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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

**The spiritual underpinnings of emerging adult resilience
amidst COVID-19 stressors and community disadvantage**

by

Beverly Seabi

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS

(Educational Psychology)

in the Faculty of Education

at the

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Supervisor: Prof Linda Theron

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Declaration

I, Beverly Seabi (student number: 11252074), declare that the mini dissertation titled, *The Spiritual underpinnings of emerging adults resilience amidst COVID-19 stressors and community disadvantage*, which I hereby submit for the degree to the Magister Educationis in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.”

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B Seabi', on a light-colored background.

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MEd

The spiritual underpinning of emerging adult
resilience to COVID-19 stressors and
community disadvantage

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07 July 2022

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- No significant changes,
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- Adverse experience or undue risk,
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- Data storage requirements.



Dedication

I dedicate this research to my supportive husband, whose unwavering love, encouragement, and belief in me carried me through every step of this journey.



Acknowledgements

To have achieved this milestone in my life, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people:

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Abstract

My study is a sub-study of the project titled: “The multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa project”. This study aimed to investigate the personal, social, structural, and ecological resources associated with emerging adult resilience to COVID-19-related stress, as reported by a sample of Indian and South African emerging adults from disadvantaged communities. The purpose of my study of limited scope was to explore how spirituality as part of African ways of being and doing supported the resilience of emerging adults challenged by structural disadvantage and COVID-19 stress in South Africa. Following the Social-Ecological Theory of Resilience (which frames my study), I define resilience as the capacity to function well despite being exposed to challenges that are significant enough to impair functioning and disturb development. I used a qualitative approach and followed a phenomenological research design to achieve this purpose. The study involved 293 emerging adults (aged 18 to 29) from disadvantaged communities in Gauteng who had experienced COVID-19-related stress. Out of the 293 participants, 98 reported having spiritual resources. The data was generated by the participants using the Draw-and-Write methodology. I used reflexive thematic analysis to analyse the data. I found that spirituality provided comfort, encouraged grit and inspired hope for a better future. My study addresses the lack of attention given to spiritual resources of resilience, particularly among African emerging adults in disadvantaged communities.

Key terms: COVID-19 pandemic, Emerging adults, Resilience, Spiritual resources, Structural disadvantage



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List of Abbreviations

ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
COVID-19	Coronavirus
D&W	Draw-and-Write
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SETR	Social-Ecological Theory of Resilience
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

My study constitutes part of a larger project, namely, “The multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa”. This project aimed to investigate the personal, social, structural, and ecological resources associated with emerging adult resilience to COVID-19-related stress, as reported by a representative sample of Indian and South African emerging adults from disadvantaged communities (Theron et al., 2023). In South Africa, the African community is mostly still confronted with structural disadvantage due to historical injustices (Long, 2021). Most emerging adults from African communities, specifically informal settlements, townships and villages, still live in difficult conditions with limited access to proper education, employment opportunities and primary care services that young people require (Levin et al., 2023). The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic worsened some of these conditions. It was viewed as a stressor that worsened structural disadvantage and threatened the goals and plans that enable future achievements and conquests (Gittings et al., 2021). Emerging adults, i.e., young people aged 18–29 years (Arnett et al., 2014), have not been spared from COVID-19 stress (Salari et al., 2020). Both structural disadvantage and COVID-19 stress have threatened the achievement and developmental tasks of emerging adults (Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). In the face of these threats, resilience comes into play.

Resilience refers to the capacity to successfully navigate challenges that could otherwise lead to unfavourable life consequences (Masten et al., 2021), and is often associated with internal capabilities and skills. However, Luthar (2006), Masten and Cicchetti (2016), and Rutter (2007) reported that personal strength and individual abilities form only a part of what enables resilience. Increasingly, resilience researchers report that resources outside of the individual (e.g., supportive families or enabling communities) are essential to resilience. These resources could vary depending on a given situational and cultural context (Ungar & Theron, 2019). An individual’s situational and cultural environment can enable or inhibit resilience based

on how people interact and cooperate, and the set of protective values that are accessible. For example, Mangaliso et al. (2018) reported that group values rooted in a collective sense of control and harmonious/respectful interconnectedness are central to an African worldview. Young African people's resilience is linked to this African perspective, as indicated by research conducted by Ebersöhn (2015), Theron and Van Breda (2021), and Van Breda and Theron (2018). Understanding the multidimensional nature of resilience is crucial for comprehending its complexities across a lifespan (Marchini et al., 2020; Yoon et al., 2021).

As various studies have investigated the resources that foster resilience (Alburn et al., 2016; Kalisch et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2017), and while there is consensus that resilience draws upon individual, relational, ecological and cultural resources that align with specific sociocultural contexts (Masten et al., 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2019), we know very little about the spiritual resources that serve as protective factors for emerging African adults residing in disadvantaged/challenging contexts (Theron, 2020; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). Hence, my interest in this master's study of limited scope was in how spirituality supports the resilience of a sample of African emerging adults living in disadvantaged communities in Gauteng. By spirituality, I mean the connection and relationship individuals have with the divine or transcendent aspects of life (Andrade Vinuesa, 2017; De Brito Sena et al., 2021). It encompasses beliefs, practices (also religious practices) and experiences that go beyond the material and physical realm, seeking a deeper understanding of the self, the universe and one's place within it (Garssen et al., 2021). Spirituality is part and parcel of traditional African ways of being and doing (Muyingi, 2015), and is deeply ingrained in the daily lives of African communities, shaping their worldview, values, and interactions. African spirituality recognises the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of harmonious relationships with ancestors, nature and the divine (Muyingi, 2015).

I was not only interested in this topic (i.e., how spirituality supports resilience) because it is under-reported in the literature, but my interest also related to my personal experiences of having been a Specialist Wellness Counsellor during 2020–2021. During this period, I had the privilege of working closely with young adults from Gauteng, witnessing first-hand how their spiritual resources played a significant role in fostering their resilience. In my sessions with these individuals, I observed that their



relationship with their spiritual beliefs and practices served as a constant source of strength and comfort. For instance, I recall scenarios where clients who were grappling with the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic found resilience in their faith. Despite the uncertainties and anxieties surrounding them, these clients relied on their unwavering belief in a higher power and drew strength from their spiritual practices.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The gap in the existing literature on resilience is the limited understanding of how spiritual resources contribute to the resilience of African emerging adults, particularly those residing in disadvantaged communities. Despite the wealth of research that has been undertaken to explain resilience, personal and relational resources have been more widely studied and reported as opposed to contextual, cultural and spiritual resources (Ungar & Theron, 2019). Also, scholars have contended that the perceptions of young people, like those in Africa, are not fully presented in explanations of resilience (Liebenburg & Ungar, 2009; Theron et al., 2021; Ungar, 2013; Varma et al., 2021). Most resilience studies exclude African emerging adults (Theron et al., 2021). Instead, the limited number of studies documenting emerging adults' resilience to the stressors that jeopardise mastery and development tasks were primarily conducted in minority world or Western contexts (Burt & Paynick, 2012; Madewell & Ponce-Garcia, 2016; Theron et al., 2020). Similarly, research on human resilience to COVID-19 related stress has mostly focused on personal resources (Kocjan et al., 2021; Zacher & Rudolph, 2021), and minority world populations (e.g., North America) (Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2021). Following more recent understandings that resilience is not just about personal resources (Masten et al., 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2019), a focus on social, structural and ecological resources and most world populations (e.g., Africa) is needed (Holmes et al., 2020).

Taken together, the above supports my interest in exploring what serves as a buffer for African young adults and what supported their resilience to COVID-19 stressors, with particular attention to how spirituality as part of African values plays into that resilience. A better understanding of the spiritual resources that emerging adults possess could play a crucial role in enhancing their resilience and promoting their mental wellbeing. This is particularly important, I believe, to the profession I am training

for (i.e., Educational Psychologist) because studies have indicated a positive correlation between spirituality and mental health outcomes among young people (Masten, 2014; Theron et al., 2021). Furthermore, incorporating an understanding of spirituality into interventions can help address the unique needs of young adults, like African young adults, whose cultures encourage an appreciation of spirituality (Panter-Brick, 2015; Raghavan & Sandanapitchai, 2020). By recognising and valuing their spiritual beliefs and practices, educational psychologists can foster a more holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing that acknowledges the spiritual dimensions of young adults' lives.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my study is to describe how spirituality, as part of African ways of being and doing, support the resilience of African emerging adults challenged by structural disadvantage and COVID-19 stress. My study aims to extend existing resilience knowledge by shifting the focus from personal resources enabling resilience to spiritual resources that have supported young people facing compound challenges (i.e., structural disadvantage and COVID-19 stress). Resilience scholars are unequivocal about the need to better understand how contextual factors such as spirituality shape resilience (Theron et al., 2021; Ungar & Theron, 2019; Ungar et al., 2023).

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

A single primary question guided my study, namely: How does spirituality, as part of African ways of being and doing, support the resilience of emerging adults challenged by structural disadvantage amid COVID-19 stress?

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.5.1 Social-Ecological Theory of Resilience

My study is framed by the Social-Ecological Theory of Resilience (SETR) (Ungar, 2011). The SETR explains resilience as a co-facilitated/shared capacity to adjust well to risk exposure. It is co-facilitated or shared by the individual and their social ecology (e.g., family, or sociocultural community). The foundation of SETR is that for individuals to use their personal strengths maximally, they need to navigate and negotiate access to environmental resources (Ungar, 2012). These resources include services provided to the individual (e.g., government services, including welfare and

mental health support) and cultural heritage (e.g., enabling family and community values; spiritual practices). Ungar (2011) noted that access to these resources encourages young people to function positively under adversity. This indicates that the emerging adult's capacity to adjust well results from a conducive environment that enhances positive outcomes (Wyngaarden et al., 2022).

I chose this framework because it informs the larger study that mine was part of and draws on the notion that the individual and the system influence each other. The theory helped my study determine how African practices/values (specifically spirituality) supported the resilience of emerging adults living in structurally disadvantaged communities in Gauteng. In addition, several South African scholars have explored the topic of resilience in various contexts. For example, Van Breda (2017) and Malindi (2014), have incorporated a SETR approach in their studies.

To have a complete understanding of the SETR (Ungar, 2011), the four principles of SETR should be explained.

The principle of decentrality suggests that the individual is not at the centre of achieving positive outcomes (Ungar, 2018). Thus, resilience scholars such as Kaldas and Foody (2021) noted that we ought to avoid over-estimating individuals' traits/strengths and underestimating the influence of the environment. The family, community, peer network, culture and institutions all count as sources of resilience (Ungar, 2011). Mertens (2022) also noted that young adults that reside in disadvantaged communities but have access to social workers, clinics, churches and libraries are prone to adjust well to adversity. This implies that the individual and their environment co-exist, and resilience becomes a collaborative process in which the environment offers essential resources that emerging adults can use to adapt to hardships.

The complexity principle implies that resilience should not be simplified; it is a complex phenomenon (Ungar, 2011). In this regard, resilience studies have demonstrated that an individual's capacity to overcome adversity varies over time. Perceived resilience in an individual should not be viewed as indefinite (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2011). In addition, resilience can also differ across contexts and genders (Sanders et al., 2017). Due to the process of resilience being dynamic, the resources that predict positive

outcomes can change across contexts and/or over time which implies that resilience resources can be differently protective at different points in life and in different sociocultural contexts (Theron, 2020; Theron & Theron, 2014; Ungar, 2015).

Atypicality, which is the third principle, informs against making assumptions about what supports resilience. According to Ungar (2011), the environment people belong to has a significant influence in equipping young people with resilience-related tools; when environments are lacking in typical resilience-enabling support (e.g., positive peers), young people are likely to rely on support that mainstream society would not typically consider enabling (e.g., gang membership). Furthermore, research conducted by Van Breda (2017) noted that individuals can develop effective coping mechanisms irrespective of their environment's nature. In a study conducted by Malindi (2014), it was indicated that streetism can provide young people with access to resources, which aligns with the concept of atypicality. This concept refers to situations where young individuals resort to resources that are not conventionally linked to positive outcomes. For instance, the study by Abera (2022) on streetism highlighted the use of substances as a coping strategy for dealing with the challenges faced while being homeless.

Finally, cultural relativity which is the fourth principle alludes to the need to understand that resilience is sensitive to culture (Ungar, 2011). Depending on the cultural values and practices that young people are socialised to embrace (e.g., interdependence as in collectivist cultures or self-dependence as in individualistic cultures), some resources will matter more, or less, for their resilience. Ubuntu provides an excellent example of this; African young people who are traditionally socialised to value interdependence, refer to Ubuntu as an important resilience-enabling resource (Ebersöhn, 2019). In comparison, White youth from Canada are more likely to report rugged individualism (Theron et al., 2022).



1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

1.6.1 Resilience

Masten (2021) defined resilience as the capacity to function and thrive despite being exposed to dire circumstances that are significant enough to impair functioning and disturb development. Resilience is often associated with personal strengths; however, people also draw strength and encouragement from resources outside themselves. Among others, these resources include positive relations with others, supportive communities that support people to surmount adversity through cohesion and collaboration and/or enabling values and beliefs (Masten et al., 2021). In my study, resilience is understood as the self-identified capacity of an emerging adult to cope well with the stress of COVID-19 and structural disadvantage. My specific focus lies in how African ways of being and doing (specifically spirituality) informed that capacity.

1.6.2 African Ways of Being and Doing: Spirituality

African ways of being and doing refer to the traditions and unique culture of African people in South Africa. These traditions are sets of ideas, values and standards passed on from one generation to another that enable Africans in these communities to cope under harsh circumstances. In my study, spirituality encompasses an individual's quest for purpose, significance and meaning in their life, their connection to something beyond themselves and the beliefs, values and practices that shape their worldview (Vinueza, 2017; De Brito Sena et al., 2021; Garssen et al., 2021). Religion on the other hand refers to the commitment and adherence to organised religion, including its rituals and gatherings. It includes a collective system of shared beliefs, values, and practices (Jensen, 2019). While religiosity and spirituality can be defined as separate concepts, there is often an overlap between the two (Garssen et al., 2021), which can be attributed to the interconnected nature of these concepts within individuals' belief systems and practices (Campbell, 2012; Victor & Treschuk, 2020). Individuals can experience and express their spirituality through organised religious frameworks, finding spiritual fulfilment within religious traditions (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Similarly, individuals who identify as religious can also have personal spiritual experiences that go beyond the boundaries of organised religion. This overlapping occurs because both religiosity and spirituality involve aspects of belief, meaning making and the search for transcendence, although through different approaches



(Murphy, 2017). Therefore, my study focused on spirituality as a construct that includes faith-based activities. Faith-based activities are highly important in African cultures, profoundly influencing individuals and communities and closely intertwined with core African values such as harmony and interconnectedness (Moodley et al., 2020).

1.6.3 Emerging Adults

Emerging adulthood is a term used to describe development spanning from 18 to 29 years (Arnett, 2000). Typical developmental tasks for this period include achieving autonomy, identity, establishing a career and building relationships. In my study, emerging adults were the 18–29-year-olds who participated in the greater study that mine is associated with: “The multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa”.

1.6.4 Structural Disadvantage

In my study, structural disadvantage refers specifically to the communities in Gauteng where the participants resided. It encompasses various factors such as a lack of resources, inadequate facilities, unemployment, low income, limited inspirational figures and a youth culture that fosters values contrary to social norms (Christodoulou et al., 2019). In addition, structural disadvantage in these communities is associated with limited opportunities and weak social networks. It is within this context of specific challenges in Gauteng communities that my study examined the role of spiritual resources in supporting the resilience of emerging adults.

1.6.5 COVID-19 Stressors

COVID-19 stressors (e.g., socioeconomic pressures, social isolation, disrupted aspirations, loss of loved ones, etc.) are human wellbeing challenges (Pietrabissa & Simpson, 2020). Exposure to these stressors can jeopardise emerging adults’ chances of completing developmental tasks associated with emerging adulthood (OECD, 2020). In my study, challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic were any pandemic-related stressors that limited 18–29-year-olds’ chances of achieving the developmental milestones that characterise emerging adulthood (i.e., completing an education, securing employment, achieving financial independence, finding a long-term partner and being future-oriented).



1.7 WORKING ASSUMPTION

Firstly, I assumed that young people living in disadvantaged communities are resilient. This assumption was based on my professional experience as a counsellor, having worked with young people without adequate resources in Gauteng. This assumption is also supported by the South African resilience literature (Ebersöhn et al., 2015; Gama & Theron, 2023; Mosavel et al., 2015; Van Breda & Theron, 2018). I also assumed that emerging adults residing in structurally disadvantaged communities would express their insights regarding what enhances their resilience. This assumption was based on an episode documented on “Special assignment” (January 2016-SABC 3) where young people from marginalised communities in South Africa shared their experiences and their motivation for one day making it in life. This assumption is also supported by the literature that studied young people living in disadvantaged communities (Gama & Theron, 2023; Van Breda, 2018). Secondly, I assumed that spiritual resources serve as a buffer for the participants. The literature has indicated that spiritual resources have the potential to mitigate stress among South African youth (Brittian et al., 2013; Morwe et al., 2015). Thirdly, I assumed that COVID-19 stressors had affected young peoples’ wellbeing and challenged their realisation of developmental tasks (e.g., attainment of employment, completing studies, financial stability). This assumption was based on my observation of young people close to me. I realised that COVID-19 stressors disrupted aspirations and delayed goals, affecting their wellbeing. The literature on COVID-19 favours this assumption (OECD, 2020; Pirkis et al., 2021; Rajkumar, 2020). In addition, COVID-19 exacerbated factors such as financial difficulties, social isolation and chronic mental health conditions (OECD, 2020).

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three provides a detailed methodology, while the following is a summary of the methodology used in my study.

1.8.1 Epistemological Paradigm

The chosen epistemological paradigm for my study was interpretivism. Interpretivism is based on the notion that reality is constructed through social interactions and emphasises how people make meaning of their world (Burr, 2018). In Chapter Three

(Section 3.4.1), I will provide a detailed explanation for choosing interpretivism as the epistemological paradigm and discuss its advantages and disadvantages.

1.8.2 Methodological Paradigm and Research Design

The methodological paradigm chosen for my study was a qualitative one and the design chosen was a phenomenological design. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a qualitative paradigm is interested in studying a phenomenon in depth by understanding how people make meaning of the phenomenon. Selecting a qualitative paradigm and phenomenological design granted me the opportunity to understand how emerging adults viewed the phenomenon I was interested in and make meaning of it. A detailed explanation for choosing the above-mentioned design and paradigm and respective advantages and disadvantages will be discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.4.2 and Section 3.5.1).

1.8.3 Selection of Participants

In my study, non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, was used to select participants. Purposive sampling involves choosing individuals who align closely with the research objectives (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). The criteria and recruitment process for selecting participants are elaborated in Chapter Three (Section 3.5.2) where I provide a comprehensive explanation for choosing purposive sampling, along with its advantages and disadvantages.

1.8.4 Data Generation

In my study, the Draw-and-Write (D&W) method was employed to investigate the factors that foster resilience among disadvantaged emerging adults experiencing stress due to COVID-19. The D&W approach has been effectively used in South Africa with children and young individuals, as evidenced by previous research conducted by Machenjedge et al. (2019) and Theron (2016). The detailed explanation for choosing the D&W method, along with its advantages and disadvantages, is thoroughly explained in Chapter Three (Section 3.5.3).



1.8.5 Data Analysis

I followed a reflexive thematic analysis approach to make meaning of the data. Reflexive thematic analysis places emphasis on the researcher's reflexivity and engagement throughout the analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). A detailed explanation for choosing this methodology and the advantages and disadvantages is discussed in Chapter Three (Section 3.5.4).

1.9 QUALITY CRITERIA

To ensure that I established trustworthiness in my study I undertook steps to facilitate credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity consistent with the seminal work of Lincoln and Guba (1985). A detailed discussion of the above-mentioned is reported in Chapter Three (Section 3.6).

