# The value of social networks to community volunteers from high-risk communities

Willem Johannes Pietersen

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UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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# The value of social networks to community volunteers from high-risk communities

by

**Willem Johannes Pietersen**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS**
(Educational Psychology)

Department of Educational Psychology
Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria

**SUPERVISOR**
Dr. Suzanne Bester

**PRETORIA**
**JUNE 2017**

# Acknowledgements


- To the community volunteers from the SHEBA research project for immersing yourselves wholeheartedly in this study by sharing your ideas, supporting one another, and instilling happiness and trust throughout the research.
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- To Maritha, my wife, and Christian, my son, for your steadfast love and unwavering support and belief in me, which provided light on the path.

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# Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this dissertation, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research approval. The author declares that he has observed the ethical requirements in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

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Willem Johannes Pietersen
May 2017

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# Ethical Clearance Certificate

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Faculty of Education

**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | CLEARANCE NUMBER: **EP 06/11/01** |
| **DEGREE AND PROJECT** | MEd<br>The value of social networks to community volunteers from high risk communities |
| **INVESTIGATORS** | Ds WJ Pietersen |
| **DEPARTMENT** | Educational Psychology |
| **APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY** | 01 January 2011 |
| **DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | 24 May 2017 |

**CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE**: Prof Liesel Ebersöhn

**CC**

Ms Bronwynne Swarts
Dr Suzanne Bester

This Ethics Clearance Certificate should be read in conjunction with the Integrated Declaration Form (D08) which specifies details regarding:

- Compliance with approved research protocol,
- No significant changes,
- Informed consent/assent,
- Adverse experience or undue risk,
- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

# Declaration of Authenticity

I, Willem Johannes Pietersen (student number 23380455), hereby declare that all the resources consulted are included in the reference list and that this study entitled **The value of social networks to community volunteers from high-risk communities** is my original work. This dissertation has not been previously submitted by me for any degree at any other university.

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Willem Johannes Pietersen
May 2017

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# Declaration – Language Editor

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN (DECLARATION OF EDITING)

Willem Johannes Pietersen's dissertation, **The value of social networks to community volunteers from high-risk communities,** was language-edited by me in May 2017. It is, of course, the author's prerogative to accept or reject my suggested changes.

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# Abstract

**The value of social networks to community volunteers from high-risk communities**

by

**Willem Johannes Pietersen**

Supervisor: Dr. Suzanne Bester

Degree: M. Ed. (Educational Psychology)

The purpose of this intervention study was to explore how the community volunteers from the Supporting Home Environments in Beating Adversity (SHEBA) research project – in two high-risk school communities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area – valued their social networks. The broader SHEBA participatory and action research project focused on how community volunteers, using their own resources, collaborated with schools in their communities to develop support plans for their communities. I selected interpretivism as the meta-theory for the study and utilised Participatory Reflection and Action (PRA) as the methodological paradigm and research design. The empirical part of this study was conducted in 2012. The data for the study were collected from 35 purposively selected volunteers who, at the time of the study, were involved in volunteer work at schools in their communities. All 35 volunteers participated in one workshop and one brainstorming session. Data were generated through a participatory workshop and follow-up brainstorming session and captured by means of posters and field notes. Inductive thematic analysis was used as the means of interpretation and I related the results to Lin's Network Theory of Social Capital in interpreting the results. The results of the study suggest that the social networks of the volunteers were valued highly by them in dealing with the various challenges in their communities. The findings suggest also that the community volunteers invested themselves continuously in preserving their social support networks by reaching out to one another in times of crisis and by responding to each other's needs by supporting one another. The findings suggest further that the volunteers maintained their social support networks by reinforcing the values that held them together and directed them in their efforts to support one another and their communities. The volunteers in the study attributed significant value to each other as sources of support and knowledge. They were able to meet their challenges together by learning from and identifying each other as resources. Modern communication media such as mobile phones were very important to the volunteers in maintaining their support networks with their colleagues and communicating with their communities. I therefore concluded that interventions in high-risk communities should be aimed at assisting community volunteers to gain access to and use such technologies effectively and appropriately in their networking. The value the community volunteers in the SHEBA project attributed to their social networks was clear from the benefits they derived from these networks. The findings of the study suggest that the social networks of the

volunteers enhanced their sense of personal wellbeing as well as their sense of social belongingness. I concluded that social support networks could contribute significantly towards people's overall wellbeing and that community interventions should adopt a holistic approach in high-risk communities thereby enhancing people's hedonic, eudemonic, and social wellbeing.

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## Key words


- Social networks
- Social network theory
- Social capital
- Community volunteers
- High-risk communities
- Social support
- Asset-based community development
- Communication media


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# Chapter 1
# Introduction

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Poverty poses a threat to people's physical health and psycho-social wellbeing (Ratele, 2007). In 2011, Statistics South Africa reported that more than half of South Africa's population live in poverty and that the severity of poverty has become worse for single-mother households and children (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Today, almost 60% of children in South Africa live in poverty, and unemployment among young people has risen to 46%. The severity of poverty for women and children is compounded by high levels of unemployment, sexual violence, child abuse and neglect, and HIV and AIDS associated risks (Ferreira, Ebersöhn, Thabe, & Pietersen, 2013; Loots, 2011). In addition, less than half of those who earn a living are employed in the formal sector, which makes it difficult for them to raise their standard of living. This means that the economic activity on the fringes of society stagnates while the country's population grows, increasing the gap between affluence and poverty (Devey, & Møller, 2002; Klasen, & Woolard, 2009).

Statistics on poverty help us understand the harshness of people's living conditions, and social studies give us some insight into the psychological suffering associated with poverty (Levine, & Roberts, 2008; Loshkin, Umpathi, & Paternostro, 2001; Makame, Ani, & Grantham-McGregor, 2002; Ratele, 2007; Statistics South Africa, 2014). Poverty is usually accompanied by a sense of exclusion and disempowerment, which typically results in a breakdown of people's confidence in themselves, other people, and society generally (Cleaver, 2005; Corbridge, 2007; Du Toit, 2004; Schimmel, 2013; Spicker, 2013). Among young people this can result in hopelessness and despair, leading to involvement in criminal activities, violence, high-risk sexual behaviour, and drug and alcohol abuse (Banerjee, Galiani, Levinsohn, McLaren, & Woolard, 2008; Makame, Ani, & Grantham-McGregor, 2002; Patel, & Kleinman, 2003; Visser, 2007a). Emotional and behavioural problems resulting from poverty usually make it difficult for children to do well at school, and many simply take to the streets and abandon their education (Cluver, & Orkin, 2009; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). A lack of proper schooling makes it difficult for people to get decent jobs and advance in life (Burger, & Van der Berg, 2011; Van den Berg et al., 2011).

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the South African government has endeavoured to ameliorate poverty by providing social grants to people in high-risk communities (Motala, Dieltiens, & Sayed, 2009; Samson, Lee, Ndlebe, Ghandi, & MacQuene, 2004). In 2015, the National Treasury allocated more than R640 billion to basic education and increased its funding of health care programmes, old age pensions, RDP housing, and public services (Nene, 2015). Economic assistance is a crucial part of social support as a basic income grant can provide people with immediate financial assistance. However, social studies

indicate that the improvement of people's lives requires not only economic transformation but also social change and collaboration on all social levels (Biswas-Diener, & Patterson, 2011; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Moyo, 2014).

Social scholars have turned to various theories of social networks in an attempt to understand how social change occurs in high-risk communities (Lin, 1999, 2008; Paxton, 1999). Research on social networks indicates that community members often experience improved physical health, mental wellbeing, life satisfaction and economic growth by engaging in such networks to support others (Iecovich, Jacobs, & Stessman, 2011; Lin, 1999). Social network research has also shown how social gains resulting from social networks can motivate community members to reinvest their time and efforts in their own social networks and social support to others (Field, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Lin, 1999, 2008).

Many international and local studies have investigated the value of social networks for community development, yet relatively few have specifically involved community volunteers as co-researchers in action research interventions (Chambers, 2014; Ennis, & West, 2014; Ferreira et al., 2013; Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012; Kongolo, & Bamgose, 2002; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Moyo, 2014; Nair, & Campbell, 2008). Social networks are especially important to community volunteers from high-risk communities in diminishing their sense of disempowerment and restoring their confidence in their abilities to change their realities together (Ferreira et al., 2013, Kongolo, & Bamgose, 2002; Moyo, 2014; Nair, & Cambell, 2008). By reaching out to one another and forming support networks, community volunteers are able to formulate their challenges, seek solutions and take action together, thus empowering themselves by relying on indigenous knowledge and values to guide their support of each other and their communities (Kongolo, & Bamgose, 2002; Moyo, 2014). Given the sense of non-participation and disempowerment experienced by high-risk communities, a clear need exists for studies where community members themselves participate throughout the research process (Moyo, 2014).

My interest in the social processes behind sustainable community development started during my time as a full-time minister of a suburban church. This was when I became involved in the congregation's outreach to neighbouring communities, which included two high-risk school communities. My involvement entailed mobilising church members and forming partnerships with local businesses and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to help meet the needs of these communities.

Through my participation in such projects, I could observe the inequities in the educational and economic resources available to learners and teachers in high-risk school communities. While the learners in these communities may have equal access to basic education, considerable inequities remain regarding infrastructure and basic health conditions to support learning and teaching. Because of these disparities, I gradually came to realise the complexity of supporting communities, especially when support takes the form of sporadic funding from external agencies. My experience was that of individuals wanting to change

high-risk communities from the outside, strengthening the perception that scarce-resourced communities are unable to take control of their own lives.

I witnessed the value of people from outside communities to assist people in need and became aware of the importance of building strong bonds of trust and reciprocal relationships with the communities we wanted to support. I noted also that outsiders tended to ignore the strong bonds that already existed among community members. It became clear that sustainable support required not only the crossing of divides between communities but also the enabling of communities to build strong bonds among themselves. By establishing such bonds, community members could experience solidarity, reciprocity, and trust – outcomes that endeavours from the outside could not achieve. In my view, support without empowerment cannot restore the dignity and confidence of people. Indeed, our efforts in the past to support others might have contributed to their sense of despondency, disempowerment, and dependency. I believe this was one of the results of the problem-orientated approach that is engrained in social interventions in high-risk communities in South Africa. My observations were confirmed through discussions with fellow researchers and readings on social networks as important forms of social capital that community members can use to take control of their lives.

High risk communities in South Africa face the negative effects of poverty on a daily basis and have to deal with insufficient resources and support from external agencies (Ferreira et al., 2013). In addition, concerns have been expressed about the negative psychological effects of ineffective efforts from the outside to improve people's lives without their participation, leaving them with a sense of dependency and disempowerment (Banerjee et al., 2008). Much research has been undertaken to understand the emergence of a network society and the usefulness of social networks, but not many studies have seek to explore how community volunteers from high-risk communities value social networks in negotiating the difficulties of their lives on a daily basis (Ebersöhn, Eloff, & Ferreira, 2007; Ennis, & West, 2010, 2014; Van Dijk, 2006). A participatory reflective and action (PRA) study focusing on how community volunteers from two particular high-risk communities value their social networks promises to add to the knowledge about how community volunteers value networking, by involving them as co-researchers to identify their own problems and find solutions together (Cambers, 2004, 2014; Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012; Reason, & Bradbury, 2008).

## 1.2 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study formed part of a broad research project, SHEBA (Supporting Home Environments in Beating Adversity) (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011-2013), where the focus is on how community volunteers use the asset-based approach in supporting individuals in high-risk school communities (Ferreira, 2015). In order to understand the background to this study, it is necessary to explain the development of the SHEBA

project as a follow-up to the STAR project (Supportive Teachers, Assets and Resilience)[1]. The STAR project was initiated in 2003 by the Department of Educational Psychology of the University of Pretoria in partnership with a group of teachers from a primary school in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan area in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011; Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012). The STAR project subsequently developed into a longitudinal research intervention, which by 2011 had been implemented in 11 other schools across three provinces.

The STAR project led to teacher partners expressing the need to transfer their acquired knowledge to community volunteers who were active in their school communities (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012). The SHEBA project thus began as a research intervention that took place in collaboration with two resource-scarce communities in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan area with the focus on how community volunteers could use the asset-based approach in supporting learners and their families. Phase 1 of the SHEBA project commenced in 2011 and involved the exploration of the social realities of community volunteers and schools (Table 1.1). The particular communities were marked by high levels of poverty, hunger, sick and deceased parents, HIV and AIDS, unemployment, domestic violence and child abuse. Housing consisted of informal housing (shacks), formal housing, and a combination of the two (Ferreira et.al., 2013).

This study formed part of the intervention phase (Phase 2) of the broader six-phase SHEBA project (see Table 1.1 below).

**Table 1.1: Research process (SHEBA project)**

| Phase | Goal |
|---|---|
| Phase 1 | Exploring the social realities of the community volunteers, schools, and community. |
| Phase 2 | Identifying and mobilising existing networking experiences and skills. |
| Phase 3 | Exploring other available resources such as policy documents that community volunteers may require. |
| Phase 4 | Identifying potential ways of supporting learners and their families in high-risk communities. |
| Phase 5 | Initiating school-community supportive plans by formulating and implementing action plans. |
| Phase 6 | Regularly monitoring the progress of the supportive initiatives and adjusting action plans. |

As stated earlier, this study formed part of Phase 2 of a broad research project. I was one of four students participating in the SHEBA project, each with his/her own research focus. My study focused on how the community volunteers from the SHEBA project value their social networks. For this purpose, a participatory reflective and action (PRA) intervention was developed and implemented collaboratively with

[1] In this study, I collaborated with the following participating students who each had a specific focus within the larger project: Maria Mnguni-Letsoalo, Charles Moshele, and Maesala Thabe.

the research participants on 3 April 2012 (PRA 1) and a brainstorming session (PRA 2) was facilitated on 3 October 2012 at the Diaz Primary School in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area.

A PRA-based workshop was held to implement the intervention in collaboration with 35 community volunteers (the research participants) who formed themselves into small discussion groups. In Chapter 3 of this study, I describe the study's research design and how the small group discussions started off with a creative beading activity aimed at eliciting the participants' prior knowledge and skills. I then asked the participants to brainstorm on their experiences of the beading activity on the basis of three questions: What happened? What was important? Were there any lessons you could take for your networking?

The beading activities and the small group discussion questions were presented and explained by me in English and repeated in Xhosa by one of the teacher-participants of the former STAR project as co-facilitator. The participants mapped their ideas on posters and gave feedback to the larger group after the small group discussions. I then summarised these ideas and displayed the posters throughout the day to encourage further reflection and discussion among and between the researchers and the participants.

The beading activity was used to create a scenario for problem solving where the community volunteers had to perform the beading activity on their own and collectively in their groups. Thus, an opportunity was created for the volunteers to reach out to one another and work together to solve their problems, illustrating the strategies that they use to deal with their challenges their own and as social support groups on a daily basis.

## 1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this PRA study was to explore how the community volunteers from the SHEBA project – in two high-risk school communities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area – value their social networks. For the purposes of the study, a social network was defined as a structure that links individuals to each other by reciprocal subjective ties that are trusting and marked by positive emotions (Lin, 1999, 2008).

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 1.4.1 CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

The central question of the study was: "What is the value of social networks to community volunteers from the SHEBA project?"

### 1.4.2 SECONDARY QUESTIONS

The study posed also the following sub-questions.

- Which processes do community volunteers from the SHEBA project use to preserve their social networks?
- Which resources do community volunteers from the SHEBA project value in their networking?
- How did community volunteers from the SHEBA project benefit from their social networks?

## 1.5 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

### 1.5.1 WHAT IS A SOCIAL NETWORK?

VandenBos (2006, p. 867) describes a social network as "the structure of the relationship that an individual or group has with others". Barker (2003, p. 405) highlights the shared experience of members by defining social networks "as individuals or groups linked by some common bond, shared social status, similar or shared functions, or geographic or cultural connection. Social networks form and discontinue on an ad hoc basis, depending on specific needs and interests".

In describing how social networks function, Barret-Lennard (2013) identified structure, process, function, and composition as key network features:

- Network structure – indicates the size of the network, the way in which the actors are connected, the density or dispersion of the actors, and the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the actors.
- Network process – includes what is being exchanged (content) and the intensity and direction of ties.
- Network function – includes the purpose of the network for the individual actors as well as for the larger social context.
- Network composition – ranges from small personal networks to broad networks that go beyond personal and local boundaries.

Understanding social networks gave me insight into the volunteers and the way power flowed through their networks and communities (Prell, 2012). Considering how power flow in networks and identifying important role players in networks can assist community volunteers to build networks in a strategic manner. Ultimately, network theory provided me with a lens to discern aspects of social networks as revealed by the experiences of the volunteers.

### 1.5.2 WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Social capital can be defined as "investment in social relations with expected returns" (Lin, 1999, p. 35). This definition reflects the neo-capital theories of Lin, Burt, Marsden, Flap, Coleman, Bourdieu, and Putnam, which, in turn, stem from Marx's classic theory on social capital (Lin, 1999). By building a network

theory of social capital, Lin identified objective and subjective relationships as two key components of social capital that are present in social networks:

- Objective ties implies that there is an objective network structure linking individuals.
- Subjective ties implies that the ties between individuals are of a particular type, namely reciprocal, trusting, and involving positive emotion (Paxton, 1999)

The way the ties are organised and the kind of ties present in social networks therefore enhance the capacity of network members to take positive action (Coleman, 2003; Greeley, 1997; Hudaykulov, & Hongyi, 2015; Kawachi, Kennedy, & Glass, 1999; Paxton, 1999; Spies-Butcher, 2009; Steinberg, & Powell, 2006). Individual volunteers gain reciprocal personal benefits from being part of social networks that may motivate them to invest further in their networks (Hulgård, & Spear, 2006; Hyde, & Chavis, 2008; Paxton, 1999; Uslaner, 2001). Social capital can, however, remain dormant within social networks, indicating the potential value inherent in such networks (Hennessy, Means, & Burholt, 2014; Lin, 2008; Musick, & Wilson, 2008).

In this study, social capital referred to the resources inherent in the social network relationships of the community volunteers, which they accessed, mobilised, and used to support individuals in high-risk communities. In addition to investment in social ties, social capital in this study also referred to personal and communal gains the community volunteers derived from engaging in their supportive actions (Ferreira et.al., 2013).

### 1.5.3 WHAT IS COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERISM?

VandenBos (2006, p. 990) describes volunteering as "the act or practice of donating one's time and energy to activities that contribute to the common good". Different kinds of volunteering are discernible, for instance volunteering in schools or hospitals, volunteering in an emergency, corporate volunteering, and community voluntary work (Corsini, 2002). Community volunteering refers usually to local individuals, groups, or organisations that act to improve their local community (Colby, & Damon, 1992). In this study, the community volunteers were the individuals and groups who, in collaboration with school communities, acted together to support high-risk individuals in their respective contexts (Ferreira et al., 2013).

### 1.5.4 WHAT IS A HIGH-RISK COMMUNITY?

High-risk communities are those where people experience numerous difficulties as a result of oppressive and marginalising forces in adverse social, economic, and physical contexts (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012; Ungar, 2011). People in impoverished communities often lose trust in themselves and others and fall prey to a sense of hopelessness and despondency. Feelings of despair and desperation can also put people at risk of falling into domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and high-risk sexual behaviour (Donald,

Lazarus, & Lolwana, 2010; Ebersohn, & Ferreira, 2011; Freeman, 2007; Mavise, 2011; Zastrow, & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). In this study, high-risk environments were characterised by the challenges the community volunteers had to face on a daily basis in their resource-scarce communities. The research sites were marked by high levels of poverty, hunger, sick and deceased parents, HIV and AIDS, unemployment, domestic violence and child abuse. The people lived in informal housing (shacks), formal housing, or a combination of the two. Consequently, there were high numbers of orphaned and other children exposed to threats to their physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. More specifically, they were at risk of poor performance at school and leaving school altogether (Ferreira et al., 2013; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015).

### 1.5.5 WHAT IS ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

Asset-based community development (ABCD) shares the central premise of the network theory of social capital, namely that relationships matter and social networks have value (Berkman, & Glass, 2000; Bertcher, 1994; Coleman, 2003; Ennis, & West, 2010; Ferreira et al., 2013; Glover et al., 2005; Warner, Bowers, & Dixon, 2011; Robinson, & Williams, 2001; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). In this study, the social capital in the social networks was characterised by relationships of trust and reciprocity (Lin, 1999, 2008). Asset-based community development sees such relationships as assets and views social capital alongside human and cultural capital as a vital strength available in communities (Loots, 2011). While high-risk communities have needs and problems, they also possess internal social, cultural, and physical assets (Kretzmann, & McKnigt, 1993). ABCD seeks to enable communities to identify and mobilise their relationships as strengths that can be used to deal with their problems collaboratively (Sander, & Lowney, 2006).

According to Foot and Hopkins (2010), ABCD is internally focused and consequently involves the identification of communities' strengths and assets to empower them to overcome their problems. People are therefore not defined as recipients of services or aid but as actors in their own development. An asset-based approach is different to a needs-based approach, which looks primarily for what is wrong or deficient in communities (Loots, 2011; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). Needs-based approaches have often led to the labelling of individuals and communities and have caused communities to develop problem-saturated descriptions of themselves (Morgan, 2000). Communities may consequently experience a sense of disempowerment and dependency and start looking for 'experts' from outside to solve their problems. Conversely, ABCD aims to build capacity in communities by expanding their social capital and starting with what they have available (Eloff, & Ebersöhn, 2001). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) maintain that community solutions pre-exist in the skills and knowledge that communities already have. Every individual or group in a community has something to contribute such as child care skills or gardening skills (Glover et al., 2005; Kretzmann, & Green, 1998; Kretzmann, & McKnight, 1993; Loots, 2011; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Shapiro, 2001).

Asset-based approaches are also relationship-driven and promote community networks, relationships, and friendships that can provide caring, mutual help, and empowerment (Kretzmann, & McKnight, 1993). Social networks that connect individuals and different parts of the local community are a vital resource that facilitates the flow of information and organises relationships to achieve change. The development of communities is therefore about strengthening and extending the social networks of individuals, organisations, and different sectors and agencies (Crane, & O'Regan, 2010; Kretzmann, & McKnight, 2005; Kretzmann, & Green, 1998; McKnight, & Kretzmann, 1997). Working to establish and maintain these networks is key to achieving effective community development.

