

**AN EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN A GROUP OF
POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A CHALLENGING TRAINING PROGRAMME**

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B.Psych

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Magister
Artium in Clinical Psychology at the North-West University,**

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SUMMARY

AN EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN A GROUP OF POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A CHALLENGING TRAINING PROGRAMME

KEY WORDS: community, community resilience, resilience, positive psychology,
community psychology

The literature on community resilience focuses on communities' adaptation in the aftermath of natural disasters. However, little attention has been given to continuous exposure to challenging circumstances that require resourceful adaptation. Community resilience is known as a community's resourcefulness and capacity for renewal despite adverse and challenging circumstances. In this research, communities are conceptualised as relational-based collectives with common boundaries and interests. This study aims to explore community resilience amongst two groups of students in a challenging training programme. In this context a challenging training programme refers to master's students in clinical/counselling psychology training. Literature confirms that these students face extremely stressful and demanding challenges such as high academic and practical workload, the mastering of complex skills, exposure to emotional hardships, and theoretical integration that need to take place. Previous research on community resilience that has been conducted from a quantitative perspective reports technical shortcomings in measurement that need considerable attention. Hence, this research employs qualitative research, as qualitative methods can side-step those shortcomings and are generally more congruent with the values of community psychology. A case study method was used to explore community resilience. The case study method was an appropriate method for this

study since it allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of community resilience. The participants as students in the 2007 and 2008 academic years constitute two separate communities under investigation. Seventeen students (3 males and 14 females) between the ages of 23 and 30 years were purposively selected to reflect on abstract processes in their own community. The data collection methods included the Mmogo-methodTM, an in-depth individual interview, focus group discussions and written texts that were used to discover community resilience. The Mmogo-methodTM makes a unique contribution to this research as it allows for the accessing of contextually-sensitive data.

The findings illustrated that challenges emerged from both within as well as from outside the community. These challenges also served as a motivation for building community resilience. Internally-created threats to community resilience, such as poor interpersonal relations, deserve special attention as previous research appears to have overlooked their relevance. In this study, developing community resilience most notably involved a cyclical process, that requires time, the availability of tangible resources (finances, lecturers) and the application of personal resources (humour, hope) and member proximity. The maintaining of community resilience implies that the community had achieved an adequate level of resilience and tried in various ways to preserve it. Such ways are amongst others the acknowledgement of shared experiences, belonging, hope, humour and respect for diversity. The functions of community resilience involved the mutual supplementation and fortification of members in the community. This function served as a resource through which members were strengthened and protected in the group. This research indicates that community resilience is not dependent on a group of resilient individuals, but that it rather emerges in the relational dynamics, through the application of

resources and the available of time. Community resilience consists of complex processes in which community members accept responsibility for each other's pain.

Word count: 500

OPSOMMING

'N ONDERSOEK NA GEMEENSKAPSVEERKRAGTIGHEID IN 'N GROEP NAGRAADSE STUDENTE IN 'N UITDAGENDE OPLEIDINGSPROGRAM

SLEUTELWOORDE: gemeenskap, gemeenskapsveerkrachtigheid, veerkrachtigheid,
positiewe sielkunde, gemeenskapsielkunde

Literatuur oor gemeenskapsveerkrachtigheid fokus op gemeenskappe se aanpassing as 'n nagevolg van natuurrampe. Min aandag is egter nog gegee aan die voortdurende blootstelling aan uitdagende omstandighede wat vindingryke aanpassing verg. Gemeenskapsveerkrachtigheid word beskou as 'n gemeenskap se vindingrykheid en vermoë om te vernuwe ten spyte van ongunstige en uitdagende omstandighede. In hierdie navorsing word gemeenskappe gekonseptualiseer as verhoudingsgebaseerde kollektiewe met gemeenskaplike grense en belange. Hierdie studie poog om gemeenskapsveerkrachtigheid onder twee groepe studente in 'n uitdagende opleidingsprogram te ondersoek. In hierdie konteks verwys 'n uitdagende opleidingsprogram na meestersgraadstudente in kliniese/voorligtingsielkunde-opleiding. Literatuur bevestig dat hierdie studente uiters stresvolle en veeleisende uitdagings in die gesig staar, soos 'n moeilike akademiese en praktiese werkslading, die bemeestering van komplekse vaardighede, blootstelling aan emosionele probleme, en teoretiese integrasie wat moet plaasvind. Vorige navorsing oor gemeenskapsveerkrachtigheid wat vanuit 'n kwantitatiewe perspektief gedoen is, maak melding van tegniese tekortkominge in die meting daarvan wat nog baie aandag moet kry. Daarom word daar in hierdie navorsing gebruik gemaak van kwalitatiewe navorsing, omdat kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes daardie tekortkominge kan sistap en oor die algemeen meer in

lyn is met die waardes van gemeenskapsielkunde. 'n Gevallestudiemetode is gebruik om gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid te ondersoek. 'n Gevallestudiemetodes is 'n geskikte metode vir hierdie studie omdat dit navorsers in staat stel om in-diepte begrip vir gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid te bekom. Die deelnemers is studente wat ingeskryf is vir gemeenskapgebaseerde voorligtingsielkunde vir die 2007 en 2008 akademiese jare. Sewentien studente (3 mans en 14 vroue) tussen die ouderdomme van 23 en 30 jaar is doelgerig geselekteer vir hulle vermoë om oor abstrakte prosesse in hulle eie gemeenskap te reflekteer. Data-insamlingmetodes, waaronder die Mmogo-metodeTM, 'n indiepte individuele onderhoud, fokusgroepbesprekings en geskrewe opsommings is gebruik om gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid te ontdek. Die Mmogo-metodeTM maak 'n unieke bydrae tot hierdie navorsing, omdat dit die verkryging van kontekstueel-sensitiewe data moontlik maak.