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As stated, my research study formed part of a larger funded study (The multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa). The greater study received ethical clearance from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee and Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria (UP17/05/01). I attained aligned approval (UP17/05/01 THERON 22-02) for my contribution to the greater study.

1.11 FORMAT OF THE STUDY

1.11.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

In Chapter 1, I presented the background of my study. The chapter focused on the problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, concept clarification and working assumptions which drove my study.

1.11.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I conduct a review focusing on the resilience of emerging adults in the context of COVID-19 and structural disadvantage. I explore the risks linked with living in disadvantaged communities and the additional challenges posed by the pandemic. Throughout the review, I identify several personal, relational, ecological and cultural resources that contribute to the resilience of emerging adults. These include the

significance of supportive relationships, individual strengths, access to community resources and the role of spirituality (which was my focus).

1.11.3 Chapter 3: Research Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodology that was used to realise the objectives of my study. This chapter explains the epistemological and methodological paradigm, research design, selection of participants, data generation, data analysis, quality criteria and ethical considerations.

1.11.4 Chapter 4: Results and Interpretations of Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of my study based on my analysis of the data. I include participants' drawings to illustrate the findings. I also discuss the findings and show how they fit with the literature I reviewed in Chapter 2.

1.11.5 Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this chapter I examine and provide a summary of the major findings. I also reflect on the limitations of my study and make recommendations for future study. This chapter concludes the study.

1.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the rationale for and purpose of my study and summarised how I went about conducting it. My research, which is focused on spirituality as part of African ways of being and doing that supported the resilience of emerging adults living in structurally disadvantaged communities amid COVID-19 stressors, aimed to address the current inattention in the literature to the resilience of African emerging adults. The next chapter presents a review of this scant resilience literature, along with a review of the risks that were relevant to my study (i.e., COVID-19 stressors, emerging adulthood, and structural disadvantage).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of emerging adults' resilience to COVID-19 and structural disadvantage and is divided into two subsections. The first section will look at the factors that make emerging adults vulnerable. These factors include the risks associated with emerging adult wellbeing, the potential harm of living in structurally disadvantaged communities and the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. As per definitions of resilience (Masten, 2021; Ungar, 2019), it is crucial to understand the risks that emerging adults undergo and to examine the multifaceted resources that facilitate their resilience to those risks. Therefore, in the second section, I provide an overview of resilience by examining personal resources, relational resources, cultural resources and ecological resources to resilience; however, I foreground emerging adults' resilience to COVID-19 and community disadvantage as this is the focus of my study. Furthermore, given that the notion of resilience is context-dependent and cultural-specific (Masten, 2014; Yoon et al., 2021), I draw mostly on African literature in this review.

2.2 RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH EMERGING ADULT WELLBEING

A critical component/aspect of resilience is exposure to risks that result in vulnerability (Masten et al., 2021). There are many risks that can affect young people which include structural inequality (Kane, 2011; Mchunu & Nkambule, 2019; Theron & Van Rensburg, 2018), illegal acts and offenses (Choe et al., 2012; Christodoulou et al., 2019; Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014), persistent diseases (Babić, et al., 2020; Mindu et al., 2023), community/social deprivation and financial insecurity (Mtintsilana et al., 2023; Qiu et al., 2021), community violence (Mindu et al., 2023; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2020), catastrophic life events (Ohlberger & Langangen, 2015), impoverishment (Mampane & Bower, 2011; Sekhampu, 2013) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevalence (Brawner et al., 2022; Teasdale et al., 2022).

Emerging adulthood (i.e., young people aged 18–29) is a crucial period for exploring potential but also during this time developing adults are likely to meet threats (like those listed in the previous paragraph) for wellbeing (Arnett, 2014; Killingley et al., 2022). This emerging adulthood stage is marked by self-discovery, increased unpredictability, independence, a feeling of being in a transition phase between adolescence and adulthood and additional responsibilities (Arnett et al., 2014; Hepper et al., 2021; Scroggs et al., 2021). It is also a period when emerging adults make important decisions, such as whether to attend college before beginning their careers or to enter the industry straight away and building peer and romantic relationships. While this stage has arguably been identified with opportunities for positive change (Arnett & Brody, 2008), the demands that typify this stage can lead to a deterioration of personal wellbeing and mental health (Schulenberg et al., 2005). These demands can also be linked with significant stress and psychological health challenges (Patrick et al., 2020; Schulenberg et al., 2005; Theron et al., 2021). Consistent with this, a study by Auerbach et al. (2018) found that emerging adulthood is a time of elevated dangers/risks for mental health instabilities, addiction use disorders and personality disorders (Mahmoud et al., 2012; Painter et al., 2018). This is because some young adults have not acquired adaptive and appropriate measures for dealing with developmental life stressors (Mahmoud et al., 2012).

It is often challenging to reach developmental tasks and milestones as an emerging adult, especially when young people are exposed to social disadvantage and other risks, thus resulting in adverse impacts on their overall wellbeing and life satisfaction (Newman et al., 2015; Preetz et al., 2022). Similarly, depressive symptoms, often relating to uncertainty about prospects, have been discovered to trigger and typically coincide with excessive alcohol consumption (Preetz et al., 2022). Many young people turn to alcohol and other forms of substances to manage challenging life circumstances (Scroggs et al., 2021). It is prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa for young people to encounter exposure to adversity which often complicates the transition to adulthood (Kabiru et al., 2013) and aggravates challenges to mental wellbeing (Burt & Paysnick, 2012; Grote & Darity, 2018; Newcomb-Anjo et al., 2017). Many African emerging adults encounter continuous pressure on their mental health (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2019). In addition, mental health issues linked to intergenerational poverty, unemployment and violence are prevalent in low-income communities (Gass et al.,

2011; Ridley et al., 2020; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020). According to UNICEF's South Africa U-Report poll, 65% of young people have pronounced struggles with mental health (UNICEF, 2020), and this is often the result of feeling alienated from South African localities with thriving economies (Hashemi et al., 2022; Waters et al., 2022), causing depression and a sense of powerlessness (UNICEF, 2020).

2.2.1 Risks Associated with Living in Structurally Disadvantaged Communities

Physical and/or structural obstacles characterise structural disadvantages that trigger adverse life outcomes of which those exposed to them have little to no control (Guoxiu et al., 2015; Chandler et al., 2015). The hallmarks of structurally disadvantaged communities include scarce resources, substance abuse, disproportionate number of households headed by women, joblessness, intense poverty and social inequality (Chandler et al., 2015; Hill & Maimon, 2013; Mchunu & Nkambule, 2019; Naidoo & Cartwright, 2022). Those who are structurally disadvantaged in South Africa have few resources and privileges compared to those who are systemically advantaged, resulting in unequal opportunities and outcomes. In addition, structural disadvantages are cumulative and are often intergenerational. For example, a young African woman in South Africa who is raised in impoverished conditions or in a disadvantaged family, perhaps by a single parent in a township or rural location, is far more likely to encounter difficulties like violence, inadequate education, poor infrastructure, marginalisation and living in crowded conditions (Du Toit et al., 2018; Sekhampu, 2013); gendered/class stereotyping could further threaten her future prospects and those of children she might have (Du Toit et al., 2018).

These considerable, co-occurring risks often decrease the chances of emerging adults overcoming the obstacles that are piled against them, especially if social-ecological actors are unsuccessful in offering resolutions (Taylor & Lazenbatt, 2014). Moreover, structurally disadvantaged communities are poor neighbourhoods with high risks of crime, loss and violence (Christodoulou et al., 2019; Johnson & Kane, 2018; Mathews & Benvenuti, 2014; Moloi 2018; Ssewanyana et al., 2018). Thus, emerging adults residing in disadvantaged communities are also often faced with no jobs/low income, few inspirational figures and township norms that encourage unsociable behaviour (Akande, 2000; Felner & De Vries, 2013; Ngai et al., 2013). For instance, in a research

study involving African American emerging adults living in under-resourced communities, researchers reported significant levels of neighbourhood-related stressors (such as house breaking, gang activities and witnessing the use drugs). These stressors were related to young people being frightened by the violence taking place in their neighbourhoods (Grote et al., 2007). Exposure to threatening situations/feeling unsafe in one's neighbourhood has been consistently linked to higher risk of behaviours that are violent and aggressive (Copeland-Linder et al., 2011).

Similarly, the comprehensive review that was conducted by Motley et al. (2017) discovered that 83% of African emerging adults had encountered violence within their communities. The focus was on young people between the age of 18 and 29 and the review included data from numerous surveys and studies which were done in various African countries. The findings suggested that community violence may expose emerging adults to a high risk for subsequent violent behaviour, which becomes a cycle of aggression in these contexts (Motely et al., 2017). Correspondingly, a significant number of studies have indicated the harmful consequences of economic and social deprivation on community cohesion (Friedson & Sharkey, 2015; Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Sampson & Morenoff, 2004; Saporu et al., 2011). For instance, young men residing in disadvantaged contexts may adopt hypermasculine presentations of themselves that stress violence (Kearns et al., 2015; Smith & Patton, 2016; Spencer et al., 2004). This is often due to the nature of disadvantaged neighbourhoods creating situations that favour violence, perhaps because they cannot obtain legal assistance and mistrust conventional resources, particularly the police (Kearns et al., 2015; Peterson & Krivo, 2010; Smith et al., 2016).

Structural disadvantage is also linked with limited personal growth and weak social networks. Caregivers and emotionally supportive friends are often absent in structurally disadvantaged communities, along with positive role models and access to youth clubs and organisations that offer career and informational support (Kim et al., 2022). Consequently, young people are susceptible to not completing Grade 12 or obtaining a tertiary qualification that provides opportunities for better career prospects which results in their dreams not being materialised (Tebele et al., 2015). Without these and other resilience-supporting resources, young people living in structurally

disadvantaged communities are more susceptible to mental health issues (Theron & Theron, 2013; Theron et al., 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Zulu, 2019).

Moreover, South African emerging adults are at a considerable risk of contracting HIV (Arije et al., 2021). The rate of HIV infection among women across Southern Africa increases during the shift from adolescence to adulthood (UNAIDS, 2021). It also increases in disadvantaged communities. Harrison et al. (2015) conducted a study in Cape Town, Durban and uMkhanyakude (South Africa). They reported that HIV prevalence among young adults living in disadvantaged communities is associated with structural factors that lead to the involvement and engagement of young women in sexual relationships with older men for financial gain. The entrenched social and economic inequalities found in these societies often force young women to engage in high levels of HIV risk as a means of survival (Harrison et al., 2015).

2.2.2 Risks Associated with the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was originally identified in Wuhan China in December 2019 and immediately became a global health threat (and associated economic crisis) (Scroggs et al., 2021; Wiersinga et al., 2020). The virus rapidly spread to other nations with transmission being mostly via respiratory secretions during direct contact with an infected person (Wiersinga et al., 2020). This led to governments imposing lockdowns and other contact reduction measures. These measures typically made people's lives more difficult. Difficulties included the challenges of lockdown, erratic and/or changed daily schedules, loss of employment/decreased remuneration and related financial crises (James & Thériault, 2020; Khambule, 2021). Social disparities – connected to disabilities, employment status, language, income, race and social class – became even more obvious (Byrne, 2021; James & Thériault, 2020). Among other factors, the loss of life and the drastic changes in daily routines had an adverse effect on mental health (Goyal & Gupta, 2020; Liu et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2020), especially on the mental wellbeing of emerging adults (Kollmann et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2020; Scroggs et al., 2021).

In emerging adults in particular, the early weeks of the pandemic triggered rapid transformations in daily routines with many of those studying facing school/college/university closures and being forced to attend classes remotely (Liu et

al., 2020). Those who were working had to adjust and start working remotely and, in some cases, they lost their jobs (Liu et al., 2020). Such disruptions put this group, which is already vulnerable given developmental pressures (Arnett, 2000), at high risk of mental health challenges (Conrad et al., 2020; Gonzalez et al., 2023; Tull et al., 2020). Other studies found that COVID-19 lockdowns restricted emerging adults from meeting their developmental needs with heightened risks of life dissatisfaction, substance abuse and partner violence (Kerekes et al., 2021; Owens et al., 2022).

A key challenge for emerging adults was lockdown-related social isolation. It is common for peer groups to play an important role in motivating emerging adults (Allan, 2008; Graupensperger et al., 2021), but social distancing mandates that were implemented to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 meant many emerging adults were isolated from their peers. Social isolation has been found to increase levels of stress (Best et al., 2021; Scroggs et al., 2021). During the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, researchers conducted several studies that showed how crucial social support is to improving wellbeing amid pandemics, especially when isolation is recommended (Mak et al., 2009). Research that studied emerging adults and COVID-19 demonstrated that being isolated from people, having a negative mindset and constantly worrying can lead to an increased level of emotional tiredness, mental illness and physical symptoms such as body pains and headaches (Cho et al., 2019; Shelvin et al., 2020).

Similarly, a study involving young adults in Brazil showed that social isolation during COVID-19 resulted in high levels of loneliness (Marchini et al., 2020). Loneliness has been linked to behavioural disorders, emotional disorders and psychosocial risk factors, such as depression, low mood and social discomfort (Danneel et al., 2019; Luchetti et al., 2020). This was found among emerging adults in Africa too. For instance, Cluver et al. (2020) reported that 10 days of isolation was associated with symptoms of posttraumatic stress for adolescents and young adults living in the Western Cape province of South Africa. According to research undertaken in Nigeria, the mental wellbeing of young adults suffered a significant decline during the COVID-19 pandemic when they were required to stay at home. Participants expressed feelings of boredom, frustration and anxiety due to their inability to engage in usual activities and socialise with peers (Ezeudu, 2020). Similarly, in Ghana, a study

revealed that emerging adults who experienced social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic faced a noticeable reduction in social support networks. Many young adults turned to various forms of digital communication, such as social media, to stay in touch with their loved ones. However, relying solely on these platforms did not always adequately address the feelings of isolation and loneliness experienced by these individuals (Asante et al., 2021).

The severity of mental health issues was influenced by factors such as gender, with young women being more affected than young men (Barzilay et al., 2020; Scott et al., 2021). Worse effects were also seen for those with lower educational levels (Kocjan et al., 2021); less financial wellbeing (Scott et al., 2021); personality traits such as emotional instability, perfectionism and impulsivity (Paredes et al., 2021) and less social support and connectedness with pre-existing peers (Graupensperger et al., 2021).

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic left many emerging adults grappling with anxiety, sadness, trauma and loss at a time in their lives when they were already insecure (Demetriou et al., 2021; Scroggs et al., 2020; Visser & Law-van Wyk, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and the social isolation strategies used to curb its spread significantly impacted the mental health of university students worldwide. In the United Kingdom, a survey found that 56% of young people aged 16–24 reported increased levels of anxiety due to the pandemic and 42% reported increased levels of depression (Shevlin et al., 2020). Similarly, in Cyprus and South Africa, university students revealed that they experienced increased stress and anxiety during the COVID-19 lockdown, which was likely exacerbated by the social isolation and disruption to their daily routines (Demetriou et al., 2021; Oluka et al., 2021; Visser & Law-van Wyk, 2021).

Fear of loss of income and failing to meet financial obligations was another major source of stress associated with the pandemic. According to a South African study, people who lost their employment during the lockdown were significantly more sensitive to depression than those who kept their jobs (Abela, 2021). Similarly, in Kenya, the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to the education and employment of emerging adults. A considerable number of these young adults had to

drop out of school or were unable to secure employment due to the pandemic, which took a toll on their mental health and general wellness (Mutiso et al., 2021).

Further, about 51% of those aged 18 to 29 had a household member who had suffered employment-related disruptions due to COVID-19 (OECD, 2021). This included job loss, a decrease in working hours, and/or a wage drop. During COVID-19, financial concerns, and the possibility of being infected or one's loved one getting infected were all associated with psychological distress (Moore & Lucas, 2020). This concern was especially prevalent among individuals whose closest relatives encountered COVID-19 due to their professions or because they were deemed more susceptible to the virus (due to factors such as chronic disease, long-time smoking, and advanced age) (Barzilay et al., 2021)

According to Kirsten et al. (2020), the South African government's ban during the initial weeks of the lockdown on informal food vending which included fruit and vegetable vendors, posed a severe threat to food security and dietary needs. The restrictions on these vendors prevented many individuals from accessing affordable and nutritious food options, particularly those living in low-income areas. The restriction on informal food vending significantly impacted the availability and accessibility of fresh foods, ultimately worsening the already problematic food insecurity situation in the country. Emerging adults that sold on the roads and owned spaza shops were at risk of loss of livelihood. The informal food sector is vital for the food security of emerging adults residing in disadvantaged communities, and during COVID-19 they were obligated to comply with the lockdown rules (Rukasha et al., 2021; Shupler et al., 2021; Zhanda et al., 2022).

Another of the stressors during COVID-19 was the improper, vague and often conflicting communications through social media and news channels, particularly during the early phases of COVID-19 (Brooks et al. 2020; Usher et al., 2020). Although journalism was deemed an "essential service" in numerous countries (Macleod, 2021; Olsen et al., 2020), many journalists encountered various difficulties in tackling the rapid spread of false information, the transmission of fake news by public figures and leaders and the ability to distinguish between reality and falsehoods. The public authorities obstructed access to information which meant the spread of misinformation thrived. The lockdown also increased social media usage up to 87% (Anwar et al.,

2020), this was particularly so among young adults. The risk of the virus spreading among young people increased as claims were made that they could not be infected by the virus (Anwar et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Conclusion to Risk Section

The collective challenges of being an emerging adult, living in a structurally disadvantaged community and facing the stresses associated with COVID-19 represent a set of intersecting risks. Such compound risk was likely to place young people under immense pressure and increase their vulnerability to adverse outcomes (like poor mental health). Further, the structural disadvantage within their communities may have limited access to resources that were necessary for resilience and worsen the stress associated with the pandemic. These factors could have disrupted the normal course of emerging adulthood by threatening the realisation of developmental tasks and milestones. As a result, it is critical to understand what might support emerging adult resilience to these multidimensional risks.

2.3 PROTECTIVE FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EMERGING ADULT RESILIENCE

The concept of resilience is often associated with personal strengths; however, people also draw strength and encouragement from resources outside themselves (Ungar & Theron, 2019; Ungar, 2011; 2021). Among others, these resources include positive relations with others, supportive communities that support people to surmount adversity through cohesion and collaboration and/or enabling values and beliefs (Masten et al., 2021; Ungar et al., 2021). This implies that resilience is influenced by a person's personal qualities, the environment they live in and the support systems they have access to. In other words, resilience is complex and draws on multiple factors (DaViera et al., 2020; Feng et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021; Rutter, 2007; Ungar, 2011). Masten (2009, 2014) argued that these multiple factors are “ordinary magic” because they are everyday resources like caring families, supportive communities, good schools and spaces to play.

As per the above, studies with emerging adults show that their resilience is also the outcome of a combination of ‘ordinary’ personal traits and ‘ordinary’ external factors from the social and ecological environments (Burt & Paysnick, 2012; Masten, 2021).

While most of these studies have not involved African emerging adults, there is an increasing interest in investigating the resilience of emerging adults in Africa (Theron et al., 2021; Van Breda & Dickens, 2017; Van Breda, 2018). This is particularly important given the manifold challenges faced by young people in the African context (Abbink, 2004; Altman et al., 2014; Ansell et al., 2012). In what follows next, I review the personal, relational, cultural and ecological resources that are related with the resilience of emerging adults with an emphasis on the African context.

