (Rachel)*

The lack of understanding and focus on mental health and wellbeing was found to further contribute to the limitation and creation of barriers towards self-expression. As such, the results indicated that this may have contributed to the management of difficult emotions and experiences to be hindered and constrained, thus enhancing the experience of emotional distress and issues with coping. It was apparent that mental health and emotional wellbeing were not part of a discourse within the family unit, the environment and community lacked access to facilities that aided and explored mental health. These facilities were attributed to a level of privilege that was not accessible within the context these communities operated.

> *"We don't have the privilege of saying we have a mental health facility in the community where you can go and speak to a counsellor or speak to a psychologist." (Rachel)*

As mentioned, the participants seemed to struggle more with thinking about their mental health when looking at it from the perspective of when they were children, whilst looking at it retrospectively seemed to be easier. As such, participants seemed to understand their childhood mental health more when looking at it from their current perspective. This

retrospective account also allowed for levels of appreciation or understanding of the situation to emerge.

> *"Looking back at it now, I think what I went through, as much as it was negative, I feel like it's made me who I am in terms of being positive, appreciating what I have in life." (Bonolo)*

The participants' mental health experiences were found to worsen when during their childhood in spaces where comparisons were being made to other children at their schools who had a different living context to them. This will be further discussed within the next theme; however, it is notable that questions directed at mental health were answered with a level of difficulty, whilst allowing participants to share their stories allowed for their mental health at the time to emerge more naturally. Therefore, it seems apparent that the understanding of what mental health is and the experience of it may be nuanced.

The narrative experience that the participants underwent illustrates emotionally stressful events in their lives. Experiences of financial stress and poverty were found to directly deepen the level of emotional stress as well as overall stress within the family unit. This resulted in a feeling of being misunderstood to be increased, further contributing to emotional distress and impacting the ability to cope with such experiences.

> *"I feel like it naturally made me an angry person, and I feel like it increased my insecurities about myself because I couldn't really speak about anything. Whenever I try to address something or talk about something it'll be like 'Tina you're being ungrateful because you know we don't have and so forth and so forth' so it would make me angry about everything. So I'll just naturally be angry and insecure about myself" (Tina).*

Results indicated that the lack of space and opportunity to express oneself and one's problems negatively contributed to enhanced feelings of emotional distress, and the emergence of difficult emotions, and impacted one's ability to cope. Considering the presence of mental health within the communities the participants grew up within, a large aspect of their narrative experience is attributed to how they coped with their lived experiences. Thus far it is clear that experiences of growing up with poverty were nuanced and complex and brought about difficult challenges that the participants have needed to face since their childhood. As such, they needed to go through a process of establishing and identifying what coping mechanisms and strategies they could engage with.

Interestingly, religion was found to be a major contributor to the ability to cope with adversity. It was found that despite the community and home environment not providing a space to consider and ultimately support mental health, each participant sought a level of solace within their religion. Fascinatingly, it was the idea that God has a plan and that believing in God was synonymous with having faith that things would improve, seemed to resonate with the participants. Their belief in religion and religious figures was found to be something that helped them cope with challenging experiences and to make meaning or accept different things they have experienced or gone through.

> *"So I think one of my sources of refuge was the church… Like everything that was happening, I would write it down instead of talking to someone. And if I didn't write it down, I would go to church and pray about it. So I think that did keep me sane. It did. Especially church, because you know, sometimes you get people who experience the same thing and sometimes it's like you have different mothers. You have like those mothers and fathers from the church as well who look out for you." (Rachel)*

It was found that each participant was religious and that going to church and speaking to God was an important ritual or practice for the participants' families and themselves. However, the reliance on religion as a coping mechanism varied slightly as other methods such as reading and writing were also found to be important strategies.

> *"I have only always loved reading books, I guess that was my escape and writing down how I felt, although they'd always find my diary around the house and read it. But yeah, I think that was my escape." (Chantelle)*

This idea of needing an escape is interesting in that thoughts of being within a different reality aided in the management and coping with the lived and true reality. Whilst coping strategies are effective in an individual manner that varies in terms of the method and impact, some participants had a mentality of needing to accept reality and move on rather than relying on a defined coping strategy.

> *"I didn't do anything to combat my feelings. Like I didn't do anything to cope. It was just a matter of, um, you know, you just live through it and forget." (Patience)*
>
> *"Letting it go, really. Remember, like I said, as a kid, you weren't allowed to be too upset. So I've learned how to chest things, you know. Wouldn't say bottle them up but learn to let them go." (Philani)*
>
> *"I've learned to live it. I just have no choice but to live it, to go through it. So I wouldn't say that I have a way of surviving it, but it's just a thing of knowing that I have no choice but to live it. This the life that I have and I'm going to live it." (Imani)*

Theme 2: The nexus of poverty, education, and opportunity

This theme explores the relationship between poverty, education, and opportunity. Due to the sample of this study deriving from the student population, this theme becomes integral in understanding their narrative experience. This theme allows one to explore the

socio-emotional experience of attending primary and secondary school, as well as the experience of facing barriers to accessing education and the reality of entering the university space. As such, the implications of the participants' past educational experiences become highly important as they directly impact the narrative they experience when transitioning into their new role as university students. As such, their readiness and adjustment to university becomes an important indication of how the participants' childhoods impact this new phase of life.

Subtheme 2.1: Socio-emotional implications of exposure to other contexts

During the interviews, it was found that each participant had been impacted in terms of their engagement within their communities. However, experiences of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantaged environment were also found to influence how participants dealt with, managed, expressed, and experienced their emotions, as well as how they made and maintained friendships. It was apparent that social exclusion was often connected to poverty and thus forms part of the social experience of the impoverished. Being socially excluded due to experiencing poverty and being within a lower socio-economic status and class largely impacted the participants on an emotional level as they were unable to enter social spaces feeling understood.

The comparison of the self with others acted as the catalyst that led to the realisation of being impoverished. Comparison was found to be a common experience amongst the participants which arguably increased their awareness of being different and further contributed to their feelings of social exclusion. Most of the participants reflected ideas of being unaware of their impoverishment. This forms part of their narrative experience of attending primary and secondary schooling during their childhood.

"Then at school, I think that's when I noticed that I'm not like the other kids at school. I don't have this; I don't have that. Because there were a lot of privileged children at school. I think it's a school where parents were financially stable. [This was] a different setting for me, because now I had to understand that this is my lunch, and this is what we can afford at home. And I tried not to compare myself with the other kids, but this is not easy." (Chantelle)

"…and to be honest, it was quite a tough time for me, especially growing up. As a child, you want things to be better, you want to live the life that you see your friends living, your classmates, but unfortunately, you couldn't…. I just felt out of place, and I felt like no one could understand my problems even if I were to explain them." (Tina)

This realisation of difference seemed to be an important moment for the participants as it seemed to have caused a level of awareness to develop. The increase in awareness increased feelings of dissatisfaction with life, insecurities, loneliness, and jealousy. The participants mostly echoed experiences of questioning or not understanding why other children could access resources that their own families could not provide them with, which was found to be a difficult experience further contributing to feeling excluded in some way, misunderstood, resentful, and increased psychological and emotional distress.

"So at times you find me comparing myself to other people and just not understanding why I don't have access to those things… it did impact me negatively because I wouldn't be happy with who I am. At school, we had a casual day where people would be wearing [casual] clothes. I had to wear my uniform. I would feel lonely at times because I feel like other children, when you don't have anything at school, other children point that out and you feel they don't want to associate with you. They would go to camps, and I wouldn't have access to that. And when everybody came back from that camp, they

would be talking about it and what happened. And I guess I'd feel lonely because I can't relate." (Bonolo)

It was found that sitting with the realisation of being different and wanting to seem to be in a better financial position than what was true, was found to be a challenging experience itself. The participants' narrative was found to highlight a nuanced experience of wanting to hide aspects of their reality, as well as being unable to ask for help from others (such as teachers). This is interesting as most of the participants related their experience of realised poverty and a moment in their life that truly made them feel impoverished, to being within their schooling environment.

"We were on a school trip hosted by the fire department in my province. And the demonstrations were teaching us about how to avoid fires and how they sort out fires. I burnt my shoes that day. And I had to go for three months without shoes, I had to go to school without shoes. And when I was asked by the teachers about what happened to my shoes, I explained and said my mom promised me shoes. Then they would ask if she can afford to buy shoes, and... I said, yes, she can. And it took a whole three months for that to happen. The whole three months I felt depressed and poor, and like I didn't belong in the school, which led to my marks dropping, at the end of the term I was low. My self-esteem was shattered." (Emanuel)

The comparison to others further inhibited the process of making and maintaining friends. This is an important moment within the participant's lives as it formed a major aspect of their childhood which may have had implications on their wellbeing going forward. Experiences of social exclusion seemed to be further increased by the realised inability to make and maintain friends thus solidifying this cycle of emotional distress due to being impoverished.

"Well, I've never had friends growing up. I've always had people that are like colleagues or people that were just classmates. I've never had close friends… The only friend that I have is my cousin who is like a sister." (Aniyah)

It was found that most of the participants struggled with the making and maintaining of friendships. This indicated an interesting pattern or cycle to emerge where most participants felt different, leading to experiences of being excluded by others, and excluding themselves because they were different. This also highlighted a level of shame that seemed to be introduced alongside the stresses and insecurities of being the odd one out when it came to school events. It was found that civvies day was a complex experience for the participants as there was an increased need to not appear different. As such, there is a greater need to appear the same as others as a way of avoiding social exclusion and shame.

"The biggest thing that I've experienced, and still gives me anxiety now is that I didn't want to seem poor at school. I still don't want to seem like, 'Oh wait, I don't have anything' because it brings me back to that point in my life." (Patience)

The need to appear normal was found to increase feelings of needing to hide their realities of being impoverished. Being seen as different or impoverished was connected to being socially excluded or having feelings of shame. As such, this negative experience seemed to enhance the need to hide the realities of poverty or pretend that their loved experiences and circumstances were different from what they were.

"So like I feel like throughout my childhood, as much as these things are happening, I was more focused on hiding it, not really showing the people how much we are suffering or how much we need this and that, you know, all my life has been a matter of presenting that good image where 'I am from a good home and everything was okay'" (Imani)

Interestingly, the need to appear normal becomes understandable when looking at the consequences of appearing different. Not only did participants indicate that they were impacted in terms of feelings of being embarrassed, alienation, and self-loathing, but being seen as different has been found to lead to those deemed as poor and different becoming victimised and bullied.

> *"I experienced bullying and all of that, you know, because coming from an impoverished home, you don't even have school uniform… that is very appropriate for a school environment. Sometimes my shoes would be torn, and so I was subject to bullying" (Bonolo)*

The socio-emotional experience was found to be highly nuanced and intricate. Being identified by the self or others as different has its own set of consequences that commonly follow. The realisation of difference and increased need to hide the self and aspects of their lived realities was found to increase the level of stress associated with keeping this façade.

> *"So it's like you're constantly living under the whole idea of having to hide and also knowing that when you get to school, you have to imitate perfection, so it doesn't bring any suspicions. You don't want to be that learner that will be noticed by the teacher for there being something wrong, so you're constantly thinking of ways You can hide and of ways to fit in with the people that you're with at that moment in time. And there's also a lot of stress knowing what you're going back home to because then you think about what you're going to eat and who are you going to find at home." (Imani)*

Whilst realising one is different from other children introduced intricate negative feelings and consequences, it was also found to be the catalyst that allowed participants to start finding and developing their resiliency to break the cycle of impoverishment.

Subtheme 2.2: Accessing education

Being from an impoverished and socio-economically disadvantaged background has thus far been found to introduce a nuanced narrative experience of socio-emotional challenges. This and having limited access to resources were found to highlight barriers to receiving education and the quality of education, as such, this sub-theme focuses on addressing barriers to education within the primary and secondary schooling environment.