Die bevindinge het getoon dat uitdagings van buite en van binne die gemeenskap gekom het. Uitdagings het ook gedien as 'n motivering om gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid te bou. Interne bedreigings vir gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid, soos swak interpersoonlike verhoudings, verdien spesiale aandag, omdat vorige navorsing klaarblyklik die relevansie daarvan oor die hoof gesien het. In hierdie studie het die ontwikkeling van gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid veral 'n sikliese proses behels wat tyd, die beskikbaarheid van tasbare hulpbronne (finansies, dosente) en die aanwending van persoonlike hulpbronne (humor, hoop) en lede se nabyheid geverg het. Die instandhouding van gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid impliseer dat die gemeenskap 'n voldoende vlak van veerkragtigheid bereik het en nou op verskillende wyses dit te probeer handhaaf. Sodanige wyses is onder andere die erkenning van gedeelde ervarings, behoort aan, hoop, humor en respek vir diversiteit. Die funksies van gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid het die wedersydse aanvulling en fortifisering van lede in die gemeenskap behels. Hierdie funksie het as bron gedien

om lede te versterk en te beskerm in die groep. Hierdie navorsing toon aan dat gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid nie afhang van 'n groep veerkragtige individue nie, maar dat dit eerder na vore kom deur verhoudingsdinamika, die aanwending van hulpbronne en beskikbare tyd. Gemeenskapsveerkragtigheid bestaan uit komplekse prosesse waarin lede verantwoordelikheid aanvaar het vir mekaar se swaarkry.

Woord telling: 500

PREFACE

The candidate opted to propose an article, with the support of his supervisor.

Prof V. Roos

CONSENT

PERMISSION TO SUBMIT THE ARTICLE FOR EXAMINATION PURPOSES

I, the supervisor, hereby declare that the input and effort of G. M. Strong, in writing this article, reflects research done by him on this topic. I hereby grant permission that he may submit this article for examination purposes in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Clinical Psychology.

Signed on this day.....at the North-
West University.

.....

Prof V. Roos

Supervisor

INTENDED JOURNAL GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

This dissertation will be submitted to the *American Journal of Community Psychology* to be considered for publication. The guidelines for prospective authors set out by the journal were adhered to in the production of this mini-dissertation.

Instructions to Authors

Manuscript submission

Manuscripts in quadruplicate and in English should be sent to the Editor:

William, S. Davidson, II, Ph.D.

Editor

American Journal of Community Psychology

Department of Psychology

132 Psychology building

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East Lansing, Michigan, 48824, 1116

Monographs not exceeding 200 double-spaced manuscript pages (including figures and tables) are also appropriate for submission. Submission is a representation that the manuscript has not been published and is not currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. A statement transferring copyright from the authors to Plenum Publishing Corporation will be required before the manuscript can be accepted for publication. The Editor will supply the necessary forms for this transfer. Such a written transfer of copyright, which previously was assumed to be implicit in the act of submitting a manuscript, is necessary under the U.S. Copyright Law in order for the

publisher to carry through the dissemination of research results and reviews as widely and effectively as possible.

Manuscript Complied with APA Ethical Standards

Authors are required to state in their initial submission letter or to provide a signed statement that they have complied with APA ethical standards in their treatment of individuals participating in the research or intervention described in the manuscript. They should note that the research has been approved by their organisational unit responsible for the protection of human subjects. It is the policy of the journal to avoid the use of the term "subjects." Research participants, respondents, or a more specific appropriate designation should be used. The journal further urges contributors to clarify how informed consent was gathered and to describe the nature and impact of feedback to settings involved in the research or intervention. In addition, it encourages the inclusion of descriptive material relevant to understanding the nature of the settings or communities where the work was carried out as well as the nature of the relationship between the professionals and the participants or respondents. It is most important that the text describe, as appropriate, the background characteristics of participants in detail. Ordinarily, this includes information on gender, age, racial and ethnic background, sexual orientation, disability status, and socioeconomic status.

Manuscript style

The style of the 1994 (fifth) edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association should guide the presentation of manuscripts, particularly with respect to such matters as citation of references and the use of abbreviations, numbers and symbols. Academic affiliations of all authors and the full mailing address of the one author who will receive all

correspondence should be included. In order to allow blind review, authors should avoid identifying information in the body of the manuscript. Full identifying information, including address for correspondence, should be placed on a cover page. Include a stamped, self-addressed postcard for confirmation of receipt of manuscript. A 150-word abstract is to be provided. A list of 4-6 key words is to be provided directly below the abstract. Key words should express the precise content of the manuscript, as they are used for indexing purposes. Tables should be numbered in one consecutive series of roman numerals and referred to by number in the text. Each table should be typed on a separate sheet of paper and should have a descriptive title centered above the table. Illustrations (photographs, drawings, diagrams, and charts) are to be numbered in one consecutive series of Arabic numerals and referred to by number in text. Photographs should be large, glossy prints, showing high contrast. Either the original drawings or high-quality photographic prints are acceptable. Identify figures on the back with author's name and number of the illustration. Each figure should have an accompanying caption. The list for captions should be typed (double-spaced) on a separate sheet of paper. Electronic artwork submitted on disk should be in the TIFF or EPS format (1200 dpi for line and 300 dpi for half-tones and gray-scale art). Color art should be in the CYMK color space. Artwork should be on a separate disk from the text, and hard copy must accompany the disk.

