Exploring the nature of self-identified strengths of families living in a resource-constrained environment in Ikageng, Potchefstroom

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Research Psychology at the Potchefstroom Campus of the North-West University

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PREFACE

This dissertation is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Research Psychology. Section B is presented in article format and will be submitted to a journal, titled *Journal on Family Issues*, published by Sage Publications. Please note, for the purpose of examination the 6th edition of APA referencing was used in-text and in the reference list. Thus, if this reference method does not align with that of the examiner, please refer to the following link:


The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the nature of self-identified strengths in families that live in a resource-constrained environment in Ikageng, Potchefstroom. This study describes the nuances of self-identified strengths of families in Ikageng and the resilient nature of the family as a social structure, irrespective of constraints in their living environment.

This study is of interest to emerging scholars focused on developing issues in South Africa with the emphasis on the family and its central position in the contemporary South African context. Researchers and people concerned with policy development and/or public servants can also use these findings as a point of reference for further exploration. The findings of this study can contribute to intervention strategies that aim to strengthen families in constraint environments in an effort to enhance the quality of life of South African families.
INTENDED PUBLISHER AND GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The article (Section B) will be submitted to a journal, titled *Journal on Family Issues*, published by Sage Publications.

Sage Publications is an independent publishing company that strives to educate and inform researchers, students and practitioners on a wide variety of subjects and fields. The company publishes books, e-books and peer-reviewed journals in science, social sciences, humanities, business, medicine and technology.

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The manuscript should include four major sections (in this order): Title Page, Abstract, Main Body and References. Sections in a manuscript may include the following (in this order): (1) Title page, (2) Abstract, (3) Keywords, (4) Text, (5) Notes, (6) References, (7) Tables, (8) Figures, and (9) Appendices.

1. **Title page.** Please include the following:

   Full article title; acknowledgments and credits; each author’s complete name and institutional affiliation(s); grant numbers and/or funding information; corresponding author (name, address, phone/fax, email).
2. **Abstract.** Print the abstract (150 words or less) on a separate page headed by the full article title. Omit author(s)’s names.

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   a. **Headings and subheadings.** Subheadings should indicate the organisation of the content of the manuscript. Generally, three heading levels are sufficient to organise text. Level 1 heading should be centred, boldface, upper & lowercase, Level 2 heading should be flush left, boldface, upper & lowercase, Level 3 heading should be indented, boldface, lowercase paragraph heading that ends with a period, Level 4 heading should be indented, boldface, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading that ends with a period, and Level 5 heading should be indented, italicized, lowercase paragraph heading that ends with a period.  

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   (ii) Authors with the same last name: use first initials with the last names to prevent confusion. For example, (L. Hughes, 2001; P. Hughes, 1998).  

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A large research project like this is never the work of only one person. The contributions of various people in their different ways have made this possible. I would like to extend my appreciation especially to the following contributors.

I thank God for providing me with the wisdom and ability to complete this research study to the fullest of my capabilities. He provided me with the patience and perseverance to see this study through and helping me to always stay positive.

Ms Janine van Aardt, for making this research possible and not only being my supervisor, but also my encourager, mentor and supporter. Her guidance and advice throughout the entire process is greatly appreciated. She pushed me to be a better version of myself and helped me to improve my research skills. Without her faith in my abilities, this research study would not have been possible.

Prof. Herman Grobler, for letting me be part of his larger project and assisting with many technical aspects of the application process and the study in general. Thank you.

Madaleen Botha, for the time and effort she put in to critically read through this dissertation and give her feedback. Her input is greatly appreciated.

And finally, the financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the NRF.
DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this research to my parents, Deon and Balinda Koekemoer, who have supported and encouraged me throughout my studies. They are the reason I was able to complete my studies and continually helped me to strive to be better.

I also dedicate this thesis to my uncle, Braam Botes, for his financial and emotional assistance. Without his contribution and assistance, I would never have been able to further my studies and complete my research.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, Mickey and Sylvia Botes. It is a great honour and a blessing to have a grandfather and grandmother who show me unconditional love and support. I applaud them for all the knowledge, skills and wisdom they pass on to their grandchildren. The legacy they will leave behind is invaluable. Thank you for your interest in my studies and prayers to get me through this process.
SUMMARY

The family is a complex system embedded in every society. The family as a social institution has undergone a tremendous transformation over the past years, where members of a family represent more than just a collection of individuals. As a social institution, the family consists of members from different generations that share physical and emotional spaces in time. The transformation of the family as a social institution shifts the focus from a traditional view of the family to a contemporary view, where different types of families emerge. These types include: homosexual families, step-families, extended families, single parents, and child-headed families.

In developing countries such as South Africa, families are exposed to numerous obstacles in their living environment that are translated into the interpersonal spaces of each family. Poverty and unemployment are at the forefront in contemporary South Africa, where families suffer from numerous constraints. However, an interesting characteristic of South African families is their adaptive and vibrant nature, where members face challenges together and overcome them by means of support and cohesion. In an effort to understand South African families entrenched in their natural living spaces, the resilience theory was applied to explore the self-identified strengths of families living in resource-constrained areas.

There is a vast body of research that describes the family; highlighting their dysfunction and deficits, but providing little insight into the surviving nature of families living in environments with ever-increasing constraints. The aim of this study was to explore self-identified strengths of families living in a resource-constrained environment in Ikageng, Potchefstroom. This study was approved by the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The researcher utilised qualitative research methods, applying a qualitative descriptive design and collecting data by means of participation learning action (PLA) techniques. Venn diagrams and free drawings from the
researcher’s PLA toolbox were utilised. These are methods that allow the researcher to gather information and understand the view of individuals, irrespective of their basic education level. Participating families were able to transfer their knowledge by means of visual representations, whereafter the researcher could ask questions and probe to understand the nuances of the visual representation linked to the research question. Visual data was used to stimulate conversations, and verbatim data was transcribed and analysed by means of thematic analyses.

The findings of this study support the importance of a strength perspective on families and revealed four main themes. Families identified their strengths embedded in the complex interconnectedness between individual members and extended networks outside of the nuclear family. Firstly, relational strengths represent the repertoire of relational connectedness (interpersonal connections) in families and emerged as a core strength unfolding on three different levels of interaction. Within these three levels of interaction, each member of the family and the community is a resource into which families could tap during adverse circumstances. Secondly, the theme of spirituality and beliefs arose unsurprisingly, taking into consideration previous research that emphasises the centrality of spirituality in families across their lifespan. Spirituality and beliefs transcend the self of individual family members by creating a sense of meaning and harmony while connecting the self to other individuals in their nuclear and broader environment. A third theme was the reciprocal nature of support across generations in the families, where members share currencies – either in the form of material or emotional support. These currencies of support are crucial to survival, especially in resource-constrained environments. Fourthly, families identified encouragement and aspirations as the most important strengths that feed into a feeling of hope. These findings contribute to empirical knowledge of the structure of families
in a South African context; their self-identified needs; and, more importantly, the nuanced nature of these strengths against the backdrop of the current socio-economic climate.

*Keywords*: Families, self-identified strengths, resource-constrained environment.
Die familie is ‘n ingewikkelde sisteem vasgelê in elke samelewing. Die familie as ‘n sosiale instelling het oor die afgelope jare ‘n geweldige transformasie ondergaan, waarin lede van ‘n familie meer verteenwoordig as slegs ‘n versameling van individue. As ‘n sosiale instelling bestaan die familie uit lede vanuit verskillende generasies wat fisiese en emosionele ruimtes in tyd deel. Die transformasie van die familie as ‘n sosiale instelling verskuif die fokus van ‘n tradisionele siening van die familie na ‘n hedendaagse siening waaruit verskillende tipes families na vore kom. Hierdie tipes sluit in: homoseksuele families, stief-families, uitgebreide families, enkelouers, en families met kinders aan die hoof.

In ontwikkelende lande soos Suid Afrika word families blootgestel aan verskeie struikelblokke in hul leefomgewing wat herlei word na die interpersoonlike ruimtes van elke familie. Armoede en werkloosheid is aan die voorpunt in hedendaagse Suid Afrika, waar families aan verskeie tekortkominge lei. ‘n Interessante karaktereienskap van Suid Afrikaanse families is egter hul aanpasbare en dinamiese aard, waarin lede uitdagings saam aanpak en oorkom deur middel van ondersteuning en samehang. In ‘n poging om Suid Afrikaanse families, gegrond in hul natuurlike leefruimtes, te verstaan, is die geeskragtigheidstorie toegepas om die self-geïdentifiseerde sterktes van families in hulpbron-beperkte gebiede te ondersoek.

Daar is ‘n ontsaglike navorsingskorps wat die familie beskryf; wat hul wanfunksionering en tekortkominge uitlig, maar wat min inisig bied tot die oorlewingsaard van families wat bly in omgewings met ewig-toenemende beperkings. Die doel van hierdie studie was om die self-geïdentifiseerde sterktes van families wat bly in ‘n hulpbron-beperkte gebied in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, te ondersoek. Die studie is goedgekeur deur die Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) van die Noordwes-Universiteit, Potchefstroom Kampus. Die navorser het kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes gebruik deur ‘n kwalitatiewe beskrywende
ontwerp toe te pas en data in te samel deur middel van deelname-leertegnieke (DLT). Venn-diagramme en vrye sketse vanuit die navorser se DLT gereedskapskis is gebruik. Hierdie is metodes wat die navorser toelaat om inligting in te samel en die siening van individue te verstaan, ongeag hul basiese vlak van opvoeding. Deelnemende families kon hul kennis deur middel van visuele uitbeeldings oordra, waarna die navorser vrae kon vra en kon peil om die nuances van die visuele uitbeelding verstaan aan die hand van die navorsingsvraag. Visuele data is gebruik om gesprekke te stimuleer, en verbatim data is transkribeer en geanaliseer deur middel van tematiese analise.

Die bevindinge van hierdie studie ondersteun die belangrikheid van ‘n sterkte-perspektief op families, en het vier kerntemas onthul. Families het hul sterktes geïdentifiseer wat vasgelê is in die ingewikkelde interverbondenheid tussen individuele lede en uitgebreide netwerke buite die kernfamilie. Eerstens verteenwoordig relasionele sterktes die repertoire van relasionele verbondenheid (interpersoonlike verbindinge) in families, en het dit as ‘n kernsterkte na vore gekom wat op drie verskillende vlakke van interaksie ontvou. Binne hierdie drie vlakke van interaksie is elke lid van die familie en die gemeenskap ‘n hulpbron waarby families kan inskakel gedurende ongunstige omstandighede. Tweedens het die tema van spiritualiteit en geloofsoortuigings sonder verrassing opgedui, gegee vorige navorsing wat die sentrale rol van spiritualiteit in families oor hul leeftyd beklemtoon. Spiritualiteit en geloofsoortuigings oortref die self van individuele familielede deur ‘n sin van betekenis en harmonie te skep, terwyl dit die self verbind aan ander individue in hul kern- en breër omgewing. ‘n Derde tema was die wedersydse aard van ondersteuning regoor generasies in die families, waar lede ruilmiddele deel – in die vorm van óf materiële óf emosionele ondersteuning. Hierdie ruilmiddele van ondersteuning is kardinaal tot oorlewing, veral in hulpbron-beperkte omgewings. Vierdens het families aanmoediging en aspirasies as die belangrikste sterktes geïdentifiseer wat in ‘n gevoel van hoop invloei. Hierdie bevindinge dra
by tot empiriese kennis van die struktuur van families in ‘n Suid Afrikaanse konteks; hul self-geïdentifiseerde behoeftes; en, meer belangrik, die genuanseerde aard van hierdie sterktes gesien aan die hand van die huidige sosio-ekonomiese klimaat.

*Sleutelwoorde:* Families, self-geïdentifiseerde sterktes, hulpbron-beperkte omgewing.
PERMISSION TO SUBMIT ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

The candidate opted to write an article with the support of her supervisor. I hereby grant permission that she may submit this article for examination purposes in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Research Psychology.

__________________
Ms Janine van Aardt
DECLARATION BY RESEARCHER

I, hereby declare that this research, Exploring the nature of self-identified strengths of families living in a resource-constrained environment in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, is entirely my own work and that all sources have been fully referenced and acknowledged.

Furthermore, I declare that this dissertation was edited by a qualified language editor as prescribed.

…………………………..

Yolinda Koekemoer
DECLARATION BY THE LANGUAGE EDITOR

I, hereby declare that I have language edited the thesis: Exploring the nature of self-identified strengths of families living in a resource-constrained environment in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, by Y. Koekemoer for the degree of MA in Research Psychology.