It was apparent that the narrative experience within the primary and secondary schooling environment included difficulties in paying for school fees, uniforms, and food. Each of the participants was reliant on single-income households, and these incomes were often found to be connected to occupations such as being domestic workers or piece jobs. It was found that in spaces where school fees were not being paid, some of the participants experienced academic exclusions ranging from being excluded from school events, their academic accolades and results being withheld, and the school writing letters stating that repercussions were to follow.

> *"So my parents couldn't pay the school fees and they wrote me a letter that my parents needed to pay or there would be repercussions. And my mom wasn't working at that time. My dad was the only person who was working. And yeah, we had to write a motivational letter while they needed to keep me in school. Because my parents couldn't afford to pay. So in terms of the economic status that they were in, they couldn't afford the school. But then they couldn't keep me in that school that was close by that was free because they didn't want to take me because of my age." (Mbali)*

The above extract speaks to a lack of support and additional barriers to receiving an education due to financial reasons, as well as general admission restrictions based on other

factors. However, what is notable is the presence of barriers in place that stifled the learning experience by creating a stressful experience for the student.

> *"I hate it till this day. I was a student who performed well since primary school, and we would have awards, but my parents couldn't pay my fees… So they (the school) would not include you in the awards. You wouldn't be invited to Prize-Giving Day. So they wouldn't give you your trophies and certificates and your badges. They would just exclude you. And it continued into my senior phase, and I hated it… You're telling me you're not going to award someone because they cannot pay the fees. That's something you should take up with the parents. But anyway, yeah. So I couldn't afford my fees. I think it was only in grade three when my dad paid the portion of my fees and I got one of my trophies." (Patience)*

It became evident that experiences of school or academic exclusion contributed to making the academic experience more emotionally stressful and upsetting for the participants. This is notable as it may have impacted the learning potential and ability of the participants during this time, as well as their experience of academic gratification. Not being in a space of being able to afford various things and resources was found to further create a sense of difference and alienation beyond the comparison of the self with other students. As such, it was clear that alienation existed within the dynamics between the participant and their peers, as well as with their school.

> *"I can remember the incidences when the lights were cut off or I couldn't afford my fees. Or I didn't have lunch for school. It made me feel alienated. It made me feel like, 'I don't deserve to be here' or 'there's something wrong about where I come from' or whatever." (Patience)*

An additional point to note is the quality of the school being accessed. It was found that a minority of the participants felt their schooling environments were not conducive to an effective academic upbringing, whilst most of the participants would describe their schooling environments as being 'okay' but lacking in some way.

> *"My first school was like in the township school. Like there were no resources, no nothing. It was just those schools that are struggling if I can put it that way…. It was very bad. The school was more like a hostel. It wasn't a very good environment, honestly, there weren't many resources there. There were a lot of students in one classroom. They also used corporal punishment in the school. So it wasn't a safe or maybe a comfortable environment for us. You know, you'd be beaten just for talking. At that time, we were very young. I was still young. So, when I finished my grade 1, my parents just had had enough of it, and then they took me to a much better school." (Bonolo)*

It becomes important to note that whilst each participant attended a government school, their experiences were not homogenous as not every participant echoed experiences of dissatisfaction with their schooling environments. Some of the participants' experiences included receiving a level of support from their respective schools. This was apparent as many of the participants could not afford to pay for food to take to school for lunch. These participants were found to experience food insecurity and scarcity within their households. As such, some of the schooling environments were found to employ a feeding scheme to assist these students.

> *"The school was great, especially when it came to the feeding scheme. Like they would give you stuff. Stuff that you could take back home. If you didn't have something to eat back home, they would give you food. There was this porridge that they used to give us.*

So that was so nice. And they would give me extra to take it back home to eat as well, or to share with my family. Because my sister was in a different school at that time. So I think the feeding scheme was great. We'd have something to eat at school, even though you didn't have lunch money, but you'd come back home full and with something to share." (Rachel)

The feeding scheme was a source of support which was found to be greatly relied on by the participants to access food. It was noted that these participants often kept some of their food to share with their families. As such, the feeding scheme became instrumental in the wellbeing of the participants and their families. The schooling system was also found to provide a level of support that existed within the relationships between the students and the teachers. It was evident that positive relationships with teachers were not apparent for each participant however, those who were able to form these relationships looked at their teachers as major sources of support. In a previous subtheme, *1.2 Reliance on others*, the reliance participants had on people within their lives was considered, however, the role of the teacher is one of notable importance.

It was found that emotionally supportive teachers fulfilled roles that allowed their students to foster a sense of motivation and excitement to learn. The results indicated that the presence of a supportive teacher led to moments with this teacher to be emotionally impactful and at times, contributed to why these participants had chosen to apply for tertiary education. These teachers were found to also take on the role of a parent for some of the participants.

"When it came to me being parented, I'd say my parents were my teachers because my teachers developed a keen interest in making sure that I was well taken care of, that I had emotional support and everything that I needed." (Emanuel)

"My high school English teacher used to say, 'Don't let your background bring you back to the ground.' So, I think it has inspired me to live a life where in the future when other people look at me, they will know that it's possible to achieve great things irrespective of having a poor financial background." (Refiloe)

It was also found that walking to school is a very normal and common aspect of the narrative experience for children who live in an impoverished background. Walking to school was the norm and would happen regardless of whether the school was close to their home or not.

"To be honest you get used to the walking. And then you get to a point where you have weather challenges. It would be and you can't go to school or you have to wait an hour until it stops raining. School starts at 7:30. I used to leave the house at quarter past 6 for me to get to school early….So at times, you'd have to skip school because of the weather conditions. And it was also difficult when it was very hot, because you get out of school late in the afternoon, and you still have a distance to walk." (Emmanuel)

Although walking was found to be a tiring experience at times, it was found to be normal and formed part of a routine. Notably, despite this being a shared and normalised experience, there was an evident impact on the participants' school attendance which introduced further academic implications.

Subtheme 2.3: Entering the university space

Thus far, primary and secondary schooling has been explored however, the results also indicated barriers to accessing higher or tertiary education. This study is informed by retrospective narrative experiences of participants who are currently enrolled in tertiary education. As such, understanding the experiences contributing to their registration as a university student becomes an additional focus within this theme. Various additional barriers

were found due to the participants being impoverished such as the lack of electronic devices, Wi-Fi, and needing to make use of internet cafés to complete and submit their university applications.

> *"We didn't have a smartphone at home, so it meant that I needed to go to an internet café and do my application, which was quite difficult because you had to pay for your hours. And I think I'd save, like, R10 a week from my lunch money, and maybe I'd get 30 minutes, and the internet would be slow. I wouldn't be able to finish some applications, so I'd have to wait for the next week to save money, come back, and apply at the internet café." (Mbali)*
>
> *"I was devastated at that point of my life, to the point that I only applied to two universities. Wits and UJ. I wanted to apply to UP, but I had to pay like R300 general registration fee, so I couldn't do that. I wanted to apply in Stellenbosch and UCT but then I had to write NBTs, which were like 150 something rand in each and in in UCT. I had to write two NBTs, so that was going to go up to like 300 rand. I also didn't have my mom helping me with the whole registration process and also being in the community that I'm in, you know, there weren't people to help me with it, so each time I have like data or I'm able to do the entire application process, I just do it to a point that I took almost a month or two to complete." (Imani)*

Paying the application fee and completing the applications themselves were found to be a challenging experience for most of the participants as they had to rely on their savings or wait until they had saved enough money to apply. It was also found that many of the participants had been rejected for their degree of choice and had to choose a 'practical' degree regardless of whether it was initially what they wanted to do or had a passion for. Needs to choose practicality over desire or dreams tie directly into the motivation and reasoning

behind wanting to enter the university space. As such, this was found to be an important and interesting consideration – how tertiary education is perceived. During the interviews, each participant reflected on why they had initially wanted to attend a university, and interestingly, much of it related to wanting to escape poverty.

> *"One of the things that I've dreamed of as a kid is making sure that I do well at school so that I can be able to go to university. Because in my mind, if I go to school, then I can get a better job. If I have a better job, I can get a better income and I can change the situation at home." (Rachel)*
>
> *"I think I knew that it was my only chance to have a better future and to escape. To sort of have a better life outside of my community. I knew going to school would be my only opportunity to be able to have a better life. Maybe help support my family at some point" (Mbali)*

Whilst it is evident that escaping poverty acts as a major driving force for the attainment of higher education, it was also found that an additional driving force included the participant being the first person in their family to attend a university or trying to establish a new norm for the family to follow where children eventually attend a university.

> *"I think my mom was the first person to attend university in our family. So for me, I must make sure that I also attend university. I must make sure that from here, it becomes a norm that we all attend university, and our financial stability gets better. I wanted to attend university I wanted to ensure a better future for myself and my family. I wanted to improve our standard of living and our financial situations." (Chantelle)*

Education was found to truly be seen as a key to change, be it their living situation or altering the ambitions of the family. The participants' experiences of accessing higher education proved to be challenging as seen in the application process. However, an additional

barrier includes being able to fund their studies. Each participant was found to utilise funding schemes such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

> *"So I'll say that the main reason why I wanted to go to university was to escape poverty, knowing that if I go to university, there's NSFAS to help me pay." (Imani)*

NSFAS and other sources of funding were found to be relied upon and seen as the key that allowed participants to unlock the university space, allowing them to enter into this new environment. However, whilst NSFAS was found to be viewed through the lens of appreciation and positivity, it was also found to introduce an additional level of stress for some of the participants. This was apparent when funding and the provision of allowances were delayed in some way, thus leading participants to need to become resourceful and arrange an alternative plan.

> *"Sometimes NSFAS paid late. Sometimes it would be delayed. Sometimes the money wouldn't be enough to cover everything that you need it to. And it was quite a struggle… I remember struggling with accommodation during the first year, and I had to pay out of my pocket." (Emanuel)*

Due to the impoverished background of the participants in this study, each of them was found to be highly reliant on external funding, thus making any delayed payments that much more challenging of an experience. The results indicated that having NSFAS funding or other funding opportunities became instrumental in whether applying, registering, and attending university was possible or not.

Subtheme 2.4: University readiness and adjustment

Ambitions and drives to enter the university space were found to be challenging experiences that required participants to overcome various obstacles and barriers.

Considering the sample of this study, investigating their university readiness and adjustment was found to be an enlightening avenue that illustrates how one's childhood upbringing and educational experience are impactful at this point in one's life. The results indicated that the participants displayed a lack of readiness to start university and difficulties with adjustment. It became evident that the educational background received by the participants generally did not equip them with the required marks and quality of education to be accepted for their initial degree of choice.

Most of the participants reflected having wanted to do medical degrees. This was due to only having known more about them at the time, and wanting to obtain a career in a field where they could help others. However, each of these participants who wanted to register for medicine either registered for law or psychology due to their marks having not been sufficient. In this way, it seems that their readiness may be impacted by a potential lack of knowledge regarding their options, as well as their readiness being impacted by their previous education. It was found that academic performance was also an indication of university readiness.

> *"We don't get education in our schools, but I mean proper education. Because when I got to varsity, I wanted to study medicine. But I couldn't get in. My marks weren't really that great for medicine. So I got rejected. I did BSC Biological Sciences, and I didn't know what BSC Biological Sciences was. Most of the kids there were planning to go into medicine. So I think that's why I wanted the degree. But yeah, initially, I wanted to do medicine but first year didn't go very well. Second year things didn't go well either, so I failed both years. So I think, I don't know what it was. I wasn't taught. I'm not good at studying or wasn't good at studying. I didn't know how to study. I didn't know. You don't get taught these things in high school, which is unfortunate. So I didn't have that*

ability at the time. I failed three years; it would be like my third first year. I just didn't pass. It didn't work out… As you go through life or whatever in high school or primary, it's always been medicine as an option. But I didn't know what I wanted to do for the longest time, I think I still don't, I feel like I'm still finding my purpose. But yeah, then I applied for psychology." (Patience)

It was found that most of the participants had similar experiences of getting rejected for their initial choice of degree and decided to find meaning in the degree that were accepted for. This initial rejection as well as patterns of failing courses or struggling to get accepted into university, each illustrates elements of not being ready for university. University also was found to mark a time when participants needed to adjust to the new way of being taught compared to their high school, and thus a newer sense of independence was required of them. The results highlighted that whilst participants seemed to enjoy this new sense of independence, the transition was found to be challenging as it was generally felt that the previous academic experience did not prepare them.