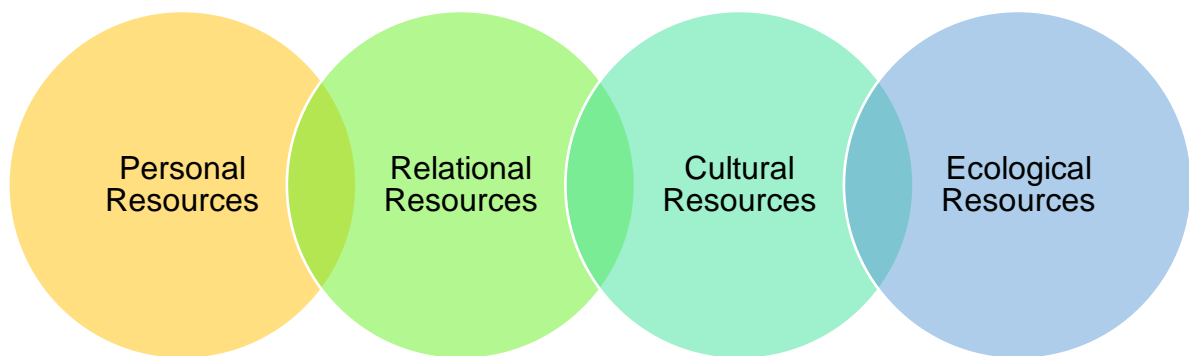


Figure 2.1: The four enablers of resilience

2.3.1 Personal Resources Associated with Emerging Adult Resilience

Personal resources refer to an individual's biological and intrapersonal (i.e., psychological) attributes (Ungar, 2019; Ungar & Theron, 2020). These are typically differentiated by developmental stage and context (Eichengreen et al., 2022). In the context of stress and adversities, these personal resources facilitate positive adaptations and future orientation (Infurna & Luthar, 2018; Masten & Cicchetti, 2016).

Hopeful future orientation is a prominent personal resource among emerging adults, including African emerging adults (Theron et al., 2021; Van Breda, 2018; Zulu, 2019). Emerging adults who are hopeful for the future may set specific and achievable goals for themselves that help them move towards their desired future. For instance, in a study conducted with 30 emerging adults from Matsapha in Eswatini, most emerging adults expressed a strong personal drive to overcome the difficulties of living in Matsapha and aspired to achieve education-/career-related goals (Gama & Theron, 2023). This involved accepting the challenges and finding ways to cope with them. Even when faced with circumstances beyond their control, they adopted a mindset of

“it’s fine” and persevered through the challenges. In addition, their personal drive was future-oriented, as they envisioned a better life beyond Matsapha.

As individuals enter emerging adulthood, they typically experience a stronger sense of control and autonomy, leading to greater independence and reduced reliance on parents and caregivers (Hinton & Meyer, 2014). In the context of academic success, a study conducted by Van Breda (2018) with university students in South Africa suggested that psychosocially vulnerable students can thrive academically when they possess a strong commitment to their studies. This commitment is often demonstrated through high levels of motivation, self-discipline/-control and goal orientation (Alpaslan, 2010; Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Van Breda, 2018). Many of these students view education as a mean to break free from poverty, not just for themselves but also for their families (Firfirey & Carolissen, 2010). This view typically motivates them further.

In addition, students who hold a hopeful future orientation and have a clear vision of their desired future pathway are more likely to achieve academic and other success (Kotzé & Niemann, 2013). For instance, researchers studying care leavers (typically young people who are 18+) in Africa (e.g., Driscoll, 2013; Gilligan, 2008; Hass & Graydon, 2009), have indicated that these individuals exhibit hopefulness and confidence about the future. They also possess a sense of competence and believe in their ability to overcome unforeseen challenges. These personal resources play a crucial role in fostering their resilience.

Resilient young adults also demonstrated significant tenacity in the face of adversity and a sense of having a positive evaluation of themselves (Kotzé & Kleynhans, 2013; Steyn & Kamper, 2011). For instance, Harper et al. (2015) carried out a study with 511 young adult males in Kenya who identified as LGBTQ, and their findings revealed that resilience played a significant role in navigating the difficulties of being gay or bisexual in a hostile environment. This resilience was found to be linked to self-fulfilment and higher self-worth.

Many emerging adults have demonstrated resilience through a mindset that focuses on overcoming challenges, including those relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have shown a willingness to adapt to changes and to find solutions to problems that

COVID-19 brought (Chan et al., 2023). For emerging adults, developing emotional intelligence can be an important personal resource that can help them not only regulate their own emotions and cope with stress but also build positive social experiences that contribute to their self-esteem (Aydogdu et al., 2017). As they navigate the challenges of emerging adulthood, having a strong sense of self-esteem can help them feel more confident and resilient in their ability to achieve their goals and overcome obstacles. According to a study conducted by Bada et al. (2020) in Nigeria, the psychological resources of self-efficacy and emotional intelligence had a noteworthy impact on resilience among a sample of 50 emerging adults from various regions of Nigeria.

Theron et al. (2021) conducted a study with emerging adults in sub-Saharan Africa who were challenged by structural disadvantage and COVID-19-related stressors. They discovered that self-efficacy and self-determination were positively associated with resilience, suggesting that personal agency is an important factor for emerging adult resilience across diverse cultural contexts. These findings collectively suggest that autonomy is a key consideration of the developmental process of emerging adulthood in African contexts. Similarly, in research conducted by Liu et al. (2020) with emerging adults from the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that young adults who possessed higher levels of resilience demonstrated the ability to effectively cope with stress and tolerate emotional discomfort. These individuals were better equipped to navigate the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Moreover, many emerging adults encounter multiple challenges in-order to find their feet and establish their own purpose in life and due to this they are bound to feel frustrated, less patient and overwhelmed with anxiety or worry regarding their future (Arnett et al., 2014). Self-compassion has been recognised as an adaptive coping strategy that enables emerging adults not to be too hard on themselves during this transition (Amanda et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2022). Self-compassion has been a shield for many young people who constantly self-blame themselves for their unsuccessful plans and are prone to giving up when faced with stressful situations which are predicted to exacerbate levels of depression and stress (Mahmoud et al., 2012). Emerging adults that treat themselves with kindness, understanding and acceptance can respond positively when their career prospects are delayed which assists them to

realise that adversities and imperfections are part of human life and resilience helps them to navigate these problems (Putri et al., 2022; Robinson et al., 2013). Moreover, self-compassion also enables young people to view experiences from a balanced perspective rather than viewing their experiences negatively or emotively (Amanda et al., 2021).

Emerging adults' strength is also seen through their ability to plan and structure their lives, but this ability to plan often requires good support structure and healthy interactions with those close to them (Harper et al., 2019; Miller & Bowen, 2020). The next section will look at the relational resources associated with emerging adults' resilience.

2.3.2 Relational Resources Associated with Emerging Adults' Resilience

Relational resources are referred to as relationships or connections that provide affective/emotional, informational, and material/instrumental help to facilitate and promote adaptations among those encountering difficult life events (Jones, 2014; Li et al., 2017; Sharer et al., 2016). Luthar (2008) noted that relational resources are crucial to human resilience. The resources that enhance resilience in childhood or later stages may vary. However, supportive relationships are crucial for resilience over the lifespan (O'Connor et al., 2011). Relational resources are important to emerging adult resilience too.

Resilient emerging adults frequently report having social support and a sense of communal belonging and connectedness (Zimmerman et al., 2015). These connections include the close relationships that emerging adults have with their families (e.g., supportive, and nourishing parenting) and friends (e.g., healthy bonds). In a qualitative study conducted by Murphy et al. (2010) in the United States, the resilience and adaptation of 10 emerging adults were examined. The findings revealed that the support provided by close friends and family played a crucial role in the development and success of these young individuals. This study emphasises the significance of support networks from these two groups in facilitating the accomplishment of developmental tasks and progress towards their goals.

Affective support. Relationships provide affective support to emerging adults by offering emotional closeness, trust and a sense of belonging, which in turn fosters

resilience (Goodwin-Smith et al., 2017; Osher et al., 2020). Support from significant others helps emerging adults feel understood, valued and cared for, which contributes to their emotional wellbeing and psychological development. As noted by Lee and Goldstein (2016), relationships with friends, peers and mentors play a crucial role in providing emotional support for emerging adults. In a study conducted by Gama and Theron (2023) looking at emerging adults residing in a stressed industrialised environment from Matsapha in Eswatini, the participants reported that the support of friends and some family members played a significant role in easing the challenges faced. They were always ready to lend an ear, offering comfort, understanding and guidance when necessary. This emotional support was invaluable in helping them cope with daily stressors. Similarly, in a study conducted by Zulu (2019) in South Africa, the experiences of five young Black women who were university students and did not have fathers were explored. The findings highlighted that positive coping strategies were associated with having strong and resilient mothers. The participants in the study expressed that their mothers served as their primary source of support and had instilled a sense of strength and fortitude within them from a young age.

Instrumental support and Informational support. In various situations, individuals often depend on social connections for practical help, such as financial assistance and transportation for healthcare needs (Amoah, 2019; Amoah et al., 2018). This is true for emerging adults too. For instance, in a study conducted by Lambert et al. (2018) with HIV positive emerging adults from South Africa, participants shared instances where a loved one played a critical role in motivating them to get tested for HIV or start antiretroviral therapy (ART). They acknowledged that without such encouragement, they might not have taken these steps. The support they received ranged from practical assistance like providing a ride to the clinic and money to get multivitamins to informational guidance that influenced their decision to seek HIV testing or start ART.

In addition, studies such as those by Koetsenruijter et al. (2016), Saeed et al. (2012), and Willemse et al. (2018) have shown that informational and instrumental support from family and friends plays a significant role in successfully managing Type 1 diabetes. For example, a study conducted with emerging adults on diabetes management in South Africa found that informational and instrumental support can

positively impact diabetes management by providing resources for diabetes-related information and practical help with management tasks (Visagie et al., 2018). The emerging adults in this study identified different individuals and groups as sources of informational and instrumental support, such as family, friends and healthcare providers. These groups of people played crucial roles in helping them manage their diabetes by providing advice regarding lifestyle modification and more knowledge about the diagnosis (Koetsenruijter et al., 2016). Family members were particularly attentive to the participants' needs, which fostered a sense of connectedness and helped them manage their diabetes better (Visagie et al., 2018). Friends also provided practical assistance such as checking the participants' blood sugar levels which made them feel supported (Visagie et al., 2018).

Likewise, studies examining the resilience of young people to stressors related to COVID-19 found that family members were a significant source of instrumental support (Chinawa et al., 2022; Juvonen et al 2022; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021; Theron et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2022). This could be because economic difficulties have resulted in many emerging adults living with their parents, particularly during the pandemic. In a survey conducted in the United States during the early stages of the pandemic, researchers found that emerging adults greatly benefitted from instrumental support provided by family members (Liu et al., 2020). This support included practical assistance and resources that were particularly helpful during these challenging times. Similarly, in a study conducted by Charvat et al. (2021), online platforms were used to explore the experiences of pregnant young adults from Black African, African American and Asian backgrounds throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The research findings revealed that these participants found solace in the knowledge shared by their loved ones, which helped them make sense of their pregnancies amid uncertain circumstances. By receiving informational support, these women were able to navigate both pregnancy and the pandemic, enabling them to make informed decisions regarding their health. Moreover, the study also highlighted instances where the social networks of the participants went beyond COVID-19 restrictions to provide instrumental support. Recognising the importance of minimising exposure to crowded places, friends and family members stepped in and helped by running errands to grocery stores and retail establishments on their behalf (Charvat et al., 2021).

2.3.3 Ecological Resources Associated with Emerging Adults' Resilience

Ecological resources are the built and natural environments that promote and enable resilience (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2011; Ungar & Theron, 2020). These are external factors such as safe and conducive neighbourhoods, proper health care services and recreational areas that support the resilience of young people challenged by risk factors (Bhana & Bachoo, 2011; Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Theron, 2017). Research has shown that interacting with nature has several positive effects on individuals' psychological wellbeing, including increasing positive mood, reducing negative emotions and improving overall mental health and behaviour (Bratman et al., 2015; Korpela et al., 2014; McMahan & Estes, 2015). Barton and Pretty (2010) conducted a multi-study analysis in the UK and they found that "green exercise" had a positive impact on self-esteem and mood, particularly among individuals under 30 years old. Natural environments also encourage physical activity which can benefit both mental and physical health (Shanahan et al., 2016). Lovelock et al. (2016) emphasised the importance of young people negotiating constraints during this phase of life to continue participating in leisure pursuits such as outdoor recreation in natural environments. McMahan and Estes (2015) suggested that contact with nature during this developmental stage can help young adults satisfy the need to explore and develop an understanding of one's place in the environment. Morse et al. (2020) also noted that nature can play a significant role in surviving and coping during times of crisis such as a pandemic.

Recreational centres and green spaces are viewed as resilience-enabling resources for emerging adults in South Africa (Theron et al., 2022) and elsewhere in Africa (Gama & Theron, 2023). These refer to spaces where young people meet each other occasionally for moral support, relaxation/exercise and social interactions. These spaces also provide safety and space for reflection or introspection (Feng et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2022). During the pandemic, green spaces and parks also provided a venue for social activities and gatherings while still allowing for physical distancing (Bell et al., 2014; Pouso et al., 2021). Similarly, Gama and Theron's (2023) study with emerging adults from Matsapha in Eswatini demonstrated that access to various ecological resources, such as clinics, retail services, libraries, recreational spaces and competent security services were found to be important for the resilience of emerging adults living there. The accessibility and proximity of these

resources proved invaluable in assisting participants in managing the physical, financial and relational pressures they encountered. Furthermore, the recreational opportunities offered by parks and open spaces allowed them to unwind, alleviate stress, and enjoy meaningful time with their peers (Gama & Theron, 2023).

According to Elmer et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic made emerging adulthood an even more stressful period because of social and physical isolation and health concerns. When young people did not have adequate built and natural environment resources, these stressors were especially difficult. For instance, in a study by Gittings et al. (2021) involving 12 emerging adults in South Africa, participants reported that the built environment, particularly the living conditions, had a negative impact on young people's ability to comply with COVID-19 regulations. For example, living in cold houses might have made it challenging for individuals to adhere to measures such as frequent handwashing or staying indoors due to discomfort or lack of resources. In a study conducted by Theron et al. (2021), which included 25 emerging adults from eMbalenhle in South Africa, participants reported that during the COVID-19 lockdown, they found value in safe open spaces and roadways with pavements for exercise purposes. Specifically, engaging in activities like jogging in these spaces had a positive impact on their wellbeing and helped them feel more relaxed.

2.3.4 Cultural Resources Associated with Emerging Adults' Resilience: Spirituality

Resilience is influenced by cultural norms and values which shape the importance of different resources in supporting the resilience of young people (Masten et al., 2021; Theron & Ungar 2023). For instance, within interdependent communities that prioritise spirituality and faith-based practices, young individuals are more likely to emphasise the role of relational, spiritual and faith-based resources when discussing their resilience (Davey et al., 2021). Cultural values shape the lens through which young people perceive and access various resources that contribute to their ability to overcome adversity. In African contexts, cultural values and other potential resources stem from the unique values and practices of African people (Uwandu & Nwankwo, 2006). These values are associated with promoting respectful interdependence and nurturance for emerging adults who reside in marginalised and disadvantaged communities (Mangaliso et al., 2021; Theron, 2015; Van Breda, 2019). In support of

respectful interdependence, African young people are expected to make their society proud. This responsibility involves bringing honour to the family and community by finishing school and progressing to university and finding ways to help the family financially (Phasha, 2010; Theron & Theron, 2013). These responsibilities bestowed on emerging adults serve as a motivation and encouragement for them not to dwell on their childhood adversities, traumas and financial burdens.

Spirituality is important in African cultures and has a strong influence on people's lives and communities. African cultural values like the sacredness of life, interconnectedness, harmony and hospitality are closely connected to spirituality (Agbiji & Swart, 2015; Moodley et al., 2020; Uwandu & Nwanko, 2006). These values shape how people cope with challenges, interact with others and show resilience. They are deeply rooted in the African way of seeing the world and impact many aspects of everyday life. Because my study focused on the resilience supporting role of spirituality and faith-based resources, I delimit the remainder of this section to this focus.

Spirituality is understood as a person's search for meaning and purpose in life, their connection to something greater than themselves and the set of beliefs, values and practices that shape their understanding of the world around them (De Brito Sena et al., 2021; Garssen et al., 2021; Vinueza, 2017). Religiosity (which is associated with faith-based resources) is a little different. It can be defined as a system of shared beliefs, values and practices that are based on a particular understanding of the nature of reality. Religion usually involves the belief in a higher power or divine force and encompasses a structured set of practices and values that are followed by a community of believers (Choi & Hastings, 2019; Garssen et al., 2021; Jensen, 2019). It supports resilience by connecting individuals to faith-based communities that provide resources, a sense of belonging or community and moral direction (Brittian et al., 2013; Garssen et al., 2021). Various authors use both spirituality and religiosity interchangeably and see them as interrelated (Arrey et al., 2016; Jang, 2016).

As noted by Pillay (2017), various faith-based organisations can serve as a refuge for emerging adults residing in disadvantaged communities. The values instilled in them, such as obedience to instructions given by elders, respect for God and ancestral beings, and a focus on proper standards of living, contribute to their resilience (Bhana

& Salvi, 2022; Buio, 2009). Furthermore, spiritual qualities, such as compassion, love, hope, strength and comfort contribute to their overall sense of wellbeing, purpose and connection with the spiritual realm (Lassi & Mugnaini, 2015). These experiences can give meaning to suffering and misery, acting as coping mechanisms (Lassi & Mugnaini, 2015).

2.3.4.1 Spirituality inspires positivity and hopefulness

By drawing on spiritual resources, young people have the potential to discover meaning and develop resilience in challenging circumstances (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Folkman, 2012). Studies have shown that spirituality can provide a framework for understanding and making sense of difficult situations, particularly for emerging adults facing adversity and stress (Howell & Miller-Graff, 2014; Morin, 2021). In addition, reading religious texts such as the Bible was found to provide hope and guidance for young adults in Kenya Nairobi during difficult times (Davis et al., 2023; Njoroge, 2014; Thomas et al., 2023). In a research study conducted by Roberto et al. (2020) in the United States, involving 127 young women during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was found that the participants exhibited a sense of hope and discovered positive aspects, even amid the crisis. The study revealed that their hope and optimism stemmed from their belief in God or spirituality. The participants emphasised that their hope in God played a pivotal role in maintaining their trust in God. Similarly, Gama and Theron (2023) conducted a study among emerging adults from Eswatini also during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings showed that the participants highlighted the significance of their connection to God (through religious practices like prayer or attending church) or their faith-based community in fostering a hopeful outlook and sustaining their focus on the future. These studies revealed that spirituality teaches feelings of optimism and hope which had a positive impact on young adults' wellbeing and resilience (Hall et al., 2016).

2.3.4.2 Spirituality brings relief and reassurance

Emerging adults often draw on faith-based and spiritual beliefs to support their resilience during difficult times. Research has shown that prayer can be a valuable source of comfort and support for young adults facing challenges, including those brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic (Schnabel & Schieman, 2022). Spirituality



fosters resilience through consoling ideals that promote understanding and acceptance (Brittian et al., 2013; Clark & Emerson, 2021; Kang et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Lalani et al., 2021; Nuraini et al., 2018; Ojagbemi & Gureje, 2020; Toledo et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2022). For instance, prayers, meditation and religious activities, for example, were the most prevalent comfortable coping mechanisms indicated by most participants in a study conducted by Arrey et al. (2015) with 44 migratory sub-Saharan African young adults living with HIV/AIDS. Most of the women indicated that praying and connecting with God gave them comfort and helped them accept, adjust and pursue a normal life (Shaw et al., 2016; Woodhouse & Hogan, 2020). Being spiritual also acted as an incentive towards treatment adherence, as participants developed contentment, positive health behaviours and inner peace. Furthermore, participants also stated that they felt less anxiety about their imminent deaths and dealing with other HIV/AIDS-related illnesses because of using (ART) and having a strong faith and confidence in God. The participants held the belief that if they did their part by taking their drugs as prescribed, God would do his part and make them feel better and happier. Similarly, in a study conducted by Wagani and Colucci (2018) with 42 young men and women from North India, practising spirituality had positive effects on these participants, making them feel more optimistic, happy and positive. Young men specifically mentioned inner peace, trust, positive thoughts, happiness, inspiration and encouragement as outcomes of their spiritual practices, leading to the experience of positive emotions (Wagani & Colucci, 2018).