In this study, the asset-based approach to community development influenced me to acknowledge existing social networks, the experiences of social networks, and the social network skills of the participants. I therefore endeavoured throughout the study to take a position of not-knowing, thereby acknowledging the volunteers as the experts in their social networks. The asset-based approach defines social networks as community assets and highlights social capital as a key resource together with physical, human, and cultural capital. In this study, I wanted to investigate how and why social networks work for communities, and I therefore explored the structure, processes, and functions of the social networks that produced valuable resources for the communities in question.

## 1.6 OVERVIEW OF PARADIGMATIC AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Table 1.2 outlines the literature review and delineates the paradigmatic assumptions and methodological perspectives of the study. The literature review covered research on poverty and social networks as well as a network theory of social capital that served as the theoretical framework of the study. I selected interpretivism as the meta-theory for the study and PRA as the methodological paradigm. In addition, I selected PRA as the research design and purposive sampling as the strategy for selecting the participants. Table 1.2 also shows the methods used for generating, collecting, and documenting the data for which inductive thematic analysis was used as the means of interpretation. Measures to ensure the rigour of the study and to maintain sound ethical research are also shown.

**Table 1.2: Overview of paradigmatic and methodological perspectives**

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">LITERATURE REVIEW</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">POVERTY:<br>Context of the literature review</th></tr>
<tr><td>Defining poverty in South Africa</td><td>Prevalence and severity of poverty</td><td>Psychological impact of poverty</td><td>Impact of poverty on education</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">SOCIAL NETWORKS:<br>Structural characteristics, functions, and employment in communities</th></tr>
<tr><th>Structure of social networks</th><th>Functions of social networks</th><th colspan="2">Community volunteers' use of social networks</th></tr>
<tr><td>Positioning<br>Density</td><td>Social support<br>Social capital<br>Social undermining</td><td colspan="2">Establishing partnerships<br>Experiencing acceptance and belonging<br>Giving social support (emotional, instrumental, and informational) to their communities<br>Enacting time-honoured values<br>Developing interpersonal and networking skills<br>Learning through practice and sharing of information</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:<br>Network theory of social capital</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Lin's network theory of social capital (1999, 2008) assisted me in understanding how the volunteers in the study accessed, mobilised, and used their social networks to purposively support others and, conversely, gained from investing themselves in these relationships</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4">RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Central research question</th><th colspan="2">Secondary research questions</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">The central question of the study was: "What is the value of social networks to community volunteers from the SHEBA project?"</td><td colspan="2">Which processes do community volunteers from the SHEBA project use to preserve their social networks?<br>Which resources do community volunteers from the SHEBA project value in their networking?<br>How did community volunteers from the SHEBA project benefit from their social networks?</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><th colspan="7">RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS</th></tr>
<tr><th>Paradigmatic assumptions</th><th>Research design</th><th>Data generation and collection</th><th>Data documentation</th><th>Data analysis</th><th>Quality assurance criteria and measures</th><th>Ethical considerations</th></tr>
<tr>
<td><u>Epistemological assumptions</u><br>▪ Interpretivism<br><br><u>Methodological assumptions</u><br>▪ Participatory action and reflection</td>
<td><u>PRA research</u><br>Identify and mobilise existing knowledge, skills, assets, strengths, and resources of community volunteers<br><br>Sample and sampling strategy<br><br><u>Purposive sampling</u><br>Select 35 community volunteers who have already been active in utilising social networks to support individuals in their communities</td>
<td><u>PRA-based workshop</u><br>▪ Mapping<br>▪ Craft activities<br>▪ Interactive discussions<br><br><u>Participant</u><br><u>Observation</u></td>
<td><u>Visual documentation</u><br>▪ Posters<br>▪ Photos<br><u>Observational documentation</u><br>▪ Research journal</td>
<td><u>Inductive analysis</u><br>Follow process of thematic analysis as suggested by Creswell (2009):<br>▪ Read and reread data<br>▪ Note trends and patterns indicating possible themes<br>▪ Identify and underline phrases or words that stand out<br>▪ Name themes<br>▪ Summarise themes and sub-themes in table format</td>
<td><u>Credibility</u><br>▪ Triangulation<br>▪ Member checking<br><u>Transferability</u><br>▪ Thick descriptions<br>▪ Reflexivity<br><u>Dependability</u><br>▪ Detailed audit trail of methodological decisions and methods of data collection<br><u>Confirmability</u><br>▪ Participation and collaboration with participants throughout the research process</td>
<td><u>Ethics approval</u><br>▪ Ethics approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education of the University of Pretoria as part of an existing study<br>▪ Amendment to existing study approved by the committee in April 2012<br><u>Ethical principles</u><br>▪ Voluntary and informed participation<br>▪ Right to privacy<br>▪ Protection from harm<br>▪ Conflict of interests</td>
</tr>
</table>

## 1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

❖ **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 introduces the study, covers the rationale of the study, and provides an outline of the study.

❖ **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Chapter 2 provides a detailed review of the literature on the utilisation of social networks by community volunteers to support high-risk communities.

❖ **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Chapter 3 covers the application of interpretivism as the meta-theory and the qualitative approach as the methodological paradigm of the study. This is followed by a review of the selection of the participants, the data collection and documentation strategies, and the application of quality criteria and ethical guidelines.

❖ **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the obtained data and a detailed discussion of the themes that emerged from the study.

❖ **CHAPTER 5: SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS, LITERATURE CONTROL, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Chapter 5 covers the conclusions of the study and the findings and concludes with recommendations for researchers and educational psychologists who are active in high-risk communities

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# Chapter 2
# Literature Review

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the potential value of social networks in supporting high-risk communities in South Africa. The review commences by contextualising the use of social networks by community volunteers as poverty continues to impact severely on people's physical health and emotional wellbeing. To illustrate the context of poverty in South Africa, the chapter first discusses the prevalence and severity of poverty in high-risk communities and reviews its effects on people's sense of self-confidence and learners' ability to learn and achieve in life. Next, the value of social networks in supporting people in high-risk communities is discussed. An overview of the nature and function of social networks is then given followed by a discussion of international and local studies on the use of social networks by community volunteers to support others in their communities. The chapter concludes by considering a network theory of social capital as a theoretical framework for understanding the networking experiences of community volunteers.

## 2.2 POVERTY AS CONTEXT OF VOLUNTEERISM

The literature on community interventions points to the importance of considering people's contexts in order to comprehend complex psycho-social phenomena (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Ungar, 2011; Viljoen, & Eskell-Blokland, 2007; Visser, 2007a). More specifically, an appreciation of the meaning and use of social networks to support high-risk communities requires an understanding of the reality and impact of poverty on people's lives (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar, & Shelley, 2010; Kana'iaupuni, Donato, Thompson-Colon, & Stainback, 2006; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Ratele, 2007). The following section discusses the literature on poverty as a social phenomenon and then relates the prevalence of poverty to disparities in income distribution in South Africa. The resultant threats of poverty-related risks for certain sections of the population are also considered. Next, I reflect on the collapse of self-confidence and trust that people in high-risk communities often experience. The discussion on poverty as the context for understanding the use of social networks to support people in high-risk communities concludes with a review of the threat poverty poses to the academic development and achievement of learners.

### 2.2.1 DEFINING POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Research by Levine and Roberts (2008), Lokshin, Umapathi and Paternostro (2004) and Ratele (2007) shows that poverty is a relative, complex concept and therefore not easy to define. In his book, *Perceptions of Poverty*, Hagenaars and De Vos (1988) defines poverty as a circumstance in which needs

are not satisfied. According to Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2013) and Watson, Whelan, Williams and Blackwell (2005), the assessment of what these needs are is a matter for debate.

Various perspectives on poverty and its complexity have resulted in different ways of measuring and describing its impact in high-risk communities (Hagenaars, & De Vos, 1988; Levine, & Roberts, 2008; Lockshin, Umapathi, & Paternostro, 2001; Mitlin, & Satterthwaite, 2013; Watson et al., 2015). More specifically, Levine and Roberts (2008) distinguish between objective and subjective measures of poverty. Their study on poverty assessment in Namibia revealed the need to compare and combine consumption-based measures and the subjective experiences of participants in high-risk communities.

According to Chen and Ravallion (2007), absolute poverty applies to households that are living below non-food poverty lines and cannot afford basic instrumental essentials required to sustain themselves. Relative poverty, on the other hand, refers to households whose incomes are above basic food lines but lack sufficient instrumental means to live effectively and advance in life (Kakwani, 2003). Aker and Mbiti (2010), Lisk (2002), and Toyama (2010) argue that poverty can also involve not being able to afford essential commodities such as mobile phones and not being able to provide for events such as funerals.

Objective measures are used to determine the severity and prevalence of poverty in communities, yet such indications do not provide a comprehensive understanding of poverty as complex social phenomenon (Hagenaars, & De Vos, 1988; Levine, & Roberts, 2008; Lockshin, Umapathi, & Paternostro, 2001). Social studies have therefore turned also to people's subjective experiences to determine the impact of poverty on their daily lives (Lockshin et al., 2004; Ratele, 2007). A study by Lockshin, Umpathi, and Paternoster (2001) highlighted the importance of a subjective analysis of the effects of poverty in high-risk communities in Madagascar (2001).

According to Ratele (2007, pp. 222-223), people's experiences of poverty in high-risk communities have the following characteristics.

- Isolation from institutions of kinship and community.
- Inability to provide sufficient or nutritious food for the family.
- Living in overcrowded conditions and in homes that require maintenance.
- Lack of access to safe and efficient sources of energy.
- Lack of employment opportunities.
- Low wages and lack of job security.
- Absent fathers.
- Children living apart from their parents as a survival strategy.

Community development research indicates that poverty in communities can be understood in its totality only by using objective measures and exploring high-risk communities' subjective experiences (Levine, & Roberts, 2008; Lockshin et al., 2004). Social studies have accordingly turned also to people's subjective experiences to determine the impact of poverty on their daily lives (Lockshin et al., 2004; Ratele, 2007). Poverty is a multifaceted phenomenon that is experienced differently in different contexts and is more severe for certain groups of people in society (Statistics South Africa, 2014; Zere, & McIntyre, 2003). In South Africa, the incidence of poverty reflects the wide divide in income distribution between different communities and sections of the population (Klasen, 1997; Klasen, & Woolard, 2009; Ratele, 2007; Van der Berg, & Louw, 2004).

### 2.2.2 POVERTY AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The poverty crisis and the need for sustainable interventions have compelled the government to provide critical support to impoverished communities (Lund, 2008). In order to support such communities, the government has provided social grants, free basic education, health care programmes, old age pensions, RDP housing, and various public services (Motala et al., 2009; Samson et al., 2004). In his 2015/2016 budget speech, the Minister of Finance, Nhlanhla Nene, revealed that the antiretroviral treatment programme had significantly reduced mother-to-child transmission of HIV (Nene, 2015). Nene (2015) also allocated over R640 billion to basic education and R7 billion to the improvement and replacement of inadequate school facilities. The minister announced also that "each learner in Grades R to 9 will receive two books per subject each year in Numeracy, Mathematics, Literacy, Language and Life Skills" (Nene, 2015). These and other initiatives indicate the seriousness of the government's attempts to address severe poverty and educational disparities in South Africa.

However, despite these endeavours, nearly half of the South African population is considered to be living in poverty and a quarter to be experiencing severe poverty (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Statistics South Africa (2014) has revealed that the severity of poverty among female-headed households is twice as high as that for male-headed households. Also, more than half of the children and young people (aged 18-24) in South Africa still live in poverty. The impact of poverty is further compounded by high instances of HIV and AIDS, substance abuse, violence against women and children, and crime and violence (Ferreira et.al., 2013; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Ratele, 2007; Visser, 2007a).

The literature links the prevalence of poverty and physical need to the unequal distribution of income in South Africa (Ratele, 2007; Van der Berg, & Louw, 2004). Studies indicate an ever-increasing divide between rich and poor, with a growing economic centre characterised by economic strength and high income and low economic influence and income on the margins of society (Devey, & Moller, 2003). The large majority of the population lives on incomes that are far below the average, and a small minority has incomes that are far above the average (Nattrass, & Seekings, 2001). A further disturbing fact is that economic activity tends to be lowest in populations with a high population growth, while economic growth

is generally associated with a decline in population growth. In other words, not only do poor people become poorer, but more children and young people will end up living in poverty (Klasen, & Woolard, 2009). The gap between rich and poor in South Africa is aggravated by unemployment figures above 25% of the population, with unemployment among young people reaching 43% (Statistics South Africa, 2014). Furthermore, almost half of the workforce is not integrated into the formal economy, and poverty is more severe in rural areas and informal settlements (Klasen, 1997; Klasen, & Woolard, 2009).

While statistics and economic indicators may give us an idea of the prevalence and severity of poverty, poverty cannot be understood solely in economic and material terms (Ratele, 2007). Research indicates that poverty can result in a sense of inadequacy and a general loss of self-confidence in high-risk communities (Cleaver, 2005; Schimmel, 2013; Spicker, 2013).

### 2.2.3 POVERTY AND DISEMPOWERMENT

Statistics are vital for understanding levels of poverty, but they cannot provide a complete picture of people's experiences. The literature shows that poverty has many dimensions, causes, and effects and threatens both physical and psycho-social wellbeing (Makame et al., 2002; Patel, & Kleinman, 2003; Romano et al., 2005; Weinreb et al., 2002). Research findings cite a total collapse of confidence as a major psychological effect of poverty (Cleaver, 2005; Schimmel, 2013; Spicker, 2013). People's experience of poverty can lead to low levels of self-confidence as well as a breach of trust in the goodwill of other people and a just and favourable society (Corbridge, 2007; Segal, Silverman, & Temkin, 1995).

Having experienced disappointment, rejection, and deprivation, individuals in high-risk communities tend to feel inadequate and often become hopeless and disheartened (Patel, & Kleinman, 2003). These experiences sometimes lead to aggressiveness and a sense of exclusion, which may manifest in domestic and gang violence, drug or alcohol abuse, and serious crimes (Romano, Tremblay, Boulerice, & Swisher, 2005). Because of feelings of exclusion, communities often respond by taking matters in their own hands, which can lead to public uprisings, unrest, and violence. For instance, in October 2015, university campuses around South Africa saw students protesting and demanding a decrease in student fees (RDM Newswire, 2015; SABC, 2015). These events were seen in the media as the direct result of poverty and unemployment, which make it difficult to meet life's costs (Lewis, 2015; Msila, 2016).

The literature indicates that the psycho-social impact of poverty cannot be dealt with effectively while people continue to feel disregarded and unwanted (Cleaver, 2005; Spicker, 2013). Scholars argue that in order to create healthy communities, people do not only need support but they also need to take responsibility and support their communities in return (Biswas-Diener, & Patterson, 2011; Moyo, 2014; Sen, 2001). Poverty studies question the value of handouts and argue that social grants over the long term may increase people's sense of dependency and disempowerment (Banerjee et al., 2008). Studies by Ferreira and Ebersöhn (2011, 2012), Loots (2011), and Moyo (2014) show the importance of enabling

members of high-risk communities to initiate purposeful action and thereby liberate themselves from experiences of poverty and take charge of their own lives

Studies on poverty and education indicate that the physical and social-emotional consequences of poverty significantly impair learners' academic functioning and put them at high risk of failing at school and in life. It is very difficult for children and communities to end patterns of poverty thereby permitting the continuance of a culture of dependency and disempowerment (Louw, & Louw, 2014; Ratele, 2007).

### 2.2.4 POVERTY AND ACADEMIC FUNCTIONING

The impact of poverty on children and young people's development is particularly severe (Weinreb et al., 2002). Studies done in Sub-Saharan Africa have shown that young children in developing countries are exposed to multiple poverty-associated risks including malnutrition, poor health, and overcrowded and unstimulating home environments (Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Glewwe, Richter, & Strupp, 2007). According to Fanzo (2012), malnutrition among poor children in Sub-Saharan Africa is almost twice as high as in any other region in Africa. In South Africa, almost 11 million learners live in poverty, and nine million of these children are dependent on feeding schemes in schools for some form of nutrition (Fanzo, 2012; Louw, & Louw, 2014).

Poverty studies have linked malnutrition with poor academic achievement in many ways. For example, a number of studies show that inadequate feeding in the early years can result in brain damage thereby affecting children's educational development (Chinyoka, 2014; Shrestha, & Pathak, 2012). Orazem (2006, p. 25) state that the "rapid generation of neurons, synaptogenesis, axonal and dendric growth, and synaptic pruning speeds up brain development during the first three years of brain development". Poor nutrition, or a lack of nutrients, can interrupt these developmental processes and compromise academic development (Chinyoka, 2014). According to a study by Chinyoka (2014) in Zimbabwe, children with a history of malnutrition score lower on intelligence and school tests. As a result of a lack of natural high-fibre foods, protein, and vital vitamins in children's diets, many children find it difficult to concentrate at school and are also more susceptible to illness thus leading to their absence from school (Chinyoka, 2014).

Child development is also fundamentally shaped by parent-child interaction (Engle, & Black, 2008; Louw, & Louw, 2014). Households in low-resourced communities often fail to provide children with stimulating home environments, such as books to read, art activities, and educational games (Engle, & Black, 2008). Parents of children in high-risk communities often cannot afford access to pre-school programmes, quality schooling, and additional education, which can contribute to delays in brain development (Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, & Ramey, 2001; Engle, & Black, 2008; Lee, & Burkman, 2002).

Economic hardship also causes family stress, which can impact negatively on the social and mental wellbeing of children and their parents (Slack, Holl, McDaniel, Yoo, & Bolger, 2004). A study done in Tanzania by Makame et al., (2002) indicated that children with unmet basic needs tend to internalise problems thereby impeding their long-term mental and academic functioning. Likewise, Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015) argues that poverty-related needs are the cause of many of the risks faced by numerous South African children including the risk of developing a wide range of behavioural problems. The aforementioned study shows also how the education of learners is affected by HIV and AIDS, at times forcing them to drop out of school to look after their siblings (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). Louw and Louw (2014) report that children from poor backgrounds often live in inadequate, self-erected structures in informal settlements and in the backyards of houses in informal settlements with poor sanitation, water, and other basic services. In addition, the accommodation is also usually overcrowded, increasing the risk of sexual abuse and disease.

Parents' inability to provide food, shelter, and clothing for their children can increase the risk of the parents and the children becoming depressed and anxious (Cook, & Frank, 2008; McLeod, & Shananan, 1993; Weinreb et al., 2002). Various studies have associated poverty also with harsh, controlling, and neglectful parenting styles (Cook, & Frank, 2008). Many fathers in high-risk communities are absent and also often abandon their families leaving the mothers with the responsibility of looking after the children (McLeod, & Shanahan, 1993; Slack et al., 2004). Negative parental behaviours do not provide children with examples of sound relationships and adaptive and problem-solving behaviour, which may prevent them from internalising sound family, community, and cultural values (Cook, & Frank, 2008; Engle, & Black, 2008). Children may consequently find it difficult to learn pro-social behaviour and 'unlearn' anti-social behaviour, making it hard for them to accept teachers' authority and get along with their peers (Slack et al., 2004). The result is often behavioural and developmental problems such as low self-esteem, a decrease in self-regulation, drug abuse, and mood disorders. Parents who are stressed and overwhelmed by the pressures of poverty are thus often unable to meet the emotional, cognitive, and caregiving needs of their children (Engle, & Black, 2008; Slack et al., 2004).

A review of poverty provides insight into the emotional, material, and informational needs of people in resource scarce communities (Murnane, 2007). The literature indicates also the importance of communities coming together in social networks to define their challenges and develop strategies to deal with their problems. Community interventions should therefore focus on developing social resources in communities by strengthening social support networks (Ennis, & West, 2010; Falk, & Kilpatrick, 2000; Heaney, & Israel, 2008). In the next section of this study, I review the literature on the characteristics and functions of social networks that can lead to social support.

## 2.3 SOCIAL NETWORKS

### 2.3.1 INTRODUCTION

The term social network generally refers to the web of social relationships that surrounds individuals (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). The provision of social support is an important function of such relationships between people (Bottrell, 2009; Ennis, & West, 2014; Heaney, & Israel, 2008; Putnam, Feldstein, & Cohen, 2003; Roditti, 2005; Van Dussen, & Morgan, 2009). Social studies show that social networks are particularly important in sustaining and protecting high-risk communities against the devastating effects of poverty (Ennis, & West, 2010; Falk, & Kilpatrick, 2000). Lin (1999, 2008) argues that social networks accumulate and provide the necessary resources needed by communities to support each other purposefully. Heaney and Israel (2008) maintain that social networks can be used to provide empathy, share material resources, and provide useful information and feedback to their memb*ers* (Ennis, & West, 2010, 2014; Moyo 2014). Volunteers from the community can thus become a vital resource as they take responsibility to change and support their own communities (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). In addition to providing support, community volunteers can also influence others through their example and encourage other community members to become involved (Einoff, & Chambré, 2011).

The value and influence of social networks in high-risk communities gives rise to the question as to how these networks can lead to social support. In order to understand how social networks work, we need first to understand the primary characteristics and functions of such networks (Cook, & Whitmeyer, 1992; Ennis, & West, 2010; Heaney, & Israel, 2008; Lin, 1999, 2008; Lin, Cook,& Burt 2001; Sander, & Lowney, 2006; Walker et al., 2000).

### 2.3.2 STRUCTURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

The structure of a social network refers to how actors and relationships are organised and the kind of ties that exist between members (Ennis, & West, 2010; Heaney, & Israel, 2008; Lin, 1999, 2008; Van Dijk, 2006). The way actors and relation are positioned and distributed in social networks can influence the extent to which actors have access to other actors and common resources (Lin, 1999). Lin (1999) argues that people's position in a system critically influences their access to resources and ultimately empowers them to sustain themselves and support others. Similarly, the density of ties in a social network influences the extent to which members are familiar and interact with each other, resulting in increased social support (Heaney, & Israel, 2008).

A social network consists essentially of a network of at least three members or social actors who are linked to each other through at least two social ties (Ennis, & West, 2014; Van Dijk, 2006). An actor is most commonly an individual person, but the term can refer also to a group, organisation, or community

(Ennis, & West, 2010; Lin, 1999). A tie indicates a relationship between two actors and can vary from intimate bonds to bridging relationships across different levels of community (Van Dijk, 2006).