"When I got to varsity, I started learning things all over again, especially with the computer. I didn't know much about those things. I didn't know much about… being technological or technologically advanced or using the library because we didn't have one. We didn't have a computer lab ." (Aniyah)

In addition, it was also found that most of the participants struggled to adapt and adjust to the new workload and methods of teaching, but also continued to experience difficulties with socialisation and making friends as seen during their childhood. It was apparent that their childhood feelings and experiences of being socially different, excluded, and alienated, as well as wanting to hide from others in some ways continued to influence the

participants. As such, the increased number of students present within this new context was found to be a daunting experience.

> *"I find the large number of people roaming around a bit overwhelming, and I find the workload a bit overwhelming too. There's a lot of content that you must understand that you may not have dealt with before because from high school to varsity, is a big jump. This is a bit of a… it's a whole shock to the system." (Philani)*

Participants overall were underprepared for university, thus leading to their confidence within this environment to impacted. Each participant was found to feel a level of support and approachability towards the lecturers; however, it was within the context of their university being a new environment with new students, and requiring a level of knowledge and exposure to different things they may not have had, that was found to be the biggest challenge with adjusting to being a university student. As such, lacking readiness was found to impact academic performance and emotional experiences within this context.

Theme 3: Participants' constructions of resilience

Throughout the interview process, it became clear that each participant attributed resilience to being connected to motivation, acceptance, and adaptation, rewriting a narrative that speaks to a mindset of growth and appreciation, as well as a need to find the strength to enact change. As such, each subtheme will begin with an extract that encompasses what resilience means to the participants. This theme is vital for answering the second research question and has been structured to address each aspect of how the participants have indicated their understanding and conceptualisation of resilience.

Subtheme 3.1: Understanding motivation

> *"So for me, resilience is finding the motivation and strength inside you to work to change things. It's also like making sure you make good choices like going to a good university so you can start making a name for yourself." (Chantelle)*

The results indicated that the participants had attributed resiliency to being tied to motivation. As such, motivation became a key component within this section. When understanding the role of motivation within resilience, it was found that participants attributed motivation to resiliency due to the drive one has to change their circumstances. As such, ideas around being motivated for change were apparent and connected to ideas around finding strength which will be explored in the next subtheme.

Motivation was found within the participants' narratives and was also connected to the presence of role models whom they looked up to and saw to be a symbol of the future they strive to have or the life they want to live. It was evident that role models were people in the participants' lives. Participants looked to people within their communities and families as role models. Interestingly, none of the role models were celebrities. This is interesting because participants picked role models who had lived within the same community or in the same circumstances as them. It seems that having someone who shares experiences with them is a big driving force.

> *"Romeo (Rachel's brother) has always been my role model. He started working to try and help at home when he was young. So I've always seen him as someone who has always looked out for others, someone who has always had our backs. His journey, started as working in shops, doing peace jobs, and being able to save money for himself to go to college, and to be a paramedic and a firefighter, despite coming from the home that we came from and the place that we grew up in" (Rachel)*

> *"So growing up, my role models were my mother and my father, and we also had this pastor, we still have her today. She was also my role model, so I don't have celebrities or anybody who's like my role model. It's just my parents, seeing how they treat other people. They live life." (Bonolo)*

The way role models treat others and the way they work towards a future they want for themselves was found to be the crux of what inspires the participants. The focus placed on the life one was motivated to have and create for themselves became apparent throughout the participants' narratives and thus became an important aspect of where their motivations lay.

These role models as well as lived experiences also facilitated a level of motivation for the participants. Motivation being found with wanting to break the cycle of poverty was also found to be apparent in the results of this study. A major source of motivation for each of the participants was either not going back to the circumstances of their childhood, or to move out of their current social class.

> *"My upbringing was a really good motivation. Because I don't want to go back to the space of having nothing. Or having close to nothing. So, it was kind of a deal breaker for me and a big motivation for me to work hard and make sure that I get to achieve everything that I want to achieve in life. So, there's no room for failure or disappointment and things like that. It serves as a motivation to work hard." (Emmanuel)*

Interestingly, motivation was also informed by wanting to support family members to provide them with a better life. It is therefore clear that it is important to the many participants to not only change their circumstances but to also change their family's circumstances. Wanting to provide for their family and change the home situation for everyone was found to be a responsibility that further motivated the participants.

"My motivation is my daughter, I need to do this for her cause I want to give her the best life. I don't want her to grow up like me. So, I've always worked towards everything, every goal, just to make sure I provide the best life for my daughter in the future. So that's what motivated me throughout the years." (Aniyah)

It was evident that the motivation for change and a different standard of living Is what propelled participants to apply to higher education. It became clear that being motivated acted as a driving force that pushed participants towards trying to attain the life they desired. Motivation was also found to be greatly connected to ideas of strength, where the motivation acted as the strength itself or became what led to participants finding their source of strength.

Subtheme 3.2: Finding strength

"Being able to bounce back after difficulties and to sort of make use of strengths that we have, to overcome new challenges. I think in some ways, resilience empowers us and helps protect us." (Mbali)

Strength was found to be closely associated with motivation; however, a notable distinction is present. Whilst motivation and strength were found to work together, strength was found to be understood as the key that allowed participants to feel they could work through and overcome all challenges. Participants were not found to view strength as being something that merely exists within them, but rather as something they needed to find or work towards psychologically developing within themselves.

"I think they've inspired me to want better for myself. And hopefully one day I'll be able to help those from my community. Help support them with resources or information. So they just help motivate me and strengthen my ability to overcome difficult circumstances, and just not give up, fighting through difficult challenges. Until I reach

my goals. So that made me sort of feel like I have some superpower that whatever that happens, I can overcome it." (Mbali)

Strength was found to also be individualistic, as well as developed by receiving support from others and from being protected in some ways. As such, support became important to the development of inner strength. In the subtheme above, *1.2 Reliance on others*, ideas around support systems emerged that are also relevant here. This became important for the building on strength as it was found that the development of strength was positively aided by the presence of supportive figures in the participants' lives. As such, it was also found that some participants spoke to ideas around learning how to be strong from people in their family or community.

"Seeing my mother being strong throughout the whole process of us staying in an impoverished state for many years. That just also motivated me to be strong out of that. Even today, she's strong and I feel I learned that from her. That if we stay together, we are strong. And if we can always remember things happen but they also change, there is a strength in knowing that we can make it through any obstacles." (Bonolo)

Interestingly, it was also found that strength was developed as a way of combatting some of the participants' childhoods. This denotes that being stronger meant not repeating the cycle of poverty or treatment received during their childhood, and ensuring their future and the future of their families would be different.

"So I had my kid when I was 17. Ever since I've told myself that I'm not only doing it for myself, but I'm surviving for the kid and me as well and nobody else. So she gave me courage. She is everything. If I didn't have her, I don't believe I would be this strong or even go to university or anything like that. I told myself that I don't want my kid's childhood to be like mine and I don't even want myself to be like my mom." (Aniyah)

Aniyah's past and her tumultuous relationship with her mother have resulted in an increased drive for self-sufficiency and not wanting to be like her mother in the future. These act as motivations for Aniyah but what is notable is the impact these experiences have on developing strength. It was found that each participant developed a sense of strength from having experienced significant hardships in their lives as it acted as moments that illustrated to them that they were able to overcome and survive through these experiences. Additionally, the need to survive was also found to be a source of strength that further pushed participants' sense of protection over themselves.

> *"I've learned that if you don't save yourself, no one will. To be quite honest, if I didn't stand up for myself or save myself, I don't think I'd be here. I think I'd be doing drugs somewhere or prostitution. But I did have self-control and I did focus and concentrate because I knew what I wanted. So I've learned to critically think and make connections and communications because that's how I got through university without money. So I've learned to speak for myself. make connections even though I didn't grow up being connected to my people." (Aniyah)*

Subtheme 3.3: Acceptance and adaptation

> *"Resilience is a thing of accepting how things are and trying to make a change so that you don't have to go back to living in poverty, so you can change your life. Things happen in life, so it is about how we move forward but also appreciating how things have shaped us so that we can continue to grow in life. It can also be about acceptance and adaptation so you can handle things and move on" (Philani)*

This understanding of resilience posits the presence of adaption. Arguably, one cannot be resilient without being able to adapt in different ways. Adaptation was seen in different ways. The first is the implementation and utilisation of creativity in having fun. Having fun

arguably may be often overlooked when understanding how resilience is developed and identified. It is having fun that makes a child's lived experiences more balanced in that the child experiences positive emotions amongst the adversity. It is also an indication of resilience and good adaptation to be able to utilize resources within the impoverished environment and to make it something new for the child.

> *"So what we'd do is we'd use old tins, like for beans. We had different games we'd use to play. We liked playing 'house'. So what we do is, it's either we go to the dumping sites, just look for old food items or food items that were thrown away and we'd use that to like play 'house'. We'd use what we found to decorate our houses, pretend like we're cooking with those items. On days we were lucky, each one of us would have to steal something from home when we wanted to cook because we'd make fire with the tins. So one will bring a tomato, one will bring a potato, and then we'd use that to cook or clean our house in our game. We'd paint a hose and cut it into many, many different, strips and then tie all of them. Then play a game like hopscotch or skipping (jump rope), but we play on the streets all the time. We play hide and seek. So all the kids from the street would just play outside constantly." (Mbali)*

The above extracts highlight the creativity, resourcefulness, and use of imagination to experience fun. Participants being able to adapt and employ their imaginative abilities were found to make their lived experiences more positive. It was found that adapting to adversity was a key component of what made their childhood experiences and narratives fun and exciting. It is noted that this experience of imaginative play was not the only indication of acceptance and adaptation. Part of the narrative experience has previously been discovered to include lacking consistent sources of electricity.

"So we just try to conserve electricity. And I remember June was very cold. I would wake up feeling cold, pick up the candle and my books, and study. Not having power or needing to conserve what we had made things hard, but I made matric count." (Thabiso)

Despite having more limited access to resources that would aid in academic development, and fulfil basic needs such as heat, participants were overall found to employ a level of utilising what they had to adapt as best they could. Participants were found to have goals of attending university or performing well at school and did what they could to facilitate the realisation of these goals.

Interestingly, adapting to adversity seemed to be more of a condition of reality rather than being an active choice for some of the participants. What this denotes is that adapting to adversity became part of what participants felt they needed to do to survive. Where a mentality of accepting reality for what it is, was apparent.

"I learned from that when you're living or in a situation, you have no choice but to live it. Whether you've adapted to it, whether you're uncomfortable with it, if that's your life, you have no choice but to live it… this is the life that I have and I'm going to live it to the fullest. " (Imani)

Subtheme 3.4: Rewriting the narrative: mindset and learning

"I believe there is a lesson in everything, so for me, that is being resilient because I am choosing to see life in that way so that I can move forward and overcome challenges. So it is about how we see things and choosing to find something in our struggles to motivate us and give us the strength to be open to learning and implementing the lessons life teaches us. It is also about persevering through the challenging times and coming

out on top because of not just the mindset but also because of seeing our strengths and tapping into that to conquer any challenges." (Emanuel)

Whilst this subtheme arguably forms part of a strategy to adapt to adversity, its prevalence increased the need to have this form a separate subtheme. During the interview process, it was noticed that participants displayed having changed their narrative in some ways to reflect on what growing up in poverty has positively added to their lives. This is not only seen as an illustration of positive adaptation to adversity but is largely what participants conceive resilience to entail. Participants arguably engage with their inner strength to not allow themselves to get negatively consumed by their adversity and to choose to change the narrative that allows them to develop and make meaning of their lives more positively. As such, retrospective learning became important.