2.3.4.3 Spirituality promotes endurance and dedication

In times of difficulty, perseverance becomes crucial when facing stress and challenges (Abasimi & Xiaosong, 2016; Appiah et al., 2018; Van Tongeren et al., 2019). Spirituality and religion can enhance this perseverance by shaping narratives that provide a transcendent perspective (Dunn & Sundene, 2012; McClendon & Riedl, 2015; Niemiec et al., 2020). Belief in a divine plan, a caring higher power and the ability to handle challenges can directly impact an individual's resilience (Naeem et al., 2015). These spiritually motivated individuals find the strength to persist in tough circumstances (Yates et al., 2015). For example, a study by Gerson (2018), which focused on spirituality as a predictor of resilience and life satisfaction in emerging adults from the United States, found that spirituality is often viewed as a source of



strength and determination (Fombuena et al., 2016). In a study conducted by Theron et al. (2021), the experiences of 16 emerging adults from eMbalenhle, South Africa (a township with high levels of structural violence) were explored. One of the key findings of the study was the profound impact of faith on perseverance among these emerging adults. Their faith-based community and beliefs served as a wellspring of inspiration, empowering them to navigate through the uncertainties and adversities brought about by the pandemic. The participants strongly believed that God's presence and support would guide them through these difficult times (Theron et al. 2021). Similarly, in a study conducted by Gustavsson et al. (2017), the experiences of 16 emerging adult women from Uganda, who had been involved as child soldiers, were examined. These individuals demonstrated a profound ability to derive meaning and strength from seemingly trivial day-to-day tasks which they had learnt to do since childhood. Through their religious beliefs and unwavering faith in a supportive higher power, they found courage and empowerment (Gustavsson et al., 2017). In this regard, spiritual resources can be seen as a type of heritage that plays a crucial role in upliftment, meaning making and confidence that enables young adults to cope with stress and trauma and show resilience (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Liu et al., 2021; Ozbay et al., 2007; Smith & Snell, 2009).

2.4 CONCLUSION OF RESILIENCE SECTION

To conclude, resilience is contextual (Pswarayi, 2020; Scorgie et al., 2017). This is an indication that emerging adult resilience should be observed from the individual's specific context to understand the risks and protective factors. Research on risk and resilience among emerging adults has been mostly conducted in European and North American contexts with limited attention given to other regions such as Africa (Burt & Paysnick, 2012; Madewell & Ponce-Garcia, 2016; Theron et al., 2020). Moreover, previous studies on South African emerging adults living in disadvantaged communities have mostly focused on personal and relational factors (Theron et al. 2021), leaving a significant gap in understanding the ecological and cultural (e.g., spiritual resources) that supported the resilience of South African emerging adults during COVID-challenged times. It is imperative to fill this gap, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which created unique challenges for individuals living in structurally disadvantaged communities. In response, my study aimed to address this gap by exploring the role of spiritual resources in enhancing the resilience of emerging



adults in these communities during COVID-19. Spiritual practices are often deeply ingrained in the lives of individuals from certain communities, particularly those like Africans with a strong religious or cultural heritage (Moodley et al., 2020). This focus aimed to explore a spiritual dimension of resilience that is deeply embedded in the cultural and personal lives of individuals in African communities. In the next chapter, the methodology used in this study will be presented in detail.



CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter centres on the methodology of the study. To begin, I situate my study of limited scope within the study: Multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa. I then outline the aim of my research. Next, I delve into the paradigmatic perspectives used in my study, which include the metatheoretical and methodological paradigms. Finally, I discuss the quality criteria and ethical considerations that were considered throughout the research process.

3.2 SITUATING MY STUDY OF LIMITED SCOPE IN THE MULTISYSTEMIC SOURCES OF HUMAN RESILIENCE TO COVID-19 RELATED STRESS

I was invited to be part of a study titled “The multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa”. This binational study (South Africa and India) had the primary objective to examine the personal, social, structural and ecological resources related to resilience among emerging adults aged 18–29 years, living in disadvantaged communities in India and South Africa and challenged by COVID-19 stress (Theron et al., 2023). The study employed a one-phase mixed methods convergent parallel design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches, following the methodology proposed by Creswell and Poth (2018). By using mixed methods, the research aimed to obtain diverse yet complementary data concerning the resilience of emerging adults in the face of stress related to COVID-19 and neighbourhood disadvantage. Specifically, the study sought to develop a comprehensive understanding of resilience among emerging adults living in underprivileged communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the intention of fostering positive results for their wellbeing. To achieve this objective, the investigating research team selected both a South African and an Indian site. They invited emerging adult participants from these locations to contribute data between 2020 and 2021.



I was invited to contribute to the South African part of the study. When I joined the team, the data had already been generated. When I commenced my research in January 2022, South Africa had implemented relatively lighter COVID-19 restrictions to manage the ongoing challenges. These measures, although less stringent than earlier restrictions, still enforced mask-wearing and hand sanitising and limited social contact as per the regulations set by the Government of South Africa (Grest, 2022). I was, therefore, grateful to have access to the data which the team had, at that stage, not yet begun to analyse. This allowed me to explore research questions that the dataset could answer and provided a cost and time-effective option for the study.

For my study, I focused on emerging adults residing in structurally disadvantaged communities in the Gauteng province which aligned with the broader project's objectives. Specifically, I sought to investigate how spiritual resources supported these individuals. I chose this focus because spirituality is often deeply ingrained in African societies and holds significant cultural and traditional value (Salinas et al., 2018). By exploring the potential contributions of spiritual resources, I aimed to honour and respect the significance of these beliefs in the lives of young adults facing socioeconomic challenges. I also chose to work only with the qualitative data. The choice to work with qualitative data was driven by the need to obtain a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the role of spiritual resources in the lives of emerging adults in structurally disadvantaged communities. Qualitative data was well suited to providing such an understanding (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). As explained in the remainder of this chapter, I familiarised myself with qualitative research and designed the study using a phenomenological approach. Working alongside a co-researcher, my supervisor and a research psychologist from the team that generated data, I identified key themes from the collected data. I shared these themes with the greater team and invited their scrutiny to heighten the trustworthiness of my analysis. The greater team drew on my analysis for subsequent analyses and write-ups (see Theron et al., 2023).



3.3 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of my study was to describe how spirituality, as part of African ways of being and doing, supports the resilience of emerging adults (18–29 years) challenged by structural disadvantage and COVID-19 stress. This effectively indicates that the study aimed to describe the role of spirituality in supporting resilience among this specific population. My study's objective was therefore descriptive. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2013), a descriptive study aims to provide a detailed account of the topic under investigation. In the context of this study, I intended to describe the ways in which spirituality functions as a supportive factor in fostering resilience among the targeted population. The advantage of a descriptive study is that it is useful when studying phenomena for which limited prior information is available (Aggarwal & Ranganathan, 2019). Also, descriptive studies prime further research which can provide critical insights that can lead to a better understanding of the subject matter being studied (Fouché & De Vos, 2014). This is in line with the fact that understandings of what supports emerging adult resilience in the African context is scant (Gwata, 2018), also concerning COVID-19-related stressors (Kim et al., 2021). Moreover, as highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018), a descriptive focus is valuable in enriching the significance of phenomenological studies, thus rendering it relevant to the research design I chose for my study. However, descriptive studies can have potential biases due to relying heavily on self-report measures and subjective interpretations. To redress this, I followed the quality guidelines outlined in Section 3.6.

3.4 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

3.4.1 Epistemological Paradigm: Interpretivism

Interpretivism was the metatheoretical paradigm I selected for my study. Interpretivism is founded on the belief that reality is socially constructed and refers to how people make meaning of their realities. Hence, what we know is influenced by social settings, culture and relationships with other people (Burr, 2018). Tuohy et al. (2013) highlight the importance of recognising that the experiences of participants are intertwined with their cultural, political and social contexts. These contexts significantly shape participants' understanding and experiences of the phenomenon being studied.

According to Burr (2018), interpretivism emphasises that our understanding of the world and human beings is shaped by language, thought and interaction, rather than

by an objective external reality. This perspective acknowledges that truth and knowledge are subjective and culturally and historically influenced, reflecting our individual experiences (Elster, 2007). In line with interpretivism, researchers employing purposive sampling intentionally select participants who can represent their specific perspective of reality (and how this shapes their experience of the research phenomenon), as reality can be represented in diverse ways (Kelly et al., 2018). This deliberate sampling approach aligns with the researcher's intention to recruit participants with experiences of the research phenomenon and their corresponding subjective insights. As a result, researchers using the interpretivist paradigm are concerned with thoroughly understanding people's connection to their environment, how people interact in creating a social bond of which they are part, and how these experiences influence the meaning they make of the phenomenon that is being researched.

Scholars such as Liebenberg and Ungar (2009) have contended that the perception of what supports the resilience of young people all over the world, like those in Africa, is not fully presented in explaining the phenomenon of resilience. The advantage of my choosing an interpretivist paradigm is that it redresses the problem within the resilience literature that has limited studies grounded in the views and experiences of emerging adults outside of the Global North (e.g., in Africa) on what supports their resilience. In addition, resilience studies have been critiqued for not completely addressing cultural and contextual realities that shape the resilience of emerging adults (Theron, 2020). The added advantage of interpretivism is its attention to cultural realities. Using an interpretivist paradigm enabled me to prioritise the participants' interpretations regarding the significance of spirituality in their resilience. This approach allowed me to gain insight into their understanding of how spirituality helped them navigate the difficulties arising from COVID-19 stress and challenges associated with their neighbourhood disadvantage.

The disadvantage of working from an interpretivist stance in research is that the researcher brings their own subjectivity to bear on the study. For example, the researcher makes meaning of the interpretations made by participants and that meaning can be shaped by the researcher's positioning, knowledge and experience. This generates room for bias in how the researcher conducts the study and analyses

the data (Creswell, 2014). To address this limitation, I actively and regularly engaged in self-reflection and acknowledged my own biases and assumptions. As a young African woman who values spirituality, I was more attentive to the enabling value of spiritual practices than someone who did not bring that bias.

3.4.2 Methodological Paradigm

My study used a qualitative research methodology. A qualitative methodology explores a social phenomenon and is interested in studying that social phenomenon in depth by understanding how people make meaning of it (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers uphold the value of participants as producers of knowledge and give importance to their insights; they search for commonalities or patterns in those insights to better understand the research phenomenon (Moletsane et al., 2017). In addition, qualitative research is subjective (Moletsane et al., 2017). Researchers acknowledge that they are not neutral observers but actively engage with participants and their perspectives. By acknowledging subjectivity, qualitative research recognises that there is no single objective truth but rather multiple interpretations and understandings of a phenomenon (Krause, 2021). It collects detailed views of participants, using non-numerical forms of data (e.g., visual data and narratives) to obtain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

The use of qualitative methods in resilience research has received support from various resilience researchers such as He and Van de Vijver (2015), Ungar (2003), and Van Breda and Theron (2018). The construct of resilience can be better understood by using a qualitative methodology (Rahman et al., 2021). This approach is particularly useful in preserving the specific meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences and actions, as emphasised by Wright and Masten (2015). Qualitative research places importance on capturing the unique meanings that individuals assign to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Thus, Ungar (2003) states that resilience researchers have noted that qualitative research addresses the challenges in understanding the cultural contexts in which resilience occurs. Furthermore, qualitative methodology adds power to the voices that are largely marginalised in Western studies of resilience which account for positive outcomes (Ungar, 2003). Given the lack of attention paid to the meaning that young African

people assign to resilience and the spiritual resources that support their resilience, I thought a qualitative approach was the right fit for my study.

One advantage of using a qualitative method is that it allows the researcher to develop a personal connection with the study fuelled by their interest. As explained, I have a strong interest in spirituality and how it enables resilience. In my study, the advantages associated with the qualitative approach was that it facilitated a rich understanding of participants' subjective experiences and perspectives regarding spirituality and resilience. Furthermore, in my study, the qualitative approach appreciated how people from high-risk environments find solutions to coping well under threatening circumstances. The rich report from participants generated data that reflect the views of disadvantaged individuals and their disadvantaged social discourses (Ungar & Nicol, 2003). I believe this was a distinct advantage in my study.

Analysing qualitative data can be complex and requires a high level of skill and expertise (Petticrew et al., 2013). Researchers must navigate through large amounts of data, identify patterns and extract meaningful themes or categories (Petticrew et al., 2013). To overcome this, I had to keep my data well-organised and documented throughout my research. By being organised, I could easily manage and analyse my data, which helped me identify themes and meaningful categories more effectively.

3.5 METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 Research Design

In my study, I followed a phenomenological design. Phenomenology provides a deep understanding of a particular issue from the participants' perspective (Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeijer, 2016). The main goal of a phenomenological design is to study how and what people believe/experience in terms of a given research phenomenon and to understand peoples' shared insights of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenological research aims to answer the question: what is the essence and meaning of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this individual or group of people? Examining an experience as it is subjectively lived can lead to the development of new meanings and appreciations that might inform, or even re-orient, how we comprehend that experience (Neubauer et al., 2019). Thus, the researcher should understand and describe the research phenomenon from the participants'

viewpoint. Furthermore, phenomenological studies are subjective due to their emphasis on personal perspectives and interpretations (Neubauer et al., 2019). My research study was interested in understanding the phenomenon of the resilience of emerging adults exposed to COVID-19 stress and living in disadvantaged communities in Gauteng, South Africa; specifically, my study was interested in describing how spiritual resources enable that resilience. The participants that formed part of the study agreed to share their lived experiences of resilience concerning COVID-19 stress in a disadvantaged community. As the researcher, to better understand this phenomenon (with a specific interest in spirituality as a resilience enabler for emerging adults), I immersed myself in the participants' perspectives (using their drawings and explanations of what supports their resilience) and made meaning of their meaning.

As predicted, the phenomenological approach yielded rich and valuable insights from young individuals, contributing to a deeper understanding of how spirituality fosters resilience in emerging adults (Myburgh et al., 2015). The use of a phenomenological approach helped uncover common themes and patterns, enhancing our understanding of how young people demonstrated resilience during COVID-19. These valuable insights, drawn from young African people's real-life experiences, have the potential to inform policies and interventions with the goal of supporting the mental wellbeing and resilience of young individuals in similar situations. Because phenomenology values the perspectives and voices of participants, this allowed the emerging adults in my study to actively contribute their experiences, insights and perceptions which in turn empowered them to have a voice in the research process (Neubauer et al., 2019). One of the limitations of this design includes challenges in analysing and interpreting data and the need for additional time for data analysis and interpretation. To address this limitation, I effectively managed time and resources by carefully planning and allocating sufficient time for data analysis and interpretation. I leveraged technological tools and software (ATLAS ti) to organise and analyse data, optimising efficiency during the analysis phase.

3.5.2 Participants

The participants included in my study were purposefully selected (i.e., the sample was a non-probability one). Qualitative research uses purposive sampling, as it is a



commonly employed sampling method when researchers require participants with specific experiences or knowledge (Creswell, 2012; May, 2001; Strydom & Delpont, 2014). Palinkas et al. (2015) emphasise the importance of individuals being willing, available and capable of explaining and reflecting on their experiences and ideas. In addition, purposive sampling involves choosing participants who know and/or have experienced a phenomenon that the researcher is interested in studying (Showkat & Parveen, 2017).

The criteria for participation included young people being 18–29 years old, capable of reading and writing in English, residing in a disadvantaged/marginalised community in the province of Gauteng, having personal experience of COVID-19 related stress, believing they were doing OK despite having been challenged by COVID-19 stress (e.g. disrupted education/future plans; financial strain; separation from/loss of someone significant) and living in a disadvantaged community (e.g. high density, poor infrastructure, low socioeconomic status) in Gauteng. The study's eligibility criteria were promoted through various channels such as social media and strategically placed flyers and supported by gate keepers (e.g., staff members at youth-focused non-government organisations). Emerging adults who identified with the criteria could express their interest by sending a text message to a designated study number. Research assistants, who were psychology or social work graduates, then followed up with a phone call to explain the study's purpose and confirm if the participants met the eligibility criteria. During this conversation, the research assistants also outlined the expected tasks for participants, mentioned potential minor risks (such as survey questions triggering negative memories or emotions), and provided an estimate of the participation duration. If the participants remained interested, the research assistants sent them detailed information letters and consent forms via email. Subsequently, they scheduled a mutually convenient time for a telephonic or virtual meeting to complete the consent process, schedule the survey, and discuss the qualitative activity.

The recruitment of participants was challenging due to lockdown restrictions, but many participants recommended the study to their peers, which proved helpful (i.e., snowball sampling was also used). In two cases where potential participants resided in high-income communities, they were thanked for their interest but respectfully informed that the eligibility criteria required participants from disadvantaged communities, resulting in their non-participation. As a result, 294 participants consented to participate, with 293 of them successfully completing both the qualitative and quantitative components. On average, the participants were 24.37 years old. These participants showed a mixed representation of race: 288 were Black, four Coloured and two White. The gender distribution was unequal with more young women (n=203) than young men (n=91) participating in the study.

Table 3.1: Summary of participant demographics

Category	Sub-groups	Number of participants
Self-identified race N=293	White	2
	Coloured	4
	Black	287
Self-identified gender N=293	Other	1
	Young men	91
	Young women	201
Education N=113	Completing schools	41
	Completing a skills development course	31
	Tertiary student	41
Employed	Temporary/seasonal labour	13



N=90	Part-time employed	33
	Full-time employed	29
	Self-employed	14
	Internship	1
Not in education, employment or training N=89	Unemployed looking for work	80
	Unemployed, NOT looking for work	7
	Unemployed, looking to study	2
Undisclosed		1

The benefits of purposive sampling in my study enabled the research team to focus on young people that possessed relevant insights or experiences related to the research topic (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). By intentionally selecting participants who possessed the relevant knowledge, expertise or first-hand experiences, the study gained credibility and increased the likelihood of obtaining rich and meaningful data.

According to Sharma (2017) and Etikan et al. (2016), purposive sampling has some drawbacks, including susceptibility to researcher errors and difficulty in justifying its representativeness. However, it is important to note that in my study, the goal was not to make broad generalisations but rather to gain detailed and specific insights from the participants.



3.5.2.1 Context of participants

The participants in my study resided in various resource- constrained communities within the Gauteng province, including Soweto, Thembisa, Ga-Rankuwa and Meadowlands. Gauteng, despite its small land area of 1.5% in South Africa, is home to over a quarter of the country's population, accounting for 26% (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Gauteng is known for its diverse population. People from various ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds call Gauteng their home. It is a highly urbanised province with one of the world's largest cities, Johannesburg. According to mid-year 2022 predictions, Gauteng would be South Africa's most populous province, with a population of around 16.1 million people (Statistic South Africa, 2022). While Gauteng is known to be the city of gold, the unemployment rates among young adults have been found to be high, with many young people struggling to find employment opportunities that match their qualifications (Skosana, 2021). According to the *Quarterly Employment Statistics* (Statistics South Africa, 2022) the second quarter of 2022 saw the total number of unemployed youth (aged 15–34) increase by 2.0% (or 92 000) to 4.8 million from quarter one 2022. Other challenges reported by news platforms in Gauteng are linked to crime challenges and traffic congestion which can affect the quality and productivity of life in Gauteng (Morojele-Zwane et al., 2022; Umanah & Wotela, 2019).