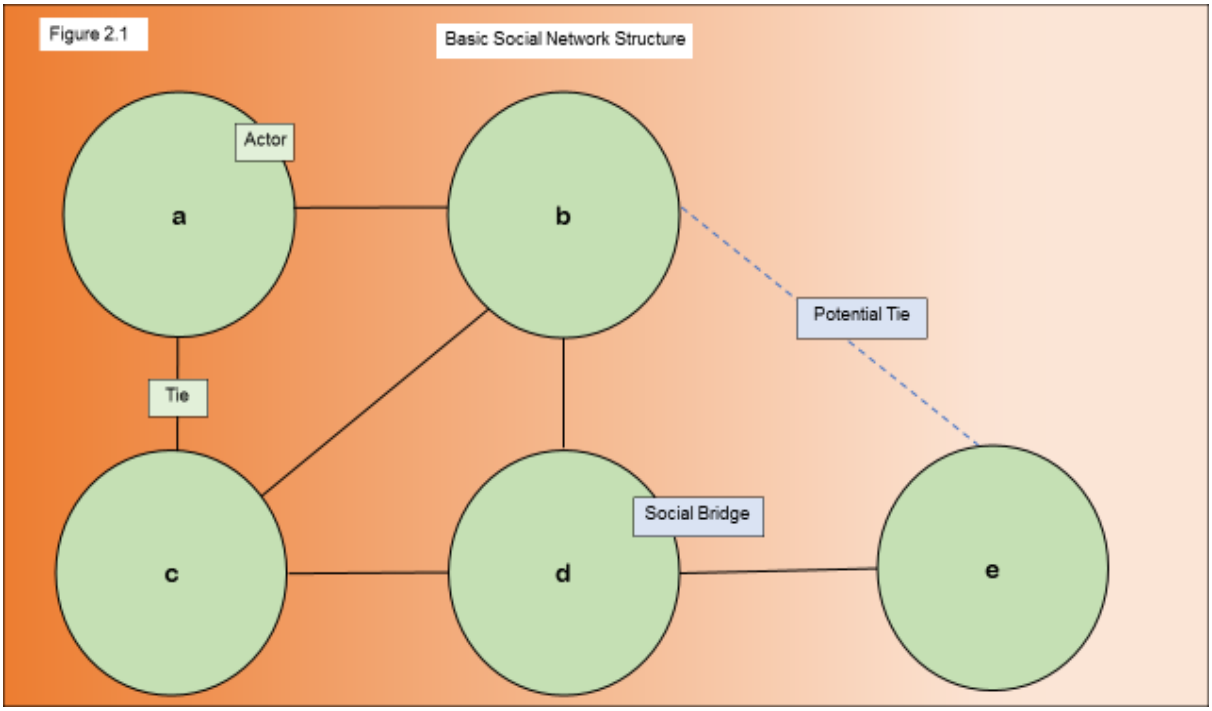


**Figure 2.1: Basic social network structure**

Social theories also distinguish certain structural features of social support networks such as how links are organised and where actors are placed in a social network (Ennis, & West, 2010; Heaney, & Israel, 2008; Lin, 1999, 2008; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). The connectedness of network members is thus considered an important feature of social networks. In his work, *Social Networks*, Mitchell (1974) refers to connectedness as a morphological feature of networks that indicates the patterns of the links in a network. According to Lin (1999, 2008), connectedness in a network points to where and how social actors are positioned in a network. In Figure 2.1, Actors a and d are connected by three or more relationships, while Actors b and c are tied by two links, and Actor e is connected through a single relationship.

As stated above, positioning in a network shapes an actor's influence and access to resources in purposively supporting his/her community (Lin, 1999, 2008). The notion of positioning can be applied to building relationships in a community in a strategic manner, identifying potential links, and mobilising such relationships in supporting community members (Ennis, & West, 2010, 2014). As a result, an important task of community volunteers involves identifying entrance points into networks and establishing relationships with important role-players (Ennis, & West, 2010, 2014). In Figure 2.1, Actor d serves as a social bridge linking Actor e with the rest of the network. The map shows also a potential relationship between Actors b and e that can be mobilised to increase people's access to resources in a network.

People can also enhance their own position and subsequent influence by devoting their resources, assets, and strengths to the cause of a particular network (Lin, 1999, 2008).

Another important feature of social networks is the density of the ties between social actors (Ennis, & West, 2010; Heaney, & Israel, 2008; Lin, 1999, 2008). Heaney and Israel (2008) define network density as the extent to which social actors in a network all know and interact with one another. Lin (1999) points to the advantage of denser social networks in being able to provide instrumental and emotional security to their members by preserving, reproducing, and keeping resources in a group. Similarly, social support is most likely and most effective when people are linked with others like them, sharing the same circumstances, and living in the same areas (Bottrell, 2009; Buz, Sanchez, Levenson, & Aldwin, 2014; Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007; Moyo, 2014; Van Dussen, & Morgan, 2009; Zippay, 1995). Thus, people are better able to support others when they share similar demographical experiences and live in close proximity to one another (Heaney, & Israel, 2008).

The above discussion indicates that the organising and positioning of relationships and people in social networks is a significant aspect of networking (Ennis, & West, 2010; Lin, 1999, 2008). Besides needing interpersonal skills, volunteers therefore also need to be able to build relationships strategically in order to increase network density and gain access to important resources so that they can support their communities effectively. In addition to the positioning of actors and network density, the kinds of ties linking social actors are also important characteristics of social networks.

### 2.3.3 FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social network structure refers to how relationships are organised (structural characteristics) as well as to the kind of ties that exist between members (relationship characteristics) (Ennis, & West, 2010; Lin, 1999, 2008). The literature links different kinds of ties with specific functions of social networks (Sander, & Lowney, 2006). Thus, none of these relationships are considered better or worse than others but may be more appropriate to certain contexts and causes (Heaney, & Israel, 2008; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). In this part of the literature review, I focus first on how social networks can give rise to social capital and then consider how such networks can lead to social support in communities. However, in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of social networks in communities, I will also explore social undermining as a negative function of social networks.

#### 2.3.3.1 Social capital as a function of social networks

Similar to other social phenomena, social networks can serve many functions such as the formation of social capital (Berkman, & Glass, 2000; Burt, 2000; Falk, & Kilpatrick, 2000; Lin 1999). A social network perspective on social capital holds that social networks have value for those who belong to them (Axford, 2012; Halpern, 2005; Lin, 1999, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). More specifically, social

capital represents the social resources embedded in social networks, which people can access and mobilise to support their communities (Lin, 1999, 2008; Lindström, 2008). According to Sander and Lowney (2006), social capital refers primarily to the relationships that exist between people, literally who knows whom, and are often characterised by norms of reciprocity, trust, and positive affect.

The most basic ingredient of social networks that gives rise to social capital is trust, that is, the extent to which individuals believe that others mean what they say and honour their commitments (Field, 2003; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). According to Sander and Lowney (2006), honesty in social networks is based on members' personal experiences of one another and whether other people are deserving of their trust. The literature distinguishes also between different kinds of trust, namely thick trusting relationships and thin trusting relationships (Anheier, & Kendall, 2002; Catell, 2012). Thick trusting relationships usually characterise networks where strong bonds exist between people who frequently meet with one another (Morrone, Tontoranelli, & Ranuzzi, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Conversely, thin trust occurs in broad communities and society at large and is based on local wisdom, indigenous customs, and cultural concepts such as collectiveness, democracy, and human dignity (Field, 2003; Ostrom, & Walker, 2003; Putnam, 2000). When communities collapse, these implicit values are also threatened (Sander, & Lowney, 2006).

Through people's continuous investment in trusting relationships, social networks produce social resources that can be mobilised to support others (Lin, 1999). Resources embedded in social networks include the flow of information (Falk, & Kilpatrick, 2000), the sharing of material resources (Glover et al., 2005; Robinson, & Williams, 2001), social cohesion (Berkman, & Glass, 2000), mutual support (Hardcastle, Powers, & Wenocur, 2011; Omoto, & Snyder, 2002), a sense of belonging (Ellemers, & Haslam, 2012; Forrest, & Kearns, 2001), mutual trust (Baron, 2015), and social reputation (Burt, 2000; Lin, 1999, & 2008).

A network theory of social capital holds that mutual support, social cohesion, and the sharing of resources result from relationships of trust, reciprocity, and positive affect (Lin, 1999, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). Because volunteers can access, mobilise, and use these resources to support vulnerable community members, social support is considered another key function of social networks.

#### 2.3.3.2 Social support as a function of social networks

In addition to social capital, scholars consider social support a key function of personal relationships and social interaction (Albrecht, & Goldsmith, 2003; Antonucci, & Jackson, 1990; Ashida, & Heaney, 2008; Berkman, & Glass, 2000; Dow, & McDonald, 2003; Heaney, & Israel 2008; Helgeson, & Lopez, 2010). In social support networks, people intentionally support one another through mutual caring and sharing experiences and deliberately refrain from undermining each other (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). Important

features of relationships in social support networks are reciprocity, equal sharing of power, emotional closeness, and versatility in offering different kinds of support.

According to Heaney and Israel (2008), reciprocity in social support networks refers to relationships where people both give and receive social support. Reciprocity refers not only to the exchange of goods and services between individuals in a network but also to a mindset of responsibility where people return the support and services given to them (Kay, 2006). In addition to reciprocity, caring relationships between people tend to display an equal sharing of power and influence (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). Sharing of power is enhanced through participation in decision making and acknowledgement of people's abilities, resources, and strengths (Moyo, 2014).

Supportive ties in social networks are likely to be strong bonds that offer emotional closeness to people. A study by Thoits and Hewitt (1995) explored how closely knit support networks provide strong affective support to social network members who have experienced major life transitions or trauma. Similarly, Kana'iaupuni, et al. (2006) describe how mothers in high-risk communities rely on close family relationships to assist them in raising their young children. Fleishman, et al. (2000) found that strong personal bonds enhance the emotional wellbeing of HIV-infected patients by encouraging positive emotions and a sense of meaningfulness

Social research shows that ties between social actors are versatile through serving different purposes and being adaptable to different circumstances. Such versatility enables social networks to achieve specific goals in specific circumstances and settings (Portes, 2000). Social researchers attribute the resourcefulness and flexibility of social networks to the multidimensionality or complexity of relationships that can adapt to the specific kind of support needed by individuals (Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2005; Hamilton, & Sandelowski, 2004; Jeffrey, 2003).

Heaney and Israel (2008) maintain that because of the multidimensionality of social relationships and interaction, social networks can assist others in addressing emotional, instrumental, and informational needs as well as the need for appraisal and feedback. Table 2.1 shows the kinds of social support that are found in social support networks, as summarised by Heaney and Israel (2008).

**Table 2.1: Types of social support provided through social networks**

| Type of social support | Description |
|---|---|
| **Emotional support** | Expressions of empathy, love , trust, and caring |
| **Instrumental support** | Tangible aid and services |
| **Informational support** | Advice, suggestions, and information |
| **Appraisal support** | Information that is useful for self-evaluation |

The literature on community interventions indicates the need for emotional support in high-risk communities, which includes enabling people to express their thoughts and feelings, empathy, affirmation, and encouragement (Jeffrey, 2003; Kottler, & Kottler, 2007). Community volunteers therefore need to have basic interpersonal and counselling skills (Ferreira et al., 2013). These skills include competence in verbal and non-verbal communication, listening, negotiation, problem solving, decision making, and assertiveness (Barrett-Lennard, 2013; Kottler, & Kottler, 2007; Kretzmann, & Green, 1998; Kretzmann, & McKnight, 1993; Pasteur, & Scott-Villiers, 2006; Paukert, Stagner, & Hope, 2004; Woods, & Ormerod, 1993).

Table 2.1 shows that social networks can be used also to provide instrumental support, which involves material assistance and other services that meet people's immediate physical needs such as food, shelter, and clothing (Berkman, & Glass, 2000; Kroenke, Kubzansky, Schernhammer, Holmes, & Kawachi, 2006). In addition to emotional and instrumental care, social networks can support high-risk communities through sharing critical information and advice and suggestions on how to deal with specific problems (Gilchrist, 2009; Heaney, & Israel, 2008). Furthermore, Ferreira, et al. (2013) report on how social networks can provide evaluative and supportive feedback thereby helping people evaluate their progress towards a common goal.

The literature shows that social support is key to social networks and involves the building of relationships that are reciprocal, equal in power, emotionally close, and able to address social needs in high-risk communities (Crane, & O'Regan 2010; Kretzmann, & Green, 1998; Kretzmann, & McKnight, 2005; McKnight, & Kretzmann, 1997). However, social studies show also that social networks can impede people's development and their ability to support one another (Antonuci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998; Salmivalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997).

#### 2.3.3.3 Social undermining as a function of social networks

Mutual support is considered a key feature of social networks, yet not all studies agree that social support is necessarily inherent in social networks (Campbell, Nair, Maimane, & Nicholson, 2007). Heaney and Israel (2008) identified social undermining as a key aspect of social networks that people in such networks attempt to prevent. An understanding of social undermining can assist community volunteers to identify and deal with any pitfalls that may impede relationship building in communities.

Heaney and Israel (2008) maintain that social undermining involves processes aimed at derailing people from achieving their goals and continuously expressing negative affect or criticism. International studies show that negative interactions in social groups can have an even greater impact on people's wellbeing than positive experiences, placing members at high risk of mood disorders (Antonuci et al., 1998). Examining the influence of social undermining in schools, Salmivalli, et al. (1997) indicate how the physical arrangement and social organisation of learners in classrooms can strengthen bullying behaviour

towards specific children. Their study found that children who bully other children are generally well positioned in peer networks enabling them to label, gossip about, and isolate their victims (Salmivalli et al., 1997). Similarly, Collins (2003) explored how processes of labelling in classrooms and schooling systems can undermine optimal academic achievement and are inconsistent with the ethic of caring.

Social undermining can also impede the work of community volunteers in high-risk communities. A South African study by Campbell, et al. (2007) highlights the complex interplay of psychological and social factors in the stigmatisation of HIV and AIDS patients in high-risk communities. They found, for example, that personal relationships and social interaction are often used to distort and prevent the dissemination of information about HIV and AIDS in high-risk communities (Campbell et al., 2007). A study by Akintola (2008) in two semi-rural communities in South Africa found that community volunteers are often in need of emotional support because of the stigma of working with people with HIV and AIDS. Volunteers also found it difficult to obtain support from their own social networks, which strained their own ability to support others (Akintola, 2008).

Social networks provide social support and enhance social capital but frequently also exclude people and obstruct support given to individuals and families (Campbell et al., 2007). As stated earlier, impoverished communities often experience a sense of exclusion and isolation from society at large (Corbridge 2007; Patel, & Kleinman, 2003). It is therefore important for community interventions to include marginalised people, bridge social divides, and address social inequities and inequalities (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011). Issues such as exclusion and power struggles on all social levels can affect the work of community volunteers thereby stressing the importance of their belonging to social support networks and building relationships with constructive institutions in the community.

In conclusion, a network theory of social capital states that mutual support in social networks results from relationships of trust, reciprocity, and positive affect (Lin, 1999, 2008; Putnam 2000; Sander, & Lowney, 2006). Social networks can therefore play a key role in giving social support to individuals and their families in high-risk communities (Ennis, & West, 2014; Kretzmann, & McKnight 1993). Social scholars argue that social support arises from the way relationships are structured as well as from strength and intensity of relationships in social networks (Ennis, & West, 2010; Heaney, & Israel, 2008). Social support networks focus specifically on being helpful to others and can be distinguished easily from intentional negative interactions such as social undermining behaviours (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). The types of social support given by social networks include emotional, instrumental, and informational support. More specifically, social researchers have found that community volunteers rely on sound social networks among themselves and collaboration with teachers and schools to support learners and their families in low-resourced communities (Ferreira et al., 2013; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015).

## 2.4 INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL STUDIES ON VOLUNTEERS USING SOCIAL NETWORKS IN PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

Previous research on community development has emphasised the importance of community volunteers in purposively supporting high-risk communities (Ennis, & West, 2006; Gilchrist, 2004). Community volunteers are well positioned to give social support because of the links they have with others like them in their communities (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). They have access to partnerships, information, and material aid that they can share or use to support others in their communities (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). According to Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015), community volunteers also share the same realities, values, and cultural views as the people they support, which makes it easier for them to reach out and build strong bonds with them.

In supporting their communities, community volunteers form different partnerships, such as partnerships with peer volunteer workers, teachers, and leaders in schools and organisations outside their school communities (Ferreira, 2015; Ferreira et al., 2013; Van Staden, 2016). For example, in a community development study done in Australia, Ennis and West (2014) found that a small group of people from the same neighbourhood worked together as networking partners by applying network thinking to support their community. A local study by Ferreira, et al. (2013) in two resource-scarce communities in the Eastern Cape Province in South Africa explored how community volunteers collaborated with teachers to initiate and implement school-based supportive plans. The study showed how the volunteers were already involved in school-community partnerships that they had established and subsequently used to change and support their community (Ferreira et al., 2013). Nair and Campbell (2008) showed in their study how community volunteers in the Etabeni project in rural South Africa partnered effectively with two non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The study revealed that collaboration with external agents is a key element in building sustainable support structures in communities. Thus, through supportive relationships with peer networkers and partnerships within and outside school communities, community volunteers can create a web of social support networks (Nair, & Campbell, 2008).

Previous social studies in South Africa have shown that community volunteers can use their social networks to render different kinds of social support including emotional, instrumental, and informational support (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011). Ferreira and Ebersöhn (2011) found that the participant teachers in the STAR intervention study met the wide-ranging needs of individuals in high-risk communities by providing social, emotional, and spiritual support. Similarly, a study by Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015) explored how community workers used memory-work to give emotional and psychological support to individuals in high-risk communities. The study found that small groups enhance people's sharing of ideas, beliefs, and understanding of their contexts (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). Thus, not only do community volunteers use networks to support others, but, by being part of social networks, they gain in terms of their own development (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). The social gains achieved in networking have been referred to in

network studies as the "invisible hand of social networks", which implies that people generally do not support others with any immediate expectation of return (Colby, & Damon, 1992; Lin, 1999, Roditti, 2005; Van Dussen, & Morgan, 2009). However, community volunteers may, for example, become part of a social support programme in their communities and benefit from regaining a sense of meaning and happiness in their lives (Ferreira et al., 2013).

In addition to personal happiness, studies have shown that social networks can also give rise to a sense of collective usefulness (Ferreira et al., 2013). As explained in 2.2.3, poverty often leads to a total collapse of confidence. People in low-resourced communities experience their powerlessness to change anything, their need for help, and their not belonging anywhere. Creating a sense of belonging, sharing, and participation is consequently a significant reason for volunteers to become part of social support networks and to pursue the common goal of supporting their communities (Ferreira et al., 2013).

In a study on the active participation of rural women in community development programmes, Moyo (2014) uncovered a need to include communities in their own development. The study concluded that it was women's active engagement in decision making and in the implementation and evaluation of development programmes that motivated them to participate in community development. By engaging them from start to finish in a community project, these women realised that they could develop themselves. Kongolo and Bamgose (2002) suggest, however, that because of policies of nonparticipation in development, many women in rural areas tend to lack initiative, innovation, and self-reliance. Their findings point to the need to involve people at ground level in all phases of community interventions (Kongolo, & Bamgose, 2002).

In order to establish social support relationships with others in their communities, community volunteers have to embrace certain values and use certain skills (Ferreira et al., 2013). According to Ferreira, et al. (2013), community volunteers address challenges and support their high-risk communities through relying on local wisdom and cultural concepts, such as *ubuntu* (Ferreira et al., 2013).

De Wet (2012) argues, however, that the spirit of *ubuntu* is not necessarily part of the experiences of volunteers and recipients of care in low-resourced settings. Mutual care in such communities often occurs in severe social and economic conditions, limiting the effectiveness of volunteer support (De Wet, 2012). Similarly, Collins-Warfield (2008) maintains that the values of *ubuntu* are not linked to any lofty ideals but are meant to bring people together to deal with very specific needs. Also, the purpose of community solidarity is to discover and meet the needs of the community but never at the complete expense of individual needs and dignity (Collins-Warfield, 2008). Collins-Warfield (2008) states that the practice of *ubuntu* calls also for the care of specific individuals in need of support.

In addition to values and attitudes, community volunteers also need particular skills to make connections with peers and organisations and to give social support to individual learners and their families. Chambers (2004) argues that community development implies not only a better way of organising a community but

also a fundamental change in how community workers behave. Ebersöhn and Ferreira (2011) highlight the need for volunteer teachers to do home visits to children, families, and community members affected by HIV and AIDS. Similarly, Petersen and Dunbar-Krige (2012) highlight the need for community-based activities to be guided by an ethos of care and social justice.

When community volunteers engage in community support programmes, they should maintain relationships by co-operating with others, communicating their thoughts and feelings, assuming mutual responsibility for the community, and showing flexibility towards others (Chambers, 2004). Community volunteers need to be able to listen and understand others, identify and deal with issues of power and capacity, learn to step back, and refrain from criticising and judging others (Chambers, 1994). Walker, Shenker and Hoover-Dempsey (2010) believe that volunteers can be taught a variety of listening skills to support learners with their education. Focusing on providing basic counselling skills to teachers, Kottler and Kottler (2007) maintain that passive and active listening skills can improve teachers' ability to assist children in crisis. International studies by Paukert, et al. (2005) found that volunteers need to be able to deal with the trauma, stress, and crises experienced by others. They argue that listening lies at the heart of trauma support and that listening skills can be significantly improved through basic training for volunteers. A study by Paris and Dubus (2005) in the United States of America (USA) found that volunteers' listening skills are most effective when dealing with clients who experience social isolation and personal disconnection. Feedback from the participants in their study referred specifically to the volunteers' use of validation and affirmation, consistent care, and instrumental assistance as important features of effective social support. By using the abovementioned skills, the community volunteers were able to enhance the participants' self-confidence in looking after their children, reduce their emotional distress, and empower them to link up with others (Paris, & Dubus, 2005).

In addition to listening skills, social research has shown the need for networking skills that go beyond personal ties with peers and clients. Oishi and Graham (2010) state that community development practice should be sensitive and make use of optimal social network strategies to support individuals and organisations in adverse social conditions. Social scholars have consequently focused on applying network thinking strategically in supporting high-risk communities (Ennis, & West, 2010). Ennis, & West (2014) found in their study that communities use network knowledge to identify power imbalances, relationship gaps, and important potential relationships in communities. Knowledge on identifying entry points to important networks and skills in building bridging relationships are vital for community volunteers (Ennis, & West, 2014). The literature shows that in order to build relationships strategically, volunteers need a basic understanding of network thinking in addition to personal networking skills.