"The rules that I learned from my childhood or my grandmother have protected me from being vulnerable and I learned how to differentiate between wrong and right or dysfunctional behaviours. I believe the support made me stronger. That made me be able to speak for myself or stand up for myself. Gave me courage and build my confidence" (Aniyah)

"I had no choice but to grow even faster than I would have if I had not been in this situation. I think it had a very positive impact on my life, because of my childhood, I know that I cannot remain stagnant. I cannot be without anything. I must make sure that I'm constantly pursuing something, constantly doing something that will get me somewhere. So it's just wanting to be the best version of myself." (Imani)

Interestingly, being able to alter the narrative also seemed to have a positive impact on the participants because they had a future to look forward to. This was found to be further facilitated by the presence of role models and motivational factors. Ideas around learning

from the past and appreciating past experiences were important for developing this more growth-focused mindset and positive meaning-making.

> *"I would say my past did build me up. I don't want to lie. Especially when it comes to responsibility. I have learned to make sure that the money that I get goes towards something important and I appreciate all the money I get or save. Whatever you have, even if it isn't a lot, you must always have gratitude. So I think the humble beginnings did turn me into an individual who is very responsible and appreciates whatever little I get. It has made me who I am and that is someone I am proud to be." (Rachel)*

Appreciation of the past was found to be a major facet of this altered narrative to allow for more positive meaning-making. It was seen that participants were now diminishing their lived experiences but were rather looking at the lessons they learned from them which led to the development of appreciation of what one has, rather than focusing on what one does not have.

> *"I believe that because of what I went through, the world only likes you when you have money. So the people who you have now while you're at the bottom and during your financial circumstances, you need to appreciate them and love them. I've learned that you don't need money to have a happy life. I feel like during my life, I was always angry. I felt like I had such a horrible life because I didn't have this, can't have that, can't have a proper phone, can't go to the movies. But I just realized all those things are materialistic things and what you need is true happiness. You need to be happy as long as you have food on the table, be grateful for it. I remember those days when sometimes we'd go a month without electricity and honestly it is so tough. So I learned to appreciate life and to appreciate yourself." (Tina)*

It was found that each participant had a level of appreciation for their childhood and upbringing within the context of poverty. Each has goals to escape the cycle of poverty but has an appreciation for the lessons learned and the memories made. It was found that the experience of poverty led to some of the families developing a sense of closeness whilst others experienced becoming more independent. Each outcome was found to be reflected on and appreciated within the narrative retrospective experience.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the results obtained from the results of this study through the utilisation of the NA process. The interpretation and presentation of the results have been done by exploring the narrative and experiential data obtained. Based on the results, the narrative experience of childhood poverty is complex and multifaceted. These experiences were found to fit within three main themes and a set of subthemes of which each was discussed and contextualised.

The first two themes within this chapter focused on addressing the first research question, whilst the third theme addresses the second question. As such, the first theme: *narratives within the living environment,* encompassed the participants' narrative childhood experiences related to their home and communal environments, whilst the second theme: *the nexus of poverty, education, and opportunity*, focused on the narrative experience with relation to the educational context. These two themes and their associated subthemes have illustrated what the narrative experience entailed for each participant during their childhood. These themes are created in such a way as to provide a holistic understanding of the narrative experience, thus truly answering the first research question of this study. The final theme: *participants' constructions of resilience*, addressed the second research question and was structured in such a way that represented how participants defined resilience. As such, this

theme illustrated how resiliency was attributed to motivation, strength, acceptance and adaption, and positive meaning-making or retrospective learning, from the perspective of the research participants.

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion

Despite the steady rise in resilience research, there are still many unknowns. This study focused on understanding the relationship between resilience and childhood poverty through the retrospective lens of high-achieving young adults by using a sample of university students. Accordingly, this study used qualitative methods to investigate two main research questions within this context: What are the students' narratives of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantaged context, and how do students construct resilience to poverty. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants and three main themes were identified using a narrative analysis: (1) *narratives within the living environment*; (2) *the nexus of poverty, education, and opportunity*, and (3) *participants' constructions of resilience*. These themes, together with the identified sub-themes are unpacked below.

5.1 Significance of qualitative accounts

It is of great importance that research on poverty and resilience be inclusive of the subjective insight of those with first-hand experiences from their childhood. As such, qualitative exploration only further enhances our knowledge base. The qualitative and narrative approach of this study allows participants to share their personal stories, thus allowing for their lived phenomena and explorative data to emerge (Gentles et al., 2015). As such, participants' unique individual perspectives of the world and their childhood are integral to the data collected and the research conducted for this study (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The data illustrates that the narrative experience is multifaceted and echoes that poverty allows for multidimensional hardships to emerge.

Much of how poverty is constructed and understood is from a narrative that Misturelli and Heffernan (2011) argue that the idea of poverty being a permanent state of being needs to be contested as they further argue for the essentiality that the narratives and

stories of poverty be told by the impoverished. As such, this study addresses these stories and experiences of poverty by allowing the participants to be the storytellers. Exploring these stories provides enriched data that allows for resilience to be assessed and to answer the research questions of this study.

The first research question seeks insight into what the narrative experience of childhood poverty entails for the participants of this study. The participants' narratives overwhelmingly echoed experiences of difficulty. The experience of difficulty and adverse challenges alongside poverty is commonly found within existing literature (Acquah et al., 2017; Duncan et al., 2013; Gamboa et al., 2020), however, the nuances of this difficulty are often not explored in enough detail. The difficulties experienced during their childhoods were largely attributed to the emotional experience related to their family dynamics, their living and environmental conditions, as well as additional difficulties related to their schooling experiences. However, a fundamental conceptual issue first needs to be addressed.

5.2 Complexities within family dynamics

Experiences of difficulties stemming from childhood poverty included elements of children not being allowed to be children. Children had to take on various levels of responsibility that they typically would not be expected to, such as becoming pseudo-parents for their siblings, parents, and other family members, and engaging in a process of parentification. It is common for impoverished spaces to include parentified children to act as pseudo-parents for their siblings, parents, and other family members (Masiran et al., 2023), which is congruent with the participants' narratives. Furthermore, a paper written by Masiran and colleagues in 2023, provides a critical literature review of parentification research, highlights that parents within poverty may not have the resources or abilities to perform as parents may typically be expected to. As such, the child enters a parentification process

whereby a parent-child role reversal is apparent due to parents being unable to fulfil their child's basic emotional, physical, and psychological needs. Which is congruent with the results of this study.

Parents form an integral role in each life stage of a child (Kalil, 2014), as one's childhood is a particularly vulnerable period (Lyndon, 2019) It is also noted that research indicates that parents within impoverished contexts face barriers to providing for their families due to their own level of education, skills, employment, and access to money (Kalil, 2014). Parents may not be emotionally and mentally able to provide such desired support and may have to manage practical restrictions such as needing to be at work (Ikebude et al., 2013; Magnuson & Duncan, 2019).

Within the context of South Africa, family units deviate from the typical nuclear family structure as the parenting role may be filled by people other than biological parents (Muthukrishna & Ebrahim, 2014). This was apparent within the study as participants were found to often be raised by their grandparents, great-grandparents, or aunts due to biological parents being unavailable or unable to fill the role. Absent parents further contribute to the difficulties experienced alongside poverty as it creates further challenging experiences (Magnuson & Duncan, 2019). The absence of a parent was found to have psychological implications on the participants during their childhood and has also been identified as having impacted their overall mental health and wellbeing. However, an academic implication is found in the presence of absent parents.

Xiaofeng, Wenhui, and Aibao investigated the connection between parental absence and reading comprehension of poor children in China (2018). They conducted their study quantitatively with 903 children ranging from grade 1 to 6, half being abandoned by

biological parents. They found that children who were abandoned by their parents had increased academic difficulties, and they lacked the necessary emotional support to thrive. This is inconsistent with the results of this study. Arguably, Xiaofeng and colleagues' study did not account for the impact of being raised by other caregivers who provide academic support. Whilst, consistently, children facing poverty have increased academic difficulties, participants in this study illustrated that they had other caregivers who supported and motivated them academically, despite being unable to help with homework, etc. As such, familial dynamics are found to be important for the wellbeing and academic success of children as they are reliant on their family members for different levels of support.

The role of familial support has been found to be important for the development of resilience which is further supported by South African researchers such as Van Breda (2018), and Zulu (2019). This is evident as they both argue for the fact that relational factors and experiences are directly associated with the attainment and development of resiliency. Therefore, the familial environment and relational dynamics becomes an integral aspect of the participants' lived experiences and development of resilience.

As such, it is important to understand that the narratives found within the results of this study largely include that due to the complex familial dynamics, their experiences of being children included needing to rely on different people. A level of adaptation to adversity was required of them as they found people they could personally rely on for care, nurture, and protection. However, the physical environments that participants grew up in were consistently found to be riddled with crime, danger, lack of hygiene, and issues with accessibility to resources. This was found to be both traumatizing for participants as well as enhancing the experience of difficulty. The physical environment is an important aspect of the participants' narratives since research has highlighted that environmental factors have direct implications

on one's mental, emotional, and physical wellbeing due to it correlating so closely with the risk of malnutrition, exposure to disease and illness (Ngure et al., 2014).

In a study conducted by Goswami (2014) on sample of 300 families within four different informal settlements in Raipur, it was found that poor children within informal settlements have significantly lower quality of life due to poor environmental conditions. In this study, it was clear that these children face risks of malnutrition, food insecurity, unhygienic living conditions, and differential access to sanitary water. Goswami argues that these are issues that the poor are faced with daily and require attention to improve the health risks and vulnerabilities of the poor, due to their living conditions and environments being inconducive for appropriate raising of children. The results of this study echo findings found by Goswami, as there is more limited access to sufficient resources, hygienic facilities, and healthcare services is evident within the participants' narratives. South African informal settlements are known to require improvement (Nkonki-Mandleni et al., 2021), however, this context is also known for its culture of violence.

5.3 A culture of violence

The South African context is known for being riddled with crime (Bhana et al., 2018). The presence of crime during childhood can be detrimental and lead to experiences of trauma (Lee et al., 2020). Research also indicates that the prevalence of crime and trauma is high as 70% of people throughout the world experience trauma during their lifetime (Lee et al., 2020). Trauma has been found to increase the risk of health issues such as the development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), chronic physical pain, stroke, increased mental health issues, paranoia, etc (Lee et al., 2020). As such, the experience of trauma during childhood has also been found to lower people's quality of life. As such, the presence of crime and trauma during people's childhood has great implications for their future adult lives.

It is important to address that during the interview process, the implications of childhood exposure to crime and trauma became apparent. Poverty in itself is often connected to topics like crime. As such, experiences of crime and trauma were organically shared during the interviews. Therefore it is clear that crime and trauma form a major aspect of the narrative experience of poverty in the South African context and illustrates that the impact of these experiences are lasting and highly impactful.

The results of this study indicate various levels of emotional distress and crime being experienced which range from being in an environment with crime and being a direct witness to crime. Einarsson and Ljungkrantz (2022) argue that it is also within the contexts where gangsterism is a common aspect of various communities throughout South Africa, which was consistent within a participant's narrative. Participants experienced restrictions and safety measures being enforced during their childhood that dictated when and where they were allowed to do something or go somewhere. Participants have experiences of being witnesses or victims of crime, and these experiences are each found to have impacted the participant and have a lasting impact. These results reinforce the idea that poverty is multidimensional and includes a range of factors such as violence crime and mental health.

