'A Pillar of Strength': Empowering Women and the Resilience of Township-Dwelling Adolescents

Tanya Pretorius[1] and Linda Theron[2,*]

[1] Optentia Research Focus Area, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa.
[2] Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa.

*Corresponding author:

Linda Theron, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria 0028, South Africa. E-mail: Linda.theron@up.ac.za

Abstract

Only a limited number of resilience studies report what challenges and enables adolescents living in townships. Even fewer report the aforementioned from the perspective of adolescents themselves. Given that resilience is a contextually and developmentally sensitive process, it is an oversight to marginalize the risk- and resilience-related insights of township-dwelling adolescents. We correct this oversight in this article. To this end, we report a grounded theory study with 17 South African adolescents (aged 17–19) who generated visual and narrative data. Two core insights emerged. First, parental expectations underpin adolescent disillusionment. Second, empowering women (i.e., mothers, woman relatives and/or woman teachers) are key to how adolescents adjust well to the aforementioned challenge. These insights, which extend what was previously understood about the risk and resilience of township-dwelling adolescents, fit with social ecological understandings of resilience and offer useful leverage points to champion adolescent resilience.

This article provides a youth-directed understanding of what accounts for the resilience of urban, Sesotho-speaking adolescents challenged by township-related risks. Living in a township (i.e., a structurally inferior or low-income residential area similar to a favela) is a South African proxy for exposure to compound and chronic risks, including poverty, communicable disease, crime and violence (Kaba, Khamisa, & Tshuma, 2017). Exposure to these risks is usually associated with negative

developmental outcomes (such as dropping out of school or substance abuse; Van Breda, 2017). But many young people living in townships avoid the expected negative outcomes (Mampane, 2014). When young people are able to sidestep these expected negative outcomes, resilience is implied (Panter-Brick, Grimon, Kalin, & Eggerman, 2015). Although there are many studies explaining how and why young people avoid expected negative outcomes (Masten, 2014), also in contexts of low-income residential areas (e.g., Vanderbilt-Adriance & Shaw, 2008), very few of these are specific to adolescents living in South African townships (Theron, Theron, & Malindi, 2012). Furthermore, it is important that more resilience studies prioritize the views of young people themselves in explanations of resilience (Bottrell, 2009; Li, Bottrell, & Armstrong, 2017). To address the aforementioned, this article prioritizes adolescents' perspectives on the risks of living in an urban, South African township along with what enabled them to overcome these risks.

Cognizance of adolescent views on the risks of living in a township and of what supports them to develop well despite these risks will provide a fuller understanding of the resilience of young people in majority world contexts (i.e., those parts of the world that accommodate the majority of people and have greater societal challenges and fewer material resources than high-income countries). Including majority world contexts in investigations of resilience is particularly pressing, given that 'not much research has been done on resilience and protective factors in low-income and middle-income countries' (Kieling et al., 2011, p. 1520). This knowledge is likely to support the adults who interact regularly with young people (e.g., parents, guardians, teachers and youth workers) to understand how they can optimally assist township-dwelling youths to beat the odds that they face. This knowledge is also likely to have value for adults who serve young people living in disadvantaged inner-city communities, low-income housing settlements or favelas (i.e., in communities that are similar to townships in terms of the levels of violence and poverty).

Social Ecology of Resilience

The Social Ecology of Resilience Theory (SERT; Ungar, 2011) informs the study being reported on in this article. Similar to the approaches of ecological systems to explaining resilience (see Masten, 2001, 2011; Rutter, 2012), a social ecological approach acknowledges that positive adjustment is a process that draws on the inputs of an individual (e.g., an adolescent) as well as the social systems (e.g., family, school community or neighbourhood) in which an individual is embedded (Ungar, 2015). What this means is that positive adjustment requires, on the one hand, that an individual navigate towards, or ask for, resources that will enable him/her to accommodate significant stressors such as poverty or violence or racism, 'and' on the other hand, that social systems make helpful resources available (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2011). For example, when children live in child-headed households, their resilience is often tied to being an active member of a supportive peer or religious group in which material resources (such as food) are available or can be requested (Lee, 2012; Skovdal & Ogutu, 2012). This example shows that as explained by SERT, resilience is about more than what the individual contributes and also more than a set of individual/intrapersonal resources.

Resilience and Township Youths

Townships are a direct legacy of South Africa's shameful apartheid politics. During the apartheid period, townships were designed to house black South Africans and to relegate them to the margins of towns and cities (Nduna & Jewkes, 2013). To this day, townships are mostly inhabited by black South Africans and are characterized by multiple challenges. For example, townships are associated with violence and associated trauma, poverty and poor access to services (Govender & Killian, 2001; Hiller et al., 2017). These challenges potentiate negative life outcomes for township residents.

As mentioned earlier, many township-dwelling adolescents show resilience in the face of the township-related challenges (Mampane, 2014). A limited number of published studies have documented their resilience (Cameron et al., 2013; Choe, Zimmerman, & Devnarain, 2012; Govender & Killian, 2001; Isaacs & Savahl, 2014; Lethale & Pillay, 2013; Mampane, 2014; Mampane & Bouwer, 2011; Mosavel, Ahmed, Ports, & Simon, 2015; Theron, 2007, 2016, 2017; Theron et al., 2012; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018). These studies have reported various threats to the positive developmental outcomes of township-dwelling adolescents. Essentially, these threats can be summarized as inadequate resources (e.g., low-quality education, inadequate school resources, poor health services, lack of technology and infrastructure) (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011; Theron, 2007), poverty (Theron, 2016, 2017), and violence (Choe et al., 2012; Govender & Killian, 2001; Isaacs & Savahl, 2014). Even so, all these studies showed that, despite these risks, many young African people develop well. These studies associated this positive development with both individual and interpersonal resources.

