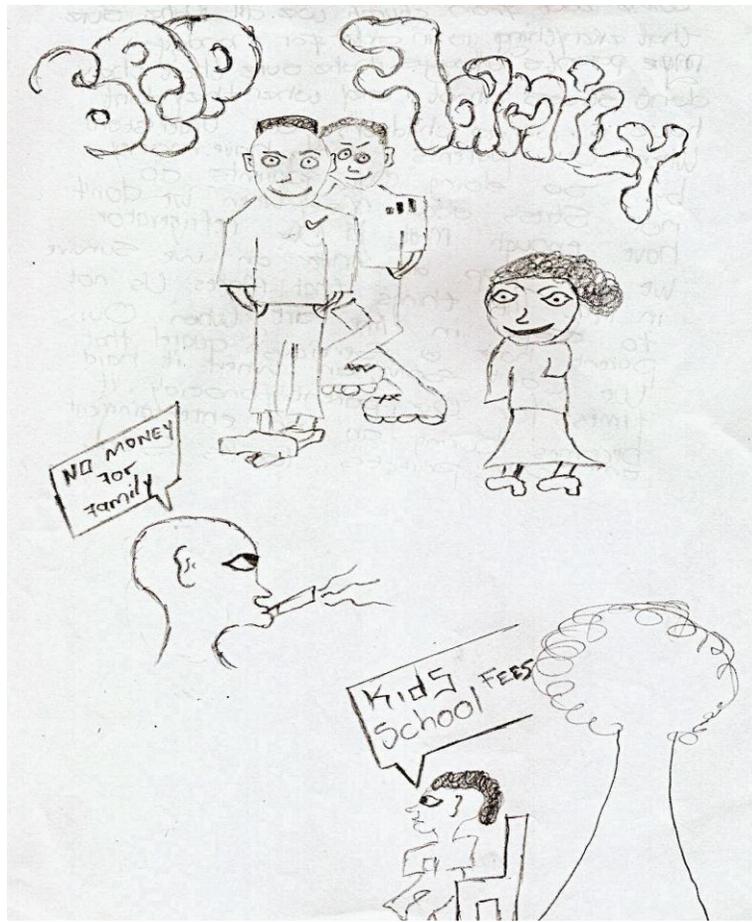


## Section 3: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations



## **INTRODUCTION**

In the overview and the preceding articles (manuscripts) of this thesis, literature was critically reviewed, research findings were reported and conclusions were described. These findings and conclusions were synthesised and are now presented as the final conclusions and recommendations derived from this research project. Thus, a retrospective evaluation of the research is offered. Limitations of the research are also discussed. Guidelines for the operationalisation of the conceptual model for psychosocial well-being of South African families are given and finally, a personal narrative about the encounters with families who participated in the research is presented.

## **LITERATURE CONCLUSIONS**

From the literature examined for the purpose of this study, it is clear that well-being is a popular topic for research, especially in the field of positive psychology where there is a wealth of information available on happiness, flourishing, resilience and well-being. However, the well-being of families has not received as much research focus in the field of positive psychology as has individual well-being through constructs such as strengths, subjective well-being, flourishing etc. Family well-being seems to be theoretically and empirically positioned more in the fields of resilience and family sciences like family therapy, as well as in developmental psychology. Research and literature that specifically focus on families within a South African context and the well-being of South African families in particular is non-existent, except for the work of Louw and Louw (2009). It is unclear if the literature is limited because there simply is not much research being done in South Africa on the topic, or whether the research findings are not being published and made available in scientific journals.

The constructs that were identified for data collection in the first phase of the study and article one namely, family functioning style (measured with the Family Functioning Style Scale; FFS), attachment (measured with the Inventory of parent- and peer attachment; IPPA), family satisfaction (measured with the Family Satisfaction Scale; FSS), family hardiness (measured with the Family Hardiness Index; FHI) and dimensions of family functioning or family relational patterns (measured with the McMaster Family Assessment Device; FAD), were apparently prominent and well-researched constructs in family sciences and literature on these topics were

easily accessed. Again, literature regarding these constructs and their use in South African research was hard to find and no evidence could be found that the Family Functioning Style Scale has been used in any South African studies.

With regard to the literature control for the qualitative results of article two, I was able to find literature on theoretical postulations or research results that seemed to support the themes that were identified from family interviews, narratives and drawings. Some themes, for example communication, doing things together, spirituality and mutual support, were well-researched topics and there were ample sources, literature and research available with which the current findings corresponded. Other themes, such as negativity, financial difficulties and discipline or obedience were hard to find in literature and it could mean that these themes were perhaps context specific to this group of participants. Furthermore, the literature control seemed to suggest that more recent literature on the various topics only repeated or reconfirmed the findings reported in much older literature, and that in some cases only older sources were available on the topics. This perhaps indicates a decline in research on these family related topics, which is a cause for concern.