A study conducted by Evans and Kim (2013) highlights that children's mental health is drastically impacted by their socio-economic and environmental factors as these contribute to South African parents adopting less supportive and responsive ways of parenting, therefore increasing corporal punishment abuse and conflict. As such, children born into impoverished environments face greater or enhanced risks of ill-treatment and abuse (Bywaters et al., 2016), which is apparent within the results of this study as participants within this study have experienced trauma due to psychological, emotional, sexual, and physical abuse.

These difficulties associated with the home environment, family dynamic, and role fulfilment are found to be major contributing factors leading to experiences of deep difficulty, adversity, and challenges. However, an additional narrative that displays great difficulty pertains to the schooling environment and all associated with it, becomes another environment that illustrates the narrative experience of immense difficulty. The participants' past schooling experiences illustrate that socio-emotional implications of engaging with others from outside the community exist. Participants had a level of unawareness of their impoverished reality until being in spaces where they were exposed to other children at school, who came from different backgrounds and communities. This is an important moment in the narrative experience as it speaks to the realisation of difference and the emergence of social exclusion.

5.4 Experiences of social exclusion

Literature establishes that social exclusion is often connected to poverty and thus forms part of the social experience of the impoverished (Birchall, 2019; Samuel et al., 2018). Being socially excluded due to experiencing poverty largely impacts people on an emotional level as they are unable to enter social spaces feeling understood and comfortable (Birchall, 2019; Samuel et al., 2018). This was found to be consistent for each of the participants. Making comparisons was found to be a common experience amongst the participants which arguably increased their awareness of being different and further contributed to their feelings of social exclusion. However, it is also seen that the experience of social exclusion often results in the exclusion of self (Samuel et al., 2018).

Experiences of social exclusion were found to be directly related to experiences of difficulty, as struggling with socialisation, and building and maintaining relationships led to experiences of loneliness that are difficult to manage. Experiencing social exclusion has very

real implications for the wellbeing of the participants and leads to feelings of not fitting in and wanting to hide parts of themselves. Desire to hide parts of the self is found to be the result of wanting to appear as if being impoverished is not part of the lived reality. As such, hiding is thought of as a method to attain more social inclusion and prevent experiencing shame.

The cumulative disadvantage theory posts that inequalities experienced in childhood may heighten the experience of social exclusion (Bäckman & Nilsson, 2011). This takes on the form of bullying and being out-casted (Wolke & Lereya, 2015), which is congruent with the results of this study. These are known to harm one's mental health as the internalisation of issues contributes to the development of depression, anxiety, and other negative psychological implications (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). As such, the cumulative disadvantage theory illustrates the potential depth of difficulty these experiences are within the participants' narratives.

The narrative experience related to education illustrates experiences of deep difficulties due to the loneliness attributed to being shamed and excluded, however, another large aspect of this experience pertains to the consequences of not appearing 'normal' to those from different socio-economic backgrounds. Bullying is evident within the narrative experience, where participants were verbally and physically targeted, thus increasing the severity of being different. With a sample of 72 young adults, De Lara (2018) qualitatively found that childhood bullying results in mental health difficulties, physiological issues, and relational difficulties in emerging and young adulthood. The results of this study found a major lack of confidence, issues with forming and maintaining relationships, and experiences of emotional distress in the sample's current lived experiences due to childhood experiences of being bullied, thus highlighting congruency with De Lara's study. Additionally, the impact

of the academic experience on the narrative retrospective story is found to move beyond the socio-emotional implications as additional barriers such as attaining university acceptance and coping within this new environment are major factors that highlighted the experience of great difficulties due to being in poverty. Thus far, it is evident that the educational environment is of great importance to the participants' narratives as it became a space of realised difference, difficulty, exclusion, and bullying, however, poverty is found to have an additional relationship with education.

5.5 Relationship to education

Existing literature highlights the strong correlation between students' home and personal environments and their academic performance within the South African context (Wills & Hofmeyr, 2018). Therefore, a nexus between poverty, education, and opportunity exists and highlights a relationship where poverty negatively leads to there being fewer educational opportunities and a heightened level of lower educational quality. Opportunities are limited by academic performance and poverty due to the high prevalence of school dropouts in South Africa due to the educational deficit, where poor children face greater barriers to quality education (Awan et al., 2011; De Lannoy et al., 2015; Ikebude et al., 2013).

The quality of primary and secondary education received by the participants is found to vary, however, results indicate that some of the schooling environments lacked resources and funding. This is found to directly impact the grades obtained in high school, thus impacting university acceptance. Gruijters and Behrman (2020) highlight that South Africa faces a crisis when it comes to educating poor children due to poor children being a demographic in which poor learning outcomes are concentrated. In their study, Gruijters and Behrman sampled 30 870 students in Grade 6 from 1808 schools across 10 African countries, who each had to complete a mathematics and English questionnaire. The quantitative results

highlight that the global South largely overlooks inequalities stemming from poverty. These children faced greater learning gaps and lower academic qualities due to schools being unequipped to under-resourced which is consistent with the results of this paper. A minority of the participants were found to be high achievers however, it is evident throughout the narrative experiences that the participants were unsuccessful in being accepted for their first-choice degrees. This illustrates an additional facet of difficulty stemming from the impact of poverty, as participants attended schools that were affordable, or government-funded. Additionally, the application process itself illustrates a narrative of immense difficulty due to the participants not having access to the technological resources (Wi-Fi, laptops, etc.) required to complete university applications, and also lacking the funding to pay for application fees, thus limiting the universities participants could apply to.

As such, participant narratives showcase how poverty led to experiences of being disadvantaged by their educational upbringing, their application processes being hindered (unless aid or support was received), and a level of lacking the readiness to enter into the university space is apparent. The participants experience difficulties related to their confidence, socialisation, adjusting to how universities teach their students, and having access to funds for student accommodation and other expenses such as travel, food, and academic resources (laptops, etc.).

Each facet of difficulty that has been discussed within this chapter becomes a conglomerate of struggle and lacking. Due to this, it is apparent that the need for support becomes integral to the success of the participants moving forward throughout their various life stages. Communal, familial, social, and religious support is fundamental, as well as the support received by different institutions such as feeding schemes at schools, laptop loans from universities, financial aid schemes, and government grants. This level of support is

found to be essential for the participants and directly aids them in reaching their current position in life as university students. The presence of supportive structures is empirically understood as being protective factors that are instrumental in aiding people with coping with their experienced (past and present) adversities such as childhood poverty and issues with life-stage transitions such as attending university (Yates et al., 2015). As such, protective factors aid with coping with adversity and ultimately impact mental health. However, mental health is found to be a more unfamiliar discourse to the participants of this study.

5.6 Mental health and well-being

Based on what the participants revealed about their mental health and emotional experiences, it is evident that their experiences are consistent with the literature. The literature denotes that adversity typically worsens people's mental health due to difficulties with buffering the incoming surge of stress and distress (Crouch et al., 2020). The participants' narratives each included levels of stress and emotional distress due to their lived experiences and issues with coping. Participants needed to go through a process of establishing and identifying what coping mechanisms and strategies they could engage with. Engaging with emotion and expression is not part of the discourse amongst family or within the community, thus further hindering their abilities to cope and deepening their experiences of difficulty.

A study conducted by Wilkins (2012) investigates the life histories of 43 African American university students and highlights that there is a level of emotional restraint due to social and cultural standards for Black people, especially men. As such, it is evident that speaking about emotions openly or visibly expressing emotion in some capacity is abnormal according to standards placed on this demographic. As such, Wilkins found that Black males especially, operate within contexts of toxic masculinity where males are expected to be

emotionless and strong, thus leaving no room for the discourse of mental health and emotional wellbeing to be explored. Wilkins highlights that a culture within the Black community exists where emotions are not paid as much attention, thus being congruent with the results of this study which highlight that participants were expected to keep their emotions to themselves. However, despite the lack of openness and understanding of mental and emotional health and expression, participants displayed an ability to cope with adversity by engaging with religion and supportive networks.

5.7 Coping mechanisms and resilience

Coping mechanisms are understood as working closely with resilience, however, they are not synonymous as coping mechanisms speak to the strategies utilised and the development of competence to face and help manage the adversity and challenges being faced, whereas resilience more so speaks to the ability to adapt (Tchombe et al., 2012). Tchombe and colleagues conducted a study that consisted of 250 participants from five poor villages in Cameroon. The results of this study denote that various coping strategies are evident; however, religion and the development of support networks underpin how this sample was able to cope with adversity and become resilient. As such, the results of this study are consistent with Thcombe and colleagues' study, as different strategies are being utilised to cope with their lived experiences and adversity, especially religion and journaling.

Religion is understood as being a system of beliefs, practices, and rituals and being inherently tied to the establishment of faith (Cornell, 2015). A major shared experience amongst the participants is each of their connections and reliance on religion. Being within one’s religious environment and being involved in religious practices are major sources of support and coping for the participants. As such, the presence of their religion is found to

positively contribute to the participants' childhood and current mental health as these spaces offered them a source of refuge that other environments did not.

5.8 Participant understanding of resilience

The second research question focuses on investigating how participants construct resilience. The resilience theory provides conceptual understanding and insight into resiliency, however, a bridge between theory and lived experience needs to be made by way of considering how those within poverty understand and experience resilience. During the process of data collection, it became apparent that participants construct resilience to be related to factors such as motivation, strength, acceptance, and adaptation, as well as rewriting their narrative by engaging in positive meaning-making.

5.8.1 Motivation

Participants largely attribute motivation to resilience. Motivation is found to be largely connected to wanting to break the cycle of poverty by way of working hard and focusing on their studies. It is the act of finding motivation that is connected to resilience from their perspective. As such, role models are found to be important sources of motivation building. Wills and Hofmeyr (2018) investigated academic resilience within their quantitative study of 2565 students and found motivation and role models to be contributors to academic resilience, which is congruent with this paper. They further establish that the presence of role models positively facilitates academic resilience, however, the same can arguably be said outside the academic context.

Motivation is vital within the conceptualisation of resilience because participants feel it is integral in working towards developing a life they desire and having hopes, dreams, and goals they want to work towards achieving. To the participants, being motivated means that

they have the necessary tools to be able to work through the adversities they face, which assists them in developing a sense of strength required to not allow adversities and challenges to break them down. Much of resilience theory denotes ideas around bouncing back or pushing past adversity (Graber et al., 2015; Suslovic & Lett, 2023; Yates et al., 2015), which participants feel is facilitated by the presence of strength and motivation. The attainment of tertiary education is found to be a key motivational factor as education is perceived to be the key that unlocks a better life that is free of poverty or supportive enough that they move forward with their lives.

Being motivated to obtain a degree to assist with entering the job market and potential earnings is what drives participants to apply for university, create a plan to pay the application fees, apply for the necessary financial aid, and to choose a different degree if their degree of choice is unattainable or 'impractical'. The unemployment rate is high in South Africa (Cheteni et al., 2018), and is found to inform part of the considerations made when choosing a degree to pursue due to participants seeking job security and attainment. Results indicate that being within a medical or health field and being in law are seen to be the most desirable degrees due to the assumed level of financial security attributed to these professions.

Participants displayed their motivations as being the factor that inspired them to push past the difficulties within their narrative experiences such as the difficulties connected to their past education, barriers due to lack of resources, and pushing past their socio-emotional and familial difficulties. Evidently, major motivations include the fear of remaining in poverty, and the need to create a better life for themselves and their families. The participants each are within contexts of intergenerational poverty which further enhances their motivation for change. Papageorgiou and Callaghan's (2020) quantitative study based on first-year

accounting university students, denotes that motivation is commonly been found concerning wanting to break the cycle of poverty, which was also found to be apparent within the results of this study. Participants want to work towards ending the poverty cycle for themselves and their families and to ensure that their future lineage does not experience what they have. Therefore ending the intergenerational aspect of poverty is found to be an additional motivation and goal.