Among individual resources, three were repeatedly highlighted. The first was a strong personality which supported adolescents to make bold choices for themselves (Cameron et al., 2013; Govender & Killian, 2001; Mampane, 2014; Theron et al., 2012). The second was the capacity to problem solve (Govender & Killian, 2001; Lethale & Pillay, 2013). The third was a future-orientated attitude which hinged on the capacity for agency, determination and perseverance to achieve a better future (Isaacs & Savahl, 2014; Lethale & Pillay, 2013; Mampane, 2014; Theron, 2017; Theron et al., 2012).

Interpersonal resources were dominated by relational networks that offered constructive supports (emotional and/or practical, depending on the adversity the adolescent was being challenged by). These networks included family, friends, individual community members and/or community groups (Cameron et al., 2013; Govender & Killian, 2001; Lethale & Pillay, 2013; Mampane, 2014; Theron, 2007; Theron et al., 2012; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018). The school environment also offered important relational networks, particularly with supportive teachers and pro-social peers (Mampane & Bouwer, 2011; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018). Township-dwelling adolescents were also bolstered by being affiliated to faith-based communities which encouraged hope-giving relationships with spiritual beings and supportive relationships with fellow believers (Cameron et al., 2013; Isaacs & Savahl, 2014; Theron, 2016; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018).

In summary, although the earlier studies provide some understanding of the risk and protective factors associated with the resilience of young people living in South

African townships, this understanding is restricted by the following limitations. Rather than foreground young people's personal, discursive accounts of township-related risk and resilience, the current understanding draws on adult perspectives of what enables adolescent resilience (Theron et al., 2012) or specific quantitative measures (Choe et al., 2012; Govender & Killian, 2001; Mampane, 2014). In instances where qualitative inquiry was used to understand resilience to township risks, some studies were limited to a single, predetermined aspect of resilience (i.e., future-orientation, Mosavel et al., 2015; school-related pathways of resilience, Mampane & Bouwer, 2011; Isaacs & Savahl, 2014). Alternatively, the qualitative studies focused on a risk that included township living tangentially (i.e., child-headed households, Lethale & Pillay, 2013; or migrant/mobile youth, Cameron et al., 2013). In other words, with the exception of the qualitative studies by Theron (2007, 2016, 2017) and Theron and van Rensburg (2018), what is currently understood about the resilience of adolescents challenged by township-related risks draws on studies that have underexplored how young people themselves freely account for their resilience. In order to remedy this limitation and offer adolescent-informed understandings of township-related risk and resilience that are not aligned to predetermined views of risk and resilience, we conducted a grounded theory study. This study was guided by the following question: 'How do township-dwelling adolescents account for resilience in the face of the risks of living in a township?'

Method

A grounded theory design aims to provide meaningful insights into an under-researched phenomenon. The reported meaning draws on the insights of a specific group of participants (Charmaz, 2006, 2017; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A grounded theory approach fitted our study's purpose; it positioned the participants as the experts on the under-researched phenomenon of what enables adolescent resilience in the face of township risks. Following Howard-Payne (2016), we used the Straussian grounded theory approach. The Straussian approach adopts a constructivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2017) which is better aligned with the purpose of the current study.

Participants and Process

In summary (see Table 1), 17 adolescents participated (11 girls, 6 boys). They self-identified as black, Sesotho-speaking adolescents between the ages of 17 and 19 (average age: 17.7). At the time of the study, they resided in six of the many townships in the Vaal Triangle area of South Africa.

Each participant contributed to at least one cycle in the data-generation process. There were three cycles in total. As explained in the following, each cycle included participant recruitment, data generation and an inductive analysis of the data. The first author interacted with the participants to generate data. She met with participants after school hours in places that were convenient to the participants (mostly a classroom at their school). As per participants' choice, the first author and the participants (all of whom were being schooled in English) communicated in English. Both authors considered the data, and following Charmaz (2017) used the emerging

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Sex	Pseudonym	Age	Home Language	Township
Male (*n* = 6)	Buddha	19	Sesotho	Township 1
	Stillo	17	Sesotho	Township 2
	Cap-sol	18	Sesotho	Township 1
	Christian Grey	18	Sesotho	Township 1
	Kheledi	17	Sesotho	Township 5
	CocktailZz Tha King	17	Sesotho	Township 1
Female (*n* = 11)	Tee	18	Sesotho	Township 3
	G-White	18	Sesotho	Township 3
	Shwex2	17	Sesotho	Township 4
	Mcee	18	Sesotho	Township 3
	Fifi	17	Sesotho	Township 4
	K-Mtwand	18	Sepedi	Township 1
	Feyona	17	Sesotho	Township 3
	M	18	Sesotho	Township 3
	Tshidi	17	Sesotho	Township 6
	London	19	Zulu	Township 1
	Paris	18	Sesotho	Township 1

Source: Pretorius, 2017.

interpretations of the data to co-generate focused questions for subsequent interactions with the participants.

Cycle 1

Ten (4 male and 6 female) participants between the ages of 17 and 19 were recruited with the help of gatekeepers (i.e., high school teachers who were formally engaged in providing support to at-risk students and/or teachers who taught life skills). All nominated adolescents needed to meet two inclusion criteria: (a) township residence and (b) evidence that they were doing well despite township risks. Following Ungar (2012), doing well meant developing in a positive way despite the challenge of growing up in adverse surroundings (i.e., a township). In our study, as in prior international and local studies, doing well was specifically interpreted as progress and/or achievement at school (Masten & Wright, 2010; Theron et al., 2012). In South Africa, educational progress is typically challenged by township-related risks and so remaining in school (rather than quitting school) and engaging in learning indicates resilience (Theron, 2017; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018).