TITLE OF MANUSCRIPT, AUTHORS AND CONTACT ADDRESSES

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MANUSCRIPT FOR EXAMINATION

**AN EXPLORATION OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN A GROUP OF
POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN A CHALLENGING TRAINING PROGRAMME**

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An Exploration Of Community Resilience In A Group Of Postgraduate Students In A
Challenging Training Programme

ABSTRACT

Literature on community resilience focuses on communities' responses to mass trauma, and little research exists on communities' continuous exposure to challenging circumstances requiring resilience. This study aimed to explore the experiences of a group of post-graduate psychology students exposed to continuous challenges, and to contribute to the discourse on community resilience. Qualitative methods were used. Data were obtained via the Mmogo-methodTM, focus group discussions, written texts and an in-depth interview. Three males and fourteen females aged between 23-30 years participated during 2007/8. Findings illustrated that threats to resilience exist within and outside the community, and that developing resilience is qualitatively different from maintaining it. Community resilience as a function was observed in the mutual support and fortification processes among participants. Research design and sampling limitations of this study could be improved in future studies to enhance generalisation. Positive psychology and social capital theory's role in community resilience requires further investigation.

KEY WORDS: Community; community resilience; resilience; community
psychology; postgraduate training; Mmogo-methodTM

INTRODUCTION

Although there appears to be no universal definition for resilience (Knight, 2007), it may be described as patterns of positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity. (Masten & Reed, 2005; Yates & Masten, 2004). While individual resilience has been well researched and is theoretically linked to the ontological assumptions of positive psychology (Yates & Masten, 2004), the scientific inquiry into community resilience on the other hand is still in its infancy and thus, lacking in theoretical depth (Carr, 2004; Stone & Hughes, 2002; Ahmed, Seedat, Van Niekerk & Bulbulia, 2004; Kimhi & Shamai, 2004). Community resilience in this study refers to the resourcefulness and ability of a community to link a network of adaptive capacities to serve as a buffer against adverse and challenging circumstances (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008; Ahmed et al., 2004). At a group or societal level, positive psychology focuses on the creation and maintenance of positive institutions and communities (Compton, 2005). Although positive psychology has been adopted in many applied branches in psychology, community psychology has still largely remained problem-oriented or deficit-based (Fryer & Fagan, 2003; Orford, 2008).

Community psychology primarily focuses on prevention and reducing problems in the community (Fryer & Fagan, 2003). Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2007), however, speculate that a positive research focus on communities is likely to become more prominent. The literature on community competence (for example Roos & Temane, 2007; Sonn & Fisher, 1998) has already made significant contributions in this regard. Another relevant concept may be communal mastery which refers to “a sense that individuals can overcome life challenges and obstacles through and because of their being interwoven in a close social network” (Hobfoll, Jackson, Hobfoll, Pierce & Young, 2002, p.856). Benight (2004) points

out that communal mastery involves mere perceptions of close social ties and not on behaviour per se.

Most of the research on community resilience thus far has focused on communities' adaptation in the aftermath of mass trauma such as war and disasters, for example terrorist attacks, hurricanes and tsunamis (Low & Cheng, 2007; Ganor & Ben-Lavy, 2003; Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003; Norris & Stevens 2007; Norris et al., 2008; Paton et al., 2007; Paton & Johnston, 2001; Reich, 2006; Walsh, 2007). Little attention, however, has been given to communities' resiliency in circumstances involving continuous processes of exposure to challenging circumstances that require constant resourcefulness adaptation. This implies shifting the focus to ongoing challenges such as violence, dealing with HIV/AIDS, unemployment, poverty, or even to performance arena's such as sport teams, and challenging corporate environments and training programmes.

For the purpose of this research the community consists of trainee psychologists that are exposed to various challenges such as high academic and practical workloads and the mastering of complex practical skills (Gibson, Sandenbergh & Swartz, 2001). Gibson et al. (2001) suggest that some of the more practical challenges these students may face in the South African context include: cultural and linguistic differences, exposure to community violence, poverty and deprivation, theoretical confusion leaving students feeling overwhelmed, and political pressure to succeed in social intervention leading students to take on too much work. The community is thus conceptualised as a relational-based collection of people with common identifying boundaries and interests (Bess, Fisher, Sonn & Bishop, 2002; Naidoo, Duncan, Roos, Pillay & Bowman, 2007). This study aims to explore the experiences of a community of postgraduate students in a challenging training programme.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative research methods. Qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world in which researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and attempt to interpret them in terms of the meanings people convey to them (Creswell, 2007). Most of the studies on community resilience in various contexts have employed quantitative research (for example, Ahmed et al., 2004; Kimhi & Shamai, 2004; Paton et al., 2007). However, during the last decade there has been consensus that qualitative research supports the core values of community psychology, enhances the study of human relations embedded in community contexts and permits the exploration of subjective life events much better than traditional quantitative research (Banyard & Miller, 1998; Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Furthermore, the instruments developed for the quantitative measurement of community resilience need much more refinement (Kimhi & Shamai, 2004; Ahmed et al., 2004). For these reasons, and in an effort to shed new light on the subject at hand, this research followed a qualitative, explorative, contextual and inductive approach.