Motivation and strength are found to be interlinked according to the participants' perspectives. Their constructions of resilience included motivation and strength being used together however, a difference in terms is apparent. Based on the data obtained, motivation speaks to what participants tapped into to push past adversity, whilst strength is what gave them the ability to do so. Participants view strength as not being an intrinsic factor or personality trait which contradicts the past understanding of resilience (Graber et al., 2015; Suslovic & Lett, 2023; Theron, 2023; Yates et al., 2015).

5.8.2 Strength and grit

Resilience theories have developed throughout time (Yates et al., 2015), however, a notable focus of resilience researchers have additionally defined resilience within a social-ecological perspective thus further supporting the move away from the notion of resiliency being tied to personality traits (Theron, 2023). Strength is rather understood and conceptualised as being something participants needed to find and work towards developing by leaning on their supportive systems and life lessons. Additionally, participants learned how to be strong through their experiences of adversity by people within their support system modelling what being strong entails. The crux of why the development of strength is perceived as being important to the participants' understanding of resilience is due to strength

affording them with the ability to overcome adversities and ensure that they are strong enough to secure a more protected and improved life, therefore breaking the cycle of poverty.

Notably, the strength that the participants spoke to may also be understood as the presence of grit. Grit is defined as the perseverance or passion towards the attainment of longer-term goals and a commitment to completing activities despite past experiences of failure, adversity, and barriers (Calo et al., 2019; Mohan & Kaur, 2021). Grit is theoretically understood as the consistency of one's interest and one's perseverance over some time (Mohan & Kaur, 2021). Calo and colleagues (2019) investigated grit and resilience by way of having 134 final-year physiotherapy students complete surveys. As such, they found that the presence of grit is positively connected to resilience and the consolidation of both allows for a heightened ability to cope with life stressors optimally, therefore improving one's wellbeing.

Stoffel and Cain (2018) indicate that the presence of grit alongside resilience increases the chances for academic success and coping with mental health issues and pressures. Grit is found to emphasise individual differences that contribute to success, illustrating that those who experience adversity may have the commitment and perseverance to overcome their challenges to gain success (Mohan & Kaur, 2021). Whilst participants speak to ideas around strength, it is evident that their experiences also speak to the presence of grit and resilience. Another key element of their construction of resilience incorporates acceptance and adaptation.

5.8.3 Acceptance and adaptation

Participants display behaviours of acceptance of their past and current realities which allows them to enable a sense of resilience for themselves on a social-ecological level as per

the work of Theron (2023). According to Theron this is seen as being a personal resilience-enabler which denoted the presence of acceptance within adverse experiences. Theron published a study in which a scoping review of resilience is investigated within Sub-Saharan children and adolescents. In this work, Theron engages with 59 peer-reviewed publications from 2000 to 2018. As such, an argument is made that resilience is achieved through an interplay between systems, and that the cultural perspective and context is needed to be considered. Additionally, Theron highlights that resilience-enablers exist within certain ecological levels. Adaptive meaning-making connects to acceptance and reframing and was found to be a major resilience-enabler as it was found within 19 of the studies investigated. Therefore it is apparent that a level of resiliency was engaged within the childhood narrative when acceptance was reached, thus highlighting that resilience was engaged with during the participants' childhoods due to their abilities to accept and adapt by reframing. It was this acceptance that led to the adaptation and development of coping mechanisms that were appropriate within the context in which each participant grew up.

Participants displayed an understanding of poverty as being more temporary, leading to the participants feeling hopeful of their poverty-stricken lives being changeable, thus allowing for positive adaptation. Zulu (2019) highlights the efficacy of the ability to learn from, adapt to, and accept current and past experiences with the development and facilitation of resilience. Thus being consistent with the findings of this study as accapetnace and adaptation was evident in different ways. Additionally, research indicates that resilience often considers the ability one has for good adaptation to adversity, where people can adjust to the circumstances and challenges being faced (Wright et al., 2012). Participants did not want to allow themselves to dwell on their adversities and difficult experiences, as they focused more on adapting where possible. As such, adaptation is found to be tied to resourcefulness.

Participant narratives illustrate the great difficulty and losses of childhood as mentioned. Despite not having access to various resources and simple things like toys during their childhood, participants each engaged in a positive adaptation by being resourceful and imaginative by playing on the streets and utilising tins and other products they could find to play with, thus creating games to play. The experience of fun correlates with positive implications on children's mental health and overall wellbeing (Piek et al., 2010). Thus elucidating that despite their childhood loneliness, bullying, exclusion, and difficulties with managing academic and familial difficulties, they ensured they got to play when they could, therefore alleviating the influx of pure difficult experiences. The constant experience of difficulty is severely detrimental to people's mental and emotional health and psychological wellbeing (Brown et al., 2020; Crouch et al., 2020, Finkelhor, 2020), thus highlighting the importance of this alleviation.

5.8.4 Rewriting the narrative and mindset

Another aspect of resilience as constructed by the participants includes an element of rewriting their narratives and learning from their past experiences. As such, a mindset of growth is adopted and attributed to resiliency. The growth mindset is defined as a belief that an individual's intelligence can be developed as it is not something fixed (Claro et al., 2016). Research conducted by King and Trinidad (2021) investigates the connection between the growth mindset and achievement with a particular focus on socio-economic status and found that the growth mindset strongly facilitates ideal attitudes to arise regarding learning and positively connects to motivation. Academic performance and achievement are not only influenced by cognitive ability, as factors like beliefs, attitudes, values, goals, and motivations are found to be influential as well (Xia et al., 2022).

The participants of this study are found to display a growth mindset due to their continual academic development and work towards reaching academic goals despite having received varying quality of previous academic support. The participants of this study were motivated by their experiences of poverty and viewed the attainment of a degree to be the key to escaping poverty. This is consistent with Van Breda's 2018 study where is it explained that adopting a positive mindset or perspective towards academics is found to be protective factor for the sample of this study. As such, participants viewing their academics as having the power or potential to essentially change their lives, is arguably an illustration of Van Breda's point. This perspective was also found to positively impact and motivated the students as some participants in this study spoke about having been high achievers in high school, as most said they performed well enough to enter university.

Despite this, some of the participants are registered for Masters degrees, and these individuals have experienced being rejected for their initial choice of degree due to their marks being too low, and one needed to undergo a process of improving her grades. Therefore this growth mindset is evident within the results of this study and works closely with motivation. Participants do not want to allow their experiences of adversity, difficulty, and previous barriers to predict the trajectory of their lives. As such, participants were found to not allow the lack of electricity to prevent them from studying or completing their work so they could improve their academic ability and achievement, thus illustrating how the presence of the growth mindset provides a level of motivation to build upon one's intellect.

Participants speak about learning from their past experiences as being resilient because it allows them to implement these lessons, ensuring that they do not go back to being in deeper poverty, or assist them in breaking the cycle. This is consistent with a chapter written by Brady (2019) in a book titled *The Valur of Emotions for Knowledge*. Brady

highlights that adversity is generally perceived negatively and argues that spaces of adversity and hardship are spaces of potential growth. He thus argues that there are lessons to be learned within spaces of difficulty. As such, participants' relationships with money and other resources are prime examples of where these lessons are apparent as their past experiences lead to greater responsibility and appreciation of money. Much of the research that investigates adversity negates the fact that suffering can lead to development and may be valuable experiences (Brady, 2019). The view of adversity being valuable is consistent with the results. This is due to the presence of retrospective consideration of childhood adversity being associated with a sense of appreciation as participants have rewritten their narrative of difficulty and struggle to being more positive due to these experiences contributing to their personal growth and character building. Therefore, positive meaning-making is engaged with. Participants view their childhood poverty as being important to their growth but not determining their potential future lives. The desire for growth and the drive to reach their goals facilitate moving forward with their lives despite adverse childhood experiences is what participants consider to be resilience. As such, participants display a sense of gaining control over their narrative by trying to adapt it towards more positive meaning-making.

Changing the narrative forms part of an acceptance and adaptive strategy whilst employing motivation and developed strength. Therefore, their mindset to determine their narrative encompasses each factor that participants deem to be facets of resilience. The rewriting and framing of their narratives are understood as being adaptive meaning-making and are aligned to enabling personal resilience (Theron, 2023). The desire for improvement and growth illustrates the drive to move forward and away from poverty, leading to the narrative being rewritten more positively, thus further enhancing positive perspectives and experiences within their lives. Rewriting their narratives affords participants a level of

strength and control over writing their own story, where they choose where they will be rather than allowing poverty to dictate their story.

How participants have constructed resilience is found to align with social-ecological theories of resilience that posit that resilience is a multilevel and dynamic process that enables positive outcomes through the interaction of systems and protective factors and support (Theron, 2023). As such, it is the interaction of systems such as the communal environment, home environment, personal psychological and biological factors as well as other social factors (Ungar & Theron, 2020). Ungar and Theron focus on assessing resilience within a sub-Saharan African perspective and denote human resilience to be dependent on the interaction between various systems such as biological, psychological, social, and ecological. As such, the results of this study coincide with the social-ecological systems theory of resilience.

Participants did not identify ‘protective factors’ as being part of their construction of resilience, however, the narratives told to indicate the positive experience associated with the presence of protective factors such as receiving support from family, the community, teachers, and the employed safety precautions, which further highlights the congruency between the social-ecological theory of resilience. Research illustrates that children require a level of support to work through difficult experiences and adversity (Ikebude et al., 2013). As such, support and protective factors are required for the development and emergence of resilience (Yates et al., 2015). Every participant had access to and exposure to a form of support and other protective factors. Resilience theory highlights that resilience exists in spaces where there is an amalgamation of protective factors (Graber et al., 2015; Yates et al., 2015), which is congruent with the results of this study.

It is noted that this study is not conducted to investigate the social-ecological systems theory of resilience, however, one cannot neglect that this theory may be more appropriate for a working theory within the South African context. Resilience research has been dominated by researchers from various contexts outside of South Africa (Theron, 2023).

When considering how the participants of this study have constructed resilience, it is found to align with ideas generated by the social-ecological theory of resilience, as well as to resiliency related to research conducted by Graber and colleagues (2015), Suslovic and Lett (2023), Toland and Carrigan (2011), and Yates and colleagues (2015), whom each advance the theory by understanding resilience as a lifelong and dynamic process of adaptation and further facilitated by the presence of protective factors and support.

Additionally, Aranda and colleagues (2012) argue that resilience is connected to ideas around the ability to bounce back by drawing on inner strength, resourcefulness, and protective factors, which is also found to align with the results of this study. Theron argues the social-ecological systems approach is most applicable to a sub-Saharan African due to its contextual sensitivity (2019), however, the existing research outside of this context is arguably applicable as well. The amalgamation of these theories and works denotes a hybrid conceptualisation of resilience as experienced by the participants of this study. Understanding how participants construct resilience sheds light on how they experience resilience as well, thus taking resilience theories and adopting them, illustrating a more personal and experiential account of resilience.

5.9 Strengths and limitations of the study

This study was conducted by way of a narrative approach which allowed the participants within this study to explore their experiences fully. As such, the semi-structured

format of the interview also allowed participants to share what they felt was appropriate and natural to them. Much of the existing literature on poverty engages with this topic by way of imploring objective and standardised instruments to measure poverty, however, the self-identification of poverty is arguably a strength of this study as it allows for a deeper understanding of the experiential data obtained as it speaks to a more personal aspect of being impoverished compared to what other measures may render. Whilst this may have resulted in differing levels of poverty to inform the sample, they each arguably meet the criteria of being impoverished during their childhood as each speaks to a lack of basic resources being met, access to resources (such as food, funds, and at times, a hygienic environment), and there was an overall reliance on external funding schemes such as NSFAS or the reliance on government grants or funding as means to meet minimum living expenses which are understood as being an indication of poverty.