The literature shows also that community volunteers need to come together in social support networks to support their communities (Moyo, 2014; Kongolo, & Bamgose, 2002). Such volunteers are particularly well placed to give social support as they are already part of social networks that give them access to

important networking partners and resources (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). Besides offering support, social networking contributes also to community volunteers' wellbeing (Heaney, & Israel, 2008, Iecovich, Jacobs, & Stessman, 2011). Many community volunteers derive a sense of personal happiness and meaning in purposefully supporting others as well as a sense of collective usefulness and participation (Ferreira et al., 2013). In order to support their communities, community volunteers adhere to certain values and norms and use their networking skills to give emotional, material, and informational support. Skills needed to support communities include practising social justice and bridging social divides (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012).

Scholars use different models to integrate research findings on volunteers' use of social networks to support their communities (Ennis, & West, 2010; Kretzmann, & McKnight, 1993). In this study, I used Lin's network theory of social capital to understand the purpose of volunteering and the purposeful use of social networks to give social support to volunteers' communities (Lin, 1999, 2002, 2008; Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001). The foregoing section provides the backdrop for the section on community volunteers.

## 2.5 NETWORK THEORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In this study, as stated earlier, I used Lin's network theory of social capital as a theoretical framework (Lin 1999; 2002, 2008; Lin et al., 2001; Lin, & Dumin, 1986; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981). A network theory of social capital states that social resources are inherent in social relationships and describes the process by which they are captured and result in personal gain (Ostrom, & Walker 2003; Coleman, 2003; Field, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Lin, 1999, 2008; Morrone et.al., 2005; Putnam, 2000). In order to understand social resources in social networks, it is necessary to place them in the context of different theories of capital. For instance, traditional models state that capital is produced through investment in the production and circulation of goods (Field, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Lin, 1999). Basic commodities are acquired and used by workers who receive payment for their labour (exchange value). In addition, such commodities are sold at a higher price to the workers than the price at which they were produced (user value) (Ostrom, & Walker, 2003; Field, 2003). This results in gains on the original investment that are re-invested in processes of production and circulation (Figure 2.1).

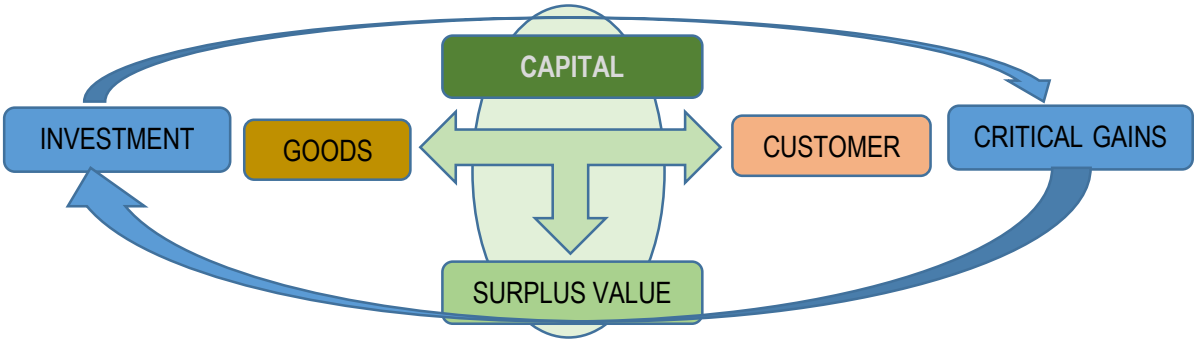


**Figure 2.2: Basic capital investment and gains**

The network theory of social capital proposed by Lin, builds on the idea of an investment resulting in certain gains (Figure 2.3). Accordingly, people invest in social networks by building personal relationships, trust, commitment, and positive emotions (Lin, 1999). This interaction results in the formation of embedded resources that network members can access to sustain and improve their lives (Ostrom, & Walker, 2003; Field, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Morrone et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000).The embedded resources can include financial, natural, social, and human assets where the social assets involve strong social bonds and community relations (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). Social bonds also provide access to essential information, influence in the community, social support, and a sense of identity and acknowledgement (Ellemers, & Haslam, 2011; Falk, & Kilpatrick, 2000; Glover et al., 2005; Omoto, & Snyder, 2002). After gaining access to social resources, members of social networks can mobilise these resources in purposeful actions such as supporting vulnerable members of the community (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). In the end, purposeful actions result in critical gains for individuals, groups, and communities, including material gains (Lin, 1999, 2008)

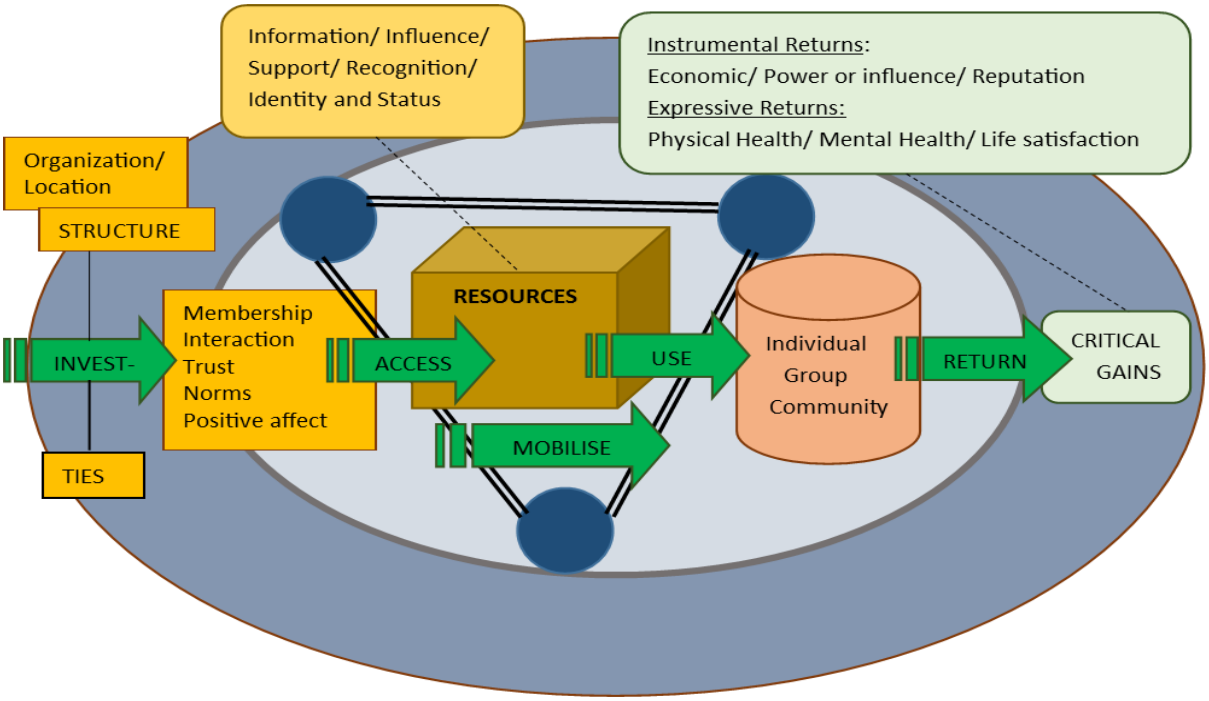


**Figure 2.3: Social capital, investment, and gains**

I found a network theory of social capital useful in understanding the link between investment in social networks and its returns for individuals and communities. Investment and returns gave me some insight into the chain of processes involved in capturing and releasing collective resources. More specifically, processes in volunteer networking consist of investment in relationships, access to and mobilisation and collective use of resources, and critical gains resulting from these processes (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012; Kawachi et al., 1999; Thoits, & Hewitt, 2001). Furthermore, a network theory of social capital helped me

relate specific gains to certain kinds of relationships, network locations, and social resources embedded in volunteers' networks (Linn, 1999, 2008).

In this study, I used Lin's network theory of social capital to understand how the research participants accessed, mobilised, and used the flow of information, influence, support, and acknowledgement provided by their networks to support vulnerable community members. I also used the theory to indicate the kinds of returns the participants gained in terms of their personal wellbeing and social standing, which I related to relationships consisting of sound interaction, trust, commitment, and positive affection. Finally, I used the theory to understand the resources available to the participants and the specific actions they engaged in to support vulnerable members of the community.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

A review of the literature paints an alarming picture of the prevalance of poverty in South Africa and its implications not only for individual lives but also for society. In my view, this calls for social interventions that are serious about social justice and implementing change. Equally, I agree with the literature that the implications of poverty cannot be reduced to figures and facts as communities' experiences of hardship lead to social and psychological distress resulting mainly from social exclusion, dependency, and disempowerment. It is against this background that many studies have pointed to the critical importance of social networks and community volunteers taking hands with schools to support scarce-resourced communities and families. Social networks are vital to community volunteers in securing support, respect, and social cohesiveness.

In summary, a network theory of social capital has shed light for me on the way social networks operate. More specifically, the literature review helped me understand how social capital can be built thereby providing valuable guidelines for action research in designing sustainable interventions. According to the literature, volunteers access, mobilise, and use the resources embedded in their networks to support vulnerable community members, and, at the same time, they gain from the process. This leads to volunteers re-investing their time and effort in their relationships and social networks resulting in the production of social returns.

This study focused specifically on the way community volunteers in the SHEBA project used (accessed and mobilised) the resources embedded in their networks in order to look after vulnerable members in their communities. Finally, the study was differed from previous studies as selected volunteers from two specific communities were included as co-researchers in the SHEBA action research project and shared their unique experiences with the co-facilitators and other participants.

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# Chapter 3
# Research Design and Methodology

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 outlines the principles underlying the paradigmatic and methodological approaches followed in the study as well as the methods used to generate data from the participants and to analyse the data. This chapter provides a more detailed description of the methodology and methods, quality criteria, and ethical norms of the study. First, I describe the ontological and epistemological positions chosen as the foundation for the methodological decisions and research methods in the study. Next, I discuss my approach to obtain the required data, the procedures used to gather the data, and the data sources used to construct the findings. I explain also my role as researcher and how the rigour of the research was enhanced by employing various measures of trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with how the study dealt with the ethical issues that guided the relationship between the researcher and the participants.

## 3.2 UNDERLYING PARADIGM AND RESEARCH APPROACH

Creswell (2014) refers to the paradigmatic perspectives underlying certain research methods as a particular worldview or the primary set of beliefs that guides the actions and decisions taken in conducting a study. In this study, I used a participative reflection and action research approach grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm.

### 3.2.1 META-THEORETICAL PARADIGM

The study used interpretivism as the meta-theoretical paradigm. The meta-theoretical paradigm of a study refers to the epistemological considerations that determine what should be considered acceptable knowledge in a specific discipline (Bryman, 2012). Interpretivism finds its origins in hermeneutics, which is attributed largely to theological thinkers such as Schleiermacher (1768–1834) and Dilthey (1833–1911) and modern-day philosophers such as Gadamer (1900–2002) and Wittgenstein (1889–1959) (Higgs, & Smith, 2006). Theological hermeneutics argues that there are many ways to approach biblical texts and that the methods used by readers will determine their interpretation of these texts (Van Huyssteen, 1999). Hermeneutics acknowledges also that readers bring their own life experiences to understanding such texts (Higgs, & Smith, 2006). Similarly, interpretivism focuses on how people make sense of the world around them and, as a theoretical approach, aims to interpret people's actions from their point of view (Bryman, 2012, Makkreel, & Rodi, 1989).

Interpretivism is considered by some as an outcome of the debate between exponents of hermeneutics and positivism. Positivism in social theory can be attributed to theorists such as Comte (1798–1857) and

Durkheim (1858–1917), where Comte refers to positivity as the degree to which both natural and social phenomena can be precisely defined (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Durkheim followed by asserting that the social sciences, too, can adhere to notions of objectivity, rationalism, and causality as applied in the natural sciences (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Thus, theoretical positivism holds that reality exists independently of our knowledge of the world (Grix, 2010). According to Grix (2010), positivist social theories assume that social behaviour can be explained by laws of cause and effect, similar to those found in the natural world. As a result, positivist thinkers in social research focus on explaining as opposed to understanding human action (Bryman, 2012). In contrast, interpretivism holds that social realities differ significantly from the subject matter of the natural sciences (Bryman, 2012). Social realities cannot be seen as objective realities but are socially constructed through people's daily interactions in certain settings (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, & Sklar, 2012). Thus, interpretivist social science is concerned with subjectivity, understanding, agency, and how people construct their social realities (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001; Bryman, 2012; Liamputtong, 2013).

Interpretivists' focus on understanding is particularly evident in Max Weber's idea of Verstehen, which refers to the understanding of meanings that people ascribe to their experiences (De Vos, Strydom, Schulze, & Patel, 2011; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011; Kogler, & Stueber, 2000). Verstehen implies putting oneself in the shoes of research participants (Kogler, & Stueber, 2000). According to Bryman (2012), the goal is to enter into people's daily experiences and then interpret their actions and social realities from their point of view. The researcher and the researched can consequently no longer be separated; however, the experiences, beliefs, and values of the researcher can significantly influence the outcome of a study (Thomas, 2011).

The interpretivist paradigm contains a number of core premises. First, interpretivists subscribe to the view that the world does not exist independently of our knowledge of it (Grix, 2010). Instead, social realities are seen as socially constructed, and therefore facts and values cannot always be separated (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, & Sklar, 2012). The position also assumes that the social world needs to be studied from within and with methods different from those used in the discipline of the natural sciences (Leedy, & Ormond, 2014). Second, interpretivism assumes that our understandings are interpretations of social realities, which inevitably impacts researchers' research findings (Grix, 2010). Researchers thus become part of the very reality they want to analyse, and, consequently, research results may reflect their subjective views, attitudes, and values (Thomas, 2011). Third, interpretivist research seeks to understand people's experiences as opposed to explaining the causes and effects of human behaviour (Bryman, 2012; Fouché, & Schurink, 2011).

Critics argue that interpretivism is too subjective in its approach, making it difficult to verify the truth of research findings (Baxter, 1991). Consequently, some assert that research conducted in this way has no relevance beyond the experiences of the participants.

As stated in Chapter 1, I adopted an interpretivist stance in this study by embracing the meanings that the participants ascribed to their networking experiences (Ferreira et al., 2013). This was in keeping with the purpose of the study, which was to explore how the community volunteers from the SHEBA project – in two high-risk school communities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area – value their social networks. I also acknowledged the subjective nature of the study and the restrictions on generalising the results. In addition, I recognised the complexity of the volunteers' experiences and actions that could not be explained in terms of cause and effect or single realities (Miell, & Dallos, 1996). Instead, I approached their experiences as multiple and jointly constructed realities in a specific social and cultural setting (Miell, & Croghan, 1996).

I came to see my own understandings as tentative and provisional, influenced by my own background (Leedy, & Ormrod, 2014). I assumed the role of participant-observer, listening to the views of the participants during group discussions (Fouché, & Schurink, 2011). In addition, I reflected critically on my own observations, discussing my experiences with the participants, and clearing up uncertainties with them. In this way, I recognised the pre-existing knowledge and wisdom of the participants. I also collected data that captured the meanings they attributed to their realities (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2011, 2012).

The main benefit of adopting an interpretivist approach in the study was to obtain rich and thick descriptions of the community volunteers' life experiences (Morgan, 2000). These rich descriptions were generated by the participants themselves, enabling them to use their own strengths to deal with their problems (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

### 3.2.2 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Participatory reflection and action research (PRA) can be seen as a form of participatory action research (PAR), which falls under the broad discipline of action research. According to Reason and Bradbury (2008), action research broadly represents different forms of research aimed at integrating practice and theory to enhance people's health and wellbeing. As a methodological paradigm, PRA holds the view that research in high-risk settings should be participative and collaborative (Chambers, 1994, 2008, 2014). PRA thus involves a bottom-up approach to community research where the research focuses on the needs of participants as defined by them (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001).

Being a form of action research, certain features of PRA can be distinguished. First, PRA emphasises the importance of participation throughout the research process as well as the enablement of participants (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). PRA assumes that high-risk communities understand their situation better than outsiders. As a result, studies aim generally to support these communities to come together, analyse their situations, formulate plans, encourage each other, and take purposeful action (Bryman, 2012; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015).

Secondly, PRA researchers also facilitate interventions that enable participants to become aware of and use their own knowledge and skills to make real progress in their communities (Creswell, 2012; Ebersöhn et al., 2007). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), PRA research clears the way for participants to take action and control their own affairs through democratising the research environment and processes. Participants discover not only new information but learn also to be assertive about their own knowledge and skills (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001).

Participation also implies the importance of relationships in PRA (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). According to Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015), participation is enhanced by establishing rapport early in the process and continually building and rebuilding trusting relationships with participants (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). Democratising the research process implies establishing and maintaining an atmosphere of relaxed rapport as a minimum pre-condition for participation in PRA. Participant observation in communities does not necessarily entail months of residence in a community struggling to learn a new language and life. The goal of PRA is to facilitate participation and action by engaging participants in research activities that foster relationships more quickly and give researchers more immediate insight into people's lives (Chambers, 2008; Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015).

Third, PRA promotes people's participation in research through the use of visual group and usually fun activities. According to Chambers (2004), once good rapport is established between participants and researchers, it is often surprising what local people show that they know and what they are able to do. Therefore, methods are used that help to shift the emphasis from individual to group and verbal to visual communication. These methods, may shift the research experience of participants from reserve to rapport and frustration to fun, transforming domination in research relationships and creating a culture of democracy within interventions (Chambers, 2004, 2008). Through using visual and creative methods in groups, such as beading and brainstorming, participants are often better able to express their understandings of their challenging contexts. In addition, by mapping their own understandings in visual and tangible ways, participants are then able to look at their own circumstances and resources and reflect on the progress they have made (Chambers, 2008).

The fourth feature of PRA research is participants' engagement in an ongoing cyclical process of reflection and action. According to Reason and Bradbury (2008), action refers to the gathering of information and assessment of practices. In reflection phases, participants seek to understand collaboratively what is happening in order to further plan and deal with difficulties (Reason, & Bradbury, 2008). Participants come together to reflect on their current realities, formulate action plans, and implement them (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012). They then share information and reflect on their own actions and the outcomes of the study (Ebersöhn, Eloff, & Ferreira, 2007). Sharing useful information with others thus becomes a key aspect of participation in PRA studies (Chambers, 2004). Sharing of experiences and mutual learning has become the primary way in which PRA spreads within and across communities. Sharing forms part of a

study where participants share not only ideas and ownership of outcomes but also eat, travel, and have fun together (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012).

Fifth, PRA research tends to prefer qualitative, interpretive, and inductive methods to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences and to construct knowledge based on local information and skills (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Such research therefore does not aim to produce generalisable outcomes but to generate knowledge that can be used by local community members to tackle particular problems in specific communities (Bryman, 2012; Chambers, 2008, 2014; Corsini, 2002)

The sixth feature of PRA concerns its implications in defining the roles of researchers and participants (Chambers, 2008; Ferreira et al., 2013; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). The emphasis on participation defines the role of researchers as change agents, and participants are seen as co-researchers (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). First of all, the task of researchers is to build trust through commitment to democratic values and the creation of a democratic atmosphere (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Second, the responsibility of researchers is to be supportive and facilitative by building enduring relationships with participants (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012). Third, researchers become part of the learning process when they take a position of not-knowing, being ready to learn, and being ready to adjust to the needs of participants (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012). Babbie and Mouton (2001) state that participative approaches aim to be academically non-imperialistic by not imposing social theory and expertise on participants. Researchers inevitably bring valuable knowledge and skills to the research process, yet this knowledge remains irrelevant unless participants regard it as useful in reaching their goals (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Similarly, through acting in particular community settings, researchers work within a framework of values different to their own. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), working with different values requires researchers to develop a framework of de-professionalising themselves to understand, respect, and communicate with people in high-risk communities.

In this research, I aimed to keep to the abovementioned principles of PRA research thereby using an intervention that ensured the participation of the participants throughout the study. The participants generated knowledge in their small groups by formulating their own understandings of their challenges and realities of being volunteers in their high-risk communities. Through participation in beading and brainstorming sessions the volunteers were also able to identify and recognise their own knowledge and networking skills that they were already using to actively support other people. Furthermore, in my study I constantly engaged in social interaction and building respectful relationships with the community volunteers as to create a relaxed environment in which they could feel free to share their own knowledge and understandings with each other. The approach allowed me to use visual and tangible PRA-based activities to map existing knowledge, skills, and resources (Chambers, 2008). By putting their ideas on to posters, community volunteers could express complex realities and relationships and display their knowledge and skills (Chambers, 2008). Ultimately, this research was PRA based because it was

practical, focused on change, involved the participation of community volunteers, and represented a continual process of reflection-action-reflection (Ebersöhn et al., 2007).

## 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study had a PRA research design. A PRA intervention is an applied action that is undertaken by a helping agent in collaboration with participants to enhance or maintain the physical, emotional, or social wellbeing of individuals, families, or communities (Strydom, 2011). Accordingly, the aim of PRA research is to enhance community engagement and social action to improve communities' wellbeing (Wallerstein, & Duran, 2008). Rothman and Thomas (1994) maintain that intervention research is applied research that seeks to produce results that are of practical use in providing possible solutions to practical problems of people that need assistance. Intervention research is thus in line with an interpretivist focus on understanding subjective experiences and PRA's focus on achieving change (Du Preez, & Roux, 2008). When involving community members to contribute their knowledge and skills to understand certain phenomena and integrating such knowledge with action, intervention research truly becomes community-based projects (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998).

De Vos and Strydom (2011) distinguish the following phases of an intervention project, namely problem analysis and project planning; information gathering and synthesis; design, early development, and pilot testing; evaluation and advanced development; and dissemination. However, PRA-based intervention research is conducted in dynamic contexts, and all phases and operations are not always applied linearly (Strydom, Steyn, & Strydom, 2007). According to Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015), a research intervention should be planned and structured in a manner that will result in observable and beneficial outcomes for participants. The plan should identify the details of what is going to happen and with whom, and when and where the intervention will take place.