The data for this cycle were generated through the draw-and-talk method (Groundwater-Smith, Dockett, & Bottrell, 2015). Accordingly, the first author invited each participant to make two drawings. Each was guided by the following broad prompts: (a) 'What makes life tough for you living in the township? and (b) Why do you do well in life despite these challenges?' After completing each drawing, participants verbalized what their drawing meant. The first author probed

adolescents' explanations for greater clarity and richer detail. She audio-recorded and transcribed the explanations.

Both authors analysed the visual and narrative data which were generated using the method just explained. They did not use a data software programme. Following Charmaz (2014), the analysis started with initial inductive coding (searching for data that answered the research question [i.e., how do resilient South African township-dwelling adolescents explain why they do well in life despite the risks of living in townships?] and labelling these data with short phrases that paraphrased the content). This was followed by focused coding (grouping similar codes and labelling each group with a code that reflected the gist of all included codes). This process prompted nine emerging conceptual categories (i.e., five relating to the township risks adolescents experienced [lack of resources, domestic chores, substance abuse, safety concerns and family issues] and four relating to resilience [personal drive, external sources of motivation, resources and religion]). Grounded theory analysis aims to culminate in a core category/categories which will provide deep insight into a specific research phenomenon (Charmaz, 2017). A core category is developed by refining the emerging conceptual categories (Charmaz, 2014). This necessitated a second cycle of data generation and analysis.

Cycle 2

With the help of the same gatekeepers, the first author recruited seven additional adolescent participants (two male and five female). Because personal experience shapes participant insights (Charmaz, 2017), additional participants could confirm/disconfirm the emerging understanding. Following Charmaz (2014), participant recruitment was based on theoretical sampling. This meant that the categories that emerged from the previous cycle served as the criteria for participant recruitment. Participants needed to be in a position to deepen our (i.e., the authors') understanding of the township risks and resilience-enablers which emerged in Cycle 1. To this end, the gatekeepers invited adolescents who lived in townships and were doing well, but who were articulate and confident enough to agree to and be comfortable with a one-on-one interview process.

The first author conducted the one-on-one interview with each participant. The interview questions were specific to the tentative categories from Cycle 1 (i.e., the first author asked 'who' and/or 'what' contributed to each of the specific risk/resilience categories; she probed as necessary to better understand the detail of the categories that emerged in the first cycle). The transcribed data were analysed using the codes from Cycle 1. Then the first author went backwards and forwards between Cycles 1 and 2. Following Charmaz (2017), she constantly compared the data with the codes, the codes with the codes and the codes with the categories. Ultimately, this resulted in the following refinement of the initial categories: 'domestic chores' became 'duties at home'; 'safety concerns, substance abuse and lack of resources' became 'neighbourhood risks'; 'family issues' became 'expectations from parents'; 'personal drive' became 'agency'; 'external sources of motivation and resources and religion' became 'motivating mothers and motivating friends'.

Cycle 3

Theoretical sampling once again informed recruitment. The first author invited eight (three male and five female) participants from Cycles 1 and 2 who would provide

rich data in order to further refine the emerging insights into the risk and resilience from the perspective of township adolescents. Of these participants, five originally participated in Cycle 1 and three in Cycle 2. To refine and enrich the learning from Cycles 1 and 2, the first author used a theoretical group discussion (Morse, 2010). In this group discussion, the focus was on the specific risks (i.e., expectations from parents; duties at home; neighbourhood issues) and protective factors (i.e., agency, motivational mothers and motivational friends) that had emerged from Cycle 2. The first author asked the participants to comment on how well these categories answered the research question, namely how township-dwelling adolescents account for resilience in the face of the risks of living in a township. She asked them to comment on which factors were central to their risk and resilience processes and how, if at all, the categories were interrelated. Thus, the first author probed to gain insights that would support identification of the core category and theory refinement.

An inductive analysis of the group discussion transcript suggested that protective women are central to the resilience-processes of participating adolescents. Empowering women inspired perseverance (and adolescent agency supported enactment of this perseverance) and guided adolescents to make resilience-enabling choices (which included choosing motivating friends). Similarly, parental expectations (i.e., expectations by fathers and mothers relating to household duties and scholastic expectations) were central to the risks youth reported. Neighbourhood risks were peripheral to these expectations. To confirm this refined understanding, the first author revisited the data, codes and categories of Cycles 1 and 2 and her memos to verify connections in the data in order to be sure of the earlier core categories. As explained by Charmaz (2015), she was satisfied that the core categories clarified processes in the data and connected subcategories.

Trustworthiness

Following Maree and van der Westhuizen's (2007) recommendations for heightening trustworthiness, the first author used various data collection methods (i.e., draw-and-talk interviews; semi-structured interviews; and a group discussion). She also invited a fellow postgraduate student who was engaged in resilience research to audit the codes and categories. As suggested by Saldana (2009), the authors had regular consensus discussions about the coded data and emerging categories. In the course of these discussions, they revisited the data, codes and categories, and this iterative process further heightened the credibility of the findings.

Ethics

The authors' institutional review board and the provincial department of education provided ethical clearance for the study (NWU-00006-09-A2). Per cycle, potential participants were informed about the aim and methods of the study, as well as the limited risks (e.g., being asked to explain township-related risks could prompt negative emotion). Per cycle, participants who agreed to voluntarily be part of the study provided written consent. In instances where participants were not yet 18, their parent/s provided written consent and participants provided written assent. Participants chose pseudonyms in order to preserve their anonymity. Those who

took part in the theoretical group discussion understood that because this was a group activity, anonymity was not possible and confidentiality would be limited.