Research design

The case study method was used to explore the relational processes in the group through detailed in-depth data collection methods which facilitated an understanding of community resilience (Lewis, 2003). The case study method was an appropriate method since it allowed the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of community resilience. It was also a particularly useful method to use with this community since participants were purposively chosen for their ability to reflect on abstract processes within their own community.

Research context and participants

The research took place at a tertiary educational institution offering a master's degree in community-based counselling psychology. This full-time training programme (from February to November) covers coursework and practical application as well the completion of a mini-dissertation during the first year and a 12-month internship during the second year. The course includes clinical training, with an emphasis on community practice, from individual to societal-level interventions. The graduates of this degree may register as counselling psychologists with the Health Professions Council of South Africa after passing the board exams (Sigogo et al., 2004). Students who registered during 2007 and 2008 were asked to participate in the research and therefore are regarded as two separate communities under investigation. The participants were purposively selected since they are regarded as a group of people who can provide an in-depth understanding of the processes and functions of a challenging programme, and are able to express themselves as part of that process. The community of the 2007 class consisted of one male and eight females. The 2008 community consisted of two males and six females. The participants from both groups were between the ages of 23 and 30 years and all agreed to participate.

Data gathering

The data were collected towards the end of the year by means of applying the Mmogo-methodTM, focus group discussions and written texts. One participant responded to the invitation to engage in an in-depth interview to provide more information on the themes that were identified during focus group discussions.

Mmogo-methodTM

The Mmogo-methodTM requires that participants create visual presentations of their lived experiences (Roos, 2008). It is projective in nature, and allows meanings to emerge from participants' reflections on social structures and meaningful actions (Roos & Ferreira, 2008; Roos, Maine & Khumalo, 2008). The Mmogo-methodTM utilises material clay, grass stalks, wood pieces, needles, cloths, beads or colourful buttons (Roos, 2008). The following instruction was given to the participants:

“Please make a visual presentation of your development in this group since the beginning of the year.”

Approximately 40 minutes was allowed for the making of the visual representations. These were captured photographically and served as visual data.

Focus group discussions

Focus groups are usually employed in explorative research (Welman & Kruger, 2001) and to gain an understanding of the various dimensions of the research topic in a fairly quick manner (Richards & Morse, 2007). Once the visual presentations were made, participants were asked to engage in reflective discussions about their presentations, first individually, for each to state the significance of their presentations, and then as a group to discuss the presentations. The discussions were facilitated by the researchers. Clarifying questions were used to explore how the participants dealt with their challenges as a community. The discussions were recorded with the use of a digital voice recorder and transcribed verbatim.

Written texts

Towards the end of the focus group discussions the participants were asked to write a summary on a piece of paper on how they conceptualised community resilience.

In-depth interview

An in-depth interview was conducted with one of the participants to gain a deeper understanding of themes that were identified.

Data analysis

Visual data

The visual data, which consisted of photographs of participants' constructed Mmogo-methodTM models, were analysed using the approach suggested by Roos (2008):

- (a) Ask participants about each object that was made to determine the literal meaning of each object.
- (b) Determine the relationship between the different objects in the visual presentations.
- (c) Apply the visual presentations to the specific research question that was asked to provide insight into the phenomenon being studied.
- (d) Explore the contextual meanings that are manifested in the symbolic use of objects.

The following sequential presentation provides an example of how the visual data were managed:



Photo 1. Crossing bridges with the help of the community

Step 1: Identification of objects with explicit meanings. The human figures represent a student at various stages of her development during the year, from a small to a large human-like figure. The blue beads scattered in the flattened clay represent rough waters, or the challenges that need to be overcome. In the middle there is a bridge providing a means to deal with the challenges. On top of the human figure's head are various beads representing community members who accompany the student during the year.

Step 2: The relationships between the objects. The three human figures are all different from each other. The first one on the left has no mouth, symbolising the student's difficulty in expressing herself during the early phases of the community's development, an indication of insecurity. The arms of the figure are more closed than those of the other two figures, indicating the lack of cohesion in and perceived support from the community. The second human figure tries to manoeuvre her way across the challenging waters, but she is not alone.

The different orange and yellow beads on her head are symbolic of the community members' warmth and comfort. They not only helped her across her bridge, but also helped her to build it. The last figure towards the right has its arms wide open which is symbolic of acceptance of other community members. The huge smile represents triumph.

Step 3: Insight obtained from the visual presentations and the research question. In this example there is some evidence regarding the processes involved in forming community resilience. In the beginning there is a clear lack of cohesion, and mutual trust has yet to be developed. However, as individuals tried to navigate their way through the challenges of community life they encountered others who were not necessarily close companions, but who nonetheless offered their empathy and support. This communal empathy was reciprocated to allow other members to deal with similar challenges. Furthermore, in the absence of these challenges the community may not have developed such resilience.