Mari Grobler
SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

Background

Conceptualisation of the Larger Research Project

This research study is affiliated with a larger research project, titled *Strengthening compromised families and disadvantaged communities through a community engagement initiative* (ethics number NWU-00329-15-A1). The larger research project endeavoured to understand and identify the needs and strengths of families in a resource-constrained environment and subsequently focused on the implementation of the strengthening perspective strategy of families in South Africa, as outlined in the White Paper on families (Department of Social Development, 2012). The White Paper on families in South Africa addresses the needs and strengths of families by encouraging academic researchers to explore these constructs in an effort to draft an effective implementation plan – sustainable in constrained environments (Department of Social Development, 2012). The larger research project consisted of three phases. This specific study made use of data collected during the first phase of the larger research project.

The larger research project took place from 2015-2017 and consisted of data collection in the Western Cape, Northern Cape and North West (specifically the areas of Paarl, Wellington, Christiana, Castello and Ikageng). A total of seven researchers and four student researchers were involved in the larger research project.

The main objective of the larger research project was to strengthen comprised families living in disadvantaged communities by means of a community engagement initiative. This could only be accomplished by first researching the particular needs and strengths of the families at that moment. A preliminary literature survey showed that there was no research in the South African context on community engagement activities that aim to promote the
strengths of families. Therefore, the first phase of the larger research project was designed to contribute to the body of knowledge on community engagement and family strengths.

The overall objectives of the first phase of the larger research project were to explore and describe how compromised families and disadvantaged communities can be strengthened through a community engagement initiative. More specifically, the following two objectives led the first phase of the larger research project:

1. To explore and describe the needs of compromised families in disadvantaged communities.
2. To explore and describe the strengths of compromised families in disadvantaged communities.

The research project was focussed at both the needs of these families as well as their strengths. Hence, the objective was split into two focus areas.

These two objectives were examined by means of a qualitative approach. A qualitative descriptive design was applied. The current study also employed a qualitative descriptive design, which allowed the researcher to obtain an in-depth perspective of the participants’ social world and experiences while providing an opportunity for the participants to create an all-inclusive summary of these experiences (Lambert & Lambert, 2012; Snape & Spencer, 2003). According to Magilvy and Thomas (2009), a qualitative descriptive design allows for simple research questions to be stated falling between constricted boundaries that prompt responses from participants, which in turn enables an analysis process and reflection. This research design enabled the researcher to stay close to the collected data in answering the following questions relating to the study: What, who and where? Moreover, it enabled the researcher to use observations and also include documents or visual representations, such as drawings (Sandelowski, 2000).
Data were collected by means of Participation Learning Actions (PLA), a method deemed appropriate as it enables a qualitative researcher to study a phenomenon embedded in the worldview of participants (Bozalek & Biersteker, 2010). This technique assisted the researcher in learning about communities through engagement with specific community members. PLA is an approach that makes use of visual methods and interviewing that is a natural way of gathering information. These methods are very flexible and can be adapted to a specific context (Bozalek & Biersteker, 2010; Gupta, 2000; Thomas, 2004). Furthermore, PLA can be used with individuals who boast different levels of literacy and the diverse types of representations that can be employed enables the inclusion of different ways of thinking and knowing things (Bozalek & Biersteker, 2010). This method was of particular importance as the larger research project entered communities where not all of the family members were literate. For the purpose of phase one of the larger study, the researchers were interested in families as complete structures – all generational family members who share living and emotional spaces. This structure includes comprised families living in disadvantaged communities. In addition, PLA helps to empower individuals to share their personal knowledge about life and also assist with community actions (Appel, Buckingham, Jodoin & Roth, 2012; Connelly, 2015).

There are a variety of tools available that can be employed as part of a PLA session. The two tools that were used in the larger research project were Venn diagrams and Free drawings. *Venn diagrams* were used to represent the roles and relationships between individuals in a family structure. Moreover, Venn diagrams were used to rank different spheres that influence these individuals and a ranked number is, therefore, attached to these spheres (Appel, et al., 2012; Thomas, 2004). *Free drawings* enabled the families to draw themselves in relation to their community or environment in order for the researchers to become aware of where families see themselves in a bigger community picture (Appel, et al.,
Families were able to identify the resources available to them in their community and what they regarded as important in and relevant to their lives (Thomas, 2004).

**Research Process of the Larger Research Project**

Phase one of the larger research project was conducted in the Western Cape, Northern Cape and North West. This affiliated study involved only the data collected at the Ikageng site (North West). Only the data collection process for this particular site is, therefore, discussed. Statistics show that there are more than 3.7 million of South African people residing in the North West Province. This is 6.7% of the total population of South Africa (StatsSA, 2018). The North West has four municipalities providing service delivery to 24 different cities in this specific province. Furthermore, it is separated into 15 sub-areas (StatsSA, 2018). The main source of economic productivity in the North West, which is the source of more than half the province’s gross income, is the mining industry. In two of the most populated cities, Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp, is where the mining activity is at its highest (StatsSA, 2018). The North West exemplifies the entire South African population through its demographic diversity. There are 90.8% Black individuals (mostly Tswana-speaking), 7.2% White individuals (mostly Afrikaans-speaking), 1.6% Coloured individuals and 0.4% Asian individuals residing in the area (StatsSA, 2018). Data were collected at three different sites in the North West. These sites were situated within communities in Christiana, Castello and Ikageng. For the purpose of this affiliated study, only data collected in the Ikageng-township area was used. This township boarders Potchefstroom and includes 98% Black individuals and 2% Coloured individuals that reside in the area. These Ikageng residents are mostly Setswana, Sotho and English speaking individuals (StatsSA, 2018). Ikageng, like many other rural townships, have been divided into different geographical subsections, which are locally called extensions, and varies from developed to underdeveloped areas (StatsSA, 2018).
As part of the project planning phase for the Ikageng site, contact was initiated with a chief executive officer of a non-profit organisation project in Ikageng. The project leader of the larger research project made contact with the chief executive officer of the Mosaic Community Centre, which is demographically located in the heart of the most resource-constrained area in Ikageng. Hereafter, a mediator was assigned by the chief executive officer to assist with the recruitment process after permission was obtained from the community leader of Extension 12, Ikageng. The mediator was responsible for contacting families living in Extension 12, Ikageng, in an effort to recruit participants for the larger research project. The project leader and a research team briefed the mediator on the aim and process of the larger research project, where after the mediator explained this information to the families who were interested in participation. The families who indicated their possible participation, received relevant information about the time and venue of the data collection, which occurred at the Mosaic Community Centre in Extension 12, Ikageng. On the day of data collection, consent and assent forms were given to the participants upon their arrival. The participating families were given an opportunity to ask any questions and uncertainties were discussed and resolved. The hall on the ground level of the Mosaic Community Centre was used as a “meet and greet” where snacks were served. Several recreational activities were at the disposal of the families in a shaded area outside of the building, especially for the young children. Activities, such as a jumping castle, finger painting activities, board games and a slide, were available under the supervision of two caretakers.

Private rooms on the first floor of the Mosaic Community Centre were used for the PLA groups where a researcher facilitated a session privately with each family. No other families were allowed to use the first floor facilities without a researcher in an effort to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The aspect of partial confidentiality was explained verbally and in the consent/assent form by virtue of the familiarity of participating families. Data were
collected in private rooms. Conversations were recorded and transcribed by the researchers involved. Confidentiality agreements were signed by all of the family members involved in the larger research project, including the mediators, community workers, translators, fieldworkers and students.

Debriefing was available throughout the data collection sessions where after the research team and participants concluded the day with lunch. Collected data (electronic) are stored on a password-protected computer and visual data are stored in a locked cupboard in a locked office. Data will be stored for five years at the office of the COMPRES Research Unit at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, and will be destroyed as stipulated in the standard operating procedure (SOP) for recordkeeping.

Orientation of the Current Affiliated Study

This affiliated study formed part of the first phase of the larger research project and only used the data collected at the Ikageng site in the North West. The aim of this affiliated study was aligned with the larger research project’s phase one. This study only focussed on aim two (strengths of the families) of the larger research project and therefore it was formulated as follows: Exploring the nature of self-identified strengths of families living in a resource-constrained environment in Ikageng, Potchefstroom.

Literature Overview

Families

Families are important social groups in which members of different generations form part of and share physical and emotional spaces in time (Walsh, 2015). Family members create and develop emotional bonds with each other and perform social duties and activities as part of a family structure (Alesina & Giuliano, 2010; Chudhuri, 2016). Families are viewed as a primary social institution where family members have socialisation practices that teach them what is acceptable and what is not (Chudhuri, 2016; Hammond, 2010;
Most individuals are born into a family and also create their own family at some point in their life – they get married or not and procreate as part of the natural life course process.

The family structure has evolved tremendously over the last years where its identity and function has shifted away from what literature describes as a *traditional family structure* (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Okon, 2012; Walsh, 2015). Conventionally, family members are described as groups of people who are related to one another biologically (either through birth and marriage) and/or related via adoptions (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Okon, 2012). Members of a family are usually described as a group of people living together and functioning as a unit in which they perform various activities and share resources in an effort to sustain and provide in the basic needs of the family (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Anastasiu, 2012; Asay & DeFrain, 2012; Chudhuri, 2016; Edgar, 2004; Hammond, 2010).

The diversity and complexity of contemporary families have to be contextualised in order to be able to understand the nuance structure of different members in a family and their unique role and contributions (Boss, 2001; Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010; McGoldrick, Carter, & Gracia-Pretó, 2011). Contemporary families represent members of different generations with a focus not only on the nuclear family, but on many different forms of family members (Bekhet, Zauszniewski, & Nakhla, 2009; Donaldson & Goldhaber, 2012; Walsh, 2015). Within a rapidly changing society, the social lives of families are ever changing and families are viewed as a social institution that continuously re-configures its position and structure (Boss, 2001; Craigie, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2010; Walsh, 2015). Changes in the structure of families may cause changes in available time, social and economic resources (Carlson & Corcoran, 2001; Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Craigie, et al., 2010; Ryan, Claessens, Markowitz, 2013). For example, if one parent passes away, the economic and social strains on the surviving parent increase due to
the single income, which now has to tend to the social needs of the whole family. As a result, of all the changes that are taking place in society a variety of family forms is found. These changes that result in different family forms may be rooted in the organisational patterns, living arrangements and different relationship types of families (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Okon, 2012). It is, therefore, more common today to find heterosexual and homosexual families, cohabitating families, single parents and even child-headed families in the modern family structure (Boss, 2001; Conger, et al, 2010; Walsh, 2015). Families as an institution or structure has become much more than just the collection of individuals who are related by birth or adoption (Walsh, 2015). It can rather be viewed as a multifaceted structure – individuals in a family structure share physical and psychological space and are embedded in a larger society (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). Within a larger society, families are exposed to a wide range of challenges that may include trauma and loss, a sudden crisis and changes that vary from illness and job loss to physical separation (Walsh, 2006, 2015). In light of all these challenges, Walsh (2006, 2015) suggests that empirical work has to shift from the deficiency definition of a family structure to a strength-based definition similar to Edgar’s (2004) definition of a family structure as a potential of human capital that is characteristically resilient. A family structure works together as a whole – members share responsibilities and social capital that improve a family structure’s ability to be resilient (Edgar 2004; Walsh, 2015). For families to be resilient, close cohesive relationships are needed among the different generations who are part of the structure (Walsh, 2015).

Positive relational connections within a family structure are of great importance for the wellbeing of a family unit and for the individual members as well (Babington, 2006; Koen, 2012). Families function as structures of supportive relationships, emotional bonds, and closeness among members and loyalties (Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004; Koen, 2012). Relationships are a key determent of social cohesion and
key in holding a society together and, therefore, highlights the important role of relationships within families (Dykstra, Liefbroer, Kalmijn, Knijn, & Mulder, 1999). Every family is entrenched in a network of relationships; a foundation for mutual influence and interaction with other members (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). A network of relationships may include immediate family members, extended family members, friends and/or even community members. A network of relationships may be context specific. Literature should, therefore, be contextualised concerning African and South African families in an effort to shed light on the significant interest of families in Ikageng, Potchefstroom.