Results

The results comprise of two categories. From the perspective of participating adolescents, township-related risks crystallized in the expectations which their parents had of them. Parents referred to adolescents' biological mother and father and/or the mother or father figure (e.g., a step-parent or biological parent's partner) with whom they resided at the time of the study. The everyday neighbourhood risks were distal, compared to 'parents [who] expect a lot' (Figure 1). As illustrated in Figure 2, adolescent capacity to adjust well to these risks was grounded in the support which empowering women (or 'pillar[s] of strength') facilitated. The inclusion of mothers in both categories signals an interesting tension between risk and resilience. However, empowering women were not exclusively biological mothers. Participating adolescents also included grandmothers, aunts and woman teachers. In the course of providing guidance and inspiration, these women protected the adolescents in question.

Category 1: Adolescent Disillusionment Related to 'Parents Expect a Lot from Us'

Mcee's central message was a protest: 'Parents expect a lot from us … they *expect* us to do this and that …' The 'this and that' referred primarily to duties at home (e.g., domestic chores, minding younger siblings, obeying elders) and to scholastic achievement. Mcee's grievance was echoed by the other participants (male and female).
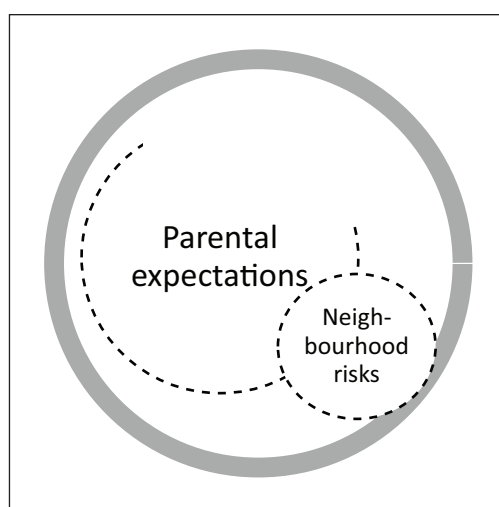

Figure 1. Category 1 Demonstrates that Adolescents Experience Parental Expectations as the Major Risk to their Well-being
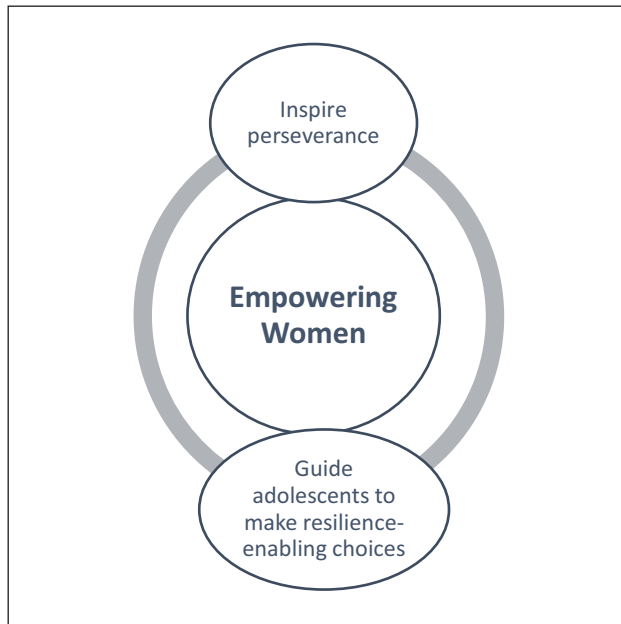
Source: Authors' own.

Figure 2. Category 2 Demonstrates that Adolescents Experience Empowering Women as Central to their Resilience

Source: Authors' own.

For example, Cap-sol (a boy) explained, 'I cook, I wash, I clean—then my mother is always pressuring me to look after my little brother.' Similarly, Feyona (a girl) said, 'Like normally when I came back from school, I have to cook … each and every day … in the evening I have to wash dishes and early in the morning before school … I have to clean.'

Essentially, household duties resulted in adolescents experiencing that their studies could not be prioritized. This was at odds with parent expectations that the participants do well at school and 'succeed more than they [his parents] did' (CocktailZz Tha King). As M explained, 'It makes it difficult for me to study, because I have to cook and clean and wash my laundry.' Similarly, Paris retorted, 'when I have to study … I have to cook *and* study.' Tshidi explained that expectations relating to household chores meant that she was not in control of her time: 'I have to do laundry, I have to clean the house and then sometimes I iron a few things … I cannot do time management.'

Household chores obstructed opportunity to rest or be sociable. For example, the drawing which Fifi made showed her bathing her little sister. She lamented that her duty to her younger siblings and additional cleaning chores meant that her time for homework and peer interaction was non-existent. Similarly, M said, 'I do not have time for myself.'