3.5.3 Data Generation

To determine what supports the resilience of young people faced with disadvantages and COVID-19-stress, the research team employed the D&W methodology to generate data. The D&W has been effectively used in South Africa with children and young people (e.g., Machenjedze et al., 2019; Theron, 2016). It involves participants answering the research question by making a drawing relating to the research phenomenon and explaining (writing about) the meaning of their drawing (Guillemin, 2004; Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Drawings alone can be inadequate in providing a deep meaning of the research phenomenon (Theron et al., 2011). Therefore, explanations must complement a drawing (in D&W, a written explanation). The explanation enables the participant to co-construct how the researcher makes meaning of their drawing and related knowledge about the research phenomenon. Some researchers have noted that D&W is a powerful instrument to generate rich insights into the research

phenomenon while also assisting people in seeing the complexities and simplicities of a phenomenon (Angell et al., 2015).

In my study, participants were asked to make a drawing that demonstrates their understanding of what supports young people's resilience when life is challenging. Participant-directed explanations supported the drawing to assist the research team in understanding the meanings of the drawings. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on contact research during the lockdown, to facilitate this process, participants were provided prompts through WhatsApp. They proceeded to create their drawings and provide accompanying explanations. Each drawing was captured via a photograph and sent to the research team through WhatsApp. Participants who had access to email scanned their drawings and explanations, subsequently sending them to the research team electronically. Upon receiving the photos or scans, the research team manager uploaded them to a project repository secured with a password.

The D&W method granted young people the opportunity to reflect on what enables their resilience, resulting in insights that could potentially guide mental health professionals and service providers on how to support young people to be healthy and do better in life. It is also reported to be a non-threatening, powerful means of accessing young people's understandings, particularly when research foci involve abstract phenomena or subjects that are taboo or difficult to discuss and address (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). In my case, given that resilience is quite abstract, using the D&W method supported participants to formulate a response, allowing for the complexities of resilience-supporting resources to be researched. A limitation could have been associated with participants not having internet access to send their photograph and explanation electronically, however, the research team ensured that they provided 50MB of data to complete these research activities.

3.5.4 Data Analysis

The data was voluminous – the number of drawings/explanations was 294. I considered all the drawings/explanations and used only those that included content about spiritual resources (n=98). My study employed reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022) which is a research approach known for its flexibility in design and its close alignment with phenomenology. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is

popular in qualitative research and emphasises the recognition of subjectivity in data coding and analysis and the active involvement of the researcher in the process of coding and theme generation (e.g., McDonald & Braun, 2022; Trainor & Bundon, 2021). In addition, the focus is on identifying and interpreting patterns or themes within the data while considering the researcher's role in shaping those themes. It involves a recursive process where the researcher continuously reflects on their assumptions, values, preconceptions and the potential influence of their background and experiences on the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, to conduct RTA, I adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) original six-step process as a foundational framework. However, I approached the analysis with a mindful acknowledgement of my own subjectivity and reflexivity. It is important to note that in RTA, these steps are not followed strictly in a linear and sequential manner, but rather the process is characterised by iteration and flexibility. By adopting this approach, I recognised the need to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the data, allowing themes to emerge and evolve throughout the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This iterative and recursive nature of the analysis process enabled me to refine and deepen my understanding of the data, while also considering the influence of my own interpretations and biases.

While Braun and Clarke's six-step process provided a valuable starting point, my application of RTA involved actively questioning and reflecting on my own assumptions, preconceptions and positionalities throughout the analysis.

Phase 1 – Familiarising yourself with the data

This phase involves thoroughly reading and re-reading the data, which could be in the form of interview transcripts or other qualitative material (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The purpose is to gain a deep understanding of the data and to identify initial ideas emerging from the dataset (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). During this phase, researchers engage in a process called data familiarisation, which involves immersing themselves in (or getting to know) the data to develop a comprehensive overview (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

I was granted access to the full data set by my supervisor. Following Braun and Clarke (2022), I reflected on the assumptions I had made regarding the study and familiarised myself with the content. This allowed me to develop a detailed and complex

understanding of the data. I immersed myself in the data by carefully examining the visual data multiple times and reading through the accompanying narrative information to actively engage with and gain a deep understanding of the content as suggested by Terry et al. (2017). This immersive process was particularly significant because, as previously mentioned, I was not part of the initial data collection process. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) framework, I carefully considered how the data could contribute to answering my research questions. During this process, I began documenting initial ideas that emerged from the data, such as the significant roles of prayer, faith, hope and God as enablers of resilience for these emerging adults.

Phase 2 – Generating initial codes

In my analysis process, I took a careful and thoughtful approach to assigning codes to segments that addressed the research question following the guidelines put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Trainor and Bundon (2021). Rather than relying on a pre-existing codebook, and as directed by RTA, I considered each segment individually and selected codes that accurately paraphrased how that segment answered my research question (e.g., write a label/code that summarises how the data is answering my research question about spirituality). This mindful, cautious approach allowed me to choose the most fitting paraphrase based on the data at hand.

Phase 3 – Generating initial themes

During this phase, similar codes were clustered together to form a list of potential themes that addressed the research question, as described by Creswell (2014). To this end, I grouped several original open codes that shared a common concept or idea, consolidating them into a thematic label that captured their similarity. This process, in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2021), involved clustering codes that aligned with a central theme or concept. As I searched for themes, I considered the shared meaning and central ideas among the codes. I consciously merged codes that conveyed similar concepts, taking into consideration how the data triangulated. This involved exploring both visual and narrative data for consistent thematic patterns. For example, I summarised the codes of 'reading the Bible brings relief', 'prayer providing contentment' and 'God's voice soothes and gives peace' into a single thematic category: "spirituality provided comfort".



Phase 4 – Reviewing themes

In this phase, the themes are further refined and assessed to ensure they form a coherent pattern and effectively address the research question, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). Castleberry and Nolen (2018) emphasise the importance of quality checking the themes during this phase. This involves evaluating whether there is sufficient meaningful evidence to support each theme, assessing the coherence and relevance of the themes in addressing the research question and determining the boundaries of the themes by specifying what is included and excluded within each theme (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; see inclusion and exclusion criteria tabulated in Appendix A). As part of the review process for my themes and categories, on 13 September 2022 and 24 September 2022, I shared my identified candidate themes with a co-researcher who was also part of the study and our research supervisor. In these presentations, we discussed the suitability of the potential themes and identified any additional codes that needed to be merged or combined. In addition, we engaged in conversations about the selection of appropriate names for the theme categories as advised by Braun and Clarke (2021).

As a researcher, I embraced my subjectivity and acknowledged my biases, recognising that they could serve as valuable sources of insight and understanding. Drawing from my own personal experiences, beliefs and perspectives on spiritual resources as resilience enablers, it was easier to understand and relate to the participants' experiences. Initially, I identified four themes: spirituality provided emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and strengthened faith through prayer. However, after seeking feedback from my peer researcher and my supervisor, I realised the need for refinement. I decided to rename the theme "spirituality provided emotional support" to "spirituality provided comfort", as it better captured the essence of how spirituality functioned as a source of emotional support. In addition, upon closer consideration of the other themes, it became evident to me that the themes "spirituality provided instrumental support" and "spirituality provided informational support" shared similar elements centred on hope. Considering this, I made the decision to merge these themes into one theme that encompassed both aspects (i.e., spirituality inspired hope for a better future).

Phase 5 – Refining, defining, and naming themes

During this phase, I continuously examined and analysed my themes. I also worked on creating a summary or description for each theme as described by Braun and Clarke (2022). I went back to phase 1 through 4 and scrutinised the themes. I checked that they worked well enough with the data I associated with each theme by providing a definition for each theme and finalising a name for each one, as detailed in Chapter 4. For example, when working on the theme related to “spirituality provided hope for a better future”, I considered several options, such as spirituality enhanced “believing in the future” and “optimism for the future” before ultimately settling on the final name. To visually illustrate the relationship between the themes and my research question, I used a diagram, as presented in Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4.

Phase 6 – Producing the report

The last phase of the analysis entails composing a cohesive and logical report that presents the themes. To support these themes and develop a compelling argument that addresses the research question, detailed examples from the data are provided as evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I accomplished this phase by consolidating each theme along with the corresponding supporting evidence. Subsequently, I compiled Chapter 4 using this comprehensive information.

3.6 QUALITY CRITERIA

Qualitative studies focus on demonstrating trustworthiness to achieve quality control (Creswell, 2014). Trustworthiness refers to how accurately the data collected represents the rigour of the study (Connelly, 2016; Morse, 2015). To ensure a high-quality study, the following criteria must be met: credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability and authenticity. These criteria will be discussed in further detail below.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility, which refers to the extent to which the findings align with the participants’ reality, is essential for the internal validity of a qualitative study (Morse, 2015; Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeitjer, 2016). To achieve credibility, the study needs to examine how accurately, thoroughly, and rigorously the participants’ expressions have been

identified and portrayed in the results which ensures that the findings are believable (Schurink et al., 2014). Enhancing credibility involves employing established research methods, using an appropriate research design aligned with the question, implementing detailed data collection methods, and conducting debriefing sessions with a co-researcher and with a research supervisor (Nieuwenhuis & Hooimeitjer, 2016).

To ensure the credibility of my study, I had regular debriefings with both a peer and my research supervisor on multiple occasions. These debriefings took place on 30 August 2022, 13 September 2022, 20 September 2022, 24 September 2022, 26 September 2022, 4 October 2022, and 11 October 2022. In addition, I presented my findings at the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) annual conference on 27 October 2022 to an audience of researchers and practitioners. Their feedback, which endorsed the meaning I had made of the data, heightened my belief in the credibility of my findings. As described by Morse (2015), peer debriefing involves having a co-researcher critically review the data, data analysis and data interpretation. Through this process, the peer provides questions and comments that contribute to confirming or enhancing the credibility of the study (Morse, 2015). In my instance, I collaborated with a fellow master's student, exchanging ideas, and discussing the coding of the data. Individually, we created codes for the themes and then engaged in conversations to examine our findings. These discussions proved invaluable in identifying any areas where I might have overlooked important aspects of the data.

3.6.2 Dependability

In qualitative studies, it is important to reliably document both the data and analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Connelly, 2016). This is known as dependability. To achieve dependability, researchers can employ strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These strategies include using multiple sources or methods to validate findings and maintaining an audit trail to track decision-making and promote transparency. By implementing these strategies, researchers can enhance the dependability of their qualitative study. To increase the reliability of my research, I used an audit trail (see Appendix A) (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). This trail allows others to follow the decisions I made to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. In addition, as recommended by Merriam and Grenier (2019), I provided a thorough explanation

of how I analysed the data (see Section 3.5.4). These steps helped improve the dependability of my research.

3.6.3 Transferability

Transferability, as explained by Connelly (2016), means how useful research findings can be in different settings. To ensure transferability, a helpful strategy is to provide detailed descriptions of the participants and the context (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). In my study, I included basic information about the participants' demographics (see Section 3.5.2) and provided a detailed description of their contexts (see Section 3.5.2.1). These descriptions were intended to help researchers in different settings determine if the study's results could be relevant to their own research or practice (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). By including these details, I aimed to support the transferability of my study's findings.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, as discussed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) and Morse (2015), refers to the ability of a researcher to establish that the findings and interpretations are based on the data itself rather than personal motivations, interests, or biases. To demonstrate that the findings in my study were based on the participants' actual experiences, I included examples drawings and quotes from the participants. I also practiced reflexivity by being aware of my own biases and influences. Furthermore, I included my assumptions (see Section 1.7) and discussed the advantages and limitations of the methodologies I used. This was done to share the decision-making process with the reader, as recommended by Shenton (2004).

3.6.5 Authenticity

Authenticity in research refers to the genuine and fair representation of participants (Amin et al., 2020; Morse, 2015). To uphold authenticity in my study, I included excerpts from participants that reported spiritual resources as a resilience enabler, avoiding any bias towards specific individuals. By doing so, I ensured that the findings were authentically representative of the entire sample, without unfairly favouring any participant's explanations. "To demonstrate that I was providing an authentic account of how emerging adults displayed resilience during COVID-19, I used numerous

examples from the data Amin et al., 2020). These examples helped me demonstrate that I was not favouring specific insights in my interpretation of what contributed to their resilience”.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As stated, my study formed part of a greater larger funded study. The greater study received ethical clearance from the Faculty of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee and Faculty of Education Ethics Committee, University of Pretoria (UP17/05/01; see Appendix B). Although I did not directly engage with the participants, as a student in Educational Psychology, I followed the ethical research guidelines outlined by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2011). This included making sure that participants were involved in an informed consent process. Data were generated in 2021 so the consent process was completed by trained research assistants (who were social work or psychology master’s students). Before participants’ involvement in the study, they were informed about possible risks/discomforts (e.g., thinking about the most upsetting or frightening thing) that can occur while taking part in the study. The research team made them aware that strategies had been implemented to minimise discomforts and risks (e.g., providing contact details of SADAG, Lifeline and FAMSA should the participants require counselling). I also checked that participants provided permission for other researchers who were not involved in the data generation (like me) to access and use their data. I also checked that they gave permission for their drawings to be duplicated in research-related publications.

Then, I applied for the aligned ethical clearance to work with the data from that study in an ethically responsible manner. The researcher’s adherence to ethical regulations and respect for participants’ rights can significantly contribute to research outcomes that avoid negative or disrespectful stereotypes of participants (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021). My ethical responsibility was to respect the dignity of participants when I reported their data. I was cautious not to write up the data to stigmatise participants. I adhered to the APA rules (2021) for using inclusive language to avoid stigmatising/stereotyping language. Furthermore, I was sensitive to labelling and avoided any offensive expressions. I also used data confidentially and no data has been linked to participants’ names.



3.8 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodology I employed in my study, along with a comprehensive examination of the advantages and difficulties associated with this. In the subsequent chapter I will present the findings derived from the methodology discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: REPORTING FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In answer to my research question, “How does spirituality as part of African ways of being and doing support the resilience of emerging adults challenged by structural disadvantages amid COVID-19 stressors?” I identified three themes as summarised in Figure 4.1. The themes are spirituality provides comfort, spirituality encourages grit and spirituality inspires hope for a better future.

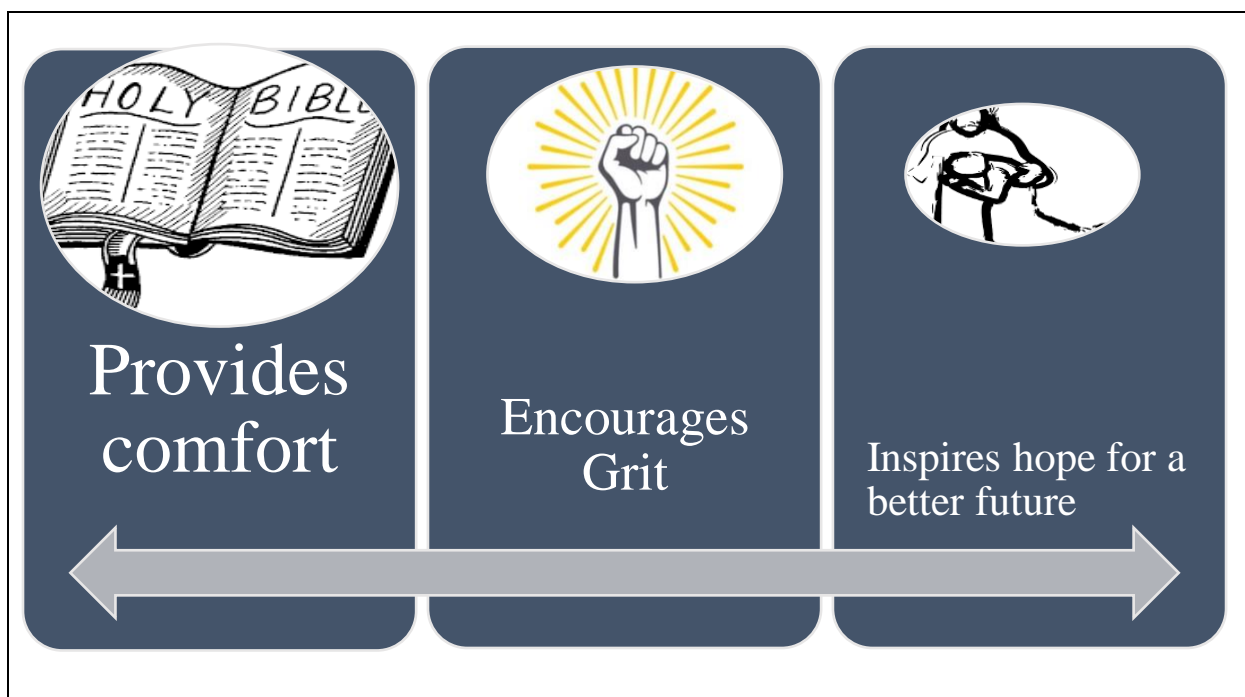


Figure 4.1: Visual summary of my findings

The themes depicted in Figure 4.1 reflect how spiritual resources supported resilience as described and explained by the participants. The visual summary demonstrates that the predominant theme was “spirituality provided comfort”, followed by “spirituality encouraged grit” and the least reported was “spirituality inspired hope for a better future” as depicted by the three illustrations. The arrow connecting the three themes shows that at times spiritual resources simultaneously provided comfort, encouraged grit, and inspired hope for a better future. However, it is important to separate the themes to clearly elucidate how they enabled the resilience of African emerging adults

who participated in the study titled “The multisystemic sources of emerging adult resilience to COVID-19-related stress in India and South Africa”. Each of these themes is explored in more detail below. Participants are noted by number, gender and age, for example: Participant 92 (young woman:29).

4.2 THEME 1: SPIRITUALITY PROVIDED COMFORT

This theme relates to mostly faith-based (i.e., religious) acts that serve as resources for comfort and the easing, alleviation and consolation of participants’ distress, and in one instance to comforting ancestral practices. According to the participants, the comfort provided by the faith-based acts enabled resilience during COVID-19 times. The faith-based acts that were reported were mostly prayer and reading the Bible. Fifty-nine (59 of 98) documents contained evidence of this theme. In other words, most (61%) of the sample of emerging adults who reported that reading the Bible and praying helps them cope when life is challenging.

In the extract below, Participant 109 (young woman:23) reported that the act of prayer helped her overcome challenging times. A particular prayer she makes provides her with solace enabling her to trust in God. She explained:

Prayer helps me to be OK. When life is hard it gets me through each day. This specific prayer ‘God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference’ reminds me that I am trying my best and I feel comforted and content to leave everything in the hands of God.

Similarly, Participant 155’s (young man:26) drawing depicts himself kneeling and having a conversation with God (see Figure 4.2). He described the act of praying as a tool that soothes and consoles him, especially when he has problems that he finds hard to share with others. He stated:

In the picture is a person representing me when I pray, as prayer has been the one thing that is giving me hope and some comfort when I had issues that I can’t discuss with other people. I pray to God, and he comforts me.