**African families.** African families have been of great interest to researchers for many years, particularly in view of the strong patriarchal traditions, normative values and pervasive politico-economic, social and cultural patterning of African families (Ekane, 2013; Therborn, 2006). The traditional definition of an African family has also shifted over the last years – changes in patriarchal traditions and normative beliefs are evident (Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003). Family patterns are altered in traditional African families due to modernisation and urbanisation (Ekane, 2013; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006; Okon, 2012). African families are undergoing a process of profound changes affecting all aspects of traditional life (Kisembo, Magesa, & Shorter, 1998; O’Donovan, 2000; Vahakangas, 2004). Westernisation of the African society is more common in the contemporary African family structure with an emphasis on individual success where young people move away from their nuclear family in search of better education and job opportunities (Ekane, 2013; Vahakangas, 2004). Van der Geest (2004, 2007) also reports on these changes in the structure of African families by highlighting the decline in the practise of normative values and the central position thereof in African families. Van der Geest’s (2004, 2007) contributions on changes in normative values in Africa, resonates with Bigombe and Khadiagala’s (2003) notion on the growing tension between traditional and modern values in African families. This tension can be defined on
the basis of the ever increasing demographic changes that ensue within families and a consequence of concurrent growth in both older and younger populations in Africa (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003). Goodrick (2012) refers to this growth as a double demographic burden that puts more demands on African families by increasing the dependency rate of both younger and older generations (Mokomane, 2014).

As a result of the decrease in members who are able to economically contribute to families, more pressure is placed on those who have a job and who are generating an income. This is specifically important as African families are already rooted in a political and socioeconomic fragility that is caused by poverty and public/political conflicts (Aboderin, 2006; Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003; Mokomane, 2014). Moreover, families in Africa are faced with a high fertility rate, which is usually accompanied with low contraceptive use, early marriage and early childbearing (Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003; Mokomane, 2014). In addition, a high rate of HIV/AIDS exists among African individuals affecting families, the family structure and their function as a whole, specifically influencing the caring roles of children or leaving them orphaned (Evans, 2010; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006; Ramashala; 2002). Intergenerational bonds are, therefore, of the utmost importance in African families and are embedded in the notion of respect, knowledge and experience (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Mokomane, 2014). Relationships among community members and extended family are also highly valued within African families (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003; Mokomane, 2014; Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006), because they support and assist one another. African families are described as resilient – underpinned by the ability of families to provide for each other with an emotional and economic network that members can rely on when confronted with adversities. The structure of African families creates a safe space for individuals in
which they feel they belong (Aboderin, 2006). Members of a family have, therefore, a sense of belonging and likewise access to a system of social support.

**Sub-Saharan African families.** Sub-Saharan African families – similar to African families – face physical/material constraints, especially in light of this region’s high unemployment figures, little to no available resources, economic constraints and the double demographic burden (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Bigombe & Khadiagala, 2003; Goodrick, 2012; Goodrick & Pelser, 2014; Hoffman & Pype, 2016; Mokomane, 2014). These material constraints cause families to be vulnerable on many different levels – their lifestyle, health, education and overall quality of life are impacted (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Amoateng, & Richter 2007; Hoffman & Pype, 2016; Ramashala, 2002). Interesting of families in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA), in the light of these constraints, are the central role of older people to offer support. Support of older people is valued and underpinned by substituting primary caregivers in case of death, abandonment and/or migration (Cohen & Menken, 2006; Hoffman & Pype, 2016; Kohler, Watkins, Behrman, Anglewicz, & Kohler, 2013; Zimmer, 2009). As a result of this central role and position of older people aiding as extended family members of a nuclear family, changes in the structure of Sub-Saharan families are also evident. One can, therefore, argue that Sub-Saharan families are going beyond the nuclear family in an effort to receive support and these families rely on various forms of emotional and financial support available to them, such as multi-generational, extended family, peer, community, relatives and friend support (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Cohen & Menken, 2006; Mokomane, 2012).

Various researchers describe Sub-Saharan families as close-knitted structures; members serve as a source of support where connectedness is established by shared social norms (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Bengtson, 2001; Hook, Watts, & Cockcroft, 2002; Mokomane, 2014). Aboderin and Hoffman (2015) describe Sub-Saharan families as vibrant
institutions where their cohesion assists them in overcoming adversities associated with their physical demography and socioeconomic climate.

**South African families.** In recent years, researchers have become more interested in the functionality and dynamics of South African families – the focus has shifted away from dysfunction and deficits (Koen, 2012). A renewed focus on South African families link with the international work of Walsh (1996, 2006, 2012, 2015) and highlights a reorientation from a needs perspective to a strengthening approach. A strengthening approach defines families as resilient structures with the potential to grow and function beyond their deficits (Walsh, 2015). This approach resonates with earlier works of Smit (2007) who concluded that South African families indeed face challenges, but their access to an immense potential of strengths assists them in difficult times (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Mokomane, 2012; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005).

Families in South Africa can merely be described and understood when light is shed on the country’s unique history and the legacy of Apartheid that still influences the future of some families in South Africa (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Özler, 2007; Seekings, 2007, 2010; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). South African families can be described as organisationally complex and multifaceted systems – members of different generations and racial groups are assembled together (Babington, 2006; Koen, 2012; Neff, 2006; Ziehl, 2003). A description that contradicts the arguments of Amoateng and Richter (2007) and Harvey (1994). These authors are of the opinion that South African families are characterised by dualism and underpinned by the reinforcement of segregation and marginalisation during Apartheid. Segregation enforced strong discrepancies between black, coloured, Indian and white South African families (Christopher, 2001, 2002; Harvey, 1994; Özler, 2007; Seekings, 2011; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). During Apartheid, families were demographically segregated by race; white families lived in more affluent areas while black,
coloured and Indian families were forced to live in underdeveloped areas (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Seekings, 2011; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). Throughout the Apartheid regime, the government provided little to no resources to black, coloured or Indian families – white families were viewed as superior and took precedence over all the other racial groups (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Harvey, 1994; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Ziehl, 2003). After the dispensation of Apartheid in 1994, South Africans and residing families had the right to demographically reposition themselves if they had the financial means to do so. When an equal and democratic approach was implemented after 1994, some of the South African families were able to change their socioeconomic environment and they received basic services, such as running water and sanitation (Seekings, 2010; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). Nonetheless, only diminutive changes in the demographic profile and distribution of families in South Africa ensued (Oheneba-Sakyi & Takyi, 2006; Seekings, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2016; Walker, 2010). The legacy of apartheid and inequality is still visible in the majority of poor communities in the contemporary South Africa (Seekings, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2016). Families in South Africa still face ripple-effects of the past even in a new democratic South Africa – there are still families who live in inhabitable areas with no access to public services and little to no available resources (Özler, 2007; Statistics South Africa, 2016; UNICEF, 2016). According to Seekings (2010), an unyielding social class hierarchy is caused by the demographic distribution in South Africa. This hierarchy demonstrates a prominent separation between families of the upper, middle, lower and under class income groups. Where families in lower and under class groups live in underdeveloped areas in South Africa – even with the democratic right to move to more developed areas – families still need socioeconomic capital to do so (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Seekings, 2010; Statistics South Africa, 2016). Literature characterises these underdeveloped areas in South Africa by poor sanitation, no running water, informal settlements and an
overall lack of basic resources (Christopher, 2001; Crankshaw, 2008; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Statistics South Africa, 2016).

**Contextualising South African Families in Resource-constrained Environments**

It is of great importance to contextualise the complexity of resource constraints in the contemporary South Africa in terms of the current socioeconomic status of the country. Currently, both affluent and poor neighbourhoods in South Africa lack basic services, such as access to running water and/or electricity, irrespective of the income of families in these areas. For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of the definition of resource-constrained environments where communities (families) have to survive without resources in the absence of a state crises for extended periods.

A resource-constrained environment provides little to no opportunities to the individuals living there, which causes the living standard to be of poor quality (Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). Resource-constrained communities are characterised by poverty and a deficiency in basic needs and services, such as water, sanitation, education and healthcare (Aliber, 2001; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007). These environments are typically known as poor or rural areas and synonymous with informal settlements and underdeveloped areas in South Africa (Dercon, 2008; Triegaardt, 2006).

Families who live in these poor resource-constrained areas have to be understood in light of the legacy of Apartheid. As a result of the country’s history and lack of effective implementation of state policies, the majority of South Africans continue to live in poor underdeveloped communities with a staggering unemployment rate (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Statistics South Africa, 2017). Moreover, these resource-constrained environments are demographically secluded and contributes to the lack of proper roads, communication, a support infrastructure and public services (Aliber, 2001; Casale & Desmond, 2007; Dercon, 2008; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Triegaardt, 2006). These constraints contribute to a
dislocation amongst individuals who live in more developed areas in South Africa and those in less to underdeveloped areas. This is especially true when particular communities in South Africa are investigated: Different sub-sections exist within one community. One section has access to all of the basic services and good infrastructure but not very far away another sub-section is underdeveloped with no access to basic services (Moche, Monkam, & Aye, 2014; Sartorius & Sartorius, 2016). Following this argument, it is of great importance to not only describe and explore groups of individuals within their larger community, but also within their unique living spaces. Poverty and inequality reduce the efficiency of families and its members by undermining the roles of family members in a society (Makiwane & Berry, 2013). Constrained resources influence the standard and accessibility of services and consequently job opportunities and economic contributions are severely impacted (Makiwane & Berry, 2013; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005; Triegaardt, 2006).

Families living in resource-constrained environments in South Africa usually rely on state funded grants as a source of income due to the unemployment rates (Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Makiwane & Berry, 2013; Statistics South Africa, 2017; Triegaardt, 2006). A vast body of existing knowledge reports that the realistic living conditions of families residing in resource-constrained environments are characterised by poor to no sanitation, electricity services or running water (Casale & Desmond, 2007; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). As a result of poor infrastructure in these areas, family members have to travel great distances to have access to public transport, schools, clinics, police stations and any other public services (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007; Seekings & Nattrass, 2005). Consequently, families in resource-constrained environments are vulnerable to environmental adversities, such as floods, fires, poor agricultural conditions and illnesses (Aliber, 2001; Hunter, Strife, & Twine, 2010). Ensuing this argument, it is important to contextualise South African families within their unique community. These families should also be described
entrenched within the family lifecycle in terms of the availability of resources in their community.

**Contextualising the Family by Means of the Lifecycle Approach**

The family lifecycle is a framework that was initially defined and explained by sociologists in an effort to understand the development of families (Golijani-Moghaddam, 2014; Norton, 1983; Murphy & Staples, 1979; Sholevar, 1995). The framework provides a representation and organisation of different observations made within a family structure that can be supported theoretically from the entrance of individuals to their exit of a particular family structure (Sholevar, 1995). The purpose of research on family development is aimed at identifying changes that occur in a life cycle, such as a family’s life span and life course (Norton, 1983; Sholevar, 1995). This framework for family development has been researched in order to determine the stages through which each family progresses. According to Carter and McGoldrick (2005), families can be defined as systems that move through time and consist of different generational members, including boundaries, sub-systems and stressors. This framework can be linked with Von Bertalanffy’s (1969) general systems theory on systems, sub-systems and boundaries. As systems, families have a variety of sub-systems and should continuously be redefined throughout different stages of development (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989, 2005). The stages of development in families have been perceived to be chronological in nature and entail prevalent and predictable events (Golijani-Moghaddam, 2014; Nock, 1981; Ramsey, 1984). Shifts in the life cycle of families, therefore, cause changes in the internal dynamics of the family structure, although there is no consensus among researchers as to which events mark significant shifting points (Golijani-Moghaddam, 2014; Nock, 1981). In addition, the predictability of family events and the progression of a life cycle become less stable due to continuous changes in a society (George, 1993), which in turn cause changes in the structure of families. Customary life cycle models
that only account for normative changes in traditional families have, therefore, become less useful as these models do not account for a variety of family forms (Erickson, 1998; Derrick & Lehfeld, 1980; Kumar, 2017; Norton, 1983).

Human beings are part of family structures and develop across their life span in a social and historical context (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005; Papalia & Feldman, 2012). Family structures also develop over time and are always palpable to change as these structures are influenced by numerous factors, such as communities, neighbours and the broader society (Papalia & Feldman, 2012). The family life cycle has also undergone many changes over the years due to changes in a society. Lower birth rate, longer life expectancy, the role of women, the various forms of a family structure and increases in divorce are all indications of how family structures and the family life cycle have changed (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). Families need to evolve from one stage of the cycle to another and this evolvement implicates great stress, because families need to realign and rebalance the relationships of its members (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). Carter and McGoldrick (1989) argue that families (“normal” traditional families) develop through different stages with accompanying challenges and experiences. These challenges are embedded in psychological changes that occur when, for example, two individuals join in courtship, they commit to a new marriage system, or when they expand their family with extended family members (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005). These changes are usually followed by having young children and realigning individual roles to fit a new family structure. As the children grow older and become adolescents, there is an increased flexibility in the boundaries of a family system as adolescents need to become more independent. The fragility of grandparents and in some cases, being responsible for their well-being, also leads to changes. When young adults are old enough, they leave their family system to create and enter into their own family system, which is accompanied by a progressive shift in generational roles of the members of the original family system (Carter &
McGoldrick, 1989, 2005; Golijani-Moghaddam, 2014; Sholevar, 1995; Ramsey, 1984). However, one needs to note that family structures vary and this process does not include all of the family types as we know today. A framework for the life cycle of families should, therefore, be flexible and include diverse family forms embedded in different cultural contexts (Carter & McGoldrick, 2005; Derrick & Lehfeld, 1980). Families are not alike and the life cycle of different families might vary, which means that a life cycle should be contextualised to a particular family.