Step 4: Contextual meanings. The students came together for the purpose of training to become counselling psychologists. In psychology, the symbolic building of bridges is significant. The acceptance that certain situations cannot be changed amplifies the need for therapeutic adjustment. In this context therapeutic adjustment is observed in the collective building of bridges and the taking of turns to cross it with the help of others.

Textual data

The transcribed data from the focus group discussions, in-depth interview and written texts were analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis employs various enumerative or thematic approaches, and can be used to explore large amounts of textual information and establish trends and patterns in texts relating to the research question (Grbich, 2007). For this research, the thematic analysis approach followed an inductive

approach, meaning the themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves as opposed to a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) for analysing qualitative data were followed. This process involves: (a) Familiarising yourself with your data by transcribing data, reading and re-reading it and noting down initial ideas. (b) Generating initial codes by coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code. (c) Searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes and gathering all data relevant to each potential theme. (d) Reviewing themes by checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), and generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis. (e) Defining and naming themes. This is an ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, and by generating clear definitions and names for each theme. (f) The writing up of the findings produces a final opportunity for analysis. The selection of vivid and compelling extracts relates the analysis to the research question and literature review.

Verification and trustworthiness

The guidelines suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were used to ensure trustworthiness of the research process. These are dependability, creditability, transferability and confirmability (Shank, 2006).

Dependability is reflected by an audit trail that informs the external auditor with regard to data collection, analysis and interpretation (Flick, 2006). These three processes were monitored through peer examination, peer debriefing and member checking.

Credibility was maintained through triangulation and prolonged engagement with the data. Triangulation allows the researcher to engage in a number of data collection procedures which focus on the same phenomenon (Shank, 2006). In this research, the Mmogo-methodTM, focus group discussions, an in-depth interview and written texts were used to ensure credibility. The researchers spent over a year engaging the data collected from 2007 to 2008, further ensuring credibility.

Transferability describes the degree to which the results may be shifted to another setting or population (Shank, 2006). This is demonstrated by the use of a thick and rich description of the data (Flick, 2006). Using an inductive approach when investigating participants' experiences of community resilience, in addition to the photographs of the visual data and verbatim texts, contributed to the dense description of the data.

Confirmability deals with the transparency of the methodologies employed (Shank, 2006). To this end, the methods used for data collection and analysis in this research, including an example of the data analysis process, are discussed in this paper.

Ethical aspects

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The project title was "An exploration of enabling contexts" and the project approval number is 05K14. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand as well as the individual participants. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that the data would be treated with confidentiality and that their written informed consent was needed. Furthermore, it was reiterated that they could withdraw at any stage from the research.

RESULTS

Table I shows the themes that were produced during the data analysis. These themes, supported by quotes from the data, are discussed. The categories do overlap, however, and are merely presented this way for ease of reading.

Table I. Themes generated from data

Main themes:	Sub themes:
Challenges affecting community resilience	Threats from outside the community Threats from within the community <i>Continuous adjustments</i> <i>Personal development</i> <i>Limited existence of community</i> <i>Strained interpersonal relations</i> Threats as motivation
The Development of community resilience	A cyclical process Availability of resources Time and member proximity
Maintaining community resilience	Shared experiences and mutual understanding Community belonging and member participation Appreciation of diversity Hope for future Humour
Functions of community resilience	Mutual support and fortification

Theme 1: Challenges affecting community resilience

Challenges refer to activities or conditions that impose barriers to the progressive functioning of the community. These challenges are multifaceted and complex and are revealed by the participants as emerging from both outside as well as from within the community. They also seem to have a motivational role in building community strengths.

Threats from outside the community

A major challenge for the participants was the constant pressure generated by the academic demands of the course. The volume of the coursework, high academic standards and number of deadlines to be met was a challenge that consistently tested the participants' coping abilities. This especially related to the task of managing the workload as well as their lives outside the academic sphere. Responses from two of the participants illustrated this:

One of the external pressures was that we always had a deadline and the academic standards were very high so basically you would be asked to rewrite something until it was at a higher level which was very difficult when you've got ten deadlines and you decide to sacrifice one and then that wouldn't be acceptable. So that made it hard and also the volume of work to cope with.

I found the deadline to be difficult because it kept me away from things that I enjoy doing. This was one of the things that made this year the worst was that I wasn't able to do the things that I normally do, for example spending time with friends or lying by the pool or going to the gym.

Threats from within the community

a) *Continuous adjustments* A challenging issue for participants was making adjustments in community living without causing damage to other important areas of their personal lives. For example, two participants stated:

The biggest challenge for me was handling this and my family and that will probably be the case for the rest of my career but it has been a huge adjustment. I have got two children so that makes it very hard. So you constantly have to think what sacrifices can I make without doing any damage.

It was a very tough year at all levels. Intellectually, emotionally, working through your own individual stuff as well as the group dynamics and working through lecturers' and students' relationships. And just trying to manage your life outside the academic and all of that made it very challenging.

b) *Personal development* Personal development entails gaining a higher level of self-understanding, overcoming insecurities and achieving a level of competence and maturity expected of psychologists. This particular process was experienced as emotionally intense and painful for the participants:

The whole year long you're busy questioning your abilities... You come into the year with all these goals and objectives and then as you go through it it's a constant battle forward. It's not just one, two, three there you go.