Adolescent participants found parents' expectations both onerous and tedious. For example, in her drawing which illustrated the domestic chores, she was expected to do daily, G-white drew herself crying (Figure 3) and concluded, 'It is sort of
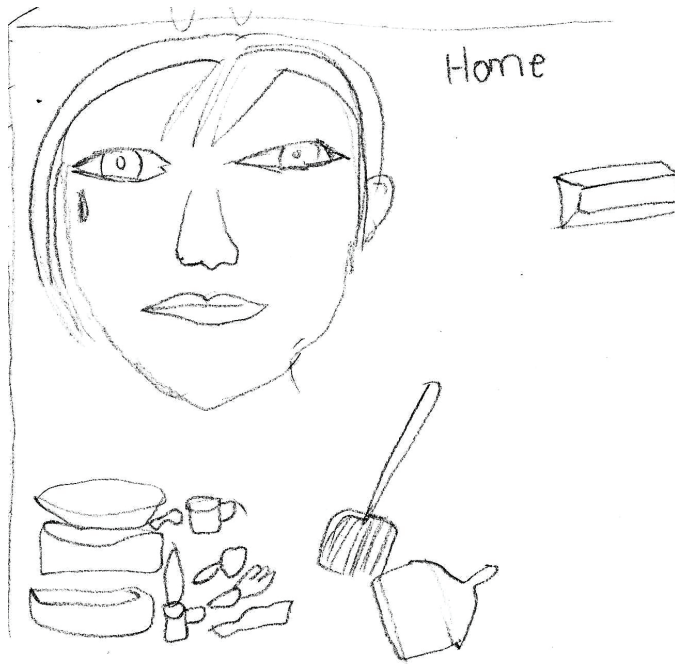
Figure 3. G-White's Illustration of the Duties at Home and the Sadness they Cause Her
Source: Pretorius (2017).

a burden to me.' Likewise, Feyona experienced the pressure from her parents as 'straining' her. Tee said, 'You feel like you are giving everything … so you end up being bitter … you cannot be yourself—instead you live to impress your parents.' For Mcee chores were synonymous with arguments, 'Your parent tells you: "I want you to cook this, this way" … and then we start fighting.' Christian Grey explained, 'Cleaning the car, cleaning the house … it is boring to do those kind of stuff … and if you do not do that it is like you disrespecting or something.' Similarly, Paris reported, 'I have to do all the duties. When I tell her [mother] that I have to study and do my homework, she gets angry with me and that causes tension between us, and we fight.' Buddha confirmed, 'It makes a lot of tension at home.' For him, this tension was like a 'push … to run away from home and be outside.' So too for Feyona who rather spent her evenings at a nearby school attending extra classes (which her parents agreed to as it fitted with their scholastic expectations). For her, however, this was an opportunity to escape chores. She explained that her parents' expectations: 'Make me go to school during that time [in the evening] because I do not want to do things at home.'

Male and female participants explained that if/when they did try to avoid being at home and/or on their way to after-hours school classes, they were exposed to safety risks. As shown in Figure 4, for example, Buddha drew the typical safety risks he encountered if he walked around his community. K-Mtwand spoke of 'gangsters'; Stillo mentioned, 'There is a lot of violence … every time I walk I need to be careful of what is happening.' Tee's words echoed this fear, 'There is no security in the township … people will just be drinking and doing what they like.' Many participants
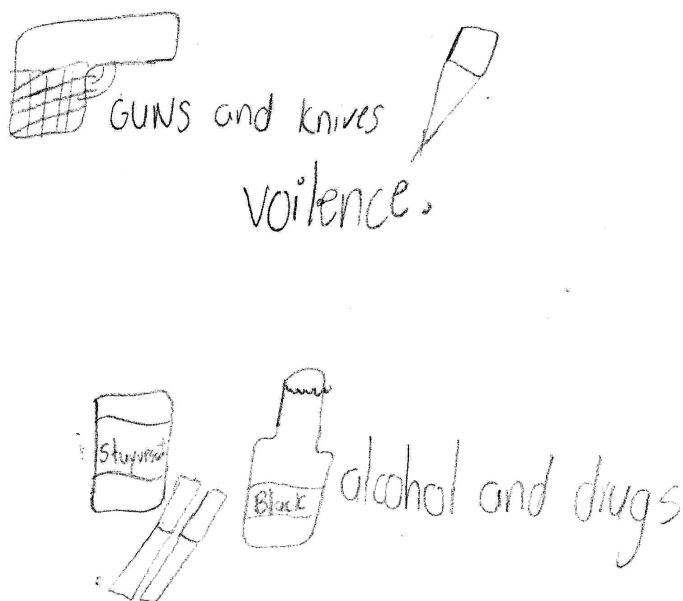
Figure 4. Buddha Illustrates the Most Pressing Neighbourhood Challenges
Source: Pretorius (2017).

linked the violence and lawlessness to substance abuse. In this regard, there was particular mention of 'Nyaope' (a concoction that typically includes anti-retroviral drugs, milk powder, rat poison and bicarbonate of soda). As shown in Figure 5, Shwex2 drew this risk and elaborated that 'Nyaope people … are all over the streets … so as children we do not find freedom to roam around the streets.'

Participants (male and female) were also disturbed by the neighbourhood noise levels which London described as 'Music, people shouting, fighting … everyday'. Stillo said, 'There is a tavern in the same street where I live, so sometimes I cannot study—they drink alcohol and they make a lot of noise.' G-White also referred to the noise: 'I live next to a tavern …. The noise is like [pulls her face to show the noise is very bothersome].'

Taken together, parental expectations and neighbourhood risks meant that the adolescents were at risk of becoming disillusioned. They saw their lives as beyond their control. To quote Tee's conclusion: 'I think that is the reason why most people end up—you know—doing drugs, dropping out of school … because there is no hope.'

Category 2: Empowering Women as Adolescents' 'Pillar[s] of Strength'

Empowering women were central to male and female participants' accounts of what supported adolescents to avoid the negative choices that disillusioned adolescents would be more likely to make. As depicted in Figure 2 earlier, empowering women (supportive mothers and/or women) guided participants to make resilience-enabling choices and inspired perseverance.

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Figure 5. The Illustration by Shwex2 Draws Attention to Drug-Related Risks
Source: Pretorius (2017).