One of the biggest challenges for this study was defining the South African family in a way that captures the essence and reality of South African families overall without narrowing the family context or excluding some types of families. What made this challenging was the fact that South African families are unique and diverse, with many different variations, forms and structures. The family landscape showed the following: extended family plays an important role in the lives of many South Africans, especially traditional African cultures which are collectivistic in nature; single-parent households are on the increase; some children do not live with any of their biological parents but with guardians; and there is the increasing feature of child-headed households. The current South African law literature is also at a loss for a definition of the family concept that is completely accurate. Moreover, there are many different and varying definitions available for the term family worldwide, and I found that most of the definitions also referred to the complex and multidimensional nature of family, irrespective of culture and country.

To conclude, the family is a crucial and fundamental structure in society that powerfully influences the lives of individuals and the quality of community life. South African families, communities and the nation can only benefit from more research and literature on strengths and weaknesses with regard to family psychosocial well-being.

## **EMPIRICAL CONCLUSIONS**

The research design and method used in this study on the psychosocial well-being of South African families proved to be appropriate, as the objectives stated to guide the research were all met and the research questions posed, were answered. The different methods of data collection were complimentary to each other and ensured the validity and quality of the data obtained. The findings reflected what was theoretically expected from the perspectives of positive psychology, developmental psychology and marital/couples and family therapy. The results reported for the quantitative research described in article one indicate that a relatively small group of youths in this study experienced optimal family psychosocial well-being. The results depicted in the first article also supported the hypothesis for a two-factor measurement model of family psychosocial well-being consisting of a family functioning and a family feelings factor that theoretically makes sense and finds support in existing family related theory. The findings reported for the qualitative research described in article two suggest that communication, mutual support, doing things together as a family and spirituality are the most prominent contributing factors, while financial difficulties and conflicts or arguments are the most prominent hindering factors with regard to family psychosocial well-being in the group of participants. These findings along with relevant literature, served as empirical data for the development of a conceptual framework and model in the last phase of the study. In the third and final article, an exposition of theory generation as methodology is given and described in three levels according to the approach of Dickoff, James, and Wiedenbach (1968). The implementation thereof resulted in the formulation of a conceptual framework and model for family psychosocial well-being in a South African context.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE MEASUREMENT MODEL**

The results reported in the quantitative research (Article 1) supported an integrated, multi-dimensional two-factor model of family psychosocial well-being consisting of family functioning and family feelings, which made theoretical sense and showed some agreement with other existing and related theoretical models. This measurement model can be operationalized, validated and used for assessment or for guidelines in treatment and prevention-oriented programmes relating to family life. It could be useful as the basis for programmes aimed at workshops, life skills classes and other psycho-educational applications that enhance family competencies, strengths and overall psychosocial well-being of families. The findings can also be applied in family therapy and guidance settings and should be made available through publication and presentations, as well as used for the training and practice of family therapists and counsellors.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS WITH REGARD TO THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL**

The model was based on a conceptual framework and intended to depict family psychosocial well-being in a South African context meets the evaluation criteria of clarity, simplicity, accessibility, generalisability and importance. The model could be operationalised, evaluated and validated through research and has much potential for theory building and for the development of a comprehensive psycho-educational programme and research projects that can be included. It is my hope that the model will be applied for this purpose in South Africa since there are currently no such models available. Table 1 provides guidelines for operationalization of the model through family enrichment workshops, family counseling sessions, parenting skills training etc. It should be taken into consideration that the guidelines provided below and their suggested activities only act as examples and may not always fit with all families in all contexts.

Table 1

*Guidelines for operationalisation of the conceptual model for family psychosocial well-being*