In Chapter 1, it was explained that my study formed part of the intervention phase (Phase 2) of the SHEBA project, thus involving a PRA-based intervention to identify the existing knowledge, skills, assets, strengths, and resources of the participating community volunteers. My study was done in collaboration with two other participating students, namely Maria Mnguni-Letsoalo and Maesela Thabe who respectively focused on the use of memory work and the development of school-based supportive plans to socially support high-risk communities. The intervention was also supervised by Prof. Ronél Ferreira and Prof. Liesel Ebersöhn as the main researchers of the broader SHEBA research intervention.

In the first phase of the SHEBA project, preceding this study, the community volunteers identified their need and explored and voiced their own understanding of their situation. Through understanding their problems, the community volunteers could also identify the broad outcomes they wanted for their communities (Van Staden, 2015). Next, they explored their own knowledge and skills that they could use to support their communities. In order to help them identify and mobilise their strengths, I devised an

intervention in collaboration with my supervisor and co-facilitators that took the form of a PRA-based workshop where PRA-based principles and activities were applied. The participants used visual mapping and craft activities to share their ideas and, at the same time, gain insight into their own realities and relationships (Chambers, 2008). The discussions of their experiences enabled the community volunteers to participate in identifying patterns and potential changes in their lives (Chambers, 2008). Feedback on the group discussions enhanced the participants' sense of ownership of the outcomes of the intervention. Furthermore, the methods employed in the PRA-based intervention allowed me to observe how the participants came together and formed networks to accomplish certain tasks and how such interactions were used to support others.

## 3.4 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling refers to the selection of participants for a particular purpose, such as selecting people who are typical of a group or those who represent diverse perspectives on a particular issue (Leedy, & Ormrod, 2014; Maree, & Pietersen, 2007).

In this study, purposive sampling was used to select the participants. In choosing the community volunteers, I acknowledged their networking experiences as vital information for answering the research questions. More specifically, I selected 35 community volunteers who had already actively used social networks to support individuals in their communities. The community volunteers were from two high-risk communities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. The volunteers comprised of 44 women and 1 male participant and pre-dominantly speak Xhosa as their home language. At the time of the study, the communities were experiencing high levels of poverty, hunger, sick and/or deceased parents, HIV and AIDS, unemployment, domestic violence and child abuse. The people lived in informal housing (shacks) or formal housing or a combination of the two. Consequently, they had experience of high numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children.

At the time of the study, the principal researchers of the SHEBA project had already gained access to the research settings and had met the participant volunteers through working together with teachers from the two school communities. The teachers identified volunteers who were active in these communities and wanted to share their knowledge and experiences (gained from their participation in the earlier STAR project) with the volunteers. The volunteers were thus already participating in the SHEBA project, which meant they were easily accessible and willing to take part in the study. I freely acknowledge, however, that they by no means represented the whole population of community volunteers in high-risk communities. But the focus of this research was on exploring the social network experiences of the participants in the SHEBA project and enabling them to use their own knowledge and skills to support their communities.

## 3.5 DATA GENERATION

The data of this study were generated mainly by the participants through facilitating a PRA-based workshop on 3 April 2012 (PRA 1) and a follow-up brainstorming session on 3 October 2012 (PRA 2). Data was also used from a third workshop in January 2013 (PRA 3) where the participants reported on the progress of the different projects of the SHEBA research project and, particularly on their use of social networks in their communities. Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015) maintains that PRA-based workshops provide a way to apply participatory principles, giving participants the status of co-researchers who manage the aim and outcomes of the intervention process. According to Chambers (2008), PRA methods include visual and concrete ways for participants to express complex experiences and what is difficult for them to verbalise.

The abovementioned workshops (PRA1, PRA2 and PRA 3) were employed to explore how the participants valued their social networks according to the research questions that were stated in Chapter 1. In the first workshop (PRA 1) the community volunteers explored how they preserve their social networks on a daily basis by interacting with one another and maintaining their relationships with each other. The workshop also enabled the community volunteers to explore the resources available and useful to them in their networking with each other. For this purpose the PRA-based workshop started with a practical beading activity, followed by a brainstorming session and concluded with feedback from the various small groups to the larger group. The workshop constituted the first session of Day 2 of the SHEBA intervention on Tuesday, 3 April 2012.

The day was started with morning prayers and hymns and the previous day's research activities were completed. After tea time I conducted the intervention of my study that wanted to explore how the community volunteers from the SHEBA project value their social networks. For this purpose I facilitated a beadwork activity where community volunteers were divided and worked in small groups. The facilitation of the beading activity involved several steps, starting with providing each group with materials for beading, as well as key rings, scissors, a large cardboard, Prestik and coloured pens. I then requested each participant to use beading to make individual key rings.

The practical art activities was followed with a brainstorming session with the assistance of the co-facilitating teachers in the SHEBA project, to illustrate how beading served as a metaphor for social networks. In this activity the community volunteers was asked to write their ideas pertaining to developing and maintain caring and supportive networks to support their high-risk communities on a poster. The community volunteers brainstormed and wrote down their ideas in terms of the following three questions: "What happened?", "What is important?" and "What lessons can be learned in using networking as a volunteer?"

Next, the different groups had an opportunity to report back on these ideas to all the other groups of community volunteers. The posters were placed on the walls of the research venue, and the volunteers could, over the course of the SHEBA project, look at them and take ownership of the outcomes of the workshop. By being visible all the time, the posters helped the participants reflect on and discuss the findings with each other and add information when necessary.

To explore the secondary research question of this study a follow-up brainstorming session was facilitated on 3 October 2012 to explore the community volunteers' use of communication media in their networking. In this activity the community volunteers was asked to write their ideas pertaining to their use of communication media on a poster The community volunteers brainstormed and wrote down their ideas in terms of the following three questions: 1) What social networks do you use? 2) For what purpose do you use them? and 3) How do you use them? After discussing the aforementioned questions the different groups had an opportunity to report back on their ideas to all the other groups of community volunteers.

## 3.6 DATA COLLECTION

This section of the report on the study discusses the methods used to collect the generated data. I collected the data that were produced in the PRA-based workshop by using participant-observation and taking field notes.

### 3.6.1 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

I used different sources of information in the study to build a coherent justification of the themes derived from the data (Creswell, 2014), and I used observation as a qualitative strategy to document data during the PRA-based workshop. According to Mertler (2012), observation can be used in action research to collect qualitative data, systematically recording what is happening in a research setting. Similarly, Creswell (2014) describes observation as taking field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals at a research site. In participant observation, the researcher joins a particular social setting for some time, listening and looking at what people say and do in their daily interactions (Bryman, 2012; Liamputtong, 2013). Strydom (2011b) argues that observation is more than just looking at what people do – it requires the researcher to use all of his or her senses to absorb all kinds of information. However, the extent to which a researcher becomes involved in a particular setting can range from being a participant-observer to partial or minimal participation.

The challenge of being a participant-observer is to become an insider in a particular setting while remaining an outsider at the same time. The role of a researcher as participant-observer should be explained to and understood by participants at the outset of a study (Creswell, 2014; Strydom, 2011b). Since being seen as an observer may influence what people say and how they behave in a research context, Strydom (2011b) suggests that observers should take a passive rather than an assertive role in

order not to influence participants' behaviour unduly. Because of the participation of an observer, participant observation has been criticised for its lack of validity, reliability, and objectivity. Also, because it is impossible to arrange exactly the same environment to repeat exactly the same results, reliability is hard to achieve (Strydom, 2011b).

Throughout the intervention, I observed and made notes on how the community volunteers acted and interacted in their groups. These observations and notes were useful in interpreting and analysing the data generated by the participants during the workshop. While the participants were engaged in discussions, I spent my time walking around the intervention setting (school hall) and between the groups, sometimes sitting in and listening to how the volunteers talked with each other about their experiences and their reactions to the experiences (Bryman, 2012). I was aware that my presence might change the degree to which the participants participated and behaved as well as the dynamics and interactions in the groups. Sometimes, the members switched to English when I joined their group, which could have inhibited their ability to express themselves fully. I also assumed the role of not-knowing in accordance with PRA research principles, thereby showing my interest in learning from the community volunteers. I realised also that my observations were not objective as I spent considerable time with the participants in the course of the three-day field visit. During and at the end of the research intervention I reflected critically on my observations with my fellow participants in the SHEBA project, in my field notes.

## 3.7 DATA DOCUMENTATION

### 3.7.1 POSTERS

During the aforementioned workshop (PRA 1) and brainstorming session (PRA 2) the participants recorded their ideas on posters which I transcribed and analysed in the thematic data analysis. According to Chambers (2008) by documenting data in this way the participants are able to express social experiences that may otherwise be difficult for participants to verbalise.

### 3.7.2 FIELD NOTES

I recorded my observations in the form of field notes, that is, written observations made by a researcher of what is unfolding in a research setting (Mertler, 2012). According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), field notes should include empirical information as well as the researcher's interpretations of events. Similarly, Bryman (2012) states that field notes should provide a detailed summary of research events, the actions of the participants, and the researcher's initial reflections. Field notes should specify the most important aspects of whatever the researcher sees or hears (Bryman, 2012).

In my field notes, I described the research events and activities as well as my initial reflections on what was transpiring. The field notes specified who was involved, the setting of the intervention, specific dates, details of the programme, and materials used during the intervention. I recorded also the sequence of

events of the PRA-based intervention process and how the workshop was facilitated and by what means. I also included some of my immediate thoughts, reflections, and questions as this information could not be captured by other means of recording.

### 3.7.3 PHOTOGRAPHS

In addition to posters and field notes, I also used photographs taken by me and my fellow researchers as research-generated visual images. According to Bryman (2012), research-generated photographs can be seen as data in their own right and can be used as part of researchers' field notes (Bryman, 2012). In the present study, the photographs were a visual form of field notes and enabled me to revisit the activities and interactions that took place between the community volunteers.

## 3.8 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I used inductive analysis to interpret the data in the study. I used inductive analysis also to organise, describe, and interpret the data. In accordance with the process of thematic analysis as suggested by Creswell (2009), I firstly organised and prepared the data by transcribing the ideas of the participants that they noted on posters in their small groups in the PRA workshops. I also organised photographs that were taken during these workshops according to the activities of the different workshops, and arranged and typed information that was collected by means of written field notes. Secondly, I read and reread the collected data, noting the trends and possible themes indicated by the data. Thirdly, I identified and underlined phrases or words that stood out from reading the transcribed data and field notes and formulated themes and subthemes. I coded the data by highlighting the data with different colours according to the different subthemes they presented. Next, I summarised these themes and subthemes in table form and on posters for presentation to the participants during member checking.

According to Mertler (2012), inductive analysis helps reduce the amount of information collected by identifying and organising data into significant themes to form a framework for reporting findings. Themes are later identified through thematic analysis, which involves reading and re-reading and analysing group data that provide similar information.

First, I collected the typed documents of the workshop session, the posters the volunteers had created in their groups, the field notes, and the photographs and familiarised myself with them by reading and re-reading them and looking and re-looking at them. Second, as I was reading through the data, I started searching for trends and patterns, making notes on the side of the documents about possible themes relating to social networking. For the purpose of generating these initial themes, I employed the following questions as proposed by Saldaña (2009): What are the people doing? What are they trying to accomplish? How exactly do they do this? What specific means or strategies are used? How do members talk about and understand what is going on? What assumptions are they making? and, What do I see

going on here?" Third, I identified and underlined phrases or words that stood out and gave these 'themes' names. Finally, I summarised the themes and sub-themes and presented them in table format.

## 3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

According to Tobin and Begley (2004), quality criteria relate to the rigour of a study, that is, how the legitimacy of the research process is established. Ensuring research rigour is especially important in PRA where participating and collaborating with participants to change communities often results in researchers themselves experiencing excitement and enthusiasm. However, PRA research needs to go beyond the personal experiences of researchers in order to assess the quality of a study. Liamputtong (2013) states that other researchers can rely on rigorous qualitative research because of its trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of a study depends on its being credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985). In the following section, I describe how these principles of trustworthiness were applied in this study.

### 3.9.1 CREDIBILITY

The credibility of a qualitative study is especially important because of the interpretivist premise that there can be no single true explanation of social phenomena (Bryman, 2012; Liamputtong, 2013). Therefore, credibility criteria relate to whether research findings make sense given certain experiences in a specific context rather than whether they are certainly true (Babbie, & Mouton, 2011). Babbie and Mouton (2001) maintain that credible research displays compatibility between social realities as constructed by participants and those ascribed to them by researchers.

I used triangulation in the study to ensure that the research findings were credible (Di Fabio, & Maree, 2012). Triangulation refers to a process where findings are based on collecting and analysing several different sources of data (Creswell, 2014). Member checking was also used to enhance credibility. Through member checking, researchers seek to know if their findings reflect participants' understanding of a particular phenomenon and to identify views that complement or contradict such an understanding (Bryman, 2012). In this study, the identified themes were reported back to the participants while they were discussing and responding to the outcomes of the study.

### 3.9.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Qualitative research tends to focus on individuals or groups of people who share certain characteristics. Qualitative research tends thus to look at the significance of specific phenomena occurring in a certain context in order to provide rich accounts of people's social realities (Bryman, 2012). Rich descriptions of people's life experiences provide detail accounts of their social realities and therefore enhances the transferability of findings (Bryman, 2012). According to Du Plessis (2016), transferability can also be enhanced when researchers take a reflective stance on their own role in the generation of knowledge.

Bryman (2012) argues that reflexivity demonstrates researchers' sensitivity to cultural and social contexts as it involves continuous reflection on how their biases and methods influence the construction of meaning with participants.

In community interventions, rich accounts generally include previous positive outcomes and unique knowledge and skills in order to counteract communities' problem-saturated views of themselves (Morgan, 2000). According to Morgan (2000), thick descriptions enhance not only an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences but enables participants to explore better ways to define themselves and their abilities (Morgan, 2000). Participants can then share knowledge and skills with others in high-risk communities, enabling them to take control of their lives (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012).

In this study, I reflected continually on my attitudes, views, and behaviour to improve my research and researching skills. Being reflexive meant that I looked at the research also as an opportunity to learn from participants and to do action research in reality. I noted such experiences in my field notes and research journal. In addition, I had to respect that the research was actually done by the community volunteers themselves as they shared information and ideas with others. Furthermore, ownership of the research process meant that the community volunteers took responsibility to reflect on their own actions through a continuous process of reflection-action-reflection.

### 3.9.3 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability indicates whether research findings are compatible with the data they are based on and will therefore yield similar results if the study were to be repeated (Liamputtong, 2013). Dependability is achieved through a process of auditing which demonstrates that research processes are logical and well documented (Bryman, 2012).

This report on the study describes in detail the methodological decisions taken and the data collection methods used. As stated in Chapter 1, the study formed part of the SHEBA project where the supervisors and student-researchers functioned as a team and documented in detail what they did as part of the larger project. In addition, my supervisors continually reviewed the development and implementation of the PRA-based intervention as well as the interpretation, checking, and reporting of the research findings – thus ensuring the coherence and logical sequencing of the research activities and compliance with the programme and aim of the SHEBA project. Dependability was enhanced also by reading and re-reading the data and reflecting continually on my understanding of the data with my peers.

### 3.9.4 CONFIRMABILITY

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), confirmability refers to the extent to which findings reflect the focus of the study and not the predispositions of researchers. Given the subjectivity of researchers, confirmability aims at ensuring that research findings capture the experiences and understandings of

participants (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). Participation in participative research implies that both researchers and participants bring their own knowledge and values into the research process. However, PRA seeks to explore and mobilise the knowledge and skills of participants in taking practical steps to change their communities (Ebersöhn et al., 2007). Researchers should accordingly refrain from imposing their 'informed' views on participants. Babbie and Mouton (2001) argue that the 'informed' knowledge of researchers is important only to the extent that it can be useful to participants in solving their problems.

The present study focused throughout on using the knowledge and skills of the community volunteers to enable them to support their communities. Through participation and collaboration with one another, the volunteers analysed their situations and developed plans for implementation in their communities. The overarching aim of the project was for community volunteers to come together and take control of their lives. However, I freely acknowledge that my own frame of reference was different to that of the community volunteers. As a fieldworker, I endeavoured to become part of the world of the volunteers and put myself in their shoes, which helped me respect, understand, and relate to them.

## 3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research on communities requires careful consideration of the ethical principles that guide the actions of researchers and their relationship with participants (Chevalier, & Buckles, 2008). Furthermore, because of the differences between individual psychology interventions and community interventions, community psychologists often need clarification of ethical norms for conducting research in specific social settings (Visser, 2007b). According to Visser (2007b), community interventions are aimed primarily at making psychological knowledge and skills useful to people in communities and enhancing the quality of life of individuals and their communities. Norms in research ethics need therefore to be extended to include guidelines for collaboration with communities and to acknowledge collective rights (Chevalier, & Buckles, 2008). Throughout the SHEBA participative research intervention, I considered relevant ethical guidelines and adhered to norms of ongoing informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy thereby ensuring the participants' wellbeing and avoiding conflicts of interest.

### 3.10.1 INFORMED CONSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

The principle of informed consent requires participants to be informed about the aim of a study, what is required from them, and the possible advantages and risks of participating in the study (Visser, 2007b). Informed consent is particularly important in PRA research because the centrality of participation requires participants to be involved in and informed about the research process from the outset (Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). People are seen not as mere subjects or participants but as key partners throughout the research process (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001).

As the present study formed part of the broader SHEBA project, informed consent had already been obtained from all the study participants. The study also received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, which allowed me to enter the research field and gather information from the participants. The participants were, in addition, informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage.

### 3.10.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND ANONYMITY

According to Strydom (2011a), privacy means concealing information that is normally not meant to be known or examined by others. Corsini (2002) states that privacy respects the right of participants to control the extent and nature of information that they want to be made known to others. Privacy is thus based on the principle of autonomy, which implies people's right to choose what, where, when, and with whom they want to share intimate information (Visser, 2007b). Allan (2008) distinguishes between confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality means that information cannot be revealed, whether the identity of a person is known or not. Anonymity, on the other hand, means that the identity of participants cannot be distinguished from the data they produce (Allan, 2008).

According to Visser (2007b), action research aims generally to make the voices of people heard, consequently making it difficult to maintain strict confidentiality. The principle therefore is to use information in the best interests and with the consent of those involved.

In this study, I respected the privacy of the participants and treated all information as confidential. I did not disclose the participants' identities, and the data were kept in a secure place. However, many of the community volunteers wanted to be identified in the photographs and reports of the research because they took ownership of the study and were proud of their participation in and the outcomes of the study (Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012).

### 3.10.3 PROTECTION FROM HARM

Social research should never harm people physically, emotionally, or psychologically, irrespective of whether they agree to participate or not (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Protection from harm is especially important when research involves people in high-risk communities. As discussed in Chapter 2, people in such communities often experience a lack of self-esteem and trust in others, as well as a sense of exclusion, worthlessness, and hopelessness. Revealing personal information about socio-economic status, literacy, and health may make participants feel uncomfortable and even intensify negative feelings about themselves (Babbie, & Mouton, 2001). Babbie and Mouton (2001) argue that research projects can sometimes aggravate personal distress and further damage participants' vulnerable low self-esteem.

Given participants' general commitment to social justice in PRA, interventions often include criticism of or action against the interests of certain individuals, groups, and institutions and their policies (Visser,

2007b). On an individual level, participants may be labelled or threatened by communities themselves and feel vulnerable in performing their work in difficult and high-risk situations (Chevalier, & Buckles, 2008). Such threats require participants to take steps to protect themselves and each other to reduce possible physical, emotional, and social harm in working in high-risk communities (Visser, 2007b).

### 3.10.4 CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

As stated earlier, community interventions require researchers to reflect continually on their own perceptions and beliefs (Visser, 2007b). According to Visser (2007b), the underlying principle in such interventions is always to consider the best interests of the community. In PRA, the main aim of research is to facilitate participation and enable people with skills to analyse their situation and improve their circumstances through a continual process of reflection-action-reflection (Ebersöhn et al., 2007; Ferreira, & Ebersöhn, 2012; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015). In return, researchers also learn from participants, interacting with participants in their settings.

In this study, I encouraged the community volunteers to share their knowledge and thus empowered them by involving them in the process of action research. As a result, the community volunteers gained knowledge and practical experience in examining their realities, gathering information, taking action, and reflecting on the outcomes of their actions. Although mutual learning took place, the study focused on the interests of the community volunteers by enabling them to take action.

## 3.11 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I reviewed the epistemological and methodological choices on which the design and methods of the study were based. I then gave a detailed description of the research process, which revealed the importance of the participants' participation in research in high-risk settings. The present study responded to the need for studies in South African communities to include and enable people to think differently about themselves and their ability to make real progress. The discussion on participation and enablement extended also to quality and ethical considerations. Ensuring trustworthiness in studies includes generating, using, and sharing knowledge that can be trusted to make a real difference in communities. Ethically, research projects need to enhance people's sense of acceptance, belonging, and respect to combat the sense of despondency and low self-confidence experienced in many high-risk communities.

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# Chapter 4
# Findings of the Study

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 covers the findings of this study. As stated in Chapter 3, the data in the study were generated as part of the intervention phase (Phase 2) of the SHEBA research project. This phase entailed two PRA workshop sessions. The first workshop was a beading activity that explored the value the community volunteers attached to social networking. In the second workshop, the volunteers took part in a brainstorming session that focused on their use of social media in networking. The results of the workshops are discussed below.

## 4.2 RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Three themes and six sub-themes emerged from the data and are summarised in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Themes and sub-themes**

| *THEMES* | *SUB-THEMES* |
|---|---|
| *Theme 1: Processes in social networks* | Sub-theme 1.1: Ways of connecting |
| | Sub-theme 1.2: Values that reinforce networking |
| *Theme 2: Social network resources* | Sub-theme 2.1: People as network resources |
| | Sub-theme 2.2: Communication media as network resources |
| *Theme 3: Benefits of volunteer networking* | Sub-theme 3.1: Personal wellbeing |
| | Sub-theme 3.2: Social wellbeing |

The following section provides definitions for each theme and the sub-themes. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for each sub-theme are provided as well as extracts from the data sources to support the findings. Each theme concludes with a recursive literature review of the theme.

### 4.2.1 THEME 1: PROCESSES IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

Processes in social networks are the dynamic ways in which people interact with one another and establish relationships to preserve or change their social organisations or structures (Lin, 1999; Miell, & McGhee, 1998; Ritzer, 2015). Network theory states that processes in social networks involve the building and rebuilding of ties between the members of the networks and the reinforcement of the behaviour and values that influence these interactions (Lin, 1999). In other words, people shape their networks by constantly interacting with one another, but, at the same time, they themselves are also shaped by their

networks. In the context of this study, processes in the social networks of the community volunteers related to how the volunteers connected and interacted with one another and also to the values that reinforced their networking behaviour (Lin, 1999).