Empowering Women Guide Resilience-Enabling Choices

The participants (male and female) were vociferous about how women supported them to make constructive choices. Cap-sol said, 'She [mother] is always there … telling me what is wrong and what is right.' Similarly, Buddha's mother motivated him to do the right things, such as studying on Saturdays and staying off the streets, by being strict. He captured this in his drawing (Figure 6) of what supported his resilience and then explained: 'This is a picture of my mom shouting at me, pushing me to do the right things.' Interestingly, he drew his mother smiling, thereby imply- ing that his mother was not cold-hearted when she was strict.

As part of these 'right things' which empowering women encouraged, adoles- cents chose to be devout and to use their faith to guide their values. For example, Shwex2 made a drawing (Figure 7) that symbolized how she drew guidance from gospel music and her Bible.

Woman teachers also guided adolescents to make health- and well-being-promoting choices. They protected adolescents by helping them to consider which actions would complicate their life paths. For example, Feyona said: 'She [teacher] does not only consider school work but also on personal levels we do talk about a lot of things.'

Empowering women supported young people to choose constructive friends and to associate with peers who would be a good influence on them. For example, Paris remembered how her mother and teacher collaborated to ensure that she distanced herself from older peers who were not a good influence. Paris recounted: 'My mom … she told the teacher that I have a best friend [and] she recommends her more than my older friends.' Similarly, when peers came to Buddha's house, his mother would tell him which peers she disapproved of. He concluded that she supported him 'into seeing which one is a better friend'.
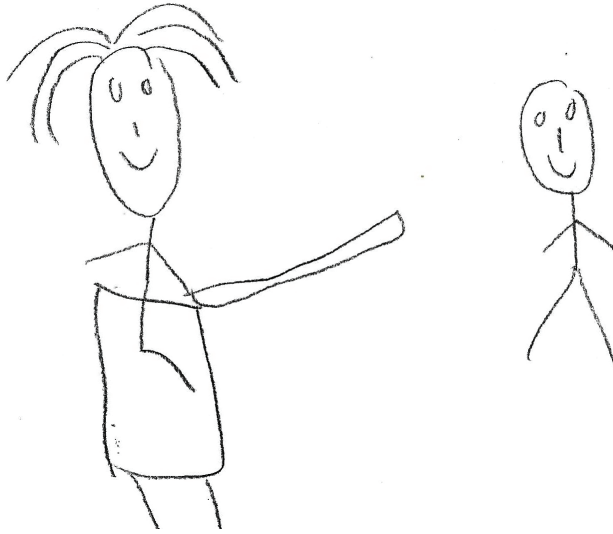
Figure 6. Buddha's Mother was Strict about Him Doing the 'Right Things'
Source: Pretorius (2017).

Figure 7. Shwex2 was Inspired by Gospel Music and the Bible
Source: Pretorius (2017).

Participants associated multiple benefits with having chosen supportive friends. These included friends understanding the stress of parental expectations which in turn allowed them to be a 'shoulder to cry on' (Lerato) and/or 'build one another' (Tee). G-White drew herself holding hands with her friends and explained that the

knowledge that her friends were challenged by similar hardships to hers had helped her realize that her hardships were not unique. Knowing that she was not the only one, supported her in feeling less like a victim.

Constructive friends also did what empowering women did: they guided participants to make judicious choices. To this end, Stillo explained that constructive friends considered what was best for one another (Figure 8). They were 'not people that will put a bad influence or pressure on you to do things you do not want to do'. They also offered advice which illuminated 'the advantages and the disadvantages' of any given choice. For Christian Grey and Paris, good friends supported habits (such as studying together) which resulted in being invested in schooling and scholastic progress. Good friends did not jeopardize their own scholastic progress. For example, Buddha said he once wanted to cheat on a test, but his friend did not help him to do that: 'We were writing a test and all of a sudden I went blank, I asked him [the friend] and he just said, "tough love" … then continued writing.'

Empowering Women Inspire Perseverance

They motivated participants (male and female) to aim high and to persevere, even when life was challenging or making scholastic progress was hard. For example, Feyona described her mother as, 'My pillar of strength, she is always there for me. She encourages me and tells me "this time around you are going to do better"'. Empowering women partly inspired academic perseverance by sharing their academic competence and in so doing making it easier not to give up. For instance, Christian Grey said his grandmother was very close to him and so 'she helps me with Afrikaans [compulsory school subject], because she is good with Afrikaans'. Similarly, London's grandmother helped her with accountancy and Kheledi's mother helped him with life sciences.
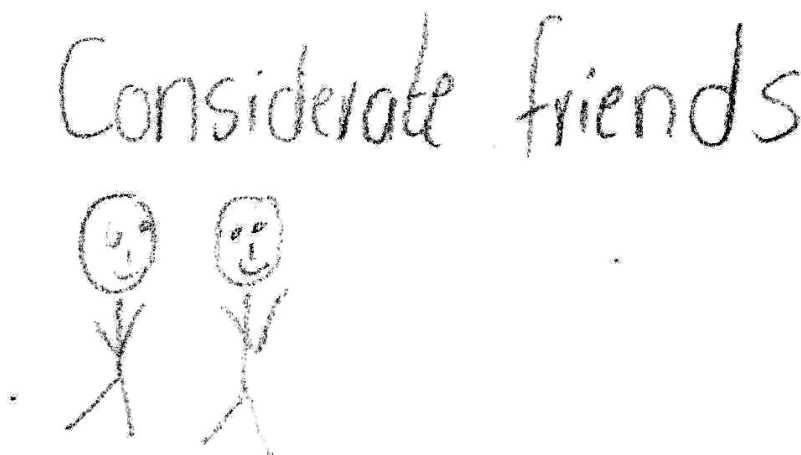

Figure 8. Stillo's Illustration of Considerate Friends (i.e., Friends Who Urge Resilience-Enabling Choices)

Source: Pretorius (2017).