Subsequent to this argument concerning the resources of South African families in their environment, a theoretical framework was used to understand and contextualise the participating families.

**Theoretical Foundations**

**Theoretical Framework**

Family resilience theory (FRT) was applied in an effort to describe and explore self-identified strengths of families in Ikageng. Ikageng is a resource-constrained environment in Potchefstroom in the North West. FRT defines the family system as a full-functioning whole and does not only focus on individual members. This theory refers to resilience as the potential of families to adapt or adjust positively during adversities or challenging times (Becvar, 2013; Holtzkamp, 2010; Hooper, 2009; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Oh & Chang, 2014; Walsh, 2003). When families are resilient, they are able to cope more effectively when facing adversities. In addition, family resilience describes families as units who are able to repair themselves, they are able to bounce back and adapt when they experience stressful situations (Patterson, 2002; Walsh, 2006). These stressful situations can include adversities in their interpersonal and external environments, such as poverty, lack of resources, discrimination and inequality. To overcome these adversities, families need to be resilient, especially in a South African context as adverse circumstances are ever increasing.
In order for families to be resilient, certain characteristics are important, including a positive outlook on life, connectedness, cohesion, collective confidence, positive communication, supportive structures and collective problem-solving skills (Becvar, 2013; Oh & Chang, 2014). These positive characteristics of a resilient family structure can indicate how families are able to protect and assist their members when confronted with obstacles (Becvar, 2013; Black & Lobo, 2008; Patterson, 2002). Fostering resilience within family units is nurtured over time through interactions among members. Family units are resilient when they are able to develop and rely on certain strengths, this in turn enables them to support each other when they need to overcome adversities (Hooper, 2009; Walsh, 2012).

According to Walsh (2003, 2006, 2008, 2012), there are three main processes involved in FRT. The first process is the family belief system, which refer to a shared construction and expression of spiritual beliefs and religion. This belief system provides hope to families for the future and a sense of purpose. This system assists them in maintaining a positive outlook on life and makes them believe that they will be able to grow through adversities (Henry, Sheffield Morris, & Harrist, 2015; Holtzkamp, 2010; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988). The second process is organisational patterns, which refer to the organisation of family related patterns in order to overcome challenges. Families have to be flexible in order to adapt to their specific circumstances and be able to change on a continual basis with every challenge they face. Furthermore, families can be characterised as a cohesive whole who work together as units (Henry, et al., 2015; Masten & Monn, 2015; Walsh, 2003, 2008), they share an emotional bond and are able to distinguish and balance between being together and also being their separate selves (Koen, 2012; Walsh, 2012). The third process is termed communication and problem solving. When family members communicate effectively with one another, it can lead to clarity in crisis situations (Koen, 2012; Walsh, 2003, 2008). Resilience is fostered when families are able to search for
solutions to their problems together and when emotional expression among members is established (Henry, et al., 2015; Oh & Chang, 2014; Walsh, 2003, 2008). Families who live in resource-constrained environments face various challenges, such as basic and spiritual needs, the availability of resources and public services in their area. The daily presence of challenges highlights the necessity for families to have hope, to be optimistic and to utilise their unique strengths to overcome or cope with their circumstances – to be resilient.

**Philosophical Worldview / Ontological Stance**

A worldview or commonly known as a paradigm, can be defined as a set of basic beliefs and assumptions about the social world surrounding us (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Willis, 2007). This in turn, provides a theoretical and philosophical framework that assists us in understanding and making sense of the world. (Ponterotto, 2005). Individuals have their own personal view of the world and this view influences the way they perceive and experience social life, and also how knowledge is produced.

The researcher views the world through a constructivist-interpretivist lens, which means that multiple realities are apprehendable and that each of these realities held by individual human beings should be viewed as equally important and valid (Krauss, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 1994). Reality is further constructed individually in the minds of individuals (Ponterotto, 2005). This paradigm adopts a hermeneutical approach, which is embedded in inter-subjectivity (Schwandt, 1994). Hermeneutics refers to how meanings are not directly and instantly understandable, but rather comes to the surface through interpretive effort and a deep reflection (Abulad, 2007; Linge, 1977; Ponterotto, 2005). The researcher, therefore, made use of the interpretation skills of the participants to uncover meanings behind their dialogue. The goals of a constructivist-interpretivist position is twofold: (1) an idiographic goal – research focuses on individuals. Human beings are unique and complex and it is, therefore, important to investigate individuals to gain an in-depth understanding of
what they are trying to convey (Castro-Schilo & Ferrer, 2013); (2) an emic goal – a view from the inside. Behaviour is described as unique to individuals and context and cannot be generalised (Ahmed, 2008; Kleppe & Mulk, 2008; Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). Moreover, the aim of this specific paradigm is to understand the meaning associated with self-identified strengths in a resource-constrained environment from the point of view of the participating families.

According to the researcher’s philosophical worldview, families experience and articulate their own situation differently. In addition, families have diverse strengths from which they can draw in order to help them during difficult times and these strengths assist them in fulfilling their unmet needs in ways they see fit. The researcher chose this specific topic, because of an avid interest in general family research, and the personal significance attached to families as the foundation of individual identity.

It is, therefore, important to define constructivism and interpretivism separately although they are linked, since constructivism suggests that knowledge is actively constructed by humans and interpretivism suggests that humans interpret and observe the social world in order to understand and make sense of it (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014). Constructivism refers, therefore, to reality as viewed by individuals – we construct our own reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher believes that the meaning of reality is not fixed and it transforms as people interact with the world they live in (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ormston et al., 2014; Willis, 2007). The mind is, therefore, the entity that creates meaning (Hansen, 2004). Furthermore, this research was based on the notion that reality has a cultural and historical basis, which means that individuals perceive their reality, but it is not “the reality” and they construct this reality through interactions and experiences (Ahmed, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Sarantakos, 2013). The families in this study based their reality on their experiences living in a resource-constrained environment. The families acquired and
constructed their knowledge through personal experiences (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Ponterotto, 2005; Schwandt, 1994). The researcher acknowledges that more than one reality existed for the participants and that individuals have, therefore, the ability to create their own personal reality. Individuals construct their reality in the way they view it to be. Moreover, constructivism is the creation and alteration of the ideas of individuals and their understanding of the world, according to their experiences and cultural background (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005; Scotland, 2012). The way the world was perceived by the participants was a result from their historical experiences and rooted in their culture, which made their view context-specific.

As a result of varying realities among individuals, they perceive and observe their surroundings differently. This is based on the concept of interpretivism (Ponterotto, 2005). The research recognises that the background of individuals plays an important role in how they view reality, which is reflected in a phenomenon defined by Max Weber as Verstehen (Sarantakos, 2013). Verstehen suggests that the experiences of individuals relate to their own views, opinions and perceptions (Bryman, 1984; Ponterotto, 2005; Sarantakos, 2013; Schwandt, 1994; Willis, 2007). Researchers should, therefore, put themselves in the shoes of participants and attempt to understand what they are trying to convey. According to Thomas (2010), interpretivism is the subjective experience of the external world of individuals. Hence, the families, therefore, observe their surroundings in order to obtain knowledge where after they interpret input to make sense and meaning of it (Ahmed, 2008). Individuals are able to understand and interpret the knowledge they gather from their social world in a personal and relevant manner (Goldkuhl, 2012; Ormston et al., 2014; Scotland, 2012). Individuals, therefore, interpret personally meaningful knowledge throughout their life span. Families obtain knowledge with regard to living in a resource-constrained environment and can share their experiences, because these experiences have a personal meaning to them.
Human beings respond and act according to the environment they are part of and that forms part of their subjective reality (Scotland, 2012; Willis, 2007).
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SECTION 2

ARTICLE

Abstract

Families are the basis of a society and form part of communities. South African families are of great importance and embedded in the unique history of the country and the legacy of Apartheid. This study was affiliated to a larger research project that focused on strengthening compromised families in disadvantaged communities through a community engagement initiative. The aim of this particular qualitative study was to explore self-identified strengths of families in resource-constrained areas, specifically Ikageng, Potchefstroom. A qualitative descriptive research design was used and data were obtained through participatory learning action (PLA) techniques, followed by thematic analysis. The findings revealed four core strengths that assist families to function optimally and foster resilience despite resource constraints. Families identified positive relationships among their members, extended family members and the community that help them function effectively. Spirituality, specifically having faith and trusting God, was reported as a way that families make sense and meaning of their adversities. Material and emotional sources of support assist them during difficult times. They described encouragement and aspirations as embedded in the hopeful spirit they have for their lives and future. Findings may be used to develop intervention programmes for the promotion of family resilience.

Keywords: Families, self-identified strengths, resource-constrained environment.
Background and Problem Statement

Families are the root of every community (Bekhet, Zauszniewski, & Nakhla, 2009; Donaldson & Goldhaber, 2012), and form the building blocks of a society (Holborn & Eddy, 2011). Traditionally, members of families are described as groups of individuals who are biologically related (either through birth or marriage) and/or via adoptions (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). However, over the last decades the structure of families has changed tremendously. Currently, families represent members of different generations who are biologically and historically related (Bekhet et al., 2009; Donaldson & Goldhaber, 2012). Contemporary families are much more than just a collection of individuals, but rather a complex structure where family members share physical and psychological space – embedded in a bigger community and society (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2004). A vast body of literature exists that emphasises the importance and societal contributions of families as units (Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Aldous, 1977; Amoateng, 2004; Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Babington, 2006; Becvar & Becvar, 2006; Carr, 2009; Keating, 2011; Ziehl, 2003). Literature generally describes families in terms of family typologies, generational dynamics and the challenges families are facing. However, little is known of how families overcome challenges as units.

South African families are of particular interest with regard to the socio-political history of the country and the multi-cultural inheritance of family structures in South Africa (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Harvey, 1994; Seekings, 2010). Families in contemporary South Africa (SA) are organisationally complex systems that are constructed by members of diverse generations and racial groups, either historically and/or biologically related to one another (Babington, 2006; Koen, 2012; Neff, 2006; Ziehl, 2003). These complex family systems did not exist before 1994. Families were typologically classified only by means of race (Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Seekings, 2010). Families in South Africa were mainly
characterised by dualism of generational members (biologically related) underpinned by the reinforcement of segregation and the marginalisation of the Apartheid regime (Christopher, 2001; Harvey, 1994; Özler, 2007; Seekings, 2010). The dualism of South African families mainly focused on the four major racial groups in South Africa at that time, namely white, black, coloured and Indian families (Christopher, 2001; Harvey, 1994; Seekings, 2010). The Apartheid regime intended to produce a country where families could only take up physical space designated to them with the aim to create both physical and emotional distance between these four racial groups (Christopher, 2001, 2002; Özler, 2007). During Apartheid, white families in South Africa were viewed as superior and were treated accordingly. Black, coloured and Indian families received little to no resources from the Apartheid regime (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Amoateng & Richter, 2007; Harvey, 1994, Ziehl, 2003). After 1994, an equal approach to all individuals and families was instituted as part of the dispensation of a democratic government in South Africa (Harvey, 1994; Holborn & Eddy, 2011; Hosegood, 2009). An equal and democratic approach changed the socioeconomic environment of South African families by providing them with basic services, such as sanitation and running water (Christopher, 2001; Özler, 2007).

In addition to a democratic approach, policies and legislation were drafted with the aim to address resource constraints faced by mostly black, coloured and Indian South African families (Department of Welfare, 1997). These legislations focused on individual members of families and not explicitly on families as units, for example, legislation only focused on older people (older than 60 years of age), young children (younger than 15 years of age) and disabled members of families (Harvey, 1994). In order to address this lack in socio-political focus on South African families, the first White Paper on Social Welfare was assembled and distributed in August 1997 (Department of Social Development, 2014). The White Paper on Social Welfare recommended that healthy South African families would yield healthy
communities and was supported by numerous proposals of how to support and uplift families (Department of Welfare, 1997). Eight years have passed and still South African families struggle with similar issues as discussed in the White Paper on Social Development, contributing to the conscription of the White Paper on Families in 2005 (Department of Social Development, 2012). Based on public feedback (Green Paper on Families) and empirical research findings, an adapted (more comprehensive) version of the White Paper on Families was issued in 2012 (Department of Social Development, 2012).