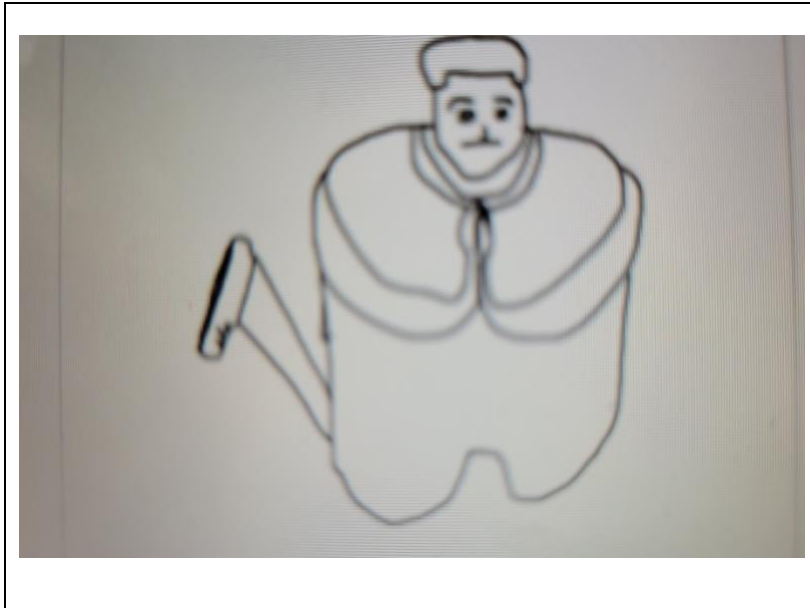


Figure 4.2: Participant 155's drawing depicting having a conversation with God

In a similar fashion, Participant 341 (young woman:27) drew a picture of folded hands representing the act of prayer (see Figure 4.3). She explained how engaging in prayer when faced with adversities brings her serenity, which enables her to confidently confront her difficulties knowing that God is with her. She said:

When I am in difficult times, I choose prayer because it makes me rest in God and allows his peace to calm me in my current circumstances and to comfort me and give me courage to face the challenges with his spirit by my side.

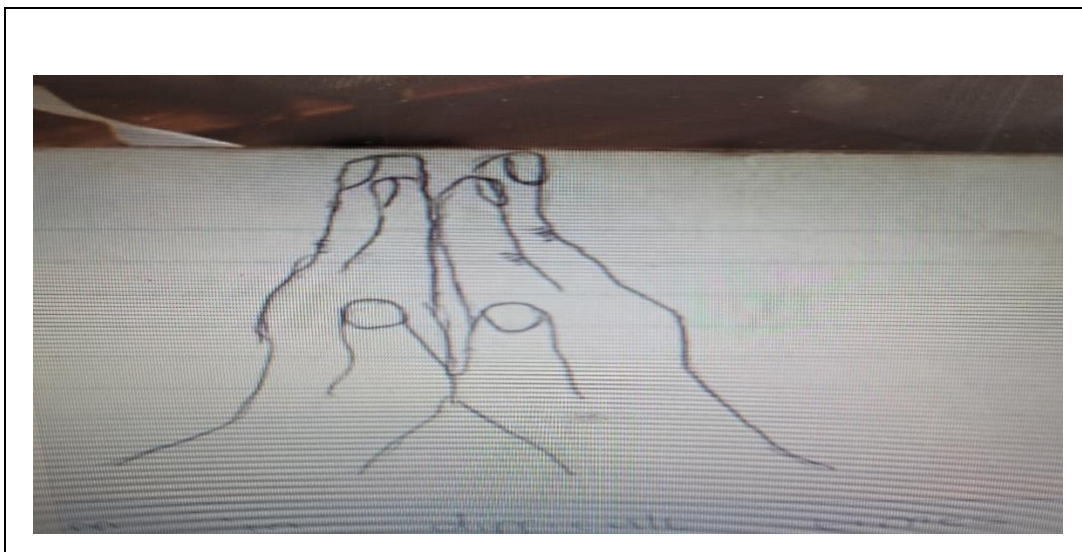


Figure 4.3: Participant 341 demonstrating the act of prayer using folded hands

In addition, Participant 62 (young woman:26) drew a picture of a Bible with a ray of light, possibly representing power from the Bible (see Figure 4.4). She described the Bible as a helpful tool in her life; it provides her with support, and it is her voice of reason when she needs advice. When things are going well, the Bible serves as a place where she could render praises and thanksgiving. She explained:

I draw strength from the Bible, I seek strength and comfort from it when I am helpless. And when I am seeking advice, it is my go-to. It is also my place of celebration and worship, when good things are happening, I am reminded of the promises that are in this book. Most importantly it is the one thing that gives confidence when I am lacking.

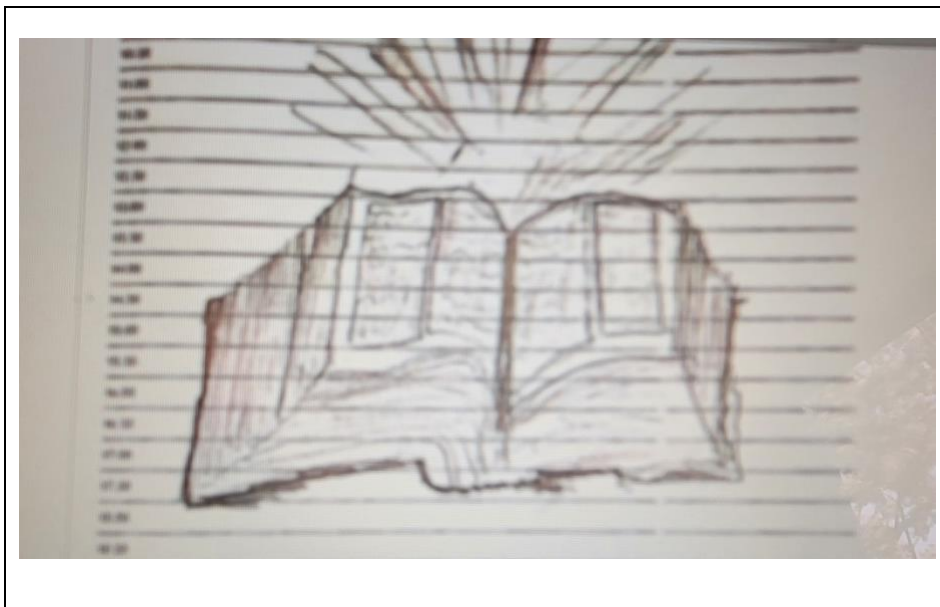


Figure 4.4: Participant 62 drew the Bible as a tool that comforts her when times are hard

Similarly, Participant 284 (young woman:27) drew a picture of a Bible (see Figure 4.5) and described that she pours out her distress when reading the Bible and during hard times, the Bible provides her with peace. She explained: “I drown my sorrows through reading the word of God, whenever life seems so difficult, I heal through reading the Bible as it comforts me”.

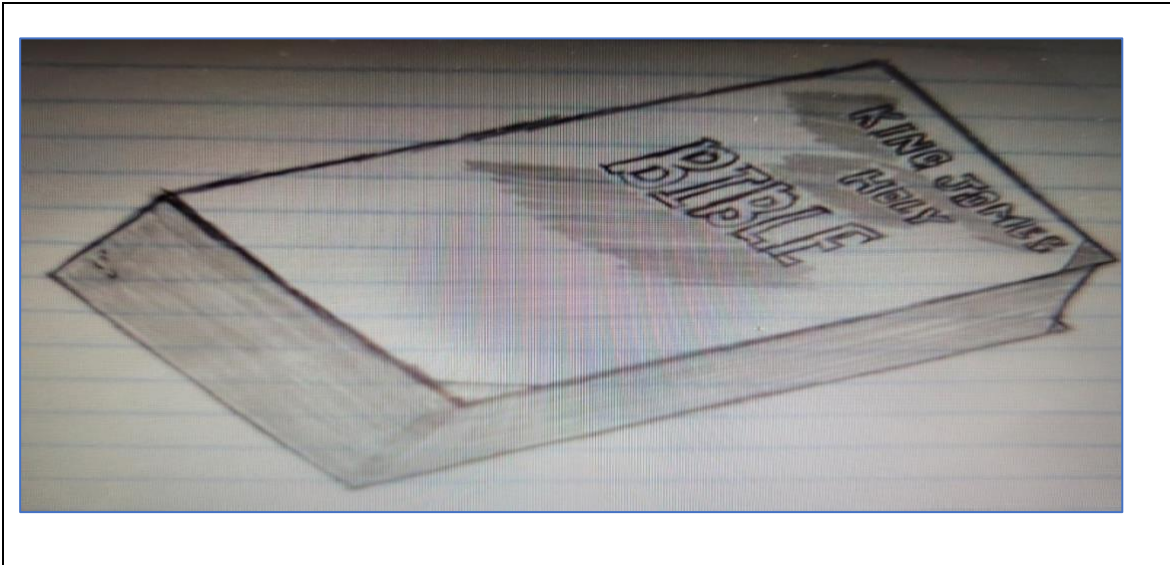


Figure 4.5: The Bible symbolising healing for Participant 284

Furthermore, Participant 224 (young woman:27) drew a picture of a Bible (see Figure 4.6) and explained that she finds light through the word of God and during COVID-19, God protected her and was her support. She said:

The holy Bible kept me going in these trying times. All my answers were there. I found strength and comfort in the Bible. It taught me to know that the world and everything in it belongs to God. I saw him and his powers. When people lost their lives, he spared mine. There was no better comfort I would have needed either than the Bible and God as my friend.



Figure 4.6: The Bible symbolising light during times of adversity for Participant 224

Participant 42 (young man: 22) drew a picture of a young man kneeling in a sacred place to render a prayer to the ancestors (see Figure 4.7). During difficult times talking to his ancestors enables him to be ok. He explained:

The drawing above represents my culture, whenever we have problems or challenges, we go to UMSAMO to talk with our ancestors. UMSAMO is a name given to a prayer place, where we burn incense and candles and make offering to the ancestors.

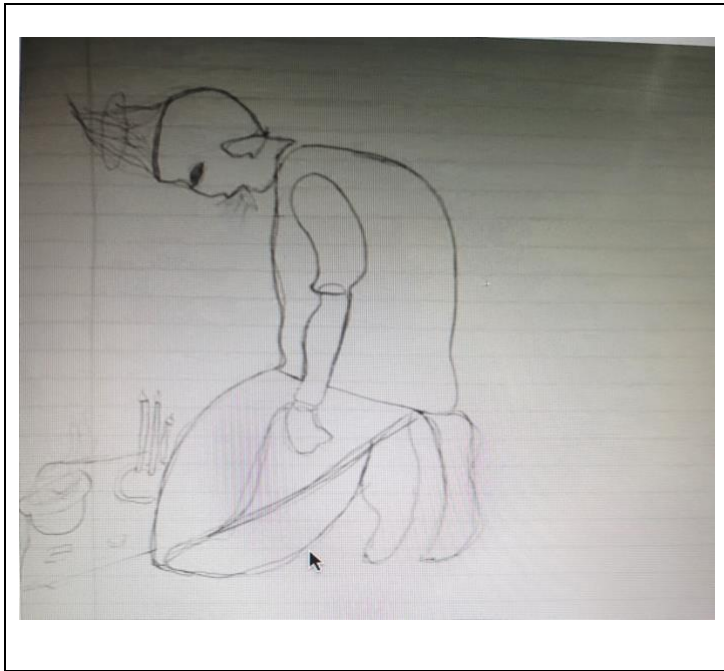


Figure 4.7: Participant 42 demonstrating prayer and offering giving at UMSAMO

4.3 MAKING MEANING OF THEME 1: SPIRITUALITY PROVIDED COMFORT

The theme of spirituality provided comfort as a resilience enabler is substantially evidenced in the literature on spirituality and resilience within the African context (Arrey et al., 2015; Brittan et al., 2013; Du Toit, 2022; Gama & Theron, 2023; Ojagbemi & Gureje, 2021; Smith & Snell, 2009; Theron et al., 2021) and the international context (Clark & Emerson, 2021; Kang et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Lalani et al., 2021; Lassi & Mugnaini, 2015; Nuraini et al., 2018; Toledo et al., 2021; Raftopoulos & Bates, 2011; Rowhani & Hatala, 2017). In the context of structurally disadvantaged communities in Africa, emerging adults face numerous challenges, including socioeconomic hardships, limited resources and various social and environmental stressors (Gama & Theron, 2023; Van Breda, 2018). In such circumstances, spirituality has been

observed to play an important role in providing comfort and support to individuals (Arrey et al., 2015; Brittian et al., 2013). Similarly, faith-based acts have been reported as having positive outcomes for young people (i.e. emerging adults) (Brittian et al., 2013; Du Toit, 2022; Landman & Theron, 2008; William et al., 2016) and at least nine studies outline how faith-based acts have provided comfort during the COVID-19 pandemic (Molteni et al., 2021; Simbarashe & Zirima, 2020; Stamps et al., 2021; Szałachowski & Tuszyńska-Bogucka, 2021; Thomaskutty, 2021; Tolmie & Venter 2021; Tolmie & Venter, 2021; Pastor et al., 2020; Weaver et al., 2022).

The emerging adults in my study identified faith-based acts as promoting their resilience by providing comfort during challenging times. The participants reported that this comfort was cultivated by the continuous prayers and reading of scriptures during the COVID-19 pandemic. This fits with research done by Schnabel and Schieman (2022) which reports that prayer can be a valuable spiritual source of solace and support during times of stress and adversity, such as academic pressure. Similarly, in another study (Arrey et al., 2015), researchers found a strong association among emerging adults' spirituality, a sense of contentment and an increased commitment to their ARV treatment. This comfort reduced worries and fears (as it did for emerging adults in my study) and increased treatment adherence.

Moreover, spirituality in the African paradigm can involve a departed human being who always listens and guides the person to God (Edward, 2013; Moore et al., 2012). Believing in the protective and benevolent care of such ancestors is comforting. In traditional African communities, young people are encouraged to embrace spiritual practices, including ancestral beliefs (Edwards, 2013; Johnson, 2015; Kanai et al., 2020; Marumo & Chakale, 2018; Moore, 2022; Ohajunwa & Mji, 2018; Thabede, 2008; Schaepe et al., 2017; Singh & Bhagwan, 2020). Some studies have linked ancestral beliefs with the resilience of African young people (Brittian et al., 2013; Pasha, 2010; Theron & Theron, 2013; Theron, 2016). Given this, I would have anticipated that multiple participants would have reported ancestral practices (i.e., praying to ancestors) as a source of comfort during hard times, however, only one young man in my study reported this. This might be because of the generational shift, where the younger generation often exhibit different beliefs and practices compared to their elders (Anderson et al., 2017; Ramphela, 2012). In the current times, young people

are more inclined to adopt contemporary forms of spirituality or prioritise personal spiritual experiences over ancestral practices (Brittian et al., 2013; Theron, 2016).

4.4 THEME 2: SPIRITUALITY ENCOURAGED GRIT

This theme refers to the determination to endure and persist. It relates to anything spiritual that emerging adults reported as a resource for motivation, strength, perseverance, and courage to keep going during difficult times, like the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty-seven documents (i.e., fewer than a third [27 of 98 = 27%]) contained evidence of this theme.

For example, Participant 158 (young man:24) has encountered tough situations and has often felt as if he could give up. He explained that during challenging times he is motivated to keep his faith in the word of God and be prayerful because that rejuvenates his strength. He explained:

Reading the Bible and praying keeps me going; sometimes situations put me in a corner where I feel discouraged by life but after speaking to God, I always have courage to carry on because I know that God never leave me nor forsake me.

Likewise, Participant 179 (young woman:29) believed that regardless of how difficult life is, she has the capacity to overcome the adversities she is confronted with. She understood that this capacity was linked to her religious faith. She said:

What keep me going in difficult times is my faith knowing that I have a purpose that I still need to complete, knowing that everything happens for a reason, most importantly that He [God] will not give you more than you can bear.

In addition, Participant 179 (young woman:29) drew a picture of a lit candle representing light and power from God during days she struggled (see Figure 4.8). The light from the candle enabled her to persevere and motivated her to keep believing that someday the situation would be different. She explained:

Through my difficult times in life, prayer has helped to deal with lots of things I went through/go through. Burning a candle and talking to God about everything, asking for strength to keep going, to keep on believing in myself. The light is for brightening up my darkest days, bringing me peace and to strengthen my faith, to get rid of fear of not making it in this life.

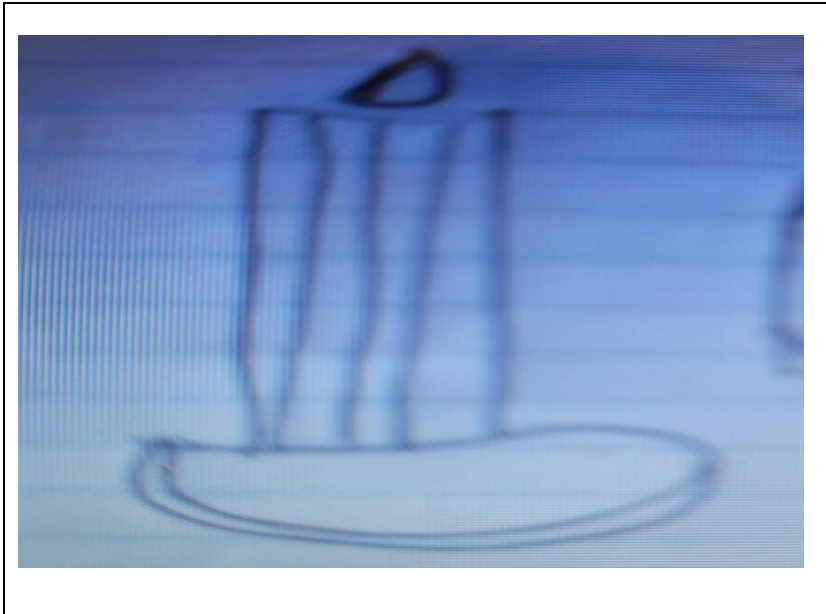


Figure 4.8: Participant 179 drew a lit candle representing light and strength

Similarly, Participant 283 (young woman:22) drew a picture of a person listening to gospel music (see Figure 4.9) and indicated that when she is overwhelmed and down because of her challenges, she is uplifted and confident that the situation will pass. She said: “When I am sad the only thing that encourages me is listening to gospel music and it reminds that nothing is permanent in this world and talking to God keeps me going”.

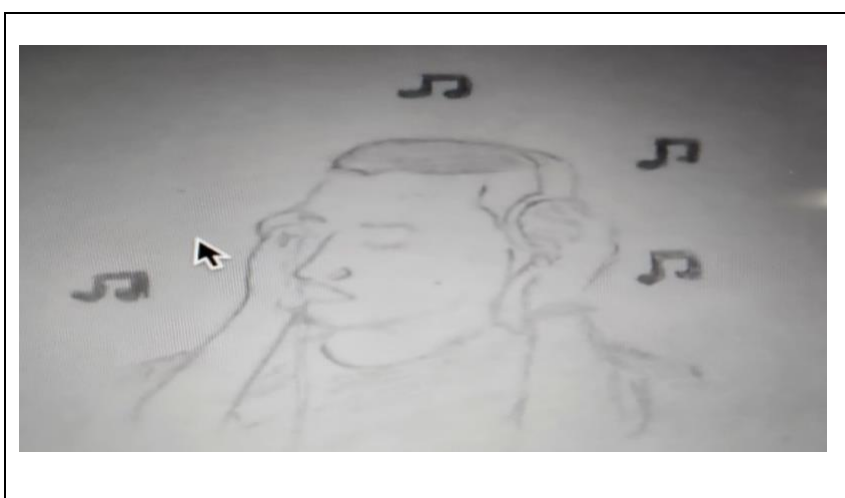


Figure 4.9: Participant 283’s illustration of how gospel music provided motivation

Furthermore, Participant 25 (young woman:21) drew a cross and described the cross as a place where she goes to when she is feeling demotivated or needs to be revived

to keep going – the cross also represents a higher power (God) and source of strength (see Figure 4.10). She explained: “This is where I draw my strength from. From my God”.