Theme 1 has two sub-themes: Sub-theme 1.1: Ways of connecting, and Sub-theme 1.2: Values that reinforce networking.

#### 4.2.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Ways of connecting

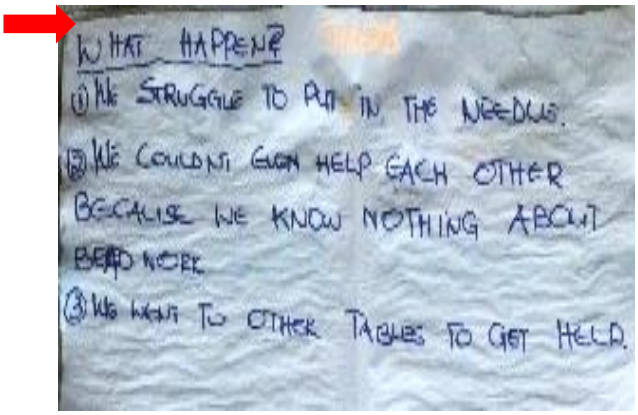
Table 4.2 provides a working definition as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria that helped me identify the dynamic ways the volunteers in the study interacted with one another.

**Table 4.2: Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for Sub-theme 1.1**

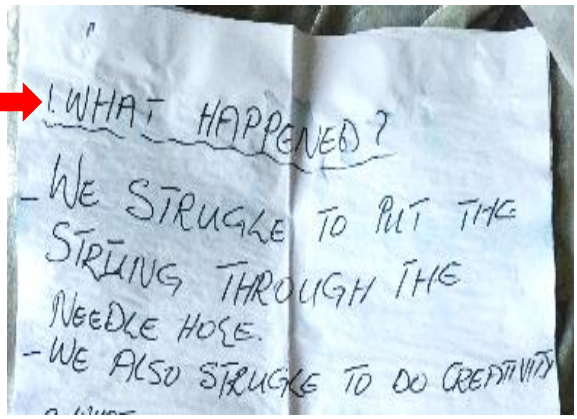
| WORKING DEFINITION: WAYS OF CONNECTING | |
|---|---|
| Ways of connecting in social networks refer to the dynamic social interactions through which people constantly build and rebuild personal relationships, such as seeking help from and providing help to others (Lin 1999, 2008). | |
| **INCLUSION CRITERIA** | **EXCLUSION CRITERIA** |
| Data indicating dynamic interactions between community volunteers aimed at establishing and strengthening their relationships. | Data indicating dynamic interactions between community volunteers other than those aimed at establishing and strengthening their relationships. |

The volunteers in the study connected with one another by sharing their experiences of the beading task. They initially experienced problems with this activity, but they then discussed the problems among themselves. A member of one of the groups said: "*Firstly, we were struggling with the needle and the thread. We could not put the thread through the needle*" (PRA 1, April, P 2)[2]. The struggle to complete the beading task was echoed by more than one group. A second group reported: "*We struggle to put thread in the needle. We couldn't even help each other because we know nothing about beadwork"* (PRA 1, April, P 5). Photographs 4.1 and 4.2 record the struggles of two of the groups during the beadwork activity.

[2] The responses of the participants are verbatim with only very light editing in order to preserve the authenticity of the responses.




**Photograph 4.1:**
Written record of the community volunteers' struggle to thread the needle




**Photograph 4.2:**
Written record of the community volunteers' struggle with the beading activity expressing their feeling that they lacked the creativity needed / felt as if that they lacked in creativity

As a result of struggling with the beading activity, some of the community volunteers shared their anger and uncertainty with the group. One group said that they were apprehensive about the activity because of ''*the fear of the unknown*" (PRA 1, April, P 8), while another group said that they felt ''*anger*'' and ''*fear*'' (PRA 1, April, P 6).

After realising that everyone was struggling, the community volunteers looked around and attempted to identify other volunteers who seemed more skilled in the beading activity. I observed also that they started moving between the groups seeking advice from one another. In my field notes, I noted how the community volunteers connected with one another:

> *The younger volunteers began to walk across the room to the other tables, and asked those who know how to do beading to help them. By crossing the boundaries between ages and the different groups of different areas in the community, the volunteers were able to provide each other with advice and to learn from one another by observing how they did it. It seemed to me that some of the older woman became aware of how valuable their expertise was and that the younger volunteers realised the importance of reaching out and asking for help.* (Field notes, 3 April, 2012, p. 5)

The groups reported back after the activity and responded to the question, "What happened?" One group said that they "*were asking for help from the other groups*" (PRA 1, April, P 2), and another group said that they crossed the room to the other tables to get advice: *"We went to the other tables to get help"* (PRA 1, April, P 5). A further group said the helping relationship with others was an important form of volunteer networking. When discussing what was important to them in the beading activity, the group reported, *"working together and helping each other"* (PRA 1, April, P 2).

Photographs 4.3 and 4.4 show, visually, how mutual support was one of the most important ways in which the community volunteers connected with one another.

**Photograph 4.3:**
A community volunteer asking for help from some of the facilitators

**Photograph 4.4:**
Community volunteers assisting each other with the beading activity

The community volunteers connected with each other not only during the beading activity but also during activities such as opening the workshop with song, dance, and prayer; eating together during breaks; travelling together to and from the research venues; and talking generally. In my field notes, I describe how the volunteers opened their meetings with hymns and prayers:

> *The volunteers went out of their way to welcome the other volunteers and spontaneously took the lead in organising the activities. They called together all the community volunteers, gathered them in a circle, and the volunteers then began to sing hymns and danced together. My two supervisors and I also participated in the song and dance, and I felt that it helped me to feel part of the group more quickly. My impression was that spirituality was clearly part of the daily lives of the participants, primarily as a way to organise their lives and make sense of them.* (Field notes, 12 April, 2012, p. 3)

The community volunteers connected with each other also by listening to one another and talking together. One of the groups specifically mentioned the importance of "*having patience*" with one another in their interactions (PRA 1, April, P 6). Photograph 4.5 shows teachers in the SHEBA research project chatting together while Photograph 4.6 shows community volunteers working in a group listening and talking to one another.

**Photograph 4.5:**
Teachers in the SHEBA project connecting by talking to each other

**Photograph 4.6:**
Community volunteers communicating with one another during the beading activity

In conclusion, the ways of connecting that were evident in the social networks of this group of volunteers – which they used to build strong and supportive ties and to overcome their fears – were voicing their struggles and problems to one another, telling each other when they were not coping, reaching out to one another, sharing knowledge within the group and across groups, admitting when they felt powerless, and seeking and receiving help from those they considered more knowledgeable.

#### 4.2.1.2 Values that reinforce networking

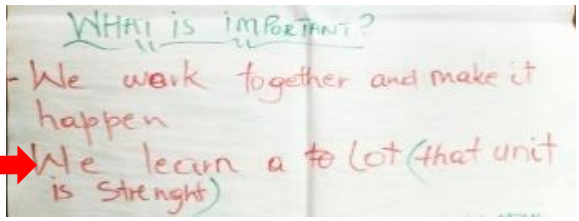
Table 4.3 gives a working definition of the values that reinforce networking, as well as the inclusion and exclusion criteria (for the purposes of this study) regarding the values that reinforced the community volunteers' networking behaviours and decisions.

**Table 4.3: Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for Sub-theme 1.2**

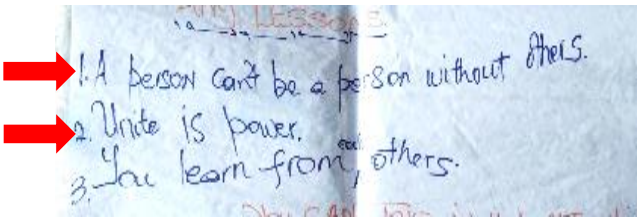
| **WORKING DEFINITION: Values that reInforce networking** | |
|---|---|
| Values that reinforce networking are the dynamic social interactions between people that strengthen the beliefs underpinning their networking behaviour and choices, such as the belief in interconnectedness as manifested in *ubuntu* (Dageid, Akintola, & Saeberg, 2016; Lin, 1999, Seedat, & Lazarus, 2011). | |
| **INCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY** | **EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY** |
| Data indicating the dynamic interactions between the community volunteers that reinforced the values underpinning their networking behaviour, such as giving advice. | Data indicating the dynamic interactions between the community volunteers other than those that reinforced the values underpinning their networking behaviour. |

The behaviours of the community volunteers in this study, that is, providing support to each other, were based on their values (Bryman, 2012; Grbich, 2013). This became evident when I asked the following three questions after the beading activity: 1) What happened in the beading activity? 2) What was

important in the beading activity? And 3) Are there any lessons that you learnt from the beading activity that you can use in networking as a volunteer?




**Photograph 4.7:**
Notes of the community volunteers echoing the local saying that unity is strength




**Photograph 4.8:**
Notes of a group highlighting the importance of local wisdom, namely that a person can't be a person without others and that unity is power

The responses of the community volunteers indicated the values that underpinned the ways they connected with each other. Some of the groups highlighted the value of local wisdom by quoting sayings such as "a *person cannot be a person without others"* (PRA 1, April, P 2)*, "unity is power"* (PRA 1, April, P 2), and "*unity is strength"* (PRA 1, April, P 1). Photographs 4.7 and 4.8 show the local wisdom sayings written down by the community volunteers that featured in the brainstorming session about what was important in the practical beading activity.

The value the volunteers attached to working together as a unit and supporting each other guided them to challenge behaviours in the group that contradicted this value. For example, one group reported that one of its members made fun of other members because they struggled with the beading activity. The group added that the member deliberately refused to help them when they asked him for help: "*We asked L to help us but he didn't help us, just laughing at us"* (PRA 1, April, P 1). In my field notes, I noted this and wrote the following: "*There were also negative comments during the feedback of the groups. One of the groups told the other volunteers how one of the volunteers mocked them because they could not get the job done, and that he did not want to help them when they asked him for help*" (Field notes, 3 April, 2016, p. 7).

By reporting their experience of not receiving support from other volunteers, the volunteers who felt unsupported by their group were raising awareness of their need for help. This, in turn, reminded the entire group that they should aspire to the values that guided them to work together and to support one another.

The importance of the values underpinning social networks could be seen also in the community volunteers' attitudes, such as commitment and dedication. One group reported that their dedication to a particular aim was important to them as community volunteers. They added that it was important to be "*committed to do something"* (PRA 1, April, P 8) and "*to push yourself to go further"* (PRA 1, April, P 8). I noted in my field notes how the community volunteers encouraged each other to persevere when they

were struggling with the beading activity: "*The volunteers said that they felt encouraged by the others to keep going when they wanted to leave the activity. According to the volunteers, in this way they helped each other to complete the activity*" (Field notes, 3 April, 2016, p. 8).

The study revealed that working together collectively was an important value for this group of volunteers who reinforced their networking behaviours and values by openly reminding each other that they were stronger when they worked collaboratively and that it was important to commit to a common goal.

#### 4.2.1.3 Findings on processes in the social networks of the community volunteers

The community volunteers in the study connected to each other by giving and receiving social support. More specifically, they reached out to one another by talking openly when they were faced with challenges. After sharing their struggles and challenges with those in their immediate environment, they reached out to volunteers outside their immediate groups who represented sources of knowledge. Those who were asked for help responded to those in need of help by sharing their knowledge. Admitting that they often felt powerless because of their lack of knowledge and skills, the "struggling" volunteers were able to reach out and seek advice from others with the necessary skills. By reaching out to one another and supporting each other in the abovementioned ways, the volunteers were able to master their fear of the unknown, find solutions to their problems, and commit to completing the task at hand.

The ways in which the community volunteers in the study connected with each other have been reported on in other research too as important features of social support networks. According to Heaney and Israel (2008), the specific purpose or aim of a social network is to build ties between members. Building and rebuilding emotional ties and reciprocal relationships in social support networks can help people provide social support to one another (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). People in social support networks can assist one another by giving emotional support (e.g. empathy), instrumental support (e.g. tangible services), informational support (e.g. advice and suggestions), and appraisal support (e.g. information for self-evaluation) (Heaney, & Israel, 2008). In this study, the community volunteers shared strong, trusting bonds that enabled them to come together as a groups, share their challenges and difficulties with one another, and find ways to overcome the challenges. They supported one another emotionally by listening to one another and providing mutual encouragement, and they provided informational support by sharing knowledge and giving advice when necessary.

Other researchers who worked in the SHEBA project came up with similar findings on how the community volunteers supported each other. Mnguni-Letsoalo (2015), who explored the use of memory boxes by the volunteers to support their high-risk communities, found that the volunteers supported each other by sharing their stories with each other in the PRA workshop. Van Staden (2015) found that the volunteers used networking to deal with the difficulties associated with volunteering in the community. The volunteers

in her study reported that sharing problems with fellow community volunteers helped them cope with the problems (Van Staden, 2015).

The findings of this study and in the literature on social support as an important way of connecting people suggest that social processes and social structures in social networks cannot be separated (Bruhn, 2009; Ennis, & West, 2010, Heaney, & Israel, 2008). Networks facilitate social processes such as providing social support, but providing social support can also be a form of networking. Berkman and Glass (2000), too, regard social support as a form of organisational behaviour that takes place on an individual behavioural level. Thus, social support can be seen as an important function of social networks. Social support or helping behaviour can be seen also as a way of connecting with others and strengthening and extending people's networks (Bruhn, 2009). Feeney and Collins (2015) found in their study that social support can be considered an interpersonal process and that by connecting with others through social support, people can thrive through relationships.

In addition to ways of connecting, the reinforcement of the values and behaviour that influence social interaction is also an important social process in people's networks (Lin, 1999). The values that reinforced the networking actions of the volunteers in this study were the collective values of "*unity is strength*", as well as the value of "*a person cannot be a person without others*", which embodies the spirit of *ubuntu*.

The community volunteers made each other aware that the above values were the values they strove after – they did this often by referring to behaviour that went against these values. By raising awareness and reminding each other of their shared values, the volunteers continuously encouraged one another to act collectively. They further developed their support networks by stressing the value of commitment and staying committed to each other and their goals. By reinforcing the values of collectiveness, *ubuntu*, and commitment, the volunteers encouraged each other to engage in volunteering and to cope successfully with challenges on a daily basis (Lin, 1999).

In line with the results of this study, other studies on volunteerism have recognised the important influence of values in volunteer networking (Casale, & Wild, 2015; Dageid, Akintola, & Saeberg, 2016; Seedat, & Lazarus, 2011). Seedat and Lazarus (2011) highlight the significance of the values of *ubuntu* in influencing both theory and practice of community psychology. Likewise, Casale and Wild (2015) found that social support relationships cannot be separated from the distinct social values and worldviews that people share with their communities. In their study, they found also that values such as solidarity and compassion are key factors influencing the work of volunteer care workers in Kwazulu-Natal (Dageid et al., 2016).

The compassion of the community volunteers in reaching out and helping each other was also evident in the present study. Dageid, et al. (2016), too, found that groups in a community that embraced *ubuntu* values were better able to deal with the problems in their communities. They found also that some

volunteers felt obliged to involve themselves in their communities as part of their Christian faith (Dageid et al., 2016)

The next section covers the social network resources in the networks of the volunteers.

### 4.2.2 THEME 2: SOCIAL NETWORK RESOURCES

According to Lin (1999), social resources are those assets embedded in people's networks that enable them to cope with the challenges of everyday living. Assets are valued and useful resources such as people and other useful resources that are vital in the context of specific actions such as completing a successful community project (Lin, 1999). In this study, people and communication media were identified by the volunteers as valuable resources. Theme 2 is discussed below in terms of two subthemes: Sub-theme 1: People as network resources, and Sub-theme 2: Communication media as network resources.

#### 4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: People as network resources

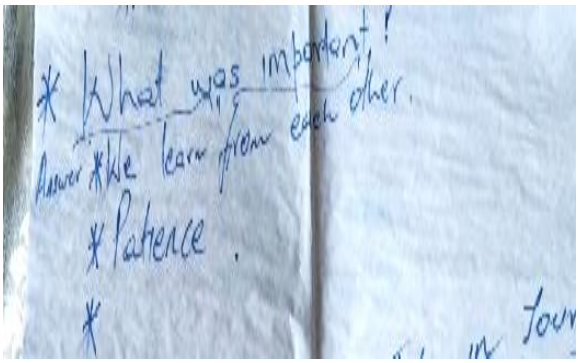
Table 4.4 gives a working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria as indicators of people as valuable social network resources.

**Table 4.4: Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for Sub-theme 2.1**

| WORKING DEFINITION | |
|---|---|
| People as network resources are people who are valued by their social networks as useful resources (Lin, 1999). | |
| **INCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY** | **EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS STUDY** |
| Data indicating that the community volunteers recognised each other as valuable resources by identifying, connecting, and learning from more knowledgeable and better resourced individuals in their networks. | Data indicating resources used by the community volunteers other than people considered valued and useful resources. |

In this study, the community volunteers learned from one another by showing each other how to do beading in the PRA workshop. Reflecting on the question: What happened in the beading activity? One group reported: "*We learn from each other*" (PRA 1, April, P 6). As a result of struggling with the beading activity, the volunteers began to identify other volunteers with the necessary skills and then connected with them by asking them for assistance. Regarding the same question, some of the volunteers replied: "*We seek help''* (PRA 1, April, P 6). They appreciated each other by recognising that the skills they needed to complete the activity were already present in other members in their group and in other groups. One group said that they realised that "*you can learn from others*" (PRA 1, April, P 2). By looking to each other for help and identifying volunteers that had the necessary skills for completing the activity successfully, the "struggling" volunteers accessed and mobilised the volunteers in their immediate environment to

transfer skills to them and to guide them through the unknown. Photograph 4.10 shows a group of volunteers doing beading, with one volunteer learning from the person next to her.




**Photograph 4.9:**
Notes of a group indicating that they have learned from each other.

**Photograph 4.10:**
Community volunteers learning from each other during the beading activity

In addition to learning practical beading skills, the community volunteers listened to one another and shared their ideas and information in the brainstorming session that followed the beading activity. The small groups then also shared their views with the larger group of volunteers.

Photograph 4.11 shows the community volunteers sharing their points of view in their groups, and Photograph 4.12 shows one of the community volunteers, sharing his group's views with the other volunteers.

**Photograph 4.11:**
Community volunteers sharing their experiences in their group activity

**Photograph 4.12:**
A participant sharing his group's views with the other volunteers

The sharing of knowledge between the volunteers in the brainstorming session is covered in the following entry in my diary.

> *The aim was for the volunteers to become aware and share their own existing network knowledge and skills with each other, which they could use in building relationships in their*

> *communities. The volunteers indicated that they learned many lessons from each other that they could use in their networking. One of the volunteers said that she learned how important it was to invest oneself in the process and not to keep one's knowledge or even one's problems to oneself. The volunteers also indicated that they learned the importance of listening to other people in a way that made them feel cared for. It was exciting to see how the volunteers participated in their groups and how willing they were to share their ideas and experiences with one another. It seemed that they really felt that they had something to say and were listening attentively to one another. I also felt pleased that the volunteers were able to draw lessons from their own interaction in the beading activities for their networking in their communities. The volunteers also seemed to be interested in and took pride when looking at their own ideas on the posters when they were shared with the other volunteers*. (Field notes, 3 April, 2012, p. 8)

The community volunteers in the study were valuable resources to each other. The knowledge embedded in the volunteer network enabled them to support one another by sharing their knowledge. Trusting relationships allowed them to admit to one another when they needed support. It seemed they followed a similar pattern of behaviour on a daily basis, turning to each other for advice when confronted by the challenges of supporting their communities.

#### 4.2.2.2 Theme 2.2: Communication media as network resources

Communication media are the technologies people use to connect and communicate with other people and exchange information (Van Dijk, 2006). From a social network perspective, communication media can be an important asset when networking with other people – through them people can mobilise valuable resources such as people in sharing their knowledge with each other (Lin, 1999). In the context of this study, communication media are the technologies the community volunteers used to provide and receive support from one another (Logan, 2010; Van Dijk, 2006).

Table 4.5 provides a working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria as indicators of the means of communication used by the community volunteers to give and receive social support in their communities.

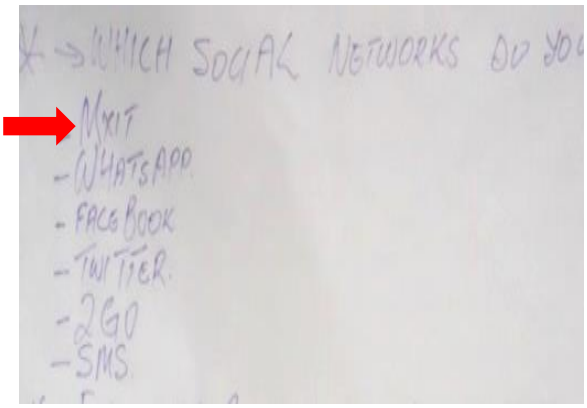
**Table 4.5: Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for Sub-theme 2.2**

| **WORKING DEFINITION: Communication media** | |
|---|---|
| Communication media are the means by which messages are exchanged between people to establish and maintain relationships (Steinberg, 1995). | |
| **INCLUSION CRITERIA** | **EXCLUSION CRITERIA** |
| Data indicating the means the community volunteers used to exchange messages with others. | Data indicating resources other than the means the community volunteers used to exchange messages with others. |

Information on how the community volunteers used social network media was obtained in the second workshop of the study (2 October, 2012). To understand their use of social media, the following three questions were put to the volunteers to brainstorm in their groups: 1) What social networks do you use? 2) For what purpose do you use them? and 3) How do you use them?

The community volunteers indicated that they used electronic messages and social media to maintain and support relationships. One group of volunteers said they enjoyed using social media such as "*Mixit, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, 2Go, SMS*" (PRA 2, Oct, P 1).

Photographs 4.13 and 4.14 show lists of the social media used by the volunteers to connect with others.