And I think also the learning to become a therapist created a lot of anxiety, so we were expected to develop extendedly and professionally and that added additional pressure.

Photo 2 shows a fully developed tree with a strong trunk and fruits, with a human figure calmly resting under it. The strong and fruitful tree represents the competency and nurturing qualities expected of a therapist by a client (which is symbolised by the calm human figure) as perceived through the eyes of the participants. Participants often felt that they lacked these qualities themselves, or that they questioned their abilities in this regard, as evidence by the first quote given here.



Photo 2. Nurturing and being nurtured: the growth of a therapist

c) Limited existence of the community Participants were aware that their community's existence had a predetermined time limit. Therefore, the disbanding of the community at a certain stage was expected. The participants indicated that as this disbanding of the group drew closer in time, their contributions towards the development of community resilience became impaired. For instance, one participant noted:

Ultimately as the year came to an end there wasn't that desperate need to be a part of the group and some people started feeling more and more cut-off and isolated. They would

actually remove themselves from the group and so, not dealing with the real issues and covering it, I think ultimately have damaged the group.

d) Strained interpersonal relations Participants maintained that their interpersonal relations in the group were at times a source of tension in the community. Avoiding intra-group conflict as a way of dealing with problems affected the group negatively as members' friendships were perceived as superficial. This was a challenge that needed to be overcome in order for the community to increase its resilience:

I think a big weakness in our group is that we are so conflict avoidant but as the year progressed we developed together and I learned to handle conflict better. I think it occurred to people at different points but I think now it became something that we can all do. I think that is why our group became more real because we can now handle the conflict and address issues.

Furthermore, while competing with one another on an academic level had certain advantages, it also presented a major challenge as members reacted with anxiety and frustration when trying to uphold their respective performances. One participant stated that:

We are a very competitive group. I think it is a strength, because then it keeps us on our toes but I also think it creates this anxiety that can be paralyzing, because you always have to live up to that standard. It is very frustrating at times because we put ourselves under so much pressure. It is really like a double-edged sword because we have all these things that motivate us but you flip it around and the other side is quite scary.

Threats as motivation Although challenges in general disrupted community functioning, they also served as an inspiration for participants to develop a stronger community. The following quote indicates this:

Groups are able to overcome difficult issues and conflict. And at the end they actually emerge stronger.

Community resilience seems to come from shared experience and shared values and is promoted through events which threaten the community.

Theme 2: The development of community resilience

A cyclical process The participants indicated that they experienced resilience as a continuously evolving process. This process is rooted in the complexity of the participants' relational patterns as well as their time spent together:

Community resilience centres around looking at factors that provide individual members, as well as the group with strength. These factors seem to be created by the group dynamics and over time.



Photo 3. The cyclical processes involved in community resilience development

Availability of resources The participants' tangible resources at their disposal played a pivotal role in the development of their community's coping abilities. In their context, tangible

resources included competent trainers, sufficient finances and personal transport. Another resource was having the required academic aptitude to pursue a demanding training programme. The following data serve to indicate this:

From my own experience, community resilience is about what physical as well as personal resources a group has [to] get through difficult times.

I think a strength was the ability to think very critically about things. Academically it was a very strong class.

The positive things from the outside are the good lecturers in most of the areas. It felt like you were working hard and it was difficult but you felt like the end product would be worth it because you were being guided by people who are kind of respected. I suppose the fact that we all had the physical means to get there. Nobody had to work excessively to earn fees to be there, we all had our own transport, cell phones, all those external things that made the work a lot easier. Everyone had the academic ability, there wasn't anyone who really couldn't cope academically.

Time and member proximity The participants spent a lot of time together. Their physical presence was a resilience feature as it provided them with ample opportunities to strengthen their ties:

We didn't have any physical space apart from each other.

And also you see each other every day. When you count the hours we probably spent more time with each other than any other people. That is what I will miss, not being able to come in and see familiar faces and not being able to express myself without being judged.

Theme 3: Maintaining community resilience

Shared experiences and mutual understanding The participants indicated that being understood by people who knew exactly what they were going through, that is, people in the community, made dealing with challenges in the community more manageable. This does not mean they did not receive understanding from people outside the community. However, it is essentially the shared understanding of the difficulties inherent to their specific community and mutual support among themselves that sustained their collective resilience:

We are all going through a shared experience and going through the same things, we are able to understand what each other is going through.

You can tell me till you are blue in the face that my family has been supportive and yes they were but they are not in it. Like when I tell her [class mate] that this assessment is killing me and she tells me that she understands, she really does understand, it's a shared understanding.

Community resilience is based upon mutual experiences and a strong sense of support experienced by community members. External pressures do arise, but the support provided by the group members has helped the community grow stronger and get through the pressure.

Community belonging and member participation For the participants, being part of a community with an established sense of identity made dealing with the external pressures more bearable. Feeling a sense of belonging in the community was equally comforting as participants felt less alone in their struggles to complete the course successfully:

I also think that the external pressure made it very difficult to deal with things on a very real level because you were so fragile all the time. The group identity was the only thing that made it manageable.

I think very genuine relationships have formed out of this group. It is something that I relied on heavily throughout the year. Having the group made me feel less alone in my own challenges. It is difficult but when you realise that there are other people with you it makes it a lot easier.

[Community resilience refers to] characteristics of the group that encourage a sense of cohesion and participation in which both the individuals in the group and the group as a whole are enabled to function and/or progress in their existence.