The 2012 White Paper on Families suggested three prominent strategy priorities with the aim to create societal stability on a micro-level, meso-level and macro-level in South Africa (Department of Social Development, 2012; Saunders, 1999). Strategy priority one specifically focused on the physical health of families while strategy priority two addressed the psychological well-being and strengthening of families. The third strategy priority highlighted the preservation of families (Department of Social Development, 2012). Following this discussion, the study was interested in strategy priority two – the government encourages researchers to explore and describe existing strengths of South African families. This study, therefore, aimed to explore the self-identified needs of families living in a resource-constrained environment in an effort to shed light on the nature of strengths of families who live in poor communities.

In an effort to explore the above-mentioned aim, the researcher applied family resilience theory (FRT), which describes families as vibrant institutions – an adaption within the context of significant adversities (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000 Walsh, 2003, 2006). South African families, particularly families who live in resource-constrained environments, have to constantly reconfigure their existence to cope with a lack in available resources (Seekings, 2010). Resource-constrained communities in South Africa lack social capital and structured infrastructure, characterised by informal housing and poor public services
(Coleman, 1988; Crankshaw, 2008; Seekings, 2010). One may postulate that families who live in these areas in South Africa have to reconfigure themselves more often than families living in areas with an abundance of available resources. FRT recognises the strengths and potential of family structures apace with limitations and/or adversities (Walsh, 2003, 2006). Furthermore, grounded in a systemic orientation, FRT looks beyond the parent-child dyad to consider broader influences in the kin network – from sibling bonds to couple relationships and extended family ties (Walsh, 2003, 2006). Primarily, this theory focuses on competence-based and strength-orientated families entrenched in the specific life course of each family member (Walsh, 2003, 2006). According to Walsh (2003, 2006), families, irrespective of dysfunction and/or disadvantages, exhibit relevant abilities that enable them to adapt and even flourish. FRT, provides insights into the relational view on human resilience as members of families can tap into their relational resources as units and not only as functioning individuals (Walsh, 2003, 2006). The relational nature of family structures provides potential for repair and growth and ultimately social cohesion where members of families support each other and reciprocally share social resources (Walsh, 2003, 2006). FRT enables researchers to shift from a deficit view of families in resource-constrained areas to families challenged by adversities and families that are informed by a multi-systemic approach as families normally function within a larger community and society (Walsh, 2003, 2006). Adversities and stressors have a severe impact on families as systems and not only on individual members of families. For example, when primary caregivers of families lose their job (income), a chain reaction is created within the functioning of family systems. This reaction is embedded in the nature of systems to adapt in a stressful environment (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972; Peery, 1972; Tamas, 2000; Von Bertalanffy, 1969; Walsh, 2006). Walsh (2003, 2006) highlights three key aspects of family resilience that enabled the researcher to conceptualise family strengths and the potential to grow in the unique context of the
participants. A family belief system (1) explains how families view or make sense of adversities and how they translate needs into strengths and includes transcendence and spirituality (Walsh, 2003, 2006). The view of families concerning crises and sufferings and their choices of dealing with these situations are greatly influenced by their belief system. Family organisational patterns (2) elucidate the nature of family structures (Walsh, 2006). Flexible structures – characterised by cohesion and connectedness – often contribute to the resilience of families (Walsh, 2003). Family communication and problem-solving processes (3) describe the vital role of clear communication and shared input concerning family resilience (Walsh, 2003). When families share the responsibility of making decisions and the negotiation of fairness, the ability of families to overcome adversities and challenges in their environment is increased.

In light of this argument, it was imperative to explore families in a contemporary South African context from a strength perspective. By understanding existing strengths of families, specifically those who live in resource-constrained environments, light is shed on the ability of South African families to adapt in a challenging milieu. An understanding may also inform future researchers to view families as structures of potential and not only deficits, and may inform future intervention programmes in resource-constrained communities. With this in mind, the following research question was formulated: What is the nature of the self-identified strengths of families who live in a resource-constrained environment?

Research Methodology

Research Method and Design

The study’s methodology was aligned with the methodology of the larger research project by following a qualitative descriptive design within a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research method with an exploratory and descriptive approach was used. Snape & Spencer (2003), argues that a qualitative research approach allows researchers to explore a
topic and gain in-depth insight from the perspective of the participants’ social world. This allowed the researchers to gather rich data, appropriate to the research topic, from the specific point of view of the families living in resource constrained environments. This qualitative research approach was done by means of applying the qualitative descriptive designs as suggested by Sandelowski (2000).

According to Sandelowski (2000), a qualitative description is desirable when answers to straightforward questions relevant to practitioners and policy makers is needed with regard to issues concerning the White Paper on Families. Sandelowski (2000) postulates that a qualitative descriptive design allows individuals or groups, such as families, to share their experiences. The sharing of experiences by participants allows for a comprehensive summarisation of experiences. Experiences can, therefore, be summarised, identified as different themes and discussed as part of research findings. A qualitative descriptive research design enabled the researcher to explore self-identified strengths with the aid of a nuanced discussion of the What (What are family strengths?), How (How are these strengths identified by members of families and how do these strengths unfold within family structures) and Where (Where are these strengths developed and applied?). In the case of this study, in a resource-constrained area in Ikageng, Potchefstroom. Sandelowski (2000) encourages researchers to use the what, how and where aspects to produce a rich report of a studied phenomenon. This research design enabled the researcher to go beyond a mere description of self-identified strengths to rather tap into the nature of these self-identified strengths from the perspective of the family members themselves.

**Research Context and Participants**

The researchers of the larger research project were interested in comprised families living in disadvantaged communities as the population. The various communities that were chosen were based on the valuable relationships and trust built with members in the
communities. The population in the Western Cape consisted out of communities in the Drakenstein Municipality including Wellington and Paarl. In the North West Province, the population included communities in the Tlokwe and Leekwa Municipalities. The specific communities were that of Christiana, Ikageng and Castello.

For the purpose of this affiliated study, the researcher was only concerned with a portion of the total population of the larger research study. The researcher aimed to make use of the data collected in a resource-constrained area in Extension 12, Ikageng, Potchefstroom. Data were collected from eight families (a population of 22 individuals) where members ranged between the ages of 15 and 60. The families consisted of generational members either biologically or historically related and include both male and females. Ikageng is a rural community in Potchefstroom. The families residing in Ikageng do not have many resources available to them and live in poor conditions, which was in line with the objective. The researchers of the larger research project had contact with an NGO, called Mosaic, in the community. This NGO had a longstanding relationship with community members, which made the community of Ikageng more accessible. The data collection also took place at the Mosaic community centre to create a sense of familiarity.

For the purpose of this study, sampling was done by means of purposive sampling – specific participant characteristics were identified as inclusive criteria in the study (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010; Wilson, & MacLean, 2011). For the purpose of the affiliated study, the researcher was interested in families residing in Extension 12, Ikageng. Sandelowski (2000) suggests that researchers who apply purposive sampling led by a qualitative descriptive design should make use of clear inclusion and exclusion criteria in an effort to acquire rich data.

As defined and outlined in the literature review, the families had to live in an environment with resource constraints, specifically residing in Ikageng Potchefstroom. All
family types and structures (according to literature there are different types of families) were included in the study as part of the researchers’ aim. Furthermore, participants had to be able to comfortably communicate in either, English, Afrikaans, Setswana or Xhosa. Therefore, families from black and brown cultures were mostly presented as they predominantly live in the Ikageng community.

**Data Collection Method**

Data collection took place on 5 December 2015 in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, by means of applying participation learning action (PLA) techniques. PLA suggests a collection of different activities that researchers can apply when engaging with communities (Thomas, 2004). PLA techniques include a wide range of visual methods, such as diagrams, drawings, paintings, sculpting, mapping and timelines – all used to engage actively with communities (Bozalek & Biersteke, 2010). For the larger research study, data were collected by means of Free drawings and Venn diagrams. Families (one family per researcher) were invited to a private room where a researcher explained the methods of data collection to them.

The different techniques (Free drawings and Venn diagrams) were explained to the participants before the commencement of the PLA group sessions. The participants had the opportunity to ask questions when they did not understand something and the researchers discussed the ground rules.

**Free drawings.** The first phase of data collection commenced when researchers asked the participants to use the provided material to produce a Free drawing of them as a family and each member had the chance to contribute something to the drawing. In most cases, the family started drawing things next to a specific family member that they considered as important. For example, a daughter drew a Bible and glasses next to her mother and another child added a taxi to the drawing. The Free drawings stimulated discussions among the participants. The participants then had the opportunity to discuss the Free drawing and the
researcher had the chance to ask the participants to elaborate on something that was not discussed during their drawing or to clarify if something was not clear. The researcher was especially interested in the significance of the drawings that members of the family added to the Free drawing.

**Venn diagrams.** The participants then had a ten-minute break where after they commenced with the second phase of data collection by means of Venn diagrams. Venn diagrams is a great tool to capture ways in which information is shared within families (Appel, Buckingham, Jodoin, & Roth, 2012). The participants were supplied with blank pages, colouring pens and crayons and were asked to draw Venn diagrams. They had to write down a need or strength that they have as a family in the middle of each diagram. Every participant could add a need and some of them added more than one. After completion of all the needs, the participants had the opportunity to explain to the researcher what they meant with each need and how a need related to the other needs. In most cases, this was a conversation where each family member had the opportunity to add to the discussion. The same process was repeated, but now the participants were asked to write a strength of their specific family in the middle of each diagram. Each participant had a turn to add a strength and in this case, some of the participants added more than one strength. After completion of the identification of strengths, the participants had the opportunity to explain to the researcher what they meant with each strength and each member of the family had the opportunity to contribute to the conversation.

The duration of the data collection per family ranged between 90 and 120 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

All of the PLA groups were audio recorded to make the transcribing of data easier. For the purpose of the study the researcher transcribed recorded data verbatim and analysed the data verbatim by means of thematic analysis, as described by Clarke and Braun (2013).
The first phase was familiarisation with the data. Firstly, the researcher read and reread data. Secondly, the researcher listened to the audio recordings thoroughly. Thirdly, the researcher noted any analytical observations. This process is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as immersing oneself in the data and becoming “intimately familiar” with it.

The second phase was coding. Coding involved the generation of labels for important characteristics of the data in concurrence to the relation the data had to the broad research question. The researcher coded every item of data and ended this phase by “collating” all of the codes and data extracts of relevance (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). The third phase was characterised by the searching for themes. This phase entailed the construction of themes rather than the discovery of existing themes in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). As advised by Braun and Clarke (2006) the researcher constructed themes and linked coded data to these themes. After the researcher had constructed the themes and categorised the coded data accordingly, the fourth phase commenced, namely the reviewing of themes. This phase enabled the researcher to review whether the constructed themes described the data correctly, the relationships among the themes were investigated and the nature of each theme was described. Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that the reviewing of themes enable researchers to combine themes, split themes and remove themes that may not describe the data effectively (Clarke & Braun, 2013). This process can also lead to the development of new themes. During the fifth phase, naming and describing themes, the researcher completed a detailed analysis of each theme.

Writing up, according to Braun and Clarke (2006) together with Clarke and Braun (2013), is the sixth phase and “involved weaving together the analytical narrative and vivid (data) extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data”. This phase allowed the researcher to effectively contextualise the data. The data were analysed to obtain findings regarding the broad research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013).
Trustworthiness

The quality of qualitative research is described, according to Tracy’s (2010) eight criteria: The topic of a study has to be (1) worthy – the topic should be timely, relevant and interesting. The researcher chose a topic of interest that concerns the majority of South African individuals and the topic had the potential for intervention development. Currently, strengths are relevant in South Africa, because we need to understand the strengths of families before we can attempt to understand them as a whole and develop an intervention. (2) Rich rigor – a wide variety of resources and appropriate constructs were used to support the claims made, such as strengths in resource-constrained environments. The researcher also consulted the project leader in formal meetings for information on the process. (3) Sincerity – the researcher was aware of bias and contradicting values during the data analysis and was introspective. Moreover, the researcher was transparent by taking note of the methods used and the challenges that occurred. The researcher also acknowledged that she was not part of the data collection process and had to consult the study leader and project leader to gain insight. (4) Credibility was obtained by using crystallisation. Multi-vocality was achieved by interpreting the meanings of individuals based on their own opinions and experiences and being aware of cultural differences. The researcher stayed close and true to the data during the analysis phase to ensure that no false interpretations or assumptions were made from her point of view. It was important to generate findings that were (5) resonant – meaningful to readers, transferrable and internationally significant. The researcher made a (6) significant contribution to the theoretical body of knowledge lacking in South Africa and this research can help to change the lives of many individuals. It is also heuristically significant as it can motivate other researchers to explore the subject in-depth and even develop an intervention. (7) Ethics – an important consideration throughout the process of data analysis. The data are kept confidential and the information was considered in the appropriate context. The data
were not shared with anyone outside and findings were aligned with what the participants provided. (8) *Meaningful coherence* was attained by staying aligned with the methods and procedures of the larger project to ensure that the correct aim of this affiliated study was achieved.