**Photograph 4.13:**
List of some of the media used by the volunteers to communicate with others in their networks

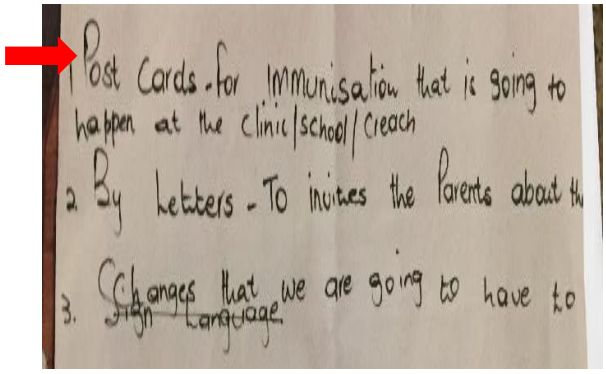

**Photograph 4.14:**
List of some of the communication media the volunteers used in their networks

The community volunteers in the study also used SMSs to exchange useful information with each other. One group reported that they used SMSs most often as a means to connect with one another: "*At this table we mostly use SMSs to communicate with each other*" (PRA 2, Oct, P 4). They added that they used SMSs to share important information with other volunteers and to communicate their particular needs: "*To get message of what you want or need. We send them to each other to inform others who were not able to get to the meetings*" (PRA 2, Oct, P 4).

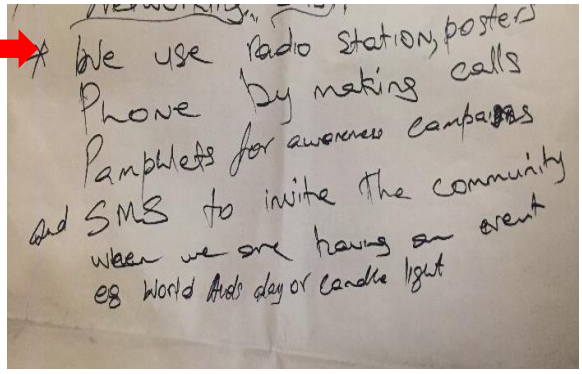
The community volunteers also used social network media to communicate with their communities. They used different media to inform people about important community events. One group of volunteers reported that they used SMSs to inform the community about a community project: "*SMSs to invite the community when we are having an event, e.g. World Aids day or candle light*" (PRA 3, Jan, P 1). Another group sent postcards and letters to inform and invite people to their events: "*Postcards for immunisation that is going to happen at the clinic/school/crèche. Letters to invite the parents about the challenges of the community that we are going to have sign language on e.g. Days of the Programmes*" (PRA 3, Jan, P 3). Distributing pamphlets was evidently also a popular way of communicating with the community, as was putting up posters to inform people about important issues: "*By doing placards to network the people*

*to the 'stop child abuse' awareness campaign.* Another group stated: "*We use posters*" (PRA 2, Oct, P 1). Mass communication channels such as radio stations and using loudspeakers while driving through communities was also an effective means of communication: "*We use loudspeakers to communicate with the parents for registration of the children at the schools*" (PRA 3, Jan, P 3).

Photographs 4.15 and 4.16 below show lists of the media the community volunteers used to share information about the projects and events in their communities.




**Photograph 4.15:**
List of some of the traditional media the community volunteers used to communicate with others in their networks




**Photograph 4.16:**
List of the older media the community volunteers used, such as radio stations, posters, and telephones, in networking with their communities

The following note in my field notes indicates the use of social network media to communicate with close contacts and peers.

> *Most of the volunteers knew what social media are and understood the questions immediately. I moved between the groups and noticed that most of them named Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp as media that they used to communicate with others, especially with their family and friends. It seems that they used WhatsApp also to forward important information to each other. At one table, one of the volunteers used SMS to send a question to one of the facilitators who responded immediately. I saw this as an example of how social media could be used to obtain information or advice almost immediately*. (Field notes, 3 October, 2012, p. 3)

The following section covers the findings on people and communication media as network resources.

#### 4.2.2.3 Findings on social network resources

In this study, I identified two networking resources the community volunteers used as assets to help them deal with everyday problems, namely people and communication media. The volunteers solved these problems by collaborating with and learning from one another. They took ownership of their problems by coming together as a group to think about possible solutions, to share knowledge, and to take action as a group to produce successful outcomes. Thus, by turning to each other for solutions, the volunteers

regarded each other as valuable resources in their environment. The volunteers were happy to learn from those members who were more knowledgeable.

In the earlier STAR project, Ferreira and Ebersöhn (2012) found that the community volunteers viewed themselves as valuable resources or change agents in their communities because of the positive changes that resulted from the community projects they had started. Their study further found that through participating in the STAR intervention and through their community engagement, local community members became aware of their own abilities and also experienced personal and professional development (Ebersöhn, 2012). The community volunteers reported that providing support in their school communities ultimately changed the schools into information and support resources for the wider community (Ebersöhn, 2012). Van Staden (2015), too, found that networking with peers and colleagues to get assistance and advice was an important coping strategy of the volunteers in the STAR project. Looking to their peers for help provided them with support and information that would otherwise not have been available to them and proved to be more effective than relying on external sources (Van Staden, 2015).

According to Ebersöhn (2012), when community volunteers analyse their own situations and draw on one another's knowledge, skills, and experiences, they become a learning community. Narayan (2002) regards the sharing of knowledge and skills as an essential part of developing communities. By identifying and employing the useful knowledge and skills that are embedded in community members, communities learn not only new knowledge but they also empower one another (Narayan, 2002).

In the present study, the community volunteers took responsibility for their own learning by identifying and recognising each other's contributions throughout the PRA intervention. For instance, when struggling with the beading activity, the volunteers observed the skills of more knowledgeable members in the group and sought their advice. This was also evident in the brainstorming sessions where the volunteers appreciated and listened carefully to one another's opinions, viewing each other as valuable resources in their networks.

In addition to using people as networking resources, the community volunteers in the study also used communication media as valuable resources. The volunteers maintained their support networks through social media and SMSs. They used SMSs in particular to communicate with their colleagues, reminding each other of important dates, meetings, and decisions that had been taken. SMSs were used also to ask for support and for suggestions and advice from others.

Communication media are crucial to the production and circulation of social capital in communities (Shah, McLeod & Yoon, 2001). A study by Haythornthwaite (2011) on the effects of the internet on social networks found that the bonds between the members of a group were strengthened through the use of multiple media. Shah et al. (2001) found that printing, broadcasting, and online media enhanced people's

engagement in their communities. More specifically, socially active community members tended to read newspapers, follow the news on radio and television, and search the internet for information on issues in their communities (Shah et al., 2001). Shah, et al. (2001) found also that the mass media could promote social change in communities with a strong sense of collectiveness. In this study, the community volunteers used mass media to communicate with their communities and to inform and motivate them about social issues such as HIV-Aids and child abuse.

Research has shown the importance of mobile phones in community development (Goggin, & Clark, 2009). Mobile phones have become a key tool of communication in developing communities, enabling people without access to the internet to send text messages (Goggin, & Clark, 2009). Goggin and Clark (2009) report on how mobile phones made it possible for community-based care workers in the Consol Home Orphan Care project in Malawi to support numerous families by enabling them (the care workers) to respond with short text messages instead of having to visit every family by bicycle. Mobile phones have been used in raising HIV-Aids awareness and education in Kenya, with programmes that enable patients to obtain useful health information (Goggin, & Clark, 2009). In the present study too, the community volunteers stressed the importance of mobile phones, especially for sending text messages to inform each other about important events. In line with literature findings on the use of mobile phones in community development, the volunteers in this study also used mobile phones to inform their communities about social programmes and found the phones very useful by enabling them to communicate with people who did not have access to the internet.

In addition to mass media and the use of mobile phones to send text messages, social platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp also enable communities to drive change (Zuckerberg, 2010). According to Zuckerberg (2010), Facebook is important because it allows people to publish information and share ideas quickly on public forums, especially in social contexts where such forums do not otherwise exist. Studies have shown also how Facebook and Twitter have been used in crisis situations such as natural disasters to inform communities about dangers and how and where to get help (Allaire, 2016; Houston et al., 2015; Stokes, & Senkbeil, 2017). Although the community volunteers in this study said that they used their mobile phones mainly to share useful information, they saw the possibilities of using social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter also to inform and remind each other of important events.

The findings in this study suggest that the community volunteers saw people as an important social resource in their networks. By acknowledging and tapping into the knowledge and skills of other individuals in their networks, the volunteers took responsibility for analysing their own problems and formulating their own solutions. Similarly, the volunteers regarded communication resources such as mass media communications, mobile technologies, and social media as valuable resources in supporting each other and their communities.

### 4.2.3 THEME 3: BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER NETWORKING

According to Lin's network theory of social capital, networks can contribute significantly to the personal and social wellbeing of their members (Lin, 1999). By investing themselves in social networks, members access and use network and contact resources in their daily actions and thereby turn such resources into particular personal and social benefits (Lin, 1999, 2008). Any personal or social wellbeing reported by the community volunteers as a result of networking with other volunteers is therefore regarded as a benefit gained and is included in this theme. Theme 3 will accordingly be discussed in terms of two sub-themes: Sub-theme 3.1: Personal wellbeing and Sub-theme 3.2: Social wellbeing.

#### 4.2.3.1 Subtheme 3.1: Personal wellbeing

Personal wellbeing has been defined also as individual happiness and refers to experiences of positive emotion, "flow", a sense of meaning, and feelings of accomplishment (Grenville-Cleave, 2012). Positive emotions are positive mood states such as immediate satisfaction and can help people reduce the effects of negative emotions such as disappointment (Grenville-Cleave, 2012). The experience of "flow" involves being intensely focused on a challenging activity that is of one's own choosing and within one's capabilities and that has a clear objective with immediate feedback (Krogerus, & Tschäppeler, 2012). The experience of "flow" is evident when people lose track of time and forget about themselves because of their total immersion in what they are doing. A sense of meaning refers to people's experiences of using their knowledge and skills in the service of something larger than themselves (Seligman, 2002). People's sense of achievement involves feelings of being competent, skilled, and successful in achieving their goals (Grenville-Cleave, 2012).

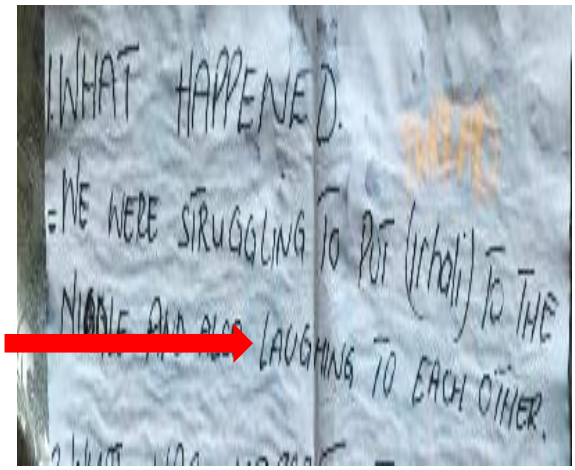
**Table 4.6: Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for Sub-theme 3.1**

| **WORKING DEFINITION: Personal wellbeing** | |
|---|---|
| Happiness is people's experience of positive emotion, "flow", meaning, and accomplishment. Positive emotion is the experience of positive mood and uplifting feelings, while "flow" is the wellbeing derived from being absorbed totally in the task at hand. Meaning derives from people's experience that they are part of something larger than themselves through the contributions they make, and achievement involves feelings of being competent, skilled, and successful in achieving one's goals (Grenville-Cleave, 2012). | |
| **INCLUSION CRITERIA** | **EXCLUSION CRITERIA** |
| Data indicating the benefits of networking relating to the experience of personal wellbeing through positive emotions, "flow", meaning, and a sense of achievement. | Data indicating the benefits of networking other than the experience of personal wellbeing through positive emotions, "flow", meaning, and a sense of achievement. |

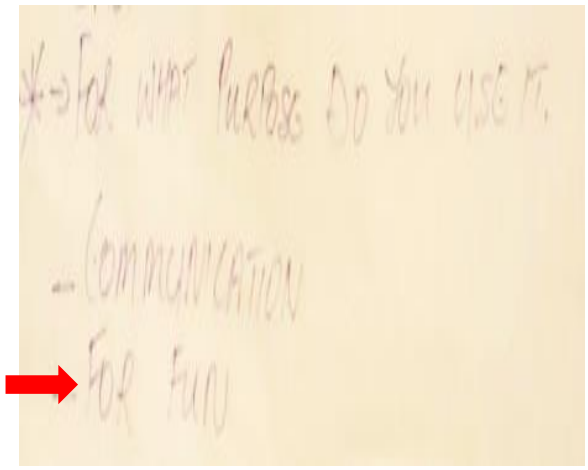
Table 4.7 gives a working definition and inclusion and exclusion crit3eria as indicators of the community volunteers' experiences of personal wellbeing in connecting with others to support their communities.

On the day of the first PRA workshop, the community volunteers were apprehensive about the activities of the day, yet their spirit of happiness was apparent throughout the day. Even when they were struggling with the beading activities in their groups, there was a lot of laughter among the volunteers. To the question "What happened?", the community volunteers responded: "*We are struggling and laughing at each other*" (PRA 1, April, P 1), "*Laughing*" (PRA 1, April, P 6), "*We thought things were harder but now we enjoy it with pleasure*" (PRA 1, April, P 1), and "*We were struggling to put 'irhali' (thread) to the needle and also laughing to each other*" (PRA 1, April, P 4).

Photograph 4.17 shows the community volunteers' notes on their positive emotions during the PRA workshops, and Photograph 4.18 shows their notes on the gratification they felt when networking with others on social media.




**Photograph 4.17:**
Indication that the community volunteers laughed together during the beading activity session



**Photograph 4.18:**
Indication that the community volunteers had fun using social networks to connect with others

The community volunteers also experienced positive emotions in the brainstorming sessions and during the feedback to the larger groups. Photograph 4.19 shows the excitement of a community volunteer sharing her group's ideas with the other volunteers. Photograph 4.20 shows how the volunteers in one of the small groups enjoyed brainstorming and mapping their ideas.

**Photograph 4.19:**
A community volunteer expresses her enjoyment in sharing her ideas with other volunteers

**Photograph 4.20:**
Community volunteers in one of the groups show pleasure in mapping their thoughts and feelings about networking

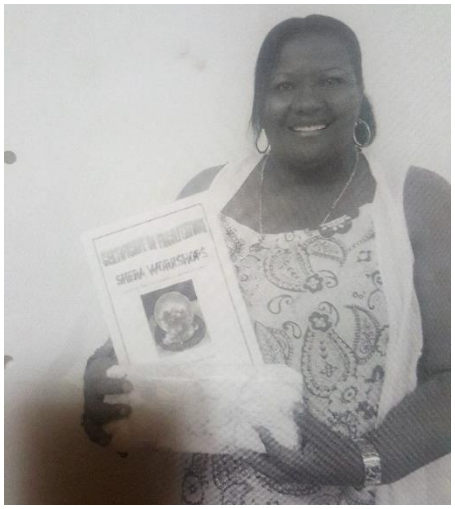
In my field notes, I noted the positive attitude of the community volunteers during the activities, which was especially significant to me because of the adverse circumstances they had to contend with every day. In this regard, I wrote the following: "*But what I also noticed this morning was the positive mood of the volunteers, despite their difficult living conditions. They seemed very happy to see each other again, and they were laughing, singing and talking, all the way to school and back*" (Field notes, April 2012, p. 2). I could see that being part of the project made the volunteers happy: "*I was again struck by the relaxed atmosphere among all the participants in the hall and for me it underlined the importance of relationships in our way of doing research. I noticed that the volunteers were happy that they could be part of this project*" (Field notes, April 2012, p. 2).

In addition to experiencing positive mood states, the community volunteers also seemed to experience "flow" in their actions as they lost track of time as a result of their intense focus on the beading task: *"There are also fewer conversations amongst the volunteers as each one is focusing on what he or she should do. While the participants at first seemed only to do the activity because they were asked to, they now appear to enjoy the activity and complain that they are not going to be able to finish the activity. It seems like time stood still for the participants as they fully engaged in what they were doing"* (Field notes, 3 April, 2012).

The personal happiness of the community volunteers was evident not only in their positive attitude and "flow" but also in their sense a sense of achievement. One group said that it was important to them that they were able to do the job they set out to do: "*Do the job/work*" (PRA 1, April, P 8), and another group added that it was important to them that they were able to achieve their goals together: "*We make it happen*" (PRA 1, April, P 1) and "*even if we have no clue about beads but we managed to do something*" (PRA 1, April, P 5). In my field notes, I noted also the sense of achievement of the volunteers and their

pride in the ideas they presented to the group: "*It seemed that the volunteers were proud of the ideas they came up with and that they gained clarity about their own abilities*" (Field notes, April 2012, p. 8)

The sense of achievement felt by the community volunteers was especially noticeable at the end of the project when they received a certificate for attending the SHEBA workshops. Photograph 4.21 and Photograph 4.22 show how proud the volunteers were upon receiving their certificates and shirts for attending the SHEBA workshops.



**Photograph 4.21:**
A facilitator with the certificate she received after completing the various workshops of the SHEBA project

**Photograph 4.22:**
Community volunteers with shirts they received for attending the SHEBA workshops

The community volunteers in the study seemed to experience personal wellbeing as a result of connecting with other volunteers in purposefully supporting their communities. More specifically, the volunteers experienced positive emotions, "flow", meaning in life, and a sense of accomplishment through their activities in the PRA workshop.

#### 4.2.3.2 Social wellbeing

Social wellbeing refers to how people experience their relationships and involves a sense of belonging to a community that shares similar experiences and goals (Son & Wilson, 2012). Table 4.8 gives a working definition as well as inclusion and exclusion criteria for experiencing social wellbeing by the community volunteers.

**Table 4.7: Working definition and inclusion and exclusion criteria for Sub-theme 3.2**

| WORKING DEFINITION: Social wellbeing | |
|---|---|
| Social wellbeing arises from people's interactions with one another (Walton, Cohen, Cwir, & Spencer, 2012) and involves a sense of belonging to a particular community (Son, & Wilson, 2012) | |
| **INCLUSION CRITERIA** | **EXCLUSION CRITERIA** |
| Data indicating the benefits of networking relating to the experience of social wellbeing through experiencing mutual trust and support, collective usefulness, and a sense of belonging. | Data indicating the benefits of networking other than the experience of social wellbeing through experiencing mutual trust and support, collective usefulness, and a sense of belonging. |

The community volunteers indicated their sense of belongingness in the first PRA workshop by stressing the significance of building relationships with one another. On answering the questions: What happened in the beading sessions? and What was important in the beading sessions?, the volunteers emphasised the importance of networking with others. One group reported that they were "*networking with other groups*" (PRA 1, April, P 3), and another group agreed that networking was important (PRA 1, April, P 8). The volunteers also stressed the importance of building relationships with one another by stating that they were "*working inter generationally and being able to go across boundaries*" (PRA 1, April, P 8) and that it was important to "*build relationships amongst groups*" (PRA 1, April, P 8). A further group also underlined the importance of "*building a relationship*" (PRA 1, April, P 6) and of "*getting new friends*" (PRA 1, April, P 4). By emphasising the importance of relationships and the significance of connecting with others, the volunteers revealed the sense of belonging that resulted from being part of their networks.

The community volunteers' sense of belonging was evident also in their experiences of sharing a common goal, their collaboration, and the teamwork in their group. The volunteers said that they needed to stand together to find a common objective to solve their problems by "*working and communicating with the group*" (PRA 1, April, P 7) and by *"collaborating to go through to what we were doing"* (PRA 1, April, P 3). One group stated that they needed to "*find a common goal*" (PRA 1, April, P 8), and two other groups stressed the importance of teamwork in dealing with their problems: "*We tried to work as team"* (PRA 1, April, P 7).

The community volunteers said that by working together as a team, they enhanced their belongingness by accepting each other and respecting one another's views. They pointed out that they accepted one another by recognising that *"everybody came with different ideas"* (PRA 1, April, P 3). They accordingly said it was important to them to "*listen to one's opinion*" (PRA 1, April, P 7) and "*we must listen to other people's views*" (PRA 1, April, P 8).

Photograph 4.23 shows the happiness of the community volunteers in their group, and Photograph 4.24 shows the community volunteers collaborating in mapping their ideas during the brainstorming session.

**Photograph 4.23:**
The happiness of the community volunteers in a group setting

**Photograph 4.24:**
Community volunteers in their team wear, identifying them as part of a team

In my field notes, I noted my observations that the personal happiness of the community volunteers seemed to arise from their sense of belonging in their networks: "*Increasingly my experience is that the positive attitude and the determination of the volunteers arises from their feelings of belonging that they experience in their networks and in the larger community. I think it is this experience of belongingness that helps them to face their circumstances and to limit possible negative emotions*". (Field notes, April 2012, p. 2)

The community volunteers indicated that they experienced both personal and social benefits from collaborating with one another. Personal wellbeing for them was derived from maintaining a lighthearted attitude when they encountered challenges, by staying focused on their task as volunteers, and by making sure things got done by finding solutions together. Being able to build relationships across boundaries of age and other differences gave them a sense of social wellbeing and connecting to others on a relational level. Their participation in the workshops was characterised by laughter, "flow", and achievement, as well as the satisfaction of being together with others who shared the same challenges. The volunteers reacted to their difficulties with the beading activity, for example, by coming together and solving their problems through teamwork and collaboration.

#### 4.2.3.3 Findings on benefits of volunteer networking in respect of personal and social wellbeing

The community volunteers in the study experienced personal wellbeing through positive emotions, "flow", and a sense of achievement. They expressed their positive feelings by laughing when working together in their groups and sharing their ideas. They were also excited when meeting each other and travelling together, starting the day's activities with song and dance and singing and talking on their way to and from the research venue where the PRA workshops were held. The volunteers were also excited about engaging in the workshop activities, creating a relaxed environment for each other to participate and share their ideas. Besides feeling happy, the volunteers experienced a sense of "flow" by focusing totally on the

beading activity and losing track of time. By persevering and focusing on the task at hand, they experienced a sense of achievement in succeeding with their activities and producing knowledge that was useful to the group.

According to Lin (1999), positive emotions are a key factor in building sound relationships in social networks. Social networks can, in turn, also produce positive emotions (Fleishman et al., 2000). Fleishman, et al. (2000) found that strong relationships in the social support networks of HIV patients enhanced their positive feelings and sense of purpose in life. Likewise, Son and Wilson (2012) found that community volunteers with effective social support networks are likely to experience higher levels of both hedonic and eudemonic happiness. Borgonovi's (2008) research confirmed that community volunteers are significantly happier than non-volunteers, irrespective of socio-economic status. More specifically, Kulik and Megidna (2011) attribute the positive affect of community volunteers to the quality of the relationships they experience in their networks. The positive emotions that community volunteers tend to experience in their relationships with other volunteers, supervisors, and clients may thus increase their personal wellbeing (Kulik, & Megidna, 2011).