Appreciation of diversity Diversity refers to members of the community having personal characteristics that differ from one another, for example, race, gender or psychological traits. The participants acknowledged that learning to embrace and respect each other's differences enhanced their capacity to deal with community challenges. Where one student might not have had adequate skills to enable him or her to be resilient, another student may have possessed these skills or qualities and thus overall community functioning was enhanced. This is supported by statements such as the following:

Our differences (and similarities) allowed us to complement each other and build the courage to tackle the unknown, the discomfort, and came through stronger.

Also a strength is that even though you are different you won't be judged in the group because you aren't bad you're just different. There are so many different sides to all of us and also similarities. We paid no attention to things like race and gender and so on. There

were struggles about some differences that we didn't know how to get around but it made us stronger.

I feel like we came to a point where we accepted different things about different people that we might not have accepted initially. Certain people are different and that's ok and we contributed differently and I think that created a balance.

Hope Participants maintained a positive outlook on the future in the midst of difficult times. They perceived the difficult times as a sacrifice in the pursuit of a greater goal, and they kept hoping there would be a good outcome in the end. For instance, some students responded:

[I] hope that the pain will end and the end goal is worth it.

Hope for the future that good things will come of this year is what gets me through.

The following extract was by a participant who was not only hoping for order to be restored in her life, but also hoping that she had grown in the process:

In that moment I felt like I was stuck in the chaos and I couldn't actually see the continuation and I had the hope that some of the order would be restored but at the same time hoping that I wouldn't go back to where I started.

Humour Humour did not necessarily entail telling universal jokes that could be appreciated by people outside the community, but rather referred to things that developed specific meanings in the community context. The use of humour broke the tension in the community; participants were able to relax and have fun and in this way cope together. However, at times humour served only as a defence in response to challenges. In this case important issues in the community were not addressed, but it brought relief, albeit temporarily:

We also have an ongoing joke in the class about the “umbrella song” The umbrella symbolises how people will help us out and protect us.

The use of humour is a large part of our coping.

I would rather make a joke about some things so I think I relieved the class in a lot of ways and indirectly I think I was able to defuse an awkward situation and by doing that I created a safe space. I will sit there and by joking I created a space where I kind of avoided it and made people realise that they don't have to do this either.

Sometimes also just the use of humour in the class and just being able to laugh about the situation, that was also very helpful. Sometimes I felt like the humour was used as a defence to avoid the real issue that was hurting but sometimes it was also just fun and I enjoyed it.

Theme 4: Functions of community resilience

Mutual support and fortification Individual members had the capacity to compliment and supplement other community members' strengths at times when those members were not able to do so themselves. The participants maintained that community resilience was present even when some individuals lacked resilience. They felt that their group's resilience was something more than merely a collection of resilient individuals. As a result, their community's resilience took on the functional role of a safe haven for its individual members when they struggled to cope on their own. This was indicated by the following data:

Where one may have personal weaknesses or challenges, this is made up for by the strengths of others in the group.

It [community resilience] is more than the sum of the parts, even though the individuals might have resilience the group's resilience or the community's resilience is more than just adding up the individuals' resilience, because they can produce something bigger in a very uplifting way.

The resilience in this group is something that I've depended and relied on this year.

DISCUSSION

Understanding the level or nature of the threats affecting the community is critical (Kimhi & Shamai, 2004), as it allows community stakeholders to question the manner in which they plan for and execute responses to such challenges (Reich, 2006). Similarly, the characteristics of the threats as identified in this research are significant as they inform the subsequent pathways in which a community could resourcefully adapt to challenges. The findings further indicate that community psychologists should particularly focus intervention on (additional) challenges created within the community itself, as these may exacerbate community stress and continually tax its resourcefulness. These internally-created challenges seem to have been overlooked by prior research, perhaps because the guiding assumption was to focus on community strengths in relation to outside threats. These internal challenges therefore warrant further investigation. The finding that continuous exposure to challenging circumstances could serve as a motivator for building more resilient communities is consistent with findings in other research (Bravo, Rubio-Stipec, Woodbury & Ribera, 1990; Holman & Silver, 1998; Schwarzer, Hahn & Schroder, 1994). Therefore, community psychologists should perhaps capitalise on helping communities reframe negative events in more positive terms, as the range of appropriate solutions to problems depends on how they are phrased (Harris & Thoresen, 2006).

The literature on resilience suggests that even though an individual has an innate capacity to be resilient, resilience ultimately takes on a developmental process (Kruger & Prinsloo, 2008). The latter statement rings true for community resilience also as shown in this research and as argued by Ganor and Ben-Lavy (2003). Thus, resilience is not something a community either possesses or does not possess. The nature of this process is dynamic (see also Dalton et al., 2007) and cyclical as opposed to linear, meaning that time and again the community revisits earlier processes in its resiliency development. Moreover, community resilience development requires investments in the community in a variety of areas and at various levels (Ganor & Ben-Lavy, 2003). Norris et al. (2008) have linked economic growth (including tangible resources) with resilient communities, a common finding in this study. This study places the availability of resources specifically as an ingredient in the community resilience development process. Whereas tangible resources in the context of disaster distress may include health services and accessible housing (Norris et. al., 2008), for students undergoing challenging training such resources may include transport, study fees and access to competent lecturers. These tangible resources infused with the participants' academic ability to succeed in their studies demonstrate the resource mobilisation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) needed in community resilience development.