Despite the strengths of this study, this study contains limitations that need to be addressed. The sample of this study predominantly included 19-year-old Black students completing their Undergraduate degrees at the University of Witwatersrand. While the sample included other universities and levels of education, this research may lack in its generalizability and reliability when looking at the wider population. This potential lack of generalizability is further apparent due to the sample being compiled of students predominantly within the Humanities faculty, and thus excluding additional faculties such as the Sciences faculty. This research also does not explore the experiences of other racial groups that may also have experienced poverty. All the participants were students who had access to tertiary education, laptops, and Wi-Fi which highlights that those with less access to resources were not part of this study.

An additional limitation of this study is how this research was advertised. The poster (Appendix E) expressed looking at resilience and the self-identification of experienced childhood poverty and resilience. As such, a limitation also lies in the sampling method as this study did not explore this topic through objective measures of poverty due to the focus being on self-identification. Another limitation lies in the fact that the sample of this study was largely formed by undergraduate students or students still studying and have not had the opportunity to enter the job market. This became a limitation as resilience was investigated concerning breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, but the sample may not have been in the position to truly illustrate the breaking of the cycle and rather illustrated the intent and desire to do so.

A major limitation of this study is the lack of consistency in the use of terms and concepts. Poverty, impoverishment, socio-economic disadvantage, and inequality are similar and interlinked; however, these concepts are not the same as one another. As such, it is a major limitation of this study for making use of these concepts as if they express the same thing as the differences in these conceptual definitions are neglected. The interview schedule (see Appendix C) makes mention of poverty and socio-economic disadvantage, which may have impacted how participants understood and answered questions as the participants may have understood the differences in the concepts.

5.10 Recommendations for future research

This study focused primarily on the experiences of university students who identified with experiences of childhood impoverishment. Further research that does not focus on retrospective accounts of poverty and rather focuses on individuals who are currently within impoverished environments may be an interesting focus as their experiences of resilience may be different. As such, this may be an enriching sample that may assist with adding to

existing research on impoverishment. This may further provide a more holistic understanding of the nuances of experiencing impoverishment.

It should also be noted that during the completion of the interview process, it was found that some participants shared sensitive information relating to crime experienced during their childhoods when speaking about childhood poverty. This information was not anticipated by the researcher or during the ethical approval process. As per the ethical guidelines for this study, participants were made aware of the support structures in place in case of any potential discomfort experienced during the interviews. None of the participants explicitly reported any levels of discomfort. Nevertheless, due to this intersection relationship found between poverty and crime in South Africa, future studies conducted in South Africa on these topics should consider this factor in their risk-level analysis in ethics applications.

5.11 Conclusion

The results of this study show that the subjective and narrative retrospective experience of childhood poverty overwhelmingly highlights experiences of immense difficulties. This discussion illustrated and engaged with the narrative experience of childhood poverty, thus answering the first research question. Additionally, a contribution to literature has been made by shedding light on the lived experiences and realities of poverty. Another crucial element of this study was answering the second research question which explores how the participants construct resilience. The results illustrate how this construction is attributed to motivation and strength, acceptance and adaptation, and rewriting the narrative. This further elucidated the applicability of the resilience theory and the social-ecological systems theory of resilience.

Additionally, the strengths and limitations of this study have been explored as well as recommendations for future research. This research report has aimed to gain insight into the narrative retrospective experience of childhood poverty and to understand how students who were part of the sample of this study construct resilience. The narrative experience is nuanced and complex. Existing research lacks a qualitative exploration of subjective experimental data regarding poverty and resilience. The results of this study arguably contribute to the filling of this gap in the literature as more is revealed about the narrative experience of poverty, as shared by those who experienced childhood poverty.

Resilience research has increasingly gained traction within existing literature; however, it is not enough to understand the theoretical understanding of resilience as it is essential to understand how those identifying with poverty have constructed and experienced resilience themselves. This study provided insight into how resilience is constructed as being inclusive of factors such as motivation, strength, acceptance, adaptation, and rewriting the narrative. In conclusion, this study has provided further subjective insight into the topic of poverty and resilience by way of presenting the data as experienced by the participants of this study.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Caitlyn Wong, I am Masters student in Community-Based Counselling Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. I am currently working on a research project which focuses on narratives and personal stories of resilience from poverty experienced by postgraduate students. The purpose of this study will be to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' experiences of growing up in socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The study aims to understand resilience from the students' perspective, by enabling them to share their experiences of their social context, including their schooling and university experiences.

I would like to formally invite you to participate in this research project. This participation will involve a single interview, which will be conducted either in person or online within strict adherence to Covid 19 protocols and regulations. The duration of this interview will be approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. With your informed permission, I would like to audio record the interview using an electronic recording device. This recording will only be accessible to myself (the researcher) and the supervisor, Dr Vinitha Jithoo. It will be stored on a secure computer and will be password protected. Should you provide consent for this recording to be used in the future by other ethically accredited researchers, then it will be made available to them, alternatively the recording will be deleted after five years.

The content of the interview will be confidential, and your identity will be protected as your personal details will be anonymized. Upon the inclusion of any quotations or direct reference to the specific interview, a pseudonym (false or random name) will be used. There will be no

direct benefits or personal costs to participating, just as there are no disadvantages, or penalties if you decline. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Although the nature of questions is not expected to cause any emotional upset, if you experience any discomfort and require support or counselling services following the interview, you may contact Lifeline, which is available 24/7 and is free of charge, at +27(0) 86 132 2322, as well as the Wits Crisis Line, +27(0) 800 111 331.

Should you have any queries during or after this study, please feel free to contact me via the details listed below. If any concerns or complaints arise regarding the ethical procedure followed

for this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) via +27(0) 11 717 1408, or via hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Sincerely,

Caitlyn Wong (Researcher)

1884632@students.wits.ac.za, +27(0) 68 336 5068

Supervisor:

Dr Vinitha Jithoo, vinitha.jithoo@wits.ac.za

Appendix B: Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Masters Research Project: **Breaking the Chains of Intergenerational Childhood Poverty: A Narrative Retrospective Study of Resilience**

Researcher: Caitlyn Wong **Supervisor**: Dr Vinitha Jithoo

I, _____ (Full name of participant) am an adult who has full capacity to participate in this research project.

I formally agree to the following: (Please **clearly indicate** your answer by **placing an X**)

This study has been explained to me and I fully understand what this study is about.	**YES**	**NO**
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw if I feel the desire to.	**YES**	**NO**
I acknowledge that this interview will be conducted within strict adherence to Covid 19 regulations. I therefore fully consent to participate in this study.	**YES**	**NO**
I acknowledge that my identity within this research will remain anonymous.	**YES**	**NO**
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	**YES**	**NO**
I give full consent for this interview to be audio recorded.	**YES**	**NO**
I fully consent that any information obtained from my involvement within this project, may be later used by other researchers in an anonymised manner once this research	**YES**	**NO**

project has been concluded. This is subject to other researchers receiving their own ethical clearance.		

Signed on this_____ day

of_____20_____in_____(City).

_____ (Signature of the participant)

_____ (Signature of the researcher/person seeking consent)

_____ (Date signed by researcher/person seeking consent)

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Demographic information

What is your name?

How old are you?

What degree are you studying towards?

What university are you studying at?

Interview Questions

1. What does poverty mean to you?
2. Can you tell me about where you grew up, your family home and the schools you went to?

   Probe: What are the physical, social, psychological experiences of growing up in a socioeconomically disadvantaged background?

3. Can you tell me a story about an experience of poverty or economic difficulty from your childhood?

   Probe: What impact (positive or negative) did the experience of growing up in a socioeconomically disadvantaged context have on physical, socio-emotional, and psychological development?
4. Can you tell me a story about the financial obstacles that you faced in going to your school?

   Probe: Describe the environment, challenges, and support from your school.
5. What influenced your decision to study your particular discipline at university?

Exploring students' constructions of resilience to poverty.

6. When did you realize that you wanted to study at university? What are your thoughts about university?
7. How did you apply for university?

Probe: How did you obtain the money for application fees?

8. How are you coping as a university student?

   Probe: From where did you receive financial support, academic support, social and emotional support?

9. How has your childhood story impacted your adult story?

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

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

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MACC/22/11**
PROJECT TITLE:	Breaking the Chains of Intergenerational Childhood Poverty: A Narrative Retrospective Study of Resilience
INVESTIGATOR	Wong Caitlyn (1884632)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	13 May 2022
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Low Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2024

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

Cc: Dr Vinitha Jithoo (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

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

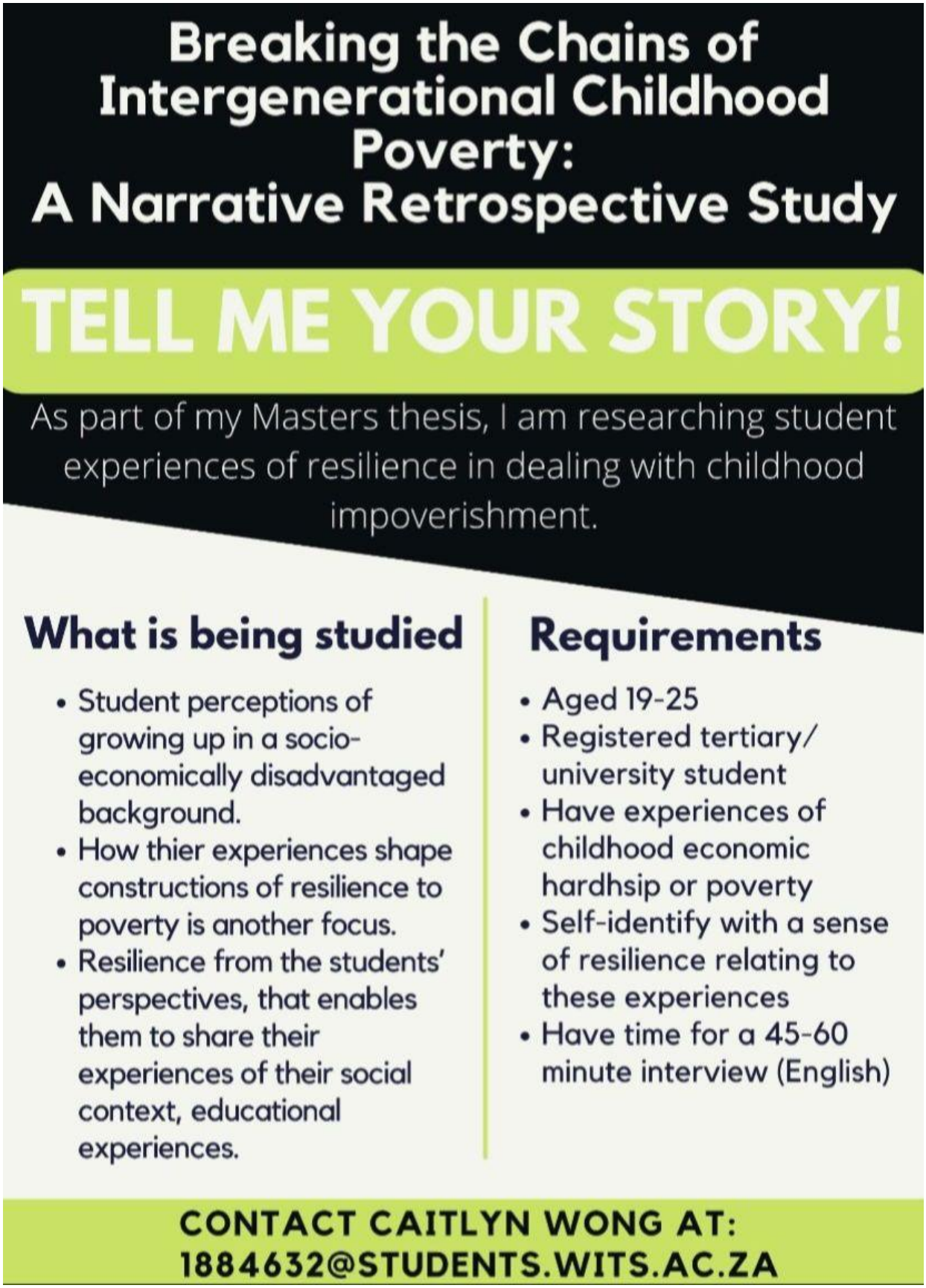
I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