Objectives to enhance the contributing factors	Guidelines
<b>Togetherness</b>	<p>Time should be invested to build and maintain relationships through for example routine family activities such as doing chores together and sharing meals.</p> <p>Partake in family hobbies and outdoor activities such as craft projects, cricket, tennis, fishing, camping, going for walks, etc.</p> <p>Plan fun activities such as a movie night with popcorn and DVDs.</p> <p>Playing games regularly such as board or card games.</p> <p>Appreciate each other's company and the time that you have together.</p>
<b>Effective communication</b>	<p>Communicate regularly and make time to discuss family issues, family plans, family members' feelings and thoughts.</p> <p>Give each member in the family an opportunity to express themselves freely.</p> <p>Make use of clear and direct communication and say what you mean instead of speaking in riddles.</p> <p>Listen actively to each other.</p>
<b>Spirituality</b>	<p>Practice your spiritual belief and make time for spiritual growth.</p> <p>Make time for spiritual activities like prayer.</p> <p>Create opportunities to discuss spiritual matters in the family.</p> <p>Be involved with, and contribute to your religious community and/or make time to network.</p>
<b>Mutual support</b>	<p>Be there in times of need and provide support through good and bad times.</p> <p>Demonstrate support and show interest by attending different family members' events.</p> <p>Provide different types of support (emotional, social, financial, and motivational) to protect family members from negative environmental influences.</p>
<b>Respect</b>	<p>Show respect to other family members to evoke counter respect.</p>

<b>Acceptance and understanding</b>	Respect each other's space, privacy and possessions.
	Respect yourself by taking care of yourself, accepting yourself and improving yourself.
	Respect people outside of the family by not being biased or prejudiced.
	Accept each other unconditionally by not judging each other and making room for different opinions, personalities, etc.
	Give each other the freedom to be who you are and do not force other family members to be something they are not.
<b>Healthy/safe community/environment</b>	Be understanding with regard to different personalities, needs and wants of family members.
	Organize the house so that each member has a place and some privacy as far as possible.
	Try to create a comforting, safe, pleasant environment for the family.
	Be involved in the community to establish contact within the neighbourhood to get to know neighbours and others in the community better.
	Explore opportunities within the community such as carpooling and neighbourliness that can contribute to family members' safety.
<b>Education</b>	Know you surrounding community and environment in order to put safety measures in place.
	Emphasize the importance of education, especially in a developing country such as South Africa, and the role it can play in family member's lives for example, to get a job, personal growth, etc.
	Motivate each other in educational endeavors and to contribute to society in a meaningful manner.
	Provide opportunities for education through appropriate schooling and providing necessary resources.
<b>Effective problem solving</b>	Develop problem solving skills by taking necessary time to discuss problems.
	Partake in constructive problem solving and do not avoid problems.
	Avoid conflicts or arguments when problem solving.
	Focus on finding a solution instead of focusing on the problem itself or becoming overwhelmed by it.
	Make use of family discussions, brain storming and explore different alternatives to solve problems.
	Find solutions and implement plans actively and learn from the process.

<b>Discipline</b>	Set household rules and implement them.
	Enforce constructive discipline to encourage good conduct and respect.
	Make use of authoritative parenting.
	Be clear on the implications or consequences of not abiding to the rules.
<b>Loving each other</b>	Demonstrate love and care for other family members.
	Create a caring and loving atmosphere in the house.
	Love unconditionally and do not withhold love as punishment for negative conduct.
<b>Shared responsibilities/chores</b>	Give each family member a fair amount of chores such as cleaning, cooking, doing the dishes, etc.
	Show appreciation for family members' contributions.
	Give chores and responsibilities as a learning opportunity or opportunity for growth in children to enhance their self-esteem.
<b>Parental/guardian guidance</b>	Model and enforce good habits as parents/guardians.
	Act as role models and as an example for children.
	Provide guidance and sound advice throughout children's developmental stages.
<b>Honesty and trust</b>	Reprimand family members for being dishonest.
	Live by constructive values.
	Practice openness and honesty in the family.
	Find ways to build trust in the family.
<b>Appreciating/being proud of each other</b>	Show appropriate trust in each other.
	Express and show appreciation for each other's contributions in the family and society.
	Express and show pride in family member's achievements.
	Learn to notice, appreciate and give recognition to family members no matter how small the contribution or achievement may be.

<b>Healthy friendships</b>	Spend time with people that have a positive influence and that add value to you and your family's life.
	Build a supportive social network outside of the family.
	Avoid negative friendships and/or spending too much time with people outside of the family.
	Realize the importance of friendships in childhood and especially teenage years as a social support system.
<b>Encouraging independence/autonomy/responsibility</b>	Allow children to practice independence and to make age-appropriate decisions.
	Make use of authoritative parenting by allowing a moderate degree of control and allowing children to take responsibility appropriate for their ages.
	Avoid smothering children and keeping them from exploring and learning (within boundaries) so that they can learn life skills.
	Be sensitive to each other's non-verbal messages and cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, hand gestures, posture, etc.
<b>Being able to read each other</b>	Develop the ability to observe and appropriately respond to non-verbal messages of other family members.
	Differentiate between wants and needs according to your financial constraints.
	Discipline should be exercised in the family to save money and prioritize what is important in difficult financial times.
<b>Differentiating/prioritizing between wants and needs</b>	Build financial security by saving and being responsible with your finances.
	Teach children the value of money.
	Learn to control and adapt to negative influences outside of the family.
	Do not allow unacceptable or inappropriate interference from neighbors or friends, etc.
<b>Adapting to/shutting out negative influences</b>	Stand together as a family and do not let negative influences tear you apart.
	Focus on the positive and do not partake in gossip or slander, etc.

## LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following limitations regarding this study and recommendations for future research were identified:

- The measuring instruments that were used for the first phase of the study only measure certain aspects of family psychosocial well-being and therefore give a limited profile of family life.
- Longitudinal research on aspects of family psychosocial well-being and further quantitative research with more instruments that measure other aspects of family psychosocial well-being is recommended.
- The measuring instruments used in the first phase of data collection should be validated for use in the wider South African context, and translation of these questionnaires into the major African languages may also be useful.
- Quantitative and qualitative research is necessary in order to understand and explain why only a low percentage experience well-being within their family and whether the challenging developmental phase of adolescence plays a role in this phenomenon.
- It would be valuable to do research on individual family members' (embedded in the family) strengths that contribute to family psychosocial well-being since, the qualitative themes discussed in Article 2 only focused on aspects that interactionally contribute to family psychosocial well-being in the contexts of the family, the community and a larger context.
- Longitudinal qualitative research on the experience of family psychosocial well-being in a South African study is recommended.
- The use of larger samples may provide a broader perspective with regard to qualitative data collection.
- Explorative individual interviews may encourage and facilitate the sharing of information with regard to the experience of family psychosocial well-being and contributing and hindering aspects since some family members find it hard to share with other family members present.
- The findings may be useful in family oriented programmes, workshops and facilitated sessions to educate and inform families on family psychosocial well-being, thereby empowering them with knowledge and skills. The findings could also be useful in family therapy/guidance and should be made available through professional and/or popular

publications and presentations. The training of family therapists/counselors can be enhanced by the current findings.

### **SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it contributes to the knowledge base in the social sciences in South Africa with regard to family psychosocial well-being in different and diverse family structures and highlights wellness features and existing strengths within families that can be used for enhancement programmes. The study also contributes to the practice fields of family therapy, positive psychology and developmental psychology as it can be applied in counseling and psycho-education settings by family therapists/counselors and be made available to non-profit organizations such as Families South Africa (FAMSA) and Life Line Southern Africa. Furthermore, the study meets the need for practice and research models of family psychosocial well-being in South Africa, which are currently non-existent. Both a measurement model and conceptual model for the psychosocial well-being of South African families are proposed and guidelines provided for the operationalization of the latter.

### **PERSONAL NARRATIVE**

Throughout this research process of exploring families' experiences and discovering their strengths, I was constantly reminded that every family is incredibly unique and special. From the very first interview to the last, I was taken on a roller coaster ride of experiences and emotions, both my own and some of theirs. I was invited into their private worlds, sat at their tables and listened to their stories. I doubt any of the families I spoke to realize the great deal of respect I have for them and the extent to which they have touched my life. I do not think any of them realize how meaningful their contributions have been. Thus, I was inspired to write a short narrative on each family to give you, the reader, a window to see through; a glimpse into my experience of their reality.

#### **Family 1 "When you cry, I cry"**

This was my first interview and an incredibly difficult one. When I made an appointment with this family, I had no idea what I would be walking into: A mother who is a nurse, twins (a boy and girl) and a son with a severe form of epilepsy. At first, the family seemed comfortable and relaxed, but as we got deeper into the interview the atmosphere became emotional. As the twin brother tried to explain to his mother how he felt about certain matters, he started to cry very softly and hid his face so that nobody would see. In response to

this, his older brother who has epilepsy started to cry openly. The mother got up to comfort him and the twin brother left the table only to come back with a tissue for his brother. This scene was very touching. Later the mother said the interview was “like a mirror” because it also helped her to see the things she didn’t want to see or couldn’t see.

### **Family 2 “Sparkle like diamonds”**

As I arrived at the home, I was taken aback by the difficult circumstances the family was living in. The house seemed to be falling apart. I walked in and was greeted by an Indian family, who indeed, sparkled like diamonds. This family was an absolute delight to sit with and talk to. The way they spoke about each other was so sincere and almost innocent. It was clear that this family always has, and will continue to enjoy each others’ company and truly value their family life and their closeness.