Length of stay in the community has previously been implicated in community resilience (Ahmed et al., 2004; Sonn & Fisher, 1998). In this research the influence of time and member proximity was important in participants' forming of the cohesive relationships characteristic of their resilience. However, equally important was the participants' perception of their community's limited future existence. The findings suggest that as the academic year came to its end, members began to perceive their future in the community as short-lived. This represented an ongoing internally-created challenge which may have influenced the

community resilience development process negatively. Furthermore, Ganor and Ben-Lavy (2003) state that community resilience cannot specifically be created, it develops on its own provided the necessary ingredients are present. Neither this study nor other research findings explicitly support or contradict this statement, and this underscores the need for further investigation.

Although the processes for developing and maintaining community resilience are intertwined, there appear to be qualitative differences between the two, and perhaps for pedagogical purposes they should be treated as distinct processes. The maintaining processes, according to the data, seem to reflect desired levels of community resilience. For instance, participants reported feeling a sense of shared experiences, greater cohesion, mutual support and member participation amongst themselves during difficult times. These characteristics are at the crux of the sense of community concept proposed by Sarason (1974) which later was most notably refined by McMillan and Chavis (1986). In essence, sense of community is thought to be the foundational value out of which community psychology was born (Bess et al., 2002; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005) and is a key component of social capital theory (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005; Perkins, Hughey & Speer, 2002; Norris et al., 2008). Ahmed et al. (2004) point out that both social capital theory and community resilience have positive community outcomes as a common denominator. Thus, social capital theory has been suggested as a framework for elucidating community resilience (Stone & Hughes, 2002). However, social capital theory's general application in community psychology faces stern challenges of its own (Perkins et al., 2002). Therefore, to remove or at least alleviate these challenges, community resilience theorists promoting social capital theory as a framework need to clearly define this concept (Norris et al., 2008), explicitly state the level of analysis and carefully consider issues surrounding its measurement (Perkins et al., 2002).

Processes maintaining community resilience were displayed further by participants' appreciation for diversities among themselves. Appreciation of community diversity is regarded as a relational sign of well-being (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007) and a core strength of a community (Visser, 2007). Member diversity allows for better coping and flexibility due to the wider range of talents available in the group (Forsyth, 1999). This was supported in the data by participants indicating that by coming to terms with one another's differences they were better able to withstand the pressures faced by their community. Therefore, efforts to facilitate appreciation for community diversity seem to have far-reaching implications for the resilient community.

Hope, as a community resilience construct, played an important role and has previously been linked to the community resilience literature (Ahmed et al., 2004). However, the data in this research do not clearly delineate community and individual levels of hope. The use of humour has not previously been implicated in community resilience studies. It has, however, been linked to individual resilience (Lefcourt, 2001; Van Rensburg & Barnard, 2005) and clinical and health psychology has already discovered its value in tertiary level interventions (Dalton et al., 2007). Understanding humour in community resilience dynamics in continuously challenging contexts seems promising, as early humour researchers such as Obrdlik (1942) recognised how Jewish communities used it to cope during their time in the concentration camps. Furthermore, Lefcourt (2001) maintains that such use of humour serves to enhance social cohesion and support among groups. An in-depth understanding of humour in community resilience, however, requires a different study altogether, as Lefcourt (2001) warns that humour has a negative basis as well. Nonetheless, community resilient responses come in the form of humour and community psychology needs to take cognisance of it to successfully promote community resilience.

The functions of community resilience relate somewhat to what Hernández (2002) refers to as the sheltering power of community. Hernández (2002) offers vivid accounts of how people faced with poverty brought on by years of war in Colombia, through solidarity took responsibility for each other's pain. When community resilience embraces this dynamic it becomes a resource for the individual (Kimhi & Shamai, 2004) and the individual, in turn, is a resource for the community.

The lack of theory underlying community resilience limits the utility of the concept in practice. Social capital theory has been offered as a way forward (Stone & Hughes, 2002) and positive psychology is likely to gain support. This research indicates that the continuous threats that reside in communities need careful examination as they have implications for resilience. In particular, internally-produced challenges are often overlooked. In this study, developing community resilience most notably involved a cyclical process, requiring time, the availability of tangible resources (financial, lecturers), the application of personal resources (humour, hope) and members occupying intimate social spaces. Maintaining community resilience implies that the community had achieved an adequate level of resilience and then in various ways tried to preserve such resilience. In this research the methods used to preserve resilience included acknowledging shared experiences, belonging, hope, humour and respect for diversity. Community resilience served as a resource through which members were strengthened and protected in the group.

The Mmogo-methodTM (Roos, 2008) makes a unique contribution to this research as it addresses the issue of contextual-sensitivity in data collection. The method particularly contributed to an understanding of the unconscious processes and relational dynamics underpinning community resilience.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As this is a case study, the findings should not be generalised to other communities. Therefore, future research should employ a mixed-method design to improve on the generalisability of the current findings.

CONCLUSION

The study of community resilience in general is still in its infancy, and community psychology is only beginning to contribute to its discourse. This research indicates that community resilience is not dependent on a collection of resilient individuals. Rather, community resilience develops out of participants' relational commitment.

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