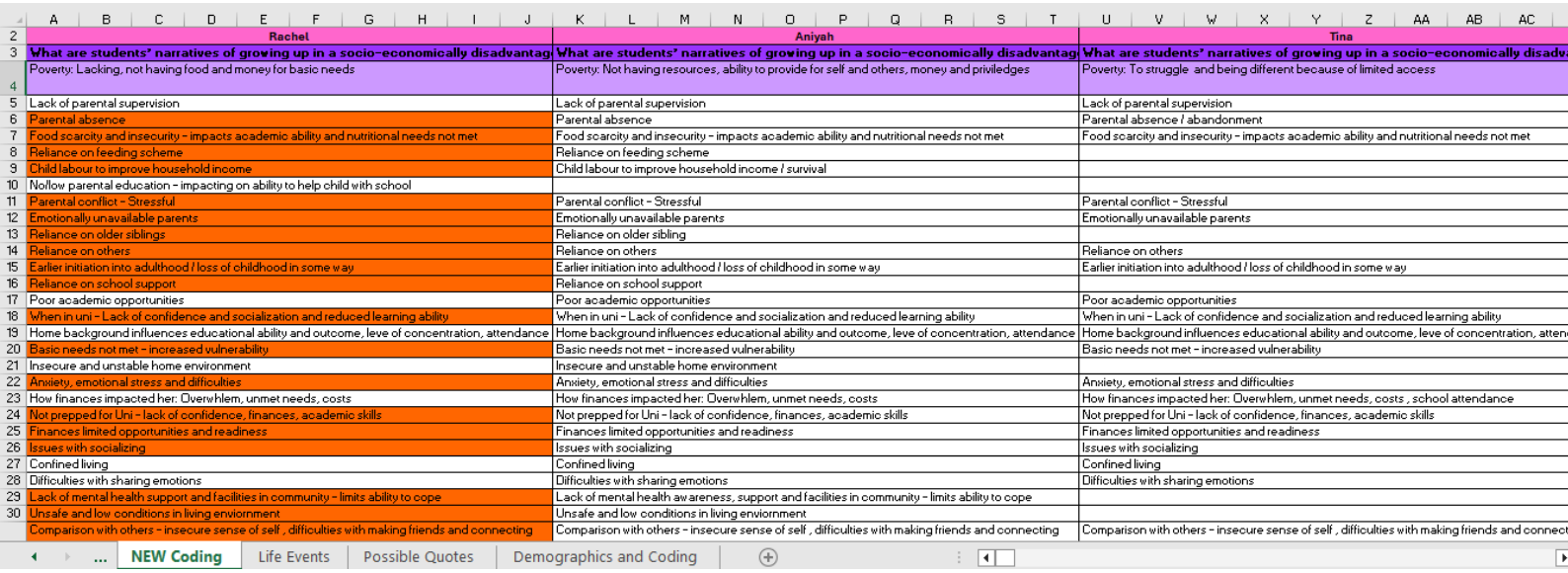
Date 11 August 2022

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

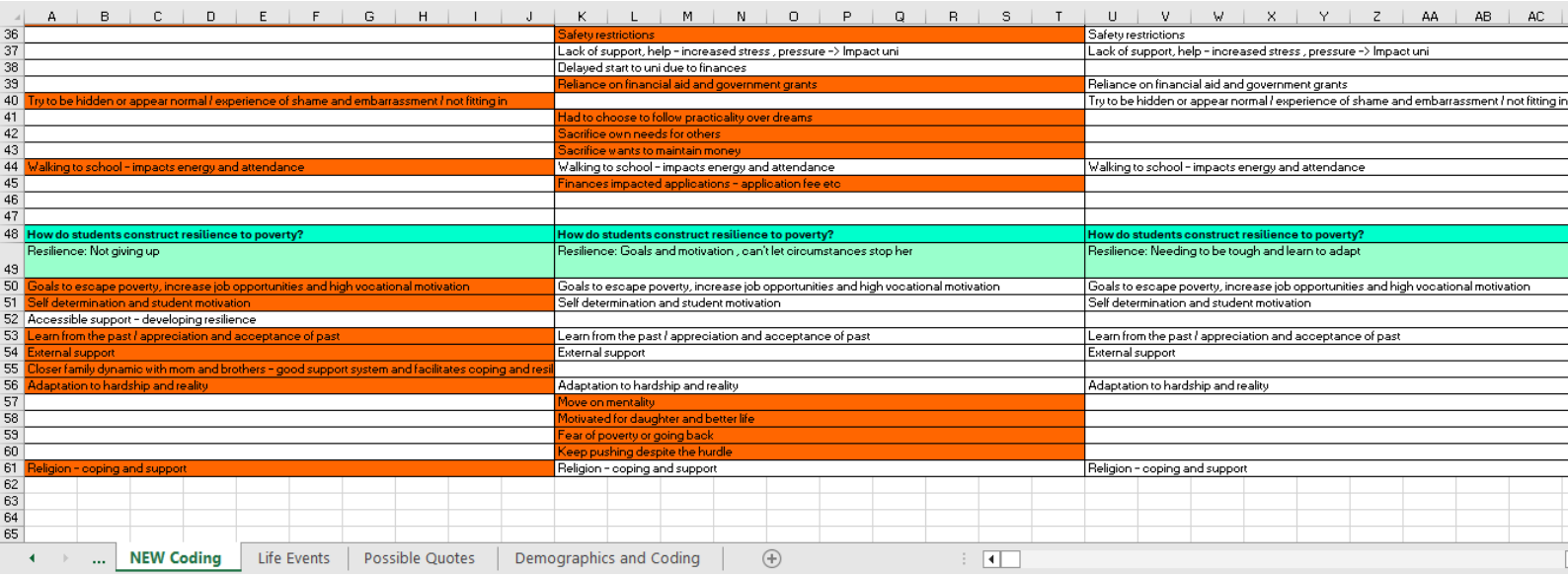
Appendix E: Research Advertisement Poster



Appendix F: Example of the Coding Process



	Rachel	Aniyah	Tina
3	What are students' narratives of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantag	What are students' narratives of growing up in a socio-economically disadvantag	What are students' narratives of growing up in a socio-economically disadv
4	Poverty: Lacking, not having food and money for basic needs	Poverty: Not having resources, ability to provide for self and others, money and priviledges	Poverty: To struggle and being different because of limited access
5	Lack of parental supervision	Lack of parental supervision	Lack of parental supervision
6	Parental absence	Parental absence	Parental absence / abandonment
7	Food scarcity and insecurity - impacts academic ability and nutritional needs not met	Food scarcity and insecurity - impacts academic ability and nutritional needs not met	Food scarcity and insecurity - impacts academic ability and nutritional needs not met
8	Reliance on feeding scheme	Reliance on feeding scheme	
9	Child labour to improve household income	Child labour to improve household income / survival	
10	No/low parental education - impacting on ability to help child with school		
11	Parental conflict - Stressful	Parental conflict - Stressful	Parental conflict - Stressful
12	Emotionally unavailable parents	Emotionally unavailable parents	Emotionally unavailable parents
13	Reliance on older siblings	Reliance on older sibling	
14	Reliance on others	Reliance on others	Reliance on others
15	Earlier initiation into adulthood / loss of childhood in some way	Earlier initiation into adulthood / loss of childhood in some way	Earlier initiation into adulthood / loss of childhood in some way
16	Reliance on school support	Reliance on school support	
17	Poor academic opportunities	Poor academic opportunities	Poor academic opportunities
18	When in uni - Lack of confidence and socialization and reduced learning ability	When in uni - Lack of confidence and socialization and reduced learning ability	When in uni - Lack of confidence and socialization and reduced learning ability
19	Home background influences educational ability and outcome, leve of concentration, attendance	Home background influences educational ability and outcome, leve of concentration, attendance	Home background influences educational ability and outcome, leve of concentration, atten
20	Basic needs not met - increased vulnerability	Basic needs not met - increased vulnerability	Basic needs not met - increased vulnerability
21	Insecure and unstable home environment	Insecure and unstable home environment	
22	Anxiety, emotional stress and difficulties	Anxiety, emotional stress and difficulties	Anxiety, emotional stress and difficulties
23	How finances impacted her: Overwhlem, unmet needs, costs	How finances impacted her: Overwhlem, unmet needs, costs	How finances impacted her: Overwhlem, unmet needs, costs , school attendance
24	Not prepped for Uni - lack of confidence, finances, academic skills	Not prepped for Uni - lack of confidence, finances, academic skills	Not prepped for Uni - lack of confidence, finances, academic skills
25	Finances limited opportunities and readiness	Finances limited opportunities and readiness	Finances limited opportunities and readiness
26	Issues with socializing	Issues with socializing	Issues with socializing
27	Confined living	Confined living	Confined living
28	Difficulties with sharing emotions	Difficulties with sharing emotions	Difficulties with sharing emotions
29	Lack of mental health support and facilities in community - limits ability to cope	Lack of mental health awareness, support and facilities in community - limits ability to cope	
30	Unsafe and low conditions in living enviornment	Unsafe and low conditions in living enviornment	
	Comparison with others - insecure sense of self , difficulties with making friends and connecting	Comparison with others - insecure sense of self , difficulties with making friends and connecting	Comparison with others - insecure sense of self , difficulties with making friends and connect



36		Safety restrictions	Safety restrictions
37		Lack of support, help - increased stress , pressure -> Impact uni	Lack of support, help - increased stress , pressure -> Impact uni
38		Delayed start to uni due to finances	
39		Reliance on financial aid and government grants	Reliance on financial aid and government grants
40	Try to be hidden or appear normal / experience of shame and embarrassment / not fitting in		Try to be hidden or appear normal / experience of shame and embarrassment / not fitting in
41		Had to choose to follow practicality over dreams	
42		Sacrifice own needs for others	
43		Sacrifice wants to maintain money	
44	Walking to school - impacts energy and attendance	Walking to school - impacts energy and attendance	Walking to school - impacts energy and attendance
45		Finances impacted applications - application fee etc	
46			
47			
48	How do students construct resilience to poverty?	How do students construct resilience to poverty?	How do students construct resilience to poverty?
49	Resilience: Not giving up	Resilience: Goals and motivation , can't let circumstances stop her	Resilience: Needing to be tough and learn to adapt
50	Goals to escape poverty, increase job opportunities and high vocational motivation	Goals to escape poverty, increase job opportunities and high vocational motivation	Goals to escape poverty, increase job opportunities and high vocational motivation
51	Self determination and student motivation	Self determination and student motivation	Self determination and student motivation
52	Accessible support - developing resilience		
53	Learn from the past / appreciation and acceptance of past	Learn from the past / appreciation and acceptance of past	Learn from the past / appreciation and acceptance of past
54	External support	External support	External support
55	Closer family dynamic with mom and brothers - good support system and facilitates coping and resil		
56	Adaptation to hardship and reality	Adaptation to hardship and reality	Adaptation to hardship and reality
57		Move on mentality	
58		Motivated for daughter and better life	
59		Fear of poverty or going back	
60		Keep pushing despite the hurdle	
61	Religion - coping and support	Religion - coping and support	Religion - coping and support
62			
63			
64			
65			