### **Family 3 “More love and happiness”**

When I first arrived, the younger daughter (8) came to open the gate for me. She was very polite with a bright smile. This family was easy to talk to: A bubbly, talkative mom and three daughters (one too young to contribute much to the interview). At a later stage in the interview the question was posed: “What do you think will enhance your family’s psychosocial well-being?” After discussing the question for some time, the mom turns to the younger daughter (8) and asks her if she needs something more, to which she replies: “More. More love and happiness.” This answer seemed so simple and direct and for a while we sat in silence. I suppose one could never have enough love and happiness.

### **Family 4 “Can I please pick you up”**

An incredible story of a teacher and her husband who adopted three African children (who are learners at the school where she is teaching) after their parents died in a car accident. My favorite moment is when the youngest son (10) said: “That’s what I like about this family. We don’t say ‘Ah gee, you fell’, we say ‘Can I please pick you up?’ The oldest adopted son (18) hardly said anything during the interview, but finally shared this: “There’s more to the word ‘family’. You can’t just say it’s a family. Otherwise, I don’t know...we’d just be friends. So obviously that means there’s something that’s binding us...if we weren’t a family then we wouldn’t be here, sitting like this.” Enough said.

**Family 5 “Welcome home”**

This family’s home is located in a township. Arriving in front of their house, I found the mother who had recently had a hysterectomy, waiting for me outside in her pajamas. When I got out of the car I was welcomed with a hug. This interview was more like a chat with old friends and like coming home to a place you’ve known your whole life. This was the first family I spoke to where the children were eager to share and easily said what they were thinking and feeling. A breath of fresh air; a miniature holiday.

**Family 6 “Just happy”**

Unfortunately, I only had the opportunity to speak to the mom and younger daughter as the father was working and the older sister (24) is out of the house. The daughter seemed unsure and constantly turned to her mother when she said something for reassurance. The mother, on the other hand, said right from the start that if I didn’t stop her she would just talk and talk. This was true – she found it very easy to share. Throughout the interview she mentioned several times that she just wants her children to be happy. She might have said a lot, but I think that summed up her feelings pretty well.

**Family 7 “Protect our property”**

This was a difficult interview for me. When the mother was phoned to make an interview she said that everything wasn’t all that well. For some reason, this made me want to do an interview with them even more – it seemed like this family would be open and honest. The atmosphere was very tense in the beginning. Yet, both daughters (13 and 10) were quite willing to share compared to some of the other families that I had spoken to and both said positive things about their mother even though the older one seemed quite upset with her. This family’s home is in a dangerous location, and they put emphasis on protecting their property. I wasn’t disappointed though – they were just as honest and open as I had hoped.

**Family 8 “Different”**

I think the grandparents, especially the grandmother, play a very important role in this family. The mother would nod and say something here and there very softly, but that was pretty much it. The daughter is an only child and seemed closest to her grandmother. The grandparents put a great deal of emphasis on their faith and how it contributes to their lives, but also makes them different and perhaps a bit separate from the outside world. Overall, it

was a pleasant, easy conversation with a bit of role reversal here and there (the grandparents were very interested to learn more about me as well).

### **Family 9 “Talk to one another”**

This was a single-parent family with three children of which two were already out of school, but struggling to find jobs. The interview was held in an office at the secondary school that the youngest daughter attended. When I arrived, the mother was already waiting and she clearly went through a lot of trouble and effort to be there for the interview. When I first phoned her to ask if she would be willing to participate, she immediately said yes and unlike many of the other families I phoned, she kept her promise. The mother stressed during the interview that it would make her happy if her son could just find a job. The youngest daughter, who was the only child that participated in the interview, seemed very strong and gave much input. At one point she said: “...as a family if you have something like, something like a bad feeling or something that is happening inside, I suggest that you must talk to one another so that you can be helped, and not just keep quiet, ‘cause that thing is going to eat you alone.” This was my last interview, but as I left the school, I remember thinking that no family will ever be the same or say and express things in the same way as another family.

To conclude, this study was a successful investigation and exploration of family psychosocial well-being in a South African context. The objectives stated to guide the research were all achieved. The contribution of the study – as far as being formative and preventative with regard to family psychosocial well-being in a South African context – is clear. I set out to know more, and learned and discovered much more than I initially thought I would. I left my world and saw other realities through the eyes of participants and I discovered something truly special. I went through it all – the dizzying highs, the frustrating lows, the ‘writer’s block’, the crocodile tears, the moments of pure genius and the times when it all seemed impossible to achieve. I am sure that the person I am now is closer to the person I am supposed to be than the person I was before this process started. For me, this experience was much like writing my own narrative and combining it with others’ stories, resulting in a tale which, I feel, is greater than the sum of its parts. It has had a profound impact on me, and although the reach and effect will be different for each individual, I hope this tale will move you and reside in your heart and thoughts.