In addition to positive feelings, people's personal wellbeing is also enhanced by experiences of "flow" (Grenville-Cleave, 2012). According to Collins, Sarkisian and Winner (2009), "flow" involves feelings of gratification that result from being fully engaged in challenging daily activities. Such engagement may include people's involvement in community projects such as soup kitchens (Rich, 2016). Freire, Tavares, Silva and Teixeira (2016) confirm that volunteering in a structured and goal-orientated manner can indeed give rise to experiences of "flow" in actively supporting others. In a study done on people's engagement in art and craft activities, such as the beading work done in this study, Collier and Wayment (2017) found that the participants in their research engaged particularly in crafts and DIY activities because these activities enabled them to stay focused ("flow") and not primarily because they experienced pleasant feelings (Collier, & Wayment, 2017). In the present study, the community volunteers reported that once they had learned how to do the beading, they enjoyed the challenge of the activity. I observed also that they seemed to lose track of time because of their full engagement in what they were doing.

Besides personal happiness, the community volunteers also experienced a sense of social belongingness by building relationships and accepting each other. More specifically, by networking with each other, they reached out to one another, establishing relationships and making new friends. They enjoyed each other's company, were glad to meet up with one another, praying and singing and having coffee and lunch together. They shared similar experiences and collaborated with one another through teamwork to achieve their common goals. Working together as teams, they accepted one another by listening to each other and listening to the other person's views.

According to Walton and Cohen (2012), the need to form and maintain social relationships is a significant motivator of human behaviour and therefore critical to people's wellbeing. When people sense that their

connectedness with others is threatened, they may struggle to regulate their emotions and maintain optimal intellectual functioning. Feeling disconnected from others may also put people's health at risk as much as high-risk behaviour such as smoking. Son and Wilson (20102 found that social wellbeing, which includes feelings of being part of a community following on involvement in one's community, is also an important motivation for people to become community volunteers. By volunteering in their communities, people develop the identity of being positive helpers who care about their communities (Compton, 2005). Likewise, Veitch (2013) maintains that sharing this identity contributes to the positive experience of volunteering and results in a sense of belonging.

## 4.3 REVISITING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand the value of social networks for the community volunteers, I linked the results of this study to Lin's network theory of social capital (Lin, 1999), which holds that social networks consist primarily of relationships and actors who are linked to one another through these relationships. People invest themselves in their networks by connecting with others and building ties that are characterised by trust, reciprocity, and positive emotions (Lin, 1999). In the present study, the community volunteers demonstrated their trust in their networks by being open with one another and sharing their struggles, experiences, and ideas. They listened and reached out to one another by giving support and advice. They also created a relaxed atmosphere in the research setting by having fun and laughing while they were working, and also when travelling and eating together. By connecting with each other in this way, they demonstrated their strong bonds and showed that their networking was characterised by trust, reciprocity, and positive emotions.

By building trusting, reciprocal, and joyful relationships, people achieve not only membership of social networks but contribute and gain access to the social resources embedded in these networks (Lin, 1999). According to Lin (1999), social resources involve access to information, social support, recognition, and identity. Through reaching out to one another and building relationships, the community volunteers in this study gained access to the resources that were available in their networks. They recognised and valued one another by acknowledging each other's knowledge and skills and looking to each other for answers to their problems. They also reinforced their identity as positive helpers in their communities by assisting each other and holding each other to the values of community volunteership. By accessing each other's knowledge and skills in their actions, they mobilised their resources to master their challenges. In line with Lin's theory (1999), the volunteers turned their resources into assets by using the valuable people and technology in their volunteer networks to achieve their goals.

Lin's model (1999) suggests also that by turning resources into assets by mobilising and using them in purposeful actions, people may experience better health, wellbeing, and life satisfaction as a return on the investment they make in building trusting relationships with one another. In this study, the community volunteers experienced happiness and a sense of belonging as a result of connecting with each other,

recognising each other's skills and knowledge, and using this information to complete the task at hand. They thus experienced the "invisible hand" of social networks, which results in happiness and belongingness (Lin, 1999).

## 4.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter covered the results of the study with reference to the three themes and six sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data generated during the two PRA workshop sessions. I presented the findings against the background of the findings in the literature. In interpreting the results of the study, I linked the findings to Lin's network theory of social capital, which helped me understand the value of social networks for the community volunteers.

The next chapter deals with my conclusions regarding the research questions stated in Chapter 1. The contributions of the study and areas for further research are also discussed.

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# Chapter 5
# Conclusions and Recommendations

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This PRA study set out to explore the value that social networks have for the community volunteers of the SHEBA project. As stated in Chapter 1, a literature review of studies on community volunteerism indicated that, traditionally, community development was done based on deficits identified in high-risk communities. Interventions aimed at helping the poor overlooked the abilities and social resources available in high-risk communities that could be used to deal with challenges facing the communities (Rhodes University, 2017). By taking people's deficiencies as a starting point, community interventions can exacerbate the psychological effects of poverty and contribute to people's sense of low confidence, disempowerment, and exclusion (Banerjee et al., 2007; Mnguni-Letsoalo, 2015; Moyo, 2014).

In addition, policies aimed at ameliorating poverty are usually based on quantified measures, along poverty lines, that do not enable those most affected by poverty to voice their own experiences of what it means to be poor in a specific context (Chambers, 2014). A growing number of studies have accordingly called for participatory and emancipatory research to enable people in high-risk communities to form social support networks and identify and analyse their challenges, find solutions, and take action together (Chambers, 2014; Ennis, & West, 2014; Kongolo, & Bamgose, 2002; Moyo, 2014).

In this PRA study, I followed a participatory approach by using methodologies that enabled the community volunteers to share their networking experiences. Workshop sessions were held in small groups to facilitate the sharing of ideas and knowledge on social networking that was unique to this group of people. The insights I gained from this study were important because the volunteers' indigenous knowledge about how they networked in their volunteer actions was unique to them and could not be gleaned from an outsider's perspective.

In this final chapter, I answer the primary and secondary research questions posed in Chapter 1 of the study, and I reflect on the challenges and limitations of the study. I also make recommendations for future research.

## 5.2 REFLECTING ON THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In answering the primary research question, I first considered the secondary questions that guided the research. My exploration of the community volunteers' networking experiences in their high-risk communities was based on the following primary research question: "What is the value of social networks

to community volunteers of the SHEBA project?" The sub-questions of the study concerned the processes, resources, and benefits of social networks for the volunteers.

### 5.2.1 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 5.2.1.1 What processes do community volunteers in the SHEBA project use to preserve their social networks?

The processes the community volunteers in the study used to preserve their support networks were connecting with each other and reinforcing the values of their group. In the face of challenges, the volunteers reached out to one another by talking openly about their challenges, frustrations, and fears of the unknown. By acknowledging their needs and feelings of helplessness to each other, they were able to gain access to the embedded resources in their social networks.

The volunteers in this study maintained their social support networks by supporting each other, which might enable them in their volunteer work of uplifting their high-risk communities.

The volunteers not only preserved their social support networks by reaching out to and supporting each other, they also maintained their networks through their values. More particularly, the volunteers held each other accountable to the values of collectiveness as represented by the spirit of *ubuntu*. They reinforced these values by sharing with each other what their values meant to them and what their values required of them in specific situations. Based on the research results, I could conclude that the volunteers in the study maintained their support networks by committing themselves to the collective values of humanity and generosity as expressed in the principles of *ubuntu*. I concluded also that the volunteers maintained their values by challenging each other on behaviours that contradicted the spirit of unity that underpinned their networking

#### 5.2.1.2 What resources did the community volunteers in the SHEBA project value in their networking?

The networking resources that the community volunteers in this study valued were people and communication media. They regarded each other as valuable resources because they could rely on each other for support and for the transfer of the necessary skills and advice to help them overcome their problems.

The volunteers considered their networks with each other as one of their most valuable resources. It is especially noteworthy that their networks were based primarily on trust and reciprocity, denoting the strong emotional ties between them.

By learning from each other and sharing ideas, the volunteers in the study could jointly find appropriate solutions to the challenges and problems in their high-risk communities.

In addition to recognising each other as valuable resources, they also valued communication media as significant resources for networking with each other and their communities. They especially valued mobile phones to connect them to and maintain their networks. Communication media thus played a central role in the social networks of this group of volunteers.

#### 5.2.1.3 How did the community volunteers in the SHEBA project benefit from their social networks?

The community volunteers in this study experienced both personal and social wellbeing in their interactions with one another. Their networking experiences were mostly positive, enabling them to work together towards a common goal and create a sense of community and coherence that motivated them to persevere until they reached their goals. This resulted in their experiencing a sense of pride and achievement.

The community volunteers in the SHEBA project indicated that they felt happy and excited, were fully engaged in their activities, and experienced a sense of pride and achievement. I concluded therefore that they experienced personal wellbeing as a result of collaborating with each other through their social support networks.

Positive affect, together with trust and reciprocity, were key features of the social interactions and personal relationships of the volunteers in the SHEBA project. In networking with each other, they engaged themselves fully in accomplishing the goal of the group.

Besides experiences of personal happiness, the community volunteers experienced also a sense of social belonging in dealing with their adverse circumstances. Through networking, they could connect and empathise with one another on the challenges and demands of being volunteers. More specifically, they regarded themselves as a team that could solve very specific challenges by working together to achieve the same goals.

The volunteers in the study derived a sense of belonging by sharing the identity of being community volunteers and therefore people who were actively and positively involved in their communities.

### 5.2.2 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

In this section, I present my conclusions relating to the primary research question as stated in Chapter 1: “What is the value of social networks to the community volunteers of the SHEBA project?”

The purpose of this PRA study was to explore how the community volunteers from the SHEBA project value their social networks. The findings of the study suggest that the social networks of the volunteers were valued highly by them in dealing with the various challenges in their communities.

The findings suggest also that the community volunteers invested themselves continuously in preserving their social support networks by reaching out to one another in times of crisis and by responding to each other's needs by supporting one another. The findings suggest further that the volunteers maintained their social support networks by reinforcing the values that held them together and directed them in their efforts to support one another and their communities.

The volunteers in the study attributed significant value to each other as sources of support and knowledge. They were able to meet their challenges together by learning from and identifying each other as resources.

Modern communication media such as mobile phones were very important to the volunteers in maintaining their support networks with their colleagues and communicating with their communities. I therefore concluded that interventions in high-risk communities should be aimed at assisting community volunteers gain access to and use such technologies effectively and appropriately in their networking.

The value the community volunteers in the SHEBA project attributed to their social networks was clear from the benefits they derived from these networks. The findings of the study suggest that the social networks of the volunteers enhanced their sense of personal wellbeing as well as their sense of social belongingness. I concluded that social support networks could contribute significantly towards people's overall wellbeing and that community interventions should adopt a holistic approach in high-risk communities thereby enhancing people's hedonic, eudemonic, and social wellbeing.

## 5.3 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study provided insight into the networking experiences of the community volunteers and the value they attached to their social support networks in dealing with challenges. More specifically, the study highlighted the value of collective caring.

The use of network theory in the study highlighted the connection between the individual agency of the community volunteers and the structural processes that supported or constrained their networking behaviour. The study thus raised awareness of the socio-economic, cultural, political, and environmental boundedness of community volunteering and accentuated the importance of taking these factors into account when doing PRA research in high-risk communities.

The study could serve also as a stepping stone for further studies in the use of social network theory and analysis in research on communities. Future intervention studies should use network concepts such as network size, relationship intensity, and directionality of information flow through ties to determine the

degree of social capital in communities and to assist communities to build relationships strategically in order to enhance their ability to access and mobilise useful resources.

Finally, the study could serve as a starting point for further research on the use and value of mobile and online technology in community interventions to maintain support networks, form new connections, and deliver effective support.

## 5.4 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first limitation concerns the generalisability of the findings of the study as its scope was confined to the experiences of 35 community volunteers from two high-risk communities in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan area. The experiences of the volunteers and the findings of the study are bound therefore to a very specific community context and cannot be generalised to volunteering experiences in other settings. In addition, the bias of the research was towards participation and problem solving thereby developing the analytical abilities of the community volunteers and mobilising their wisdom and skills to deal with their very specific circumstances. The objective of the research was not to produce outcomes that could be generalised to other contexts but, rather, outcomes generated by the community volunteers in the SHEBA project that could be used to address their particular concerns.

A further possible limitation of the study was the extent to which the volunteers were able to participate fully in the research process as the language barrier between me and them presented a significant challenge. The volunteers did not speak English as their first language – Xhosa was the predominant language spoken during the small group discussions. This made it difficult for me to follow the ideas of the volunteers and restricted them in expressing themselves in English whenever I wanted to participate in the brainstorming sessions.

In addition, although the volunteers participated fully during the workshop activities that produced the outcomes of the study, they were, for example, not involved in choosing the practical activities in the workshops. Yet, I considered the intervention a valuable experience for me as well as for the volunteers. When they were faced with an unfamiliar task, they identified and used their own strengths and relied on their value of supporting one another to deal with their immediate challenges thereby becoming aware of their own abilities and the value of networking to survive daily.

## 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH

In this section, I discuss my recommendations for further research.

To gain further knowledge on the value of social support networks for people in high-risk communities and on strengthening these networks in communities, further research should include the following:

- Participatory studies aimed at enabling community volunteers in different communities to form social support networks, analyse their circumstances, find solutions, and take action together.
- Explorative studies focusing on the development of guidelines and good practice to evaluate and enhance the participation of community volunteers as co-researchers in volunteer research.
- Descriptive studies using network analysis theory and methods to investigate social support networks in high-risk communities and to inform community volunteers about the strategic use of networking in their communities.
- Comparative studies integrating the findings of all the different studies of the SHEBA project into one body of knowledge that can provide further insight into the total experience of the community volunteers in this study.
- Surveys on the use and importance of communication media by community volunteers in South Africa in supporting their high-risk communities.

## 5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this intervention study was to explore how the community volunteers from the SHEBA project – in two high-risk school communities in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area – value their social networks. By spending time with the volunteers and analysing the results of the study, I became increasingly aware of the important contributions the volunteers made to each other, individuals, schools, and their communities at large. Not only did they play a key role in their communities, they also played a significant role in extending their support to other volunteers through networking. By reaching out to fellow community volunteers and forming social support networks, the volunteers supported each other, learnt from each other, and dealt with their challenges together.

The value the community volunteers attributed to their social support networks was especially evident in their efforts to preserve these networks by constantly reaching out and supporting one another. When challenged with difficult circumstances, the volunteers relied on each other for help and collaborated in solving their challenges. The study also found how innovative the volunteers were in preserving and extending their social support relationships by using electronic media to communicate with each other and their communities. Their vigorous use of these technologies illustrated also how important their social networks were to them.

The community volunteers in the study networked with each other and their communities on a daily basis, and their support networks enabled them to deal with the devastating effects of poverty in their communities. It was especially their collective spirit of “Unity is strength” and “A person is a person through

other people" that made the community volunteers so resilient and promoted the wellbeing in their high-risk communities.

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# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A**
Facilitators Manual SHEBA Project

**APPENDIX B**
Transcriptions of Posters Compiled from PRA-Workshop and Brainstorming Sessions

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# APPENDIX A

## Facilitators Manual SHEBA Project

# APPENDIX B

## Transcriptions of Posters Compiled from PRA-Workshop and Brainstorming Sessions

# FACILITATOR'S MANUAL

## SHEBA INTERVENTION

## SUPPORTING HOME ENVIRONMENTS IN BEATING ADVERSITY

**MARCH 2012**




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# SESSION 3 (MORNING OF DAY 2):

## "BEADING" CAREER AND NETWORKING SKILLS

**Guiding questions for this session:**

- Which basic counselling skills do you use in your job?
- How do you deal with ethical issues?
- How do you partner, network and refer to provide care and support?
- How do you partner with your external agency in terms of:
    - reading and interpreting a contract
    - administering case work
    - reporting to the external agency?

**Objectives for this session:**

- To discuss basic counselling skills required of community volunteers.
- To explore ethical considerations in view of volunteer care work.
- To discuss the development and management of supportive caring networks.
- To establish knowledge on partnering with an external agency in terms of:
    - reading and interpreting a contract
    - administering case work
    - reporting to the external agency.

**Proposed length of the session:**

± 4½ hours.

**Materials required:**

- Early morning refreshments.
- Mid-morning refreshments.
- 42 x large (A2) cardboards (6 x 6 groups + for summaries).
- 18 x coloured pens (3 per group).
- A variety of materials for beading (per group), including 45 key rings.
- 45 x scissors.
- Prestik.






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  - reading and interpreting a contract
  - administering case work
  - reporting to external agencies.

- After completion of each of these discussions, all groups display their ideas and report back to the bigger group, during which the other participants are allowed to elaborate. In each instance, facilitators can share examples of good practice (±30 minutes).
- Facilitators integrate all ideas onto one cardboard per topic and present it to the group for any further input.
- After this morning session, break for lunch.

**Examples of activities:**

*To be added…*






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# POSTERS TRANSCRIPTIONS AND COLOR CODING

## SHEBA WORKSHOP April 2012 (PRA 1)

## SHEBA BRAINSTORMING SESSION October 2012 (PRA 2)

## SHEBA FEEDBACK SESSION January 2013 (PRA 3)

**POSTERS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS**
**SHEBA WORKSHOP April 2012 (PRA 1)**

**Poster 1**

**What happened?**

1. We are struggling and laughing at each other.
2. There are one person who did not put the thread through the needle
3. We try to help het but we failed
4. We asked Lungise to help us but he didn't help us just laughing at us

**What was important?**

5. We work together and make it happen
6. We learn a lot (that unity is strength)

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

7. We thought things were harder but now we enjoy it with pleasure

**Poster 2**

**What happened?**

8. Firstly, we were struggling with the needle and the thread. We could not put the thread through the needle.

**What was important?**

9. As to work together and to help each other.

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

10. A person can't be a person without others.
11. Unity is power
12. You can learn from others
13. Yes, we were asking for help from the other groups

**Poster 3**

**What happened?**

1. We were struggling to put the string through the needle
2. We collaborate to go through to what we were doing
3. We had some soft music
4. Everybody came with different ideas

**What was important?**

5. Teamwork

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

6. To learn from each other. Focus on what you are doing and networking with other groups.

**Poster 4**

**What happened?**

7. We were struggling to put 'irhali' (thread) to the needle and also laughing to each other

**What was important?**

8. We help others and learn more to understand

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

9. Go out for help then someone assist us and get new friends

**Poster 5**

**What happened?**

10. We struggle to put thread in the needle We couldn't even help each other because we know nothing about beadwork
11. We went to the other tables to get help

**What was important?**

12. Even if we have no clue about beads but we managed to do something
13. Colours were not familiar to our culture

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

14. Networking
15. Communications
16. Learn

**Poster 6**

**What happened?**

1. Build a relationship
2. Helping each other
3. Laughing
4. Anger
5. Fear

**What was important?**

6. We learn from each other
7. Patience

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

8. Seek for help CLASH (Haal uit by tema 1.1!)
9. Ask for sponsors

**Poster 7**
**What happened?**

1. We struggle to put thread in the needle nose
2. We also struggle to do creativity

**What was important?**

3. We tried to work as as team
4. We helped each other
5. Listen to one's opinion

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

6. By working and communicating with the group
7. We must listen to other peoples' views

**Poster 8**
**What happened?**

1. Team work – help each other
2. Fear of the unknown
3. Build relationship among groups
4. Laughing while working

**What was important?**

5. Networking
6. Commited to do something
7. Find common goal
8. Do the job/work
9. … work intergenerational
10. … able to go across boundary
11. … sense of purpose
12. Push yourself to go further

**Any lessons that you learnt that you may use in networking as a volunteer?**

13. Put something in of yourself
14. on Learning
15. Listen to other people views

**SHEBA BRAINSTORMING SESSION October 2012 (PRA 2)**

**Poster 1**

**Which social network do you use?**

Mixit
Facebook
2Go
Whatsup
Twitter

**For what purpose do you use it?**

Finding new friends
Boyfriends
Chatting with colleagues
For fun

**How do you use it?**

Sending information
Requesting other things (communication)

**Poster 2**

**Which social network do you use?**

Mixit
Whatsupp
Facebook
Twitter
2Go
SMS

**For what purpose do you use it?**

Communication
For fun

**How do you use it?**

Used it daily for making conversation

**Poster 3**

**Which social network do you use?**

e-mail
phone

**For what purpose?**

To work hand in hand with Social Development & ACVV to ask with information

**How do you use it?**

By post-it
To use computer
By sms

**Poster 4**

**Which social network do you use?**

At this table we mostly use SMS to communicate with other people

**For what purpose?**

To get message of what you want or need. To communicate with your siblings that live out of town is cheaper than calling

**How do you use it?**

We send them to each other to inform others who were not able to get to the meetings

## SHEBA FEEDBACK SESSION January 2013 (PRA 3)

**How do you use networking skills?**

**Poster 1**

**How do you use networking skills?**

**We use radio station , posters. Phone by making calls**
**Pamplets for awareness campaigns and sms to invite the community when we are having an event eg. World Aids day or candle light**

**Poster 2**
**How do you use networking skills?**

**WHATSAPP Help even when you lost your phone. Course your contact that have on Whatsupp will see your number as the contact**
**SMS Helps us to communicate whith those who don't use any social networking sites**
**Facebook Helps to see and follow where your dfriends might be and feeling at the moment**

**Poster 3**

**Post-cards for immunization that is going to happen at the clinic/school/crèche**
**By letters to invites the parents about the challenges of the community**
**that we are going to have sign language eg Days of the Programmes**
**By doing plug cards to network to the People to Stop child abuse Awareness campaign**
**We using loud speaker to communicate with the parents for registration of the children at the schools**

**Poster 4**

**Networking Skills**

SMS
Facebook
Whatsupp
Mixit
2Go
Twitter
Googling
Letters's

**Poster 5**

SMS
Twitter
Whatsapp
Facebook
Mixit
You tube
Whereby you let your colleagues know about meetings
Is to tell and have friend
To invite our clients to the meetings
To also invite the parents to awareness campaign