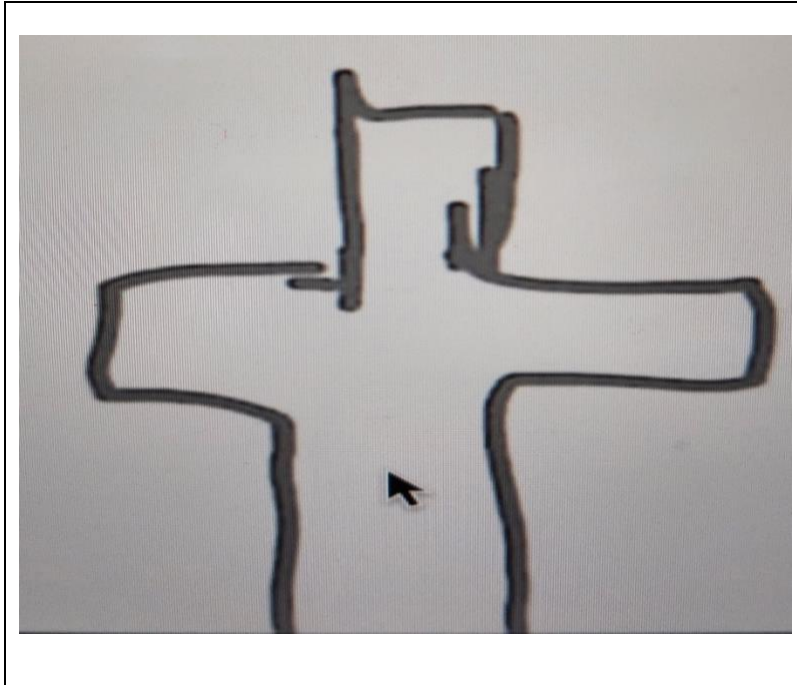


Figure 4.10: Participant 25’s cross symbolising God that enables her to keep going during hard times

4.5 MAKING MEANING OF THEME 2: SPIRITUALITY ENCOURAGED GRIT

In structurally disadvantaged African communities, young people are frequently urged to draw strength from their spirituality as a source of strength and courage amid challenges (Abasimi & Xiaosong, 2016; Appiah et al., 2016; Dun & Sundene, 2015; Gustavsson et al., 2017; McClendon & Riedl, 2015; Theron et al., 2021). Similarly, in diverse international contexts, there is growing recognition of the role spirituality plays in empowering young people (Barry & Abo-Zena, 2014; Fombuena et al., 2016; Gerson, 2018; Liu et al., 2021; Naeem et al., 2015; Niemiec et al., 2020; Ozbay et al., 2007; Smith & Snell, 2009; Van Tongeren et al., 2019). A limited number of studies have linked the association between spirituality and its potential to foster perseverance and grit and the resilience of emerging adults (Abukari, 2018; Drumm et al., 2014; Jafferis & Theron, 2017; Nadat & Jacobs, 2021; Theron et al., 2021). My findings (i.e., Theme 2) fit with this literature.

According to Gerson (2018), Naeem et al. (2015), Niemiec et al. (2020), Ozbay et al. (2007), Smith and Snell (2009) and Van Tongeren et al. (2019), spirituality is often viewed as a source of strength and determination that empowers young people to confront challenges with courage, knowing that they will overcome those challenges. During COVID-19, grit was facilitated by faith-based beliefs that served as a wellspring of perseverance and resilience in the lives of young adults living in a structurally disadvantaged community in the township of Mpumalanga (Theron et al., 2021). Integrating my findings with the aforementioned literature suggests that spirituality can indeed enhance perseverance by providing individuals with narratives and perspectives that transcend immediate challenges (Niemiec et al., 2020), especially during crises such as the pandemic.

According to Allen et al. (2023), Kundu (2020) and Meanley et al. (2016), spirituality can provide support and empowerment to emerging adults who face structural disadvantages by instilling a sense of self-worth and agency, and the belief that they can overcome adversity. Spiritual teachings often emphasise the idea that individuals have the power to create positive change (Meanley et al., 2016). This sense of empowerment can fuel their determination and grit to overcome structural barriers and achieve their goals. Furthermore, Canizales (2019) and Noble-Carr et al. (2014) highlight that spirituality often provides a sense of community and support for young people with experiences of structural disadvantage. Religious institutions and spiritual communities can offer a supportive network where they find understanding, encouragement and guidance. This support can help them navigate the challenges of their circumstances, providing emotional strength and resilience. In my findings, participants associated faith-based activities (e.g., reading the Bible, praying with a candle and believing in the cross) with opportunities for encouragement that kept them going and explained that these faith-based activities gave them the courage to persevere and a sense that they would be strong enough to overcome adversity. These faith-based activities were less associated with a sense of community support. This can perhaps also be explained by Aziz and Aziz (2021) and Kgatle (2020). Their research explained that the pandemic disrupted traditional modes of community support, such as in-person religious gatherings and community events. This disruption may have impacted the sense of community and social support that individuals derive from their spirituality.

4.6 THEME 3: SPIRITUALITY INSPIRED HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

This theme refers to faith-related beliefs, like the beliefs in an omnipotent and omniscient God that has good plans for them and will enable a better future. This served as a resilience enabler for emerging adults in that their beliefs gave them hope. Very occasionally there was reference to a faith-based act (rather than a belief), like prayer, providing hope. Twelve of the 98 [12%] documents contained evidence of this theme.

For example, Participant 19 (young woman:19) indicated that her belief that all things will work for her good and that God will prosper her in due time enables her to be hopeful regardless of the difficulties. She explained:

GOD HAS A BETTER PLAN [participant used capital letters]. Sometimes when life gets hard you must know that perhaps God has a better plan for you. I'm not saying that everyone should quit or should not give up but choose to believe that God has something better for you in store.

Similarly, Participant 19 (young woman:19) drew a picture of a blossoming flower (see Figure 4.11) and explained how confident she is that she will overcome the hardships that she encounters because God is taking care of those difficulties. She believes that God will not fail her and that keeps her hopeful. She said:

What keeps me going through difficulties is hope which I have for me and hope that God has for me. It's like there is something that is great stored and released each time I do good a sense of tranquillity that I receive from God is amazing because I prevail in difficult situations.



Figure 4.11: Participant 19 depicting her belief that God will do something good in her life

In a similar fashion, Participant 60 (young woman:23) drew a picture of a plant that grows no matter what (see Figure 4.12), which symbolises hope for better days. She described how she has an unshakable faith-based trust that regardless of the hardships, good things are coming. This conviction enables her to be OK. She said:

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conclusion of things unseen. I have hope before I receive whatever I am working towards. I see light in every situation I come across, whether good or bad. I hope for the unseen.

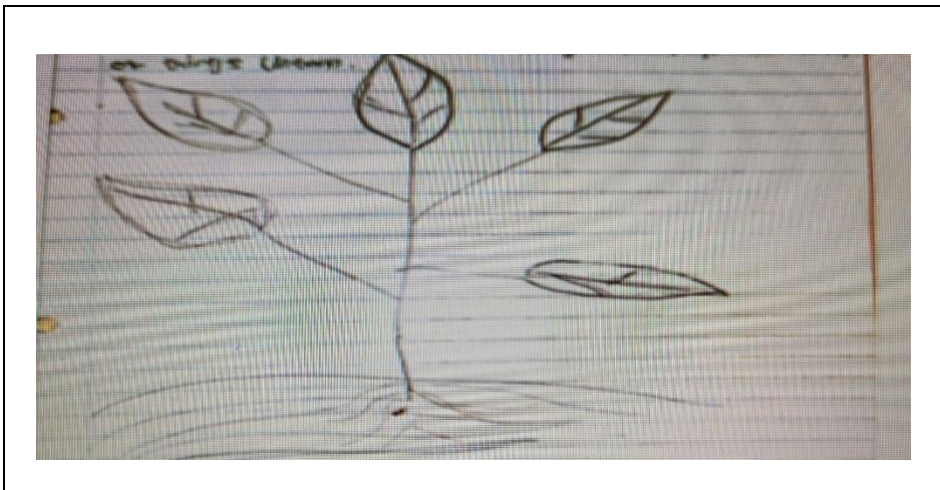


Figure 4.12: The drawing of a plant by Participant 60 demonstrating better days are coming

In addition, Participant 132 (young woman:22) drew a white candle (see Figure 4.13) representing light in difficult times. She described the candle as a tool that fuels her hope. She is assured that no matter what, everything will be OK. She explained:

I drew a lit candle. In African spirituality, we pray with a white candle. For me it symbolises hope. I think hope gets me through, no matter how small that hope is that things will get better.

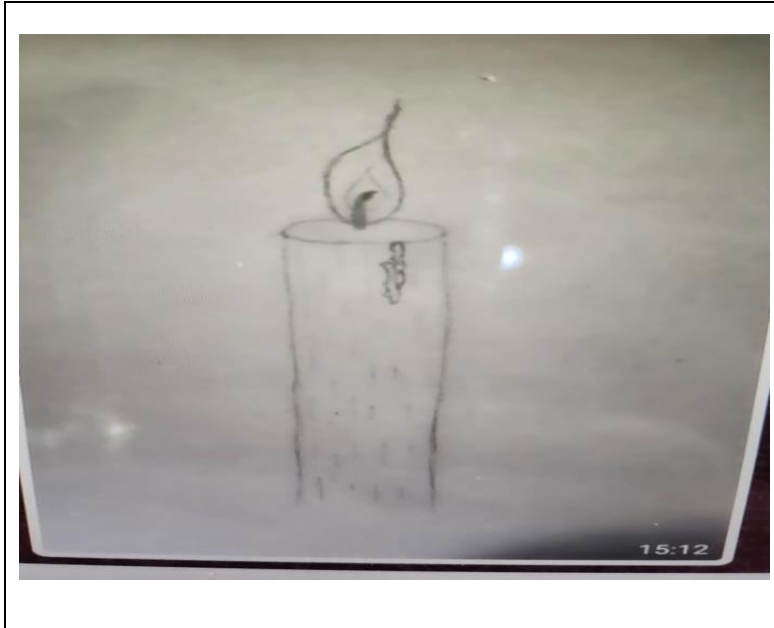


Figure 4.13: The lit candle representing light that things will eventually improve for Participant 132

Furthermore, Participant 32 (young woman:25) drew a picture of rain, a flower and a cross (see Figure 4.14) and described the cross as a symbol of affirmation that the struggles and afflictions will eventually end and something good will spring up and will be replaced by contentment.

She explained:

The cross at the top represents faith. The belief that tomorrow things will be better. That the pain and suffering, or whatever negative emotion I'm feeling, will be replaced with something positive like happiness and joy.

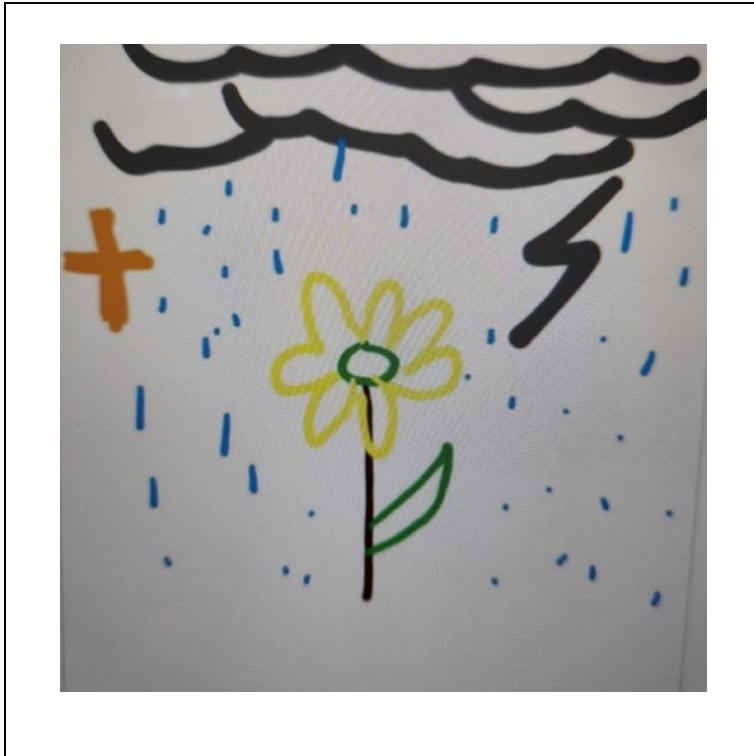


Figure 4.14: The drawing of the rain symbolises growth and assurance for Participant 32

4.7 MAKING MEANING OF THEME 3: SPIRITUALITY INSPIRED HOPE FOR A BETTER FUTURE

My third theme (i.e. spirituality inspired hope for a better future) has been fairly well established as a resilience enabler in the resilience literature in the African context (Gama & Theron, 2023; Nadat & Jacobs, 2021; Njoroge, 2014; Nyongesa et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2023) and international context (Baxter et al., 2019; Faigin & Pargament, 2011; Fongkaew et al., 2022; Gibbs et al., 2020; Howell & Miller-Graff, 2014;; Manning, 2013; Morin, 2021; Roberto et al., 2020). These studies delved into the role of spirituality in promoting resilience and fostering hope. They highlighted that spirituality serves as a guiding force during difficult times, which offers a sense of hopeful meaning, purpose and connection with something greater than oneself (Njoroge, 2014).

My study's findings fit with the above-mentioned literature because some of the emerging adults in my study reported faith-related beliefs (i.e., God having a great plan for their future) which served as a resilience enabler and gave them motivation to keep



going. In addition, at least 10 studies have reported that spirituality provided hope to young people during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bentzen, 2021; Cordero, 2022; Dixon, 2020; Keisari et al., 2022; Koenig, 2020; Lucchetti et al., 2021; Meza, 2020; Prempeh, 2021; Roberto et al., 2020). These studies revealed that spirituality provides hope, motivation and confidence for young individuals facing unprecedented challenges. These studies demonstrate the importance of spirituality in cultivating a positive mindset, encouraging individuals to envision a better future despite the challenges they may encounter. By grounding themselves in spiritual beliefs, African individuals can tap into a source of resilience that facilitates their ability to navigate hardships and maintain a positive outlook for the future (Bentzen, 2021). The above studies shed light on the role of belief in God and other higher beings in maintaining hope and optimism among emerging adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. This highlights the role of faith as a foundational aspect of their coping mechanisms. The findings also suggest that even in the face of a crisis, young people were able to find positive aspects and maintain a sense of hope, which they attributed to their faith in God.

According to studies such as Davis et al. (2023), Njoroge (2014), Thomas et al. (2023), reading religious texts like the Bible has been shown to offer hope and guidance to young adults during challenging circumstances. Participants from my study expressed faith-related hope by drawing blossoming flowers, trees with branches and rain rather than reading the Bible. This might be explained by Onyishi et al. (2021), whose study suggests that hope is a psychological state that involves positive expectations and a sense of optimism about the future rather than being solely dependent on external actions such as going to church, reading the Bible and praying.

4.8 CONCLUSION

The three themes that I reported in Chapter 4 are aligned with the African literature on how spirituality supports the resilience of emerging adults (Fongkaew et al., 2022; Gama & Theron, 2023; Njoroge, 2014; Nyongesa et al., 2022; Ojagbemi & Gureje, 2021; Theron et al., 2022). The findings also aligned with the international studies on how spirituality fostered the resilience of emerging adults (Clark & Emerson, 2021; Kang et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2019; Lalani et al., 2021; Lassi & Mugnaini, 2015) and COVID-19 studies that showed that spirituality was an important source of resilience (Bentzen, 2021; Cordero, 2022; Dixon, 2020; Keisari et al., 2022; Koenig, 2020;

Keisari et al., 2022; Lucchetti et al., 2021; Meza, 2020; Prempeh, 2021). However, the aforementioned studies made little explicit reference to the role of spirituality among emerging adults living with ongoing structural disadvantage. For this reason, my study makes a small contribution given its exclusive focus on emerging adults in structurally disadvantaged communities in Gauteng.

In contrast to the existing literature (Marumo & Chakale, 2018; Moore, 2022; Ohajunwa & Mji, 2018; Schaepe et al., 2017; Singh & Bhagwan, 2020; Thabede, 2008), my study found limited engagement in ancestral practices among young people, with only one participant reporting on it and only one other referring to African ways of praying (i.e., with a lit candle). It is a timely reminder that we should not assume which aspects of spirituality are most likely to support resilience among African young people, particularly as culture is fluid (Panter-Brick, 2015; Ramphela, 2012). Despite this discrepancy, my research revealed that the young person who did engage in such practices experienced comfort, hope and perseverance. Future studies might want to ask more explicitly about ancestral practices.

In the next chapter, I will explore the connection between the findings of my study and the theoretical framework informing my study (i.e., SETR) (Ungar, 2011). I will provide recommendations for educational psychologists working with young adults, particularly those residing in structurally disadvantaged communities during extra challenging times (like pandemics). These recommendations will focus on harnessing spirituality to enhance the resilience of these emerging adults.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I conclude my study by evaluating how my findings align with my research question. I also reflect on the effectiveness of my research methodology and acknowledge the limitations of my study. Furthermore, I provide recommendations for future research and offer suggestions to educational psychologists in South Africa based on the outcomes of my study.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION REVISITED AND FINDINGS DISCUSSED

The research question that directed my study of limited scope was: How does spirituality as part of African ways of being and doing support the resilience of emerging adults challenged by structural disadvantage and COVID-19? Resilience is the capacity to successfully adjust to the adversities of life, as discussed in the previous chapters (Masten, 2021). This positive adjustment draws on various resources, of which spiritual resources form a part (Anderson, 2019). Figure 5.1 provides a visual summary of my findings as they relate to my research question and to the relevant principles of SETR (Ungar, 2011, 2015), since the SETR approach to understanding resilience is the theoretical framework that underpinned my study. Figure 5.1 illustrates the SETR principles of decentrality and cultural relativity that were relevant to my study.

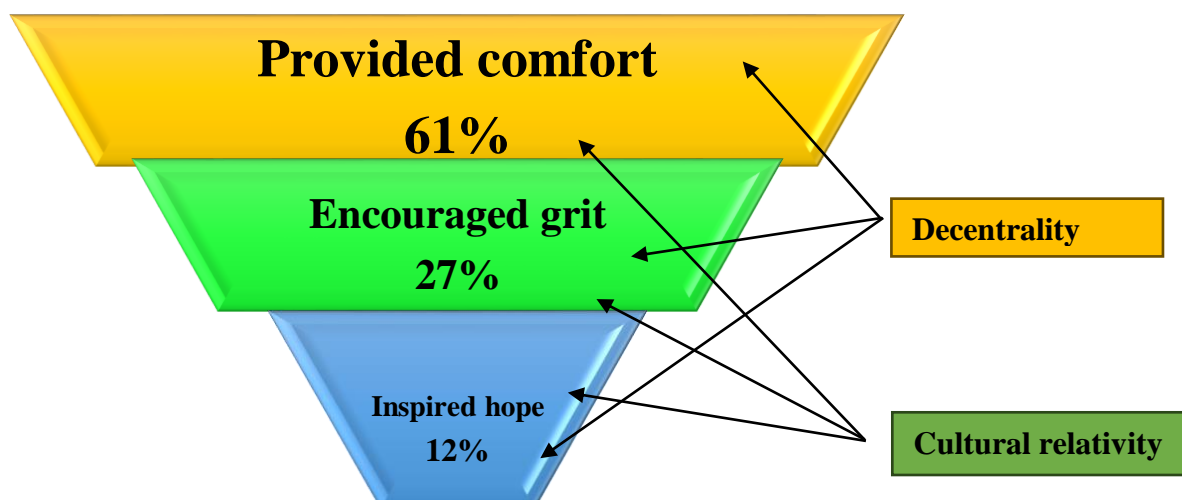


Figure 5.1: Summary of how the SETR principles relates to my research findings



My study's findings were based on the drawings and explanations generated by 98 emerging adult participants living in structurally disadvantaged communities in the province of Gauteng during COVID-19. I identified three thematic categories in this data which focused on how spirituality fostered the resilience of young adults living in disadvantaged communities amid COVID-19. In my study, the emerging adults reported that "spirituality provided comfort", "spirituality encouraged grit" and "spirituality inspired hope for a better future". These elements of spirituality (i.e., comfort, grit and hope) fostered resilience among emerging adults who participated in the project titled "Multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa". I found it interesting that overall, only a third (i.e., 98 of the 293 participants in the study) reported spiritual resources. Given my experience as a counsellor and my socialisation as an African woman, I expected more young people to report spiritual resources. This is a timely reminder that traditional ways of being and doing can change over time (Panter-Brick, 2015; Ramphele, 2012), and so we should not assume what will support resilience (Ungar, 2011; 2019).