**Ethical Considerations**

Throughout this research process the researcher adhered to all of the ethical requirements as outlined by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The ethics approval number is NWU-00044-17-S1.

As part of the larger study, a mediator was assigned by the CEO of Mosaic to assist with the recruitment process after permission was obtained from the community leader. The mediator was responsible for contacting the families and finding out what their interest would be in participating in the study. Further, the mediator had to explain the objectives of the study to the families and provide them with the date and time that data collection would take place. Consent and assent forms were given to the participants upon their arrival, which they had to sign with the independent researcher and a witness also being in their presence. The participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions and if any uncertainties were revealed, it could have been cleared up. Assent forms needed to be signed by the minor’s guardian in order for them to participate in the study.

During this study, the researcher ensured confidentiality by scheduling formal meetings and group discussions with the project leader and study leader. These formal meetings and group discussions were not recorded. These meetings took place in a private room with a closed door. In addition, the researcher signed a confidentiality agreement in order to obtain access to the data that were collected in the larger project. This agreement
stated that the researcher agreed to not use any information that can be linked back to the participants. The researcher only had access to the transcribed data for the purpose of the thematic analysis, and the data did not contain any names of the participants. Audio tapes were not included.

The data – containing the transcriptions and analysis – are stored on a password protected computer that can only be accessed by the researcher.

**Findings**

Four main themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the data. These themes and subthemes are displayed in the table below.

Table 1. *Self-identified strengths of families in a resource-constrained environment.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relational strengths</td>
<td>Immediate family</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Extended family</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Neighbours and larger community</td>
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<td>Spirituality &amp; beliefs</td>
<td>Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sources of support</td>
<td>Material support</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Emotional support</td>
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<td>Hope</td>
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<td>Aspirations</td>
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Relational Strengths

Relational strengths refer to the recognition of interconnectedness and engagement of families and their interactions they share with each other. The relational strengths of these families emerged within three different spaces. Firstly, they explained experiences of relational strengths among immediate family members (everyone in their household). Secondly, relational strengths also emerged within their interactions with extended family members and nearby neighbours. Thirdly, the families described relational strengths within shared connections with people within the broader community.

**Immediate family members.** Immediate family members refer to all the members of a family who share physical and emotional spaces with one another. This includes biologically and historically related people in one household. The relational strengths among immediate family members were described as being entrenched in the ability of the family members to spend time with each other, especially when they share meals. One of the family members explained this phenomenon by means of their Venn diagrams. “*Each of the circles here are of my family, we socialise. The strengths that we have is when we eat, we eat together during breakfast. We are a family. That boost our relationship and boost our social life*” (Family 5). This narrative links to a reflection of a single mother with two adopted daughters: “*We [the family] are always sitting at the table and eating, enjoying the food*” (Family 1). Sharing meals as a family not only creates space to spend time together, but also to interact with each other in conversation on an interpersonal level. “*Eating together, eat bread with a unity, with the family and then hoping their [family members] day was good. When you [and your family] eat you can ask them; ‘how was your homework? And how did you do at the school?’ Then they [children] start to get happy, when we [family members] talk at the table*” (Family 5).
Relational strengths between immediate family members also came to the fore in their description of their ability to support each other. One of the wives explained: “We [husband and wife] support each other and when I have a problem I just talk to him. I don’t talk to friends or anyone I just talk to him [husband]. And I’m always here for my children and I need them to talk to me about everything so that I can maybe if there is a problem, I can resolve it and if it doesn’t get solved, go to the father” (Family 2). One of the mothers of two adopted daughters added: “My children, they are my friends. I can say they are my friends because when I am hurt or unhappy, I want to talk to them. I call them and sit down and talk with them” (Family 1). The space to communicate was one of the key components the families highlighted – the space they share with their immediate family members. The essence of open dialogue among family members emerged from the narratives of both females and males. One of the men added the following: “I have a good relationship with my wife and my children because if they need help, they may ask me or their mother. If their mother can’t afford to just explain something to them, she asks me. When she does not understand, she asks me to help them” (Family 5). A second male mentioned: “… sometimes just take your girlfriend or your wife as your best buddy [husband referring to his relationship with his wife]” (Family 3). The participant further added: “I know I’ve got some friends. But I know, maybe there are like two [his sons] that are within my family” (Family 3).

Relational strengths within the immediate family was also described with a sense of cohesion and the “family” itself was described as a strength. “That’s my big strength, with my family. The unity with my family” (Family 5). The importance of them working well together as a team was highlighted: “We [referring to family (wife and 2 girls)] just work together with the issues, my wife and my children. That is the best thing we have” (Family 5).

**Extended family members and neighbours.** Extended family members refer to the second space where relational strengths came to the fore. This space was described as
specific relationships they share with extended family members (parents, grandparents, uncles, etc.). Relational strengths from the extended family members were described within the relational interactions they share with these extended family members, especially when dealing with problems. One of the wives described a situation: “If there is something wrong, I just go to his sister or call his sister [sister in law] and tell her there is this and that and my husband is doing this and that and she is the one guiding me” (Family 2). One of the other participants elaborated: “My friendship with my mother is just like when I have got problems, I can just talk to my mother and then she will make me feel better” (Family 1). One of the married females whose husband works outside of Ikageng added: “If I don’t get a solution to my problems, when my husband comes home, I just sit down with him and tell him, but usually I talk to my mother, she is like my friend” (Family 2).

**Neighbours and the larger community.** Neighbours and the larger community refers to the third space in which relational strengths were described. The families described this as disconnected from their immediate family and extended family, but still important to the family as whole. The families highlighted the significant role their neighbours play as a relational strength embedded in the sense of community within Ikageng, Potchefstroom. One of the family members explained how neighbours look out for each other in a rural area: “You know where I’m staying, there is no safety that side, so it’s like not safe, but we as neighbours we just look to each other. Like my neighbours, I always stay with my neighbours and when I am not there I am home and when I am not home, I am at work. So our neighbours we are all there so we are sitting there just, we just talk about how we are going to get work and how you have to look for work. You know just a general thing. We just speak about general things” (Family 2).

The neighbourhood and larger community as a relational strength was also described in the community’s ability to support the families within the Ikageng area and family
members also included the larger community area of Potchefstroom. One of the fathers explained: “So this in the community is a strength. During their worse time most of them, they have that strength to come together. At work we [co-workers] have togetherness as a community. Here in the community with togetherness of the community at the work. There I have experience how the community in this world can come together and listen to one another all of them. We affect each other when here [at work], because during that time you will see some groups, there they just sharing issues, ideas, of the community” (Family 5).

The larger Potchefstroom community was described as a space of resources where the families enjoyed relational interactions: “Uh, we love to go to town and to, uh, Fantasia [family entertainment centre with different games], that is our thing. We also go there for me, for my activities too” (Family 2).

**Spirituality and Beliefs**

Spirituality and beliefs refer to the families’ awareness and belief in a higher power or God. They described their awareness of a higher power as a sense of comfort, personal values and purpose. Spirituality and beliefs emerged through their narratives by means of faith and their trust in something greater than themselves.

**Faith.** Faith refers to the confidence these families have in a religion or a spiritual deity without needing proof of existence, in this case Christianity. One of the mothers described the importance of reading the Bible together as a family: “We read the Bible in the house and if when we read the Bible it’s like healing inside. My family gets the power from God, I taught them that God comes first” (Family 1). That resonates with the contribution of a member of family four; “The other thing that makes me strong is the Bible. To read the Bible. I am a person who reads the Bible. At least it gives me strength and it encourages me, and I can read it to my children and they know when I read it, I have strength” (Family 4). Faith was also expressed by means of church attendance: “I don’t know what gives me
strength but the only thing I can say is the church. I feel the church gives me strength and I love going to church. The pastor keeps me going to church and sometimes the he comes to my house” (Family 1). One of the wives, a mother of two children, shared a similar experience: “Me, my daughter and my son we went to church. The father doesn't like to go to church. He is not the person for church. When he feels like he is ready to go to church he will, so I don't want to force it when he doesn't want to go” (Family 2). The participant added: “First of all my strength is I’m always praying and you know I do believe when I go to church that I got some advice from pastor. I believe that I get the support from my church” (Family 2).

Trust. Trust refers to the firm belief of these families in something bigger than themselves. In this case, the trust in a certain deity or their own set of religious beliefs. The families find these beliefs reliable. The families indicated that they trust God and believe that He will provide what they need to survive even though they live without many resources. One of the single mothers expressed her beliefs: “Yes, when we believe in God, what we need God will provide for us. We pray to Him truly and believe He will provide. Believing in God is what gives us strength and whatever we need, God will provide for us. If we pray hard and believe, He will provide everything” (Family 1). The families expressed their trust in God by believing He will help them in their lives: “Everything is from God. Like I already said with the Bible, it is only God who created everything in the world, both the heavens and the world. Even when I have problems, obviously I trust Him and nothing is impossible for Him” (Family 4). Moreover, the families expressed trust in God by believing that He can help them cope with their difficult circumstances and that their lives will be better in future: “And to trust that God one day, He will answer for me. That is another thing that makes me trust in God. I believe in God that sometimes He is looking at what I do. That is the thing that makes me say: ‘no I won’t neglect these children’. It is to trust in God” (Family 6).
Sources of Support

Sources of support refers to the different ways in which these families receive support. These sources were described either by means of material support they receive or emotional forms of support.

Material support. Material support refers to money these families receive and was described as social grants that the family members receive from the government, salaries family members earn, and jobs or other forms of employment that provide material support. The prominent role of government grants was evident throughout the narratives of families: “My income is my children, their grants. It is R330. The father, if he sends money at least he tries to put R1200 sometimes and when he has no job he just sits. So I have to keep seeing how I can manage my debts” (Family 4). The importance of receiving social grants was highlighted by one of the mothers of two children: “My husband is the breadwinner. We get two grants for child support” (Family 2). This further resonates with the expression of a single mother; “I am getting money for foster care, grants and I am also working” (Family 1). One of the breadwinners of a family contributed: “Work. With that work that I have, I can provide for my family” (Family 3). Some of the families described material sources of support as support that they receive from individuals in and around their community. Material sources of support were also described in a relational context – individuals in and outside of the community where the families live, support them financially. The nuances of material support varied among the families. One of the fathers explained: “… my bosses came to me and said we want your children to attend there [school] we will help you where we can, you see. So the children attend that school” (Family 6). A member of Family 4 explained material support as follows: “Pastor Mofokeng in the pastor’s committee sometimes he helps us by giving cabbages and carrots and vegetables but he doesn’t come every day. He comes maybe once a month, maybe he will come on a Wednesday in that
month. And sometimes the municipality helps us with paraffin, they give 20 litres of paraffin” (Family 4).

**Emotional support.** Emotional support refers to the reciprocal care shared among the family members. From the data it was evident that the family members respect and love each other and they show compassion and empathy to their family members. Emotional support is a way to show interest in the lives of their family members. One of the core aspects of emotional support for these families was reciprocal respect among family members. One of the fathers expressed the following: “So like I respect you while I am older than you [referring to his adoptive sons], I don’t say you are children to me. So I am also asking you to respect each and every person that you meet. Whether it is your friends or adults or whoever, don’t say no that one is nothing to me, that one is not my dad, that one is not what to me. They should respect, I am supposed to be the one who teaches them. So they take it from me and they respect me I like to stay with them as I have been staying with them, the thing that gives me strength is that they don’t belittle me, they respect me. That is the thing that makes them able to accept anything, the situation we are in. Sometimes we have nothing to eat at all and they can accept that we don’t have anything. That is the thing that gives me strength and be able to stay with them. They can see that we have nothing but that man is trying were he can try and when he doesn’t have they can accept it” (Family 6). One of the mothers added the following: “I want my children to grow with good manners, I don’t know how I can put it. They should have good manners, with love and respect” (Family 4). The members of families also described the emotional support they receive from nuclear and extended family members, especially women figures. One of the daughters elaborated: “I will put my mother in front at the biggest strength” (Family 1). One of the young married female participants added: “When I need something, there is no one who can help me with it, she [her own mother] is always there for me. My mother is always there for me. Emotionally
and materially” (Family 2). One of the mothers expressed her love for her children and her awareness of the responsibility she has toward them: “The ones that make me happy and the ones that makes me strong, my children first. I live because of them. The love for my children. In other words, I put my children first, my responsibility towards my children” (Family 4). The participant further described: “I have strength that I can give my children, the love that God wants from us. I can give my children love and take care of them and raise them in love” (Family 4).