Empowering women further inspired perseverance by communicating belief in the adolescents' capacity to cope with parental expectations. Tshidi's aunt encouraged her to do her best and comforted her when succeeding was difficult: 'She talks to me in a motherly manner which calms me down.' Woman teachers also encouraged tenacity by the messages they communicated. Mcee explained: 'They keep me motivated, because at times I feel like giving up, but they tell me: "no you can do it, continue … you know you are good at this, so go on"'. Similarly, Buddha related, 'We had lost hope that time … she [teacher] started motivating us, inspiring us ….' These positive messages made teachers trustworthy allies. K-Mtwand said: 'I can talk to them and tell them how I feel and they understand.'

In turn, participants believed and repeated these affirming messages. Paris said that she repeatedly reminded herself that she 'can do this'. Similarly, Feyona looked in the mirror every day and told herself: 'I am going to do it ….' Buddha mentioned that the meaning of his real name, which his mother had given him, meant that he was a blessing and this inspired him to live up to his mother's words.

Empowering women also supported perseverance by virtue of the example they set. Tee said: 'When I think of giving up I think of her [mother] … she is my pillar of strength. … even when it [hardship] hit her [mother] the hardest she never gave up, and that inspires me.' Similarly, Paris associated her perseverance with the example of her teachers who had had similarly hard lives. She said: 'My teachers … they are young and they have everything—a car, a house, a job … so they inspire you.' Furthermore, empowering women introduced distal examples of success. For example, Tee's mother pointed her to magazines with inspirational articles and to inspirational television programmes. Tee explained the value of this: 'By reading those articles you get inspired … and I watch certain programmes … and you kind of picture yourself … being this successful person.' Similarly, London said that inspirational stories, 'kind of keeps me motivated—like if they can do it, I can do it'.

The perseverance that empowering women inspired required agency from young people. This included striving for success and investing effort to achieve this. For example, G-White said that following her mother's advice, meant she had to be 'willing to work hard to get there'. Similarly, Mcee was willing to, 'aim for a certain APS [Admission Point Score which determines university acceptances], so I have to push ….' Part of pushing themselves was to constantly remind themselves of what they were aiming to achieve. Tee's drawing was of all the luxuries she would like to acquire in order to make herself and her parents proud. Kheledi looked at pictures that symbolized his future goals. He said, 'Sometimes when I want to give up, I just look at the picture.'

Discussion

We conducted a grounded theory study to better understand township-related risk and resilience from the perspective of South African township-dwelling adolescents. Essentially, male and female adolescents were at risk of disillusionment and concomitant potentially negative choices (such as substance abuse or school attrition). Parental expectations were central to what underpinned the potential for adolescent discouragement. These expectations typically found expression in young people's duty to do household chores and to succeed academically, both of which young

people experienced as onerous. Empowering women (i.e., supportive mothers, woman relatives and/or woman teachers who nurtured adolescent self-esteem, doggedness and well-being) were central to male and female adolescent explanations of what supported positive adjustment to the aforementioned.

In some instances (i.e., when the empowering woman was also the adolescent's mother), an empowering woman constituted one half of the 'parents [who] expect a lot'. The apparent tension between parental expectations being at the heart of how township adolescents explain risk and empowering mothers ameliorating this risk highlights the complexity of the resilience process (Ungar, 2011). The centrality of parents/parent figures to children's resilience is well documented in the international literature (e.g., Masten, 2014; Panter-Brick et al., 2015) and in South African resilience literature (Van Breda, 2017). Yet some studies have reported quite the opposite, namely that detachment from parents (particularly when parents are abusive or complicit in abuse) supports resilience. For example, Werner and Smith (1992) reported that resilient children who grew up in dysfunctional families did not form attachments to their parents. Paradoxically, their avoidance of this commonly reported adaptive system supported their resilience. However, as far as we could ascertain, no previous resilience study puts parents (particularly mothers) at the heart of *both* the risk and resilience processes of the same group of young people. As explained in the following, this core finding extends previous understandings of township-related risk and resilience in three ways, and has specific implications for championing resilience.

First, previous studies of resilience to township-associated risks did not report parental expectations as a prominent risk. Instead, these prior resilience studies seemed more focused on risks relating to the neighbourhood, such as violence (Choe et al., 2012; Govender & Killian, 2001; Isaacs & Savahl, 2014), structural disadvantage (Theron, 2007; Theron & van Rensburg, 2018) or the consequences of communicable disease on township-dwelling families (Cameron et al., 2013). In comparison, our study includes neighbourhood risks but reports them as distal risks which became more proximal when young people tried to avoid the pressure of parental expectations by going out into the community. Other typical township risks, such as poor infrastructure and noisy taverns (Theron, 2007), were also more keenly felt by young people who were trying to realize parents' expectations of academic achievement. In other words, our study suggests that vulnerability to typical township risks (violence, structural disadvantage) was heightened by adolescents' immediate relational context—parent–child interaction—rather than their neighbourhood address.

Second, the resilience-enabling value of mother figures (i.e., women who provide emotional support, care and guidance) is well documented (Brewster, Stephenson, & Beard, 2014). Specific to township contexts, previous studies have emphasized caring women as important to the resilience of rural Sesotho-speaking adolescents (average age: 16; see Theron, 2016) and urban Sesotho-speaking early-adolescents (average age: 13.8; see Theron, 2017). Similarly, Hiller et al. (2017) reported that the support of protective women was fundamental to how isiXhosa-speaking adolescents (aged 13 to 17) adjusted post-trauma. Our study adds evidence that empowering women are important to the resilience of older (17–19 years), urban adolescents too. Thus, contrary to developmental trajectories which anticipate that, over time, adolescent autonomy increases and the need for parental/adult support decreases

(De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009), our findings suggest that for adolescents in township contexts empowering women matter for resilience regardless of adolescent proximity to early adulthood.