The most prominent theme reported in my study was "spirituality provided comfort". It was reported in 59 documents. Much literature reporting spirituality as a source of resilience emphasises its potential to bring comfort (Brittian et al., 2013; Clark & Emerson, 2021; Gama & Theron, 2023; Kang et al., 2021; Lalani et al., 2021; Ojagbemi & Gureje, 2021). I believe the need for comfort was heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic due to uncertainty, fear, isolation and grief and this might further explain why it was the most prominent theme in my study. Lockdowns and social distancing isolated people, leading to a demand for emotional support (Kerekes et al., 2021; Owens et al., 2022). Spirituality offered comfort as routines were disrupted and provided a sense of consolation for emerging adults facing unprecedented challenges during the pandemic (Simbarashe & Zirima, 2020). Given that the data for my study was generated in this pandemic, the prominence of comfort makes sense.

The second most prominent theme reported in my study was spirituality encouraged grit. It was reported by almost 50% fewer participants than the comfort-focused theme (i.e., only 27). This fit well with a trend I observed in the literature I reviewed (i.e., fewer studies had studied the grit-supporting value of spirituality; see Abukari, 2018; Drumm

et al., 2014; Nadat & Jacobs, 2021; Theron et al., 2021). In addition, the quite low reporting in my study on grit could be because some participants might not have consciously recognised the impact of spirituality on their grit and perseverance. Spirituality can sometimes be a subtle aspect of an individual's life (Onyishi et al., 2021), and they may not have directly connected it to their ability to persevere in challenging situations. Furthermore, different life stages can have different impacts on an individual's emphasis on the value of spirituality. For instance, young adults might be more focused on finding comfort (given their challenging developmental tasks that focus on finalising their personal, relational and work-related identity) (Arnett, 2000), while older individuals might draw more strength from their spirituality to continuously cope with challenges (i.e., to have grit) as their health declines and their social networks wane.

The least prominent theme reported in my study was "spirituality inspired hope for a better future", it was reported in only 12 documents. While this fit with the studies that looked at hope as a resilience enabler for young people (i.e., I did not find that many), I was surprised by how few emerging adults reported hope, especially as hope was emphasised in some of the literature I reviewed (i.e., Davis et al. 2023; Njoroge, 2014; Thomas et al., 2023). The participants' low reporting on spirituality inspiring their hope could perhaps be because COVID-19 challenged and threatened their realisation of developmental tasks (e.g., attainment of employment, completing studies, financial stability). Many studies reported COVID-related disruptions of young people's hopes and aspirations for the future (Khambule, 2021; Gittings et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2021). This may suggest that the uncertainties and disruptions caused by the pandemic may have overshadowed their ability to draw hope from spiritual beliefs about the future.

When analysing my research findings using the SETR framework (Ungar, 2011), it became clear to me that decentrality and cultural relativity were relevant to my study. However, complexity and atypicality did not appear to be evident in my study. In the following discussion, I will elaborate on each of these principles and their applicability to my findings.



Decentrality involves shifting the emphasis from the individual and their personal resources of resilience to the broader context or environment in which they exist and the relationship between the person and their environment (Ungar, 2011). This means that resilience is more achievable when social ecologies provide the necessary resources (Van Breda, 2018). It acknowledges that individuals rely on various sources of support and comfort from their environment, including spiritual resources (Arrey et al., 2015; Brittan et al., 2013). In this case, spirituality acts as an external source of comfort, grit and hope that individuals turn to during challenging times, highlighting the influence of the environment in supporting resilience (Ojagbemi & Gureje, 2021). In my study, emerging adults revealed that engaging in faith-based acts, such as continuous prayers and scripture reading, helped them find comfort, encouraged grit and inspired hope in the face of adversity, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. Engaging in continuous prayers and reading of scriptures demonstrates a connection to a broader spiritual belief system (Du Toit, 2022). This connection allows individuals to shift their focus away from personal resources towards something greater, such as their faith or relationship with a higher power, thereby supporting their resilience.

Cultural relativity in the SETR framework highlights the importance of recognising that resilience is influenced by cultural factors (Ungar, 2011). It acknowledges that the values and practices that young people are socialised to embrace within their respective cultures can shape the significance of different resources for their resilience (Ungar, 2015). The findings of my study reflect the cultural value placed on spirituality in African communities. In these contexts, spirituality is deeply intertwined with beliefs, rituals and practices that offer comfort, perseverance and hope (Molteni et al., 2021; Simbarashe & Zirima, 2020). Spirituality holds significant importance in African cultures, exerting a profound influence on individuals' lives and the wider community. African cultural values, such as the reverence for God, ancestors and interconnectedness are intertwined with spirituality (Agbiji & Swart, 2015; Moodley et al., 2020; Uwandu & Nwanko, 2006). These values fundamentally shape how people confront challenges, engage with others and demonstrate resilience. They are deeply ingrained in the African worldview, permeating various aspects of daily life. The significance of spirituality and faith-based resources in supporting resilience within African communities becomes evident when considering cultural relativity. This notion is reinforced by the fact that all the participants in my study were Black African young



men and women. Still, as alluded to above, only a third of the total sample (n=293) reported spiritual resources when they accounted for their resilience. This could mean that as Ramphele (2012) feared, appreciation for traditional African culture is waning among younger Africans. The same trend could explain why only one participant referred to ancestral practices that were resilience enabling and only one other referring to African ways of praying as resilience enabling. Overall, while it is important to recognise the cultural relativity of the resources that support young people's resilience (Ungar, 2011, 2019), it is also important not to assume that these resources will have enduring protective effects (Panter-Brick, 2015).

According to the SETR framework, atypicality refers to the unexpected or non-conventional resilience resources that may not be widely accepted by mainstream society (Ungar, 2011). In my study that involved emerging adults from Gauteng, I did not find any indications of atypical resilience resources. This could be attributed to the impact of COVID-19 lockdown measures which enforced staying at home. As a result, participants may have faced limitations in expressing their resilience enablers in a private setting such as their homes. In addition, they may have relied on shared resources to communicate their data to the research team investigating the "Multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa". These circumstances may have led participants to choose not to disclose any atypical resilience resources to avoid potential conflicts or judgement from peers and family members who might have had access to the information they shared (Braciszewski et al., 2018).

The principle of complexity within the SETR framework recognises that resilience is not a uniform or fixed trait but a complex and dynamic process (Ungar, 2011). This complexity is evident in the variations of resilience across different contexts, including cultural and sociocultural contexts and time periods (Ungar, 2019). In my study that involved emerging adults from Gauteng only at a given point in time, I did not find any indications of complexity. This does not mean resilience, also among African young people, is not complex. Instead, it means that the study I chose to design within the greater study (i.e., a study of how spirituality supported the resilience of a single sample of young people from similarly disadvantaged contexts in Gauteng) eclipsed the principle of complexity. Since I did not have the opportunity to work with the

emerging adults over time, and all the participants were African and came from disadvantaged contexts, the concept of complexity, as described in the SETR framework, was not applicable to my study.

5.3 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity refers to the continuous and deliberate practise of examining oneself in order to gain a better knowledge of one's behaviours, emotions and perceptions in order to improve the transparency of the research process (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). The researcher aims to minimise subjectivity and avoid imposing personal interpretations on participants' viewpoints by being self-aware during this process (Berger, 2015). Furthermore, Creswell (2014) discusses how ethnicity, gender, language, personality traits, sexual orientation and views affect the researcher's position in the study. This positioning can impact both the participants' willingness to disclose information and the study's conclusions, as they are shaped by the researcher's background.

As a Northern Sesotho-speaking African young woman who grew up in a disadvantaged community in Gauteng and upholds spirituality, my personal background and experiences inevitably shaped the way I engaged with my study. Recognising the influence of my own identity and positionality was essential for understanding the potential biases and perspectives that could have affected various aspects of the research process. My upbringing in a disadvantaged community in Gauteng provided me with first-hand insights into the challenges faced by emerging adults within similar contexts. These experiences may have influenced my choice of my research question, as I recognised the importance of spirituality in navigating adversity and promoting resilience among individuals from structurally disadvantaged communities. It is important to acknowledge that my personal background and beliefs may have introduced biases and limitations to the study. However, I endeavoured to mitigate these potential biases through various means. For instance, I engaged in ongoing self-reflection throughout the research process, examining my own perspectives and assumptions to minimise their impact on the study's findings. I also sought input and feedback from my peer and supervisor to ensure diverse perspectives were considered. At the same time, inspired by Braun and Clark (2022), I recognised the value in my bias towards the value of spirituality. It prompted me to

give focused attention to the data of the greater study that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Reflecting on the assumptions I made in my study (see Section 1.7), one assumption was not supported by the findings of my study. I assumed spirituality would enable and empower emerging adults. While this assumption was confirmed by my three themes (i.e., comfort, grit and hope are enabling), the low number of participants reporting spiritual resources made me question my assumption. Only a third of the total sample reported spiritual resources and so this implied the need to be cautious about assuming that spirituality empowers every individual. My study has, therefore, reinforced the importance of approaching clients without preconceived ideas. By embracing an open mindset, I can foster a collaborative therapeutic relationship, acknowledge clients' unique experiences and develop interventions that truly address their individual circumstances and values (including spiritual ones, if any).

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Upon reflection, several limitations of my study came to light. These limitations are summarised as follows.

- A limitation of my study is that it only considered the perspective of emerging adults from Gauteng. Although focusing on emerging adults from Gauteng provided valuable insights into the experiences of this distinct demographic, it is essential to acknowledge that spirituality and resilience can vary across different cultural, geographical and socioeconomic contexts. By solely examining the perspective of emerging adults from Gauteng, the study might not fully capture the diversity of spirituality and resilience experiences among emerging adults from structurally disadvantaged communities in other parts of South Africa.
- I did not directly engage with the emerging adults in my study for the purposes of data generation. However, I had access to the documents (drawings and explanations) generated by the emerging adults in the greater study (i.e., *The multisystemic sources of human resilience to COVID-19-related stress: Learning from emerging adults in India and South Africa*). This previously unanalysed data was ample to answer my research question. As

communicated by the study team to me, my focus on spirituality also contributed to the larger study's interpretation of the data across both South Africa and India, prompting them to look beyond typical resilience enablers like personal strengths and human relationships. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that not engaging with the participants directly posed a limitation. Without the opportunity to interact with them, I was unable to probe for additional information or ask clarifying questions which could have further enriched the data and provided a deeper understanding of their experiences (Rule & John, 2011; Yardley & Bishop, 2017).

- My study did not extensively explore contextual factors that may influence the relationship between spirituality and resilience among emerging adults from structurally disadvantaged communities in Gauteng and analysed only data generated by a sample of emerging adults in Gauteng at a specific point in time. Cross-sectional studies have inherent limitations, particularly when examining a dynamic construct such as resilience (Beames et al., 2021; Fullerton et al., 2021).

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.1 Recommendations Relating to Future Research

To address the limitations, I recommend the following.

- Future research should consider including participants from diverse regions, cultural backgrounds, spiritual beliefs and socioeconomic contexts (Ungar et al., 2021). By exploring the resilience-supporting value of spirituality in future studies with more diverse groups of emerging adults we can gain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and challenges. Considering diverse spiritual beliefs could lead to more inclusive findings, informing policies and interventions that better support young adults with diverse racial, cultural, religious and sexual identities during this crucial stage of development.
- Future research should include opportunities for direct engagement with participants for follow-up questions. This follow-up study could be designed specifically to gather more in-depth information and insights from participants.

While there was a database that included participant contact details, many of the young people's cell phone numbers were no longer in use and so follow-up was complicated for me. Future studies must consider advanced ways of being able to contact participants, especially given the strong trend to encourage students to use pre-existing data given the expense of data generation (Nyumba et al., 2018).

- Future research could delve deeper into contextual factors, such as proximity to vibrant faith-based communities, changing cultural norms and practices, socioeconomic status and community support to gain a deeper understanding of how context shapes the role of spirituality in promoting resilience. Furthermore, to capture the dynamic nature of spirituality and resilience among emerging adults, employing a longitudinal design could provide insights into how spiritual resources evolve over time and the potential causal relationships between them.

5.5.2 Recommendations for Educational Psychologists

My study's findings could be useful for educational psychologists working in similar situations from which my data was collected. I am hopeful that my findings will motivate and encourage South African educational psychologists to recognise and acknowledge the role of spirituality in the lives of their clients, particularly those from structurally disadvantaged communities. By integrating spiritual dimensions into therapeutic approaches, psychologists can help individuals explore and use their spiritual beliefs and practices as sources of resilience and coping mechanisms (Thakkar et al., 2023).

I also recommend that educational psychologists should strive to develop cultural sensitivity and competence to better serve their clients. This entails understanding and respecting the cultural, religious and spiritual backgrounds of clients from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, including those from structurally disadvantaged communities. Ongoing professional development, workshops and training programmes can help psychologists enhance their cultural competence and ensure that they can provide effective support to individuals from different backgrounds (Quartioli et al., 2020).

5.6 CONCLUSION

Through my study, I have witnessed the power of spirituality in providing comfort, grit and hope to some young individuals navigating the complexities of adulthood. Just as the plant that was drawn by Participant 60 (see Figure 5.2) draws sustenance from its roots, emerging adults who value spiritual beliefs and practices can draw on these to cultivate resilience and inner fortitude. In the face of adversity, spirituality can act as a steadfast companion, offering a sense of purpose, connectedness and meaning. Just as a plant (see Figure 5.2) reaches upward towards the sky, spirituality can encourage emerging adults to explore their potential, embrace personal growth and transcend the challenges they encounter along their journey. It can empower them to rise above difficulties, nurture their emotional wellbeing and fosters a sense of inner peace. Moreover, just as a plant is in harmony with the elements of nature, spirituality and resilience intertwine, with strong potential for fostering personal growth and empowerment. Still, I am aware that plants differ, and so I will not assume that spirituality is a strong source of resilience for all. I will take these insights from my study into my internship and subsequent practice and hope they will inspire others to do the same when they work with young people who embrace spirituality.

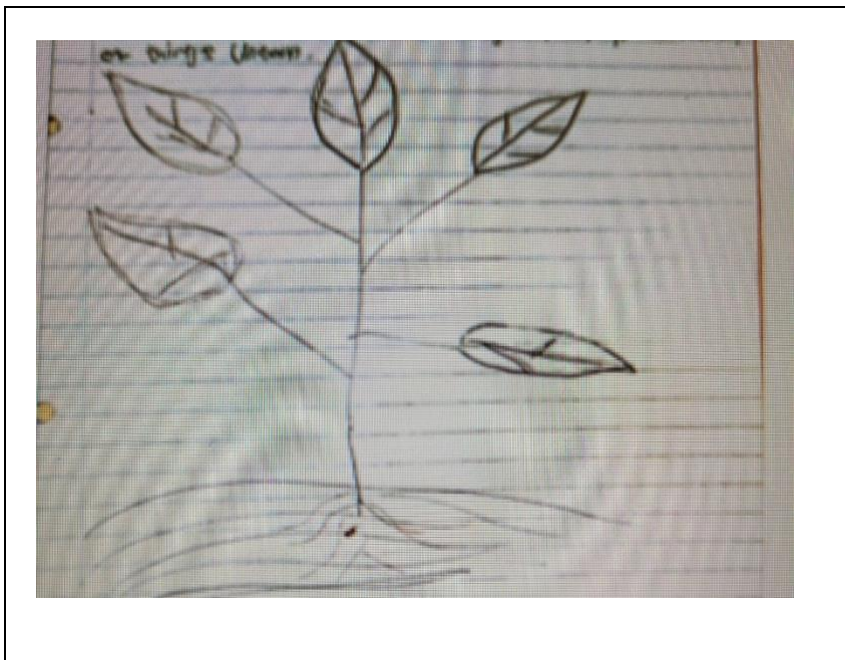


Figure 5.2: Participant 60's drawing of a plant serves as a reminder that spirituality can be a source of comfort, grit and hope



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APPENDICES


Appendix A: Audit Trail (open codes, candidate themes)

Question guiding coding: How does spirituality as part of African way of being and doing support the resilience of emerging adults living in structurally disadvantaged communities amidst COVID-19?

Table A1 – Participant 341

<i>Examples of extracts that addressed my research question</i>	<i>Open Code</i>	<i>Candidate themes</i>
<p>When I am in difficult times, I choose prayer because it makes me rest in God and allows His peace to calm me in my current circumstances and to comfort me and give me courage to face the challenges with his spirit by my side.</p>	<p>Prayer soothes during in hard circumstances</p> <p>Courage found through praying.</p>	<p>Spirituality provided comfort.</p> <p>Spirituality encouraged grit</p>
<p>Through my difficult times in life, prayer has helped to deal with lots of things I went through. Burning a candle and talking to God about everything, asking for strength to keep going, to keep on believing in myself. The light is for brightening up</p>	<p>Prayer provides strength to keep going.</p>	<p>Spirituality encouraged grit</p>

<p>my darkest days strengthening my faith, to get rid of fear of not making it in this life.</p>		
 <p>I drew a lit candle. In African spirituality, we pray with a white candle. For me it symbolises hope. I think hope gets me through, no matter how small that hope is that things will get better.</p>	<p>The lit candle</p> <p>Hope brings light during challenging times.</p>	<p>Spirituality inspired hope for a better future</p>
<p>In the picture is a person representing me when I pray, as prayer has been the one thing that is giving me some comfort when I had issues that I can't discuss with other people. I pray to God, and he comforts me.</p>	<p>Talking to God brings consolation.</p>	<p>Spirituality provided comfort</p>
<p>What keeps me going through difficulties is hope which I have for me and hope that God has for me. It's like there is something that is great stored</p>	<p>Hope provides assurance.</p>	<p>Spirituality inspired hope for a better future</p>

<p>and released each time I do good a sense of tranquillity that I receive from God is amazing because I prevail in difficult situations.</p> 	<p>The blossoming flower symbolises</p>	
<p>I drown my sorrows through reading the word of God, whenever life seems so difficult, I heal through reading the Bible as it comforts me”.</p>	<p>Reading the word of God provides relief when life is difficult.</p>	<p>Spirituality provided comfort</p>
<p>This is where I draw my strength from. From my God.</p>	<p>God provides strength.</p>	<p>Spirituality encouraged grit</p>
<p>GOD HAS A BETTER PLAN. Sometimes when life gets hard you must know that perhaps God has a better plan for you. I'm not saying that everyone should quit or should not give up but choose to believe that God has something better for you in store.</p>	<p>Believing that God has a better plan provides hope.</p>	<p>Spirituality inspired hope for a better future</p>



	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Spirituality provided comfort.	This theme includes any data relating to faith-based acts and beliefs that serve as a resource for comfort, solace, relief, and consolation in times of distress and adversity.	This theme excludes any data relating to non-faith-based practices such as physical exercise and comfort from family and friends. This theme excluded data that referred to spirituality as a source of hope, endurance, optimism, and determination.
Spirituality encouraged grit	This theme includes any data relating to spirituality serving as a resource for strength, courage, perseverance, and motivation to keep going during difficult times.	This theme excludes any data relating to drawing motivation, strength, perseverance from sources such as social networks, mental health practices and family. This theme excluded data that referred to spirituality providing hope, contentment, relief, and confidence to participants.
Spirituality inspired hope for a better future	Theme 3 relates to all data related to faith-related and spiritual beliefs, particularly the belief in an omnipotent and omniscient God with good plans for the future.	The theme excluded data related to non-faith-related beliefs such as personal goals and aspirations, self-confidence, support from relationships that can inspire



	<p>These beliefs have served as a wellspring of hope, empowering emerging adults to face adversity with determination.</p>	