Emotional support was also discussed as embedded in relationships outside of the nuclear family systems – members of the families mentioned neighbours and the broader community. One of the mothers explained: “Yes, I give them [neighbours and community members] the support. Everyone who is struggling to take care of themselves. Like when my neighbours have problems I sometimes go there and give them advice and show them that I am here for them” (Family 1). One of the members of a family of six commented: “The thing that I would like in the community, is even if life is not so good, I wouldn’t want to see another person suffering. I am not denying it, there should be something we struggle with. If we see someone suffering we should help, like when I volunteered to take the children to stay with them because they have no parents. I don’t want to see another person suffering. When I laugh in my house, I also want my neighbour to be laughing. I want life to be good” (Family 6). One of the wives highlighted: “It gives me strength. The support I get from the community” (Family 4).

Hope

Hope refers to the ability of these families to strengthen themselves and each other (either members of their nuclear or extended family or even individuals living in their community) by means of encouragement and the sharing of their aspirations.
**Encouragement.** Encouragement refers to the ability to motivate or inspire yourself or other individuals. Encouragement can lead to a sense of hope or can stimulate a belief in something or provide the necessary confidence to do something. Encouragement was described by these families as giving themselves hope and motivating themselves and others to do certain things and to strive for more in their lives. This was highlighted by one of the single mothers taking care of her two children: “*I am better off, I struggle but I think I live better because there are people who have problems that are more than mine*” (Family 4). The participant added the following: “*I also encourage myself with one day it will be better for me. That is what also gives me strength*” (Family 4). This particular participant further expressed how her children encourage her: “*These are the only ones because when I am weak and I think of my children, I get lifted up. And many times when I am hurt, I run to the Bible. So these are the ones that lift me up*” (Family 4).

In other situations, it is more important to encourage others, especially the parents who encourage their children and who have hope for a better future for their children than most of them are currently experiencing: “*My sons are at school and I wish them a bright future. We are struggling at home but we are trying to make a living*” (Family 1). A father shared the following about his three adopted children: “*And go higher, like they should work for themselves and if I am still alive I should see them. Even though they don’t do anything for me but my heart will be satisfied as long as they can stand on their own like I am able to. And they should see that, that man helped us so let us help someone like that man helped us*” (Family 6). The participant elaborated: “*I don’t want to lie to you, even their reports when they come, I am proud. I always tell them you don’t have parents, your mother has passed away and your aunt also passed away so I am the one left with you*” (Family 6). A father from a different family shared his feelings about mutual encouragement and his children – they encourage each other to be better: “*Yah, I push them, they push me* [father and his
children]. They’ve released me ... just go start your whole life there. Be yourself” (Family 3).

Aspirations. The aspirations of these families refer to what they strive to accomplish in the future. It is something they would like to achieve to make their lives better. These aspirations were in the areas of their education and employment. One of the single mothers emphasised her aspiration about better education: “I also want to go to school, I want to be educated. I personally want to be educated so I can help my children, they also need it. I need to be educated and my children also need education. At least if I am educated when there are job opportunities I can apply and help my children” (Family 4). One of the fathers stated his educational wishes for his daughters: “If she is exposed to that better life with education and then a better life after education. I just wish for her a better life” (Family 5).

With regard to more employment opportunities, some of the participants stated that they would like to have access to a certain career. A child from one of the families wants to go to a university for her to pursue her desired career: “I want to go further and become a social worker so that I can help my mother and my family to become a better family and to take responsibility of other people, like neighbours” (Family 1). One of the participants shared the dream of her daughter: “She tells me that after matric she wants to help me, she wants to work, she wants to be a soldier. So I just try to always to talk to her about school. My husband do save money for her, for education” (Family 2). One of the participants with three boys wants his children to be able to stand on their own feet and take care of themselves one day: “That is what I will be happy for, even if I can go lie down in the grave as long as I know I am leaving them [his three boys] grown up and each one of them are able to fend for himself, as I fend for myself that is when I will be okay. I will be satisfied also in life” (Family 6).
Discussion of Findings

The central position of families in a contemporary society has received much attention over the last years on both an international (Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC], 2009; Holm, Jarrick, & Scott, 2015; Kroll & Delhey, 2013; Levinson, 2013; OECD, 2011; UNDP, 2014; Walsh, 2012; World Bank, 2015) and national level (Adepoju, 2005; Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Chimere-Dan, 2015; Department of Social Development, 2012; Makiwane & Berry, 2013; Mokomane, 2012; Rabe & Naidoo, 2015). This study endeavoured to contribute to an understanding of strengths within families who live in a resource-constrained area in Ikageng, Potchefstroom. This study sheds light on the structure of families in a South African context, their definition of strengths and the value of each of these strengths with regard to their daily lives in a resource-constrained environment. It was important to contextualise these findings within a specific context of data collection and in light of the diverse context in South Africa. It was, therefore, important to acknowledge the homogeneity of groups, but also to consider the heterogeneity that exists among families.

The researcher analysed and discussed the findings by employing a constructivist-interpretivist worldview and by doing so, recognised the strengths as identified and defined by each individual family. These strengths were valued equally as it is their own personal experiences and reality.

A repertoire of relational connectedness (interpersonal connections) in the families emerged as a core strength and confirms existing literature that links interconnectedness of families with resilience and the general well-being of the family on a personal level (Asay & DeFrain, 2012; De Haan, Hawley, & Deal, 2002; Holtzkamp, 2010; Koen, 2012; Luthar, Cicchetti & Becker, 2000; Oh & Chang, 2014; Walsh, 2012). The relational strengths of the families emerged on three different levels of interactions. Firstly, the families described their relationships entrenched in cohesion and a solidarity of kinship (Becvar & Becvar, 2006;
Secondly, the family members described relational connectedness as going beyond the boundaries of families as an institution. On this level, they shared interpersonal connections with individuals in their close and external environment that links to literature on the prominent role of communities with regard to the well-being of families in an African context (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Department of Social Development, 2012; Koen, 2012; Makiwane & Berry, 2013; Malde, Scott, & Vera-Hernández, 2015). Thirdly, interconnectedness was described as a reciprocal exchange of social interactions among family members and the broader community. Interestingly, the ability of the family members to describe these interactions was quite nuanced and the researcher was able to shed light on the ability of these families to establish functional units where resources are shared (Black & Lobo, 2008; Obst, 2004; Petty, Bishop, Fisher, & Sonn, 2006; Pilch, 2006; Turcotte, 2005). Throughout these nuanced descriptions, each of the family members and community members were positioned as a resource, where families are able to tap into during adverse circumstances in a resource-constrained environment. Noteworthy of these three different levels of relational interactions was the resonance of these levels to what Walsh (2006) refers to as the repositioning of families where researchers should move from the dyadic descriptions of families to a systemic description. When we broaden our perspective beyond a dyadic bond and early life determinants, we become aware of the fact that resilience is intertwined in a web of relations, connections and experiences that occur over the life course and across generations (Hauser, 1999). Both an ecological and developmental viewpoint are essential to comprehend resilience in a social and progressive context (Walsh, 2006).

The families described spirituality and beliefs as a strength by highlighting their individual and collective faith in God and the trust they share within families and also on a community level. The position of spirituality and beliefs for these families come as no
surprise, as various researchers highlight the importance and centrality of spirituality in families across their life span (Anderson, 2009; Angell, Dennis, & Dumain, 1998; Becvar, 2013; Black & Lobo, 2008; Caldwell & Senter, 2013; Holtzkamp, 2010; Van Hook, 2013; Walsh, 2006, 2009, 2012). The profound salience and meaning across generations when the participating families discussed spirituality and beliefs are of great interest. Moving toward a systemic description of the families provided insight on spirituality and its role within families as functional units (Walsh, 2009, 2012). Spirituality and beliefs influenced the families mutually, whereby the families and individual members found meaning, established bonds and shared experiences in a dynamic process and practise that strengthened these families as units (Beavers & Hampson, 2003; Becvar, 2013; Black & Lobo, 2008; Holtzkamp, 2010; Walsh, 2009, 2012). Anderson (2009), describes families as meaning-making communities of spirituality – families de-construct and co-construct meaning rooted in their culture and generational traditions. Overall, these participating families described their spirituality and beliefs as resources of strength that resonates with literature that associates spirituality within families with quality and stable relationships beyond family units (Becvar, 2013; Caldwell & Senter, 2013; Tanyi, 2006; Van Hook, 2013, Walsh, 2009, 2012). According to Walsh (2006, 2012), spirituality transcends the self by developing a sense of meaning and harmony while connecting the self to other individuals. Families who live in poverty rely on their spirituality as a source of guidance and strength, which can help them deal with their circumstances (Walsh, 2009, 2012). Furthermore, spirituality has been linked to resilience by offering families the means to understand things more clearly, being able to come together and also to assist them with coping in troubled times (Black & Lobo, 2008; Walsh, 2006, 2009).

The findings of the present study confirm the role of support within families (Becvar, 2013; Cantwell, Muldoon, & Gallagher, 2014; Distelberg & Taylor, 2015; Masenya, De Wet,
The reciprocal nature of support across generations in the families came to the fore, and was described as *currencies* – either in the form of material or emotional support. These currencies of support link with the arguments of Asay and DeFrain (2012) and Masenya, et al. (2017) with regard to various sources of support that are needed for families to function effectively. The families described material support as rooted in physical needs in order to survive, with examples of their basic needs as families. Material support should be contextualised in this specific study in terms of the socioeconomic environment these families live in. They described material support in terms of money, work and food – basic needs in some context yet an absolute for these families (Masenya, et al., 2017; Mokomane, 2012; Wen & Hanley, 2015). Several studies confirm the role of material support in moderating the effect of stress on families (Black & Lobo, 2008; Hartshorne, Schafer, Stratton, & Nacarato, 2013; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004; Patterson, 2002a; Patterson, 2002b; Wen & Hanley, 2015), especially families who have access to little or no resources. Cantwell et al. (2014) highlight this link between sources of support and the perception of stress on a family level – families who have resources of material support available report higher levels of well-being and adjustments on an emotional level. One can support this argument in light of the hierarchy of needs and satisfaction, according to Maslow’s theory on needs (Maslow, 1954). According to this theory and contributions made by Cantwell et al. (2014), family members find it almost impossible to share emotional support reciprocally in the absence of material support.

Noteworthy of these findings was family’s ability to recognise and share emotional currencies of support – they described reciprocal compassion, love, empathy and respect for one another. Dale, Williams and Bowyer (2012) describe emotional support in families as
entrenched in what they call “mutual obligations” motivated by the culture, heritage and normative believes of families. Emotional support should, therefore, be contextualised with regard to these families who live in a specific area in South Africa. These findings on emotional support can be linked to literature of Mokomane (2012) and Walsh (2012) who suggest that extended families and community members are a great resource for emotional support that can in turn enhance resilience among family members. Parents described their love and support for their children as an effort to create positive, caregiving relationships and to try and create a better life for themselves (Masenya et al., 2017). When children grow up in a loving family environment where parents/caregivers support their emotional needs, they are more likely to be resilient (Mokomane, 2012). When individuals experience problems, they are more likely to turn to neighbours or community members for guidance, reassurance, positive feedback or other forms of emotional exchange (NCPFCE, 2013; Walsh, 2009). Positive relationships within a community can assist in fulfilling the basic needs of families and even in achieving goals – emotional support can shield families from adversities and help them cope better (NCPFCE, 2013).