Third, adolescents' references to empowering women calls attention to the value of social parenting to the resilience of township-dwelling adolescents. Social parenting fits with social ecological explanations of resilience which emphasize the centrality of contextually relevant supports to adolescent resilience (Ungar, 2011). Social parenting is a time-honoured African tradition which invites any adult to parent (e.g., guide, direct, support, motivate) children and adolescents, regardless of whether the child in question is the adult's offspring or not (Mkhize, 2006). As in previous South African studies of rural adolescent resilience (Theron, 2016), our study suggests that when empowering women (grandmothers, aunts and woman teachers) assume parent-like roles (e.g., guide, direct, inspire), they compensate for the challenges that parental expectations prompt. Woman teachers were particularly prominent social parents. This prominence might relate to adolescents spending much time at school. Still, in offering emotional support and moral guidance and inspiring perseverance woman teachers transcended their salaried, pedagogical role and parented their students.

Although it was beyond the scope of our study to explore gendered (or other) reasons for women's readiness to empower adolescents, it is possible that women accepted and enacted the Strong Black Woman Schema (Brody et al., 2014). This schema, which scripts female hardiness and unfailing support, could scaffold commitment to empowering adolescents. Allied to this, our study did not provide any clues as to why empowering women—and not empowering men—were central to young people's resilience accounts. In South Africa, mothers/mother figures are primarily responsible for child-raising and child-caring. Fathers are often absent from children's daily lives. Traditional gender roles and Apartheid-engineered policies, which fractured families and communities and scripted women as primary carers, could explain the dominance of woman caregiving (Casale, 2011). As in earlier South African resilience studies (e.g., Theron, 2016), the adolescent emphasis on empowering women could relate to father absenteeism, but would not explain the absence of men who take on a father-like role. A follow-up study would, therefore, be useful in order to ascertain the reasons (gendered or otherwise) for the under-representation of father figures/empowering men in the current study.

Implications for Championing Resilience

Adults need to be made aware that in the absence of supportive actions (such as those adolescents attributed to empowering women) parental expectations could overwhelm adolescents (also older adolescents) and trigger disillusionment and concomitant negative trajectories. Parents/caregivers should be enabled to communicate realistic expectations and simultaneously partner with adolescent children in ways that will encourage adolescents to feel that the expectations are doable. This seems to have been what distinguished empowering women. It seems that empowering women continued to expect much from adolescents. However, they were central to resilience processes because their advice and example enabled adolescents to accommodate parental expectations and offset typical township risks. Put differently, they

expected much from adolescents, but they also gave much to adolescents in the form of guidance and inspiration. L. Theron and A. Theron (2013) reported a similar duality in their account of how family communities were agents of resilience.

In supporting adults to be agents of adolescent resilience, two issues are important. First, empowering women were directive. The tough stance that participants reported empowering women taking, such as being strict and monitoring their friends, has been associated with the resilience of children and adolescents growing up in dangerous communities in North America (e.g., Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003; Ispa et al., 2004). Apparently, it would be in the interests of adolescent resilience to support caregivers to be warmly supportive, but also directive in order to limit the choices disillusioned adolescents would be more likely to make and minimize their exposure to typical township risks. Interventions should not be directed at woman caregivers only, given the multiple mental health benefits for adolescents who have access to supportive fathers/father figures (Pruett, Pruett, Cowan, & Cowan, 2017).

Second, adults need to remember that adolescents are co-facilitators of positive adolescent outcomes (Theron, 2017). Although adults were central to adolescent accounts of township risks and resilience, this centrality should not eclipse adolescent contributions to each. For example, the risks inherent to parental expectations were intertwined with how adolescents made meaning of the demands being placed on them. Similarly, adolescents appropriated the supports/advice that empowering women advocated (e.g., adolescents persevered, echoed/enacted encouraging messages and/or detached from negative peers). In short, parent figures who wish to champion adolescent resilience should nurture constructive adolescent agency.

Last, township-dwelling adults need to be supported to be empowering social parents. In this way, should the expectations of the caregiver/s with whom the adolescent resides prompt the adolescent to become discouraged, the adolescent will have a surrogate parent to lean on for support, advice and/or inspiration. Again, men should be purposefully included in social parenting programmes/workshops and taught about the multiple mental health benefits for adolescents who have access to supportive fathers/father figures (Pruett et al., 2017).

Conclusion

We acknowledge that our study was biased towards the insights of township-dwelling adolescents who attend school. Because of the many risks associated with townships, there are high rates of school attrition among adolescents living there (Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2012). To gain a fuller understanding of the resilience of township-dwelling young people, it will be necessary to learn what adolescents, who are outside of the school system, associate with risk and resilience. We also acknowledge that defining resilience in terms of academic progress risked the exclusion of the insights of school-attending youth who were not making academic progress. Still despite these limitations, our study offers fresh insight into what township-dwelling adolescents experience as risks and protective factors and draws attention to the salience of parent figures. Ascertaining how parent figures could be best supported to champion the resilience of township-dwelling adolescents is an important next step.

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Authors' Bio-sketch

Tanya Pretorius is a high school Teacher. She recently completed a resilience-focused master's degree under the auspices of Optentia Research Focus Area, North-West University, South Africa.

Linda Theron is a full-time Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology/Centre for the Study of Resilience, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. Her research (which has been locally and internationally funded) and publications focus on the resilience processes of South African young people challenged by chronic adversity and account for how sociocultural contexts shape resilience (see www.Lindatheron.org).