It is important to mention the significance of hope among the participating families – they described hope as embedded in encouragement and future aspirations. Literature compares hope in families with well-being (Black & Lobo, 2008; Henry, Sheffield Morris, & Harrist, 2015; Lybbert & Wydick, 2016; Oh & Chang, 2014; Sabanci, 2015; Taylor, 1989; Walsh, 2006, 2012; Weingarten, 2010; Wong, 2015). Hope in families serves as a protective factor that helps individual members to achieve a positive outlook on life and encourages them to reach their potential in future (Henry et al., 2015; Walsh, 2012). Snyder (2000) describes hope in families as an indicator of high resilience, underpinned by their reaction to challenges and emotional resources in overcoming barriers. Families with hope do not react the same way as families with no hope – families with hope view barriers in a positive way:

One can describe the encouragement and aspirations of families as alternative pathways to overcome adversities in their physical environment. The participating families use encouragement and their aspirations as a mediator of resilience, where they encourage themselves and family members in their family structure to see beyond their constraints. This is of particular interest, as these families use hope to see the possibilities available to them and to use their available resources to overcome their struggles (Walsh, 2012; Wong, 2015). Hope as a tool of resilience in families enables them to cope with adversities and helps them to perceive crises in a different way in order for them to deal with challenges effectively, which in turn enable them to find purpose and meaning in their struggles (Becvar, 2013; Black & Lobo, 2008; Hines, 1998; McCreary & Dancy, 2004; Orthner et al., 2004; Walsh, 2006, 2012). Older generations in families foster this sense of hope in younger generations by encouraging them through positive affirmation and aspirations to complete their education. When younger generations receive encouragement, they are able to be more persistent and seize opportunities, which in turn can also nurture resilience within individuals and family units (Wong, 2015). Parents or older family members often employ the essence of hope and encouragement to help their children strive to achieve more in life (Lybbert & Wydick, 2016; Walsh, 2006, 2012).

**Implication of Findings**

The participating families have generally been described from a deficit perspective (Walsh, 2012), especially in a South African context where the emphasis of empirical work mainly reports on the needs of families (Adepoju, 2005; Amoateng & Heaton, 2007;
Chimere-Dan, 2015; Department of Social Development, 2012; Makiwane & Berry, 2013; Mokomane, 2012; Rabe & Naidoo, 2015). These findings on the self-identified strengths of resource-constrained families shed light on the importance of a strength-based perspective, where the researcher shifted her focus away from deficits. However, the basic needs of family members should not be ignored. In this study, the PLA technique enabled the family members to participate, something that would have been increasingly difficult with any other method. This technique enabled the researcher to gain insight with regard to the contribution of each individual family member and the families as units.

The findings of this study can be utilised to foster resilience within families by using and developing their strengths to deal with their adversities. Interventions for families with scant resources can accordingly be developed. These interventions can be employed to re-establish stability within families, empower them and in turn create healthy and strong communities. In addition, this study has implications for policy makers, as programmes can be developed according to the strength-based approach by assisting families in recognising their strengths and in turn use them to improve their own lives.

**Limitations and Recommendations**

It is recommended to obtain the perspectives of different communities and cultural groups in order to provide a broad perspective of the self-identified needs of families in a South African context. Furthermore, the findings of this study were based on the data collected in one of the locations of a larger study. This has implications for the generalisation of the findings to other contexts or areas. A more comprehensive understanding of the strengths of families living in resource-constrained environments could have been captured if more locations were included in the study.

It is also acknowledged that a greater involvement by participants in a research process – during the planning, writing, and developing stages – may be helpful in an effort to
help influence policies that can change their lives. Participants should be able to have a voice. It is recommended that the findings of this study are used in the development of intervention strategies and in the changing and improving of policies for families living in resource-constrained environments.

**Conclusion**

The strengths of families are context specific and families who, therefore, live in resource-constrained environments will identify and employ strengths that help them to overcome or cope with their particular adversities. The families living in Ikageng, Potchefstroom, identified their strengths as being protective and using coping factors, which enable them to survive despite the fact that they have little or no resources available. These strengths are rooted in relationships the family members foster between themselves and other individuals outside of the immediate family. They rely on material and social systems of support to provide in their economic and emotional needs, when required. The families have faith in their spiritual beliefs and practices, which make them resilient and they have hope for their future – they view themselves as overcoming their struggles and living better lives. These families are able to employ these strengths in order to improve their lives and they are able to bounce back from adversities, which makes them resilient.

Focusing on the strengths of families rather than on their problems, make way for a more positive perspective on families and how they manage to succeed in spite of the obstacles they face. Additionally, the findings of this study should be contextualised, as the self-identified strengths of these families can differ from the strengths of families living in a different area or from another culture or families dealing with other struggles. The context of South Africans living in resource-constrained environments and the milieu of the country should be taken into consideration.
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SECTION 3

CRITICAL REFLECTION

This research study contributed to our knowledge on the self-identified strengths of families in Ikageng, Potchefstroom. These strengths are particularly important to families in this community and to empirical contributions in South Africa with regard to the resource constraints in this specific area. Four core strengths emerged from the data – embedded in the potential of the families to be resilient – irrespective of the constraints in their living environment. Family resilience theory (FRT) provided insight concerning the ability of the families to remain strong and to overcome adversities (Walsh, 2006, 2012, 2015). Currently, little empirical evidence exists in a South African context that can shed light on the ability of South African families to overcome adversities, especially with regard to the current socioeconomic state of the country. This study provided insight concerning the contemporary structure of families and the ideas and experiences of family members on strengths and how the strength found in unity can be realised in family structures. This study contributed to our understanding of relational interactions within immediate family units and repositioned the role of shared meals within families in resource-constrained environments.

The sharing of meals should be contextualised with regard to the socioeconomic status of these Setswana families who unveiled a much deeper meaning of sharing meals than the mere commensality reflected in Western literature (Cook & Dunifon, 2012; Douglas, 1972; Sobal & Nelson, 2003; Tuomainen, 2014). The sharing of meals with family members was discussed with these families beyond the normative practise and hierarchy of meals (Tuomainen, 2014). Little emphasis was placed on the quantity or regularity of these meals, but rather the quality of the relational interactions shared when they share a meal. The quality of the relationships among the family members and the interactional bonds shared during mealtimes was the key component of spending mealtimes together, rather than the
actual meals themselves (Cook & Dunifon, 2012; Musick & Meier, 2012). For the participants living in Ikageng, the ritual of spending time together and sharing meals are of more importance than just the mere act of sharing meals – during mealtimes relationships are maintained and improved. Sharing meals is an opportunity for them to share information with each other about their daily lives and to interact with other family members. Time spent together leads to conversations among family members – they are able to communicate in a safe space and share feelings and ideas, which in turn fosters positive connections. As stated by Black & Lobo (2008), these rituals and routines provide opportunities for these families to communicate on a personal level and also to strengthen the cohesion and connectedness found in family systems.

Moreover, the research added to the notion of relational connectedness of South African families that go beyond the boundaries of families to include relational connections with neighbours, friends and community members, which supports the collectiveness that exists in Africa (Amoateng & Heaton, 2007; Koen, 2012; Makiwane & Berry, 2013). The participants did not only perceive their biologically related family members as part of their family, but considered “family” as individuals who share relational ties of respect, love, reciprocal exchange, commitment and obligation (Masenya, De Wet, & Coetzee, 2017). This phenomenon is unique to African families and their culture, especially those living in poverty, as they have to rely on each other in order to survive and have access to a supportive network, whether a biological family or otherwise. A strong sense of Ubuntu came to the fore, although it was never explicitly mentioned by the families.

This research contributed to FRT in a South African context – based on the lives of families living in resource-constrained environments. According to the findings, different strengths are utilised by these families as part of their context and circumstances. However, one needs to contextualise these findings to this community and its members specifically and
has to be considered when policies and interventions are developed. In addition, studies on South African families mainly focus on the deficits of families and do not acknowledge the fact that families have strengths and positive attributes despite their deficits (Asay & DeFrain, 2012; Nkosi & Daniels, 2007). This study, therefore, addressed these gaps in literature and can make a valuable contribution when intervention strategies are developed, such as the White Paper on Families (2012). It is imperative, therefore, that researchers move away from a strength perspective when developing interventions and plans for these families. This study contributed to our understanding of psychological strengths in the absence of physical resources. These findings can inform possible interventions focusing on South African families that can add to the sustainability and profession of equity in the public sector of South Africa.

**Participatory Learning Actions**

According to Chambers (2007), participatory learning actions (PLA) enable participants to share their opinions and ideas on a specific topic and encourages them to help plan and act to improve their conditions. By making use of visual representations (Venn diagrams and Free drawings) created by the participants, the researcher was able to ask questions, discuss and elaborate on the representations through dialogue (Bozalek, 2011). This was a creative way for the families to express themselves and made it possible for the researcher to gain an in-depth insight of the lives of the participants through the involvement of different members of a family unit. This study provided the families with an opportunity to identify their own strengths by means of a PLA approach. The participants were given a voice, in contrast with previous studies that employed interviews and questionnaires. The participants were, therefore, able to form part of the planning and development of intervention strategies concerning their own lives and communities and they were able to assist in the process of policy changes.
**Free drawings.** The purpose of the Free drawings was to see and comprehend the family structures and relation to their community combined with the resources available in the specific community. These drawings were not analysed but this method was used so that the participants could relate their experiences to the drawings and they were able to explain themselves much better to the researcher. The researcher gained insight into the families and their lives and were able to ask questions concerning family mapping that made this process successful.

**Venn diagrams.** The use of Venn diagrams was particularly interesting and valuable for this study, as all of the members of the family units were able to contribute and draw something. The participants were asked to draw their strengths in different sized circles – the size of the circle indicated the size and ranking of the strengths. This method enabled each family member, regardless of their age, to contribute. It was a way for the researcher to bridge the language barrier and for the participants from different educational levels to contribute to the discussion.

**Conclusion**

This research study addressed a gap in current empirical studies on the strengths of families, especially those living in resource-constrained areas in South Africa. It also addressed the contextual gap in family resilience theory, focussing on the South African context and discussing the difference from other possible contexts. Relational strengths of South African families are different as a result of their circumstances and culture. Therefore, this research contributed to the literature on family strengths, which can be utilised in an effort to improve the lives of families living in resource-constrained environments.

The use of PLA techniques to collect data enabled the researcher to engage with the families in order to learn more about their structures and communities. The researcher was
also able to obtain data from individuals with different educational levels, which meant that individuals would not have been excluded based on that.

**Personal Reflection**

In conclusion of this research study, I would describe my experiences as daunting, frustrating and indeed a time-consuming process. With the assistance and guidance of my supervisor, I felt privileged to have learned so much and grow in the process. I still have a lot to learn as a researcher and hope to improve through experience. Working on an affiliated study of a larger research project was difficult at times, especially to align all of the aspects of the affiliated study with the aims and procedure of the larger project. The use of a qualitative descriptive research design provided me with the opportunity to learn about PLA techniques, such as Venn diagrams and Free drawings. My eyes were opened to innovative and effective ways of collecting data that can include participants who were uneducated and during this process, they were given a voice. During the analysis phase, I found myself becoming overwhelmed with the amount of data and the intense focus needed to actually be able to go through the phases of coding, re-coding and finally creating themes accurately. I had to repeat the process a few times and kept a journal of my own biases in order to immerse myself in the data while simultaneously trying not to make assumptions about what the participants meant and to still keep my opinions separate from the data. I wanted to make absolutely sure that the themes were accurate so that the findings of my study can be used to further explore the topic and to develop intervention strategies that can help these participants – and others like them – to cope better with the challenges they face in their daily lives.

I became aware of my obliviousness and consequential thoughtlessness surrounding the lives of the majority of South Africans who live in utter poverty with little or no resources. Furthermore, I was able to undergo a growth process that entailed introspection and self-reflection of my privileged life and position. As a result, I do not take my life, the
things I have and my family for granted anymore. I acknowledge how fortunate I am to not have to worry about surviving without basic needs, service delivery or a supportive family structure, something that is the basis of reality for these participants. The research allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the inherent strengths of families and how they are able to utilise their strengths when they experience challenging times. The most interesting finding to me was the predominant nature of and reliance on relationships among the family members, friends and the community. The participants regarded their relationships with others as a strength that serve as networks of support. The theme of hope was a surprise – the participants acknowledged their positive impact when providing or receiving encouragement. They are able to look past all of the adversities they face and find a way to motivate others. They also have big dreams for their future and they aspire to be better versions of themselves. They all want a better life. The participants were given the opportunity to identify their own strengths and to think about what gives them strength in their lives, which can contribute positively to their lives by having this awareness.

The research showed me that despite all of the negativity and adversities – hope is still alive. I have delved into the field of positive psychology during this process and made a mind shift from a prominent dysfunctional view. It has definitely changed my view of positive psychology and its contribution is now valued even more. Reflecting back, I have learned a lot about myself during the research process. I have gained confidence in my research skills regardless of the little experience and exposure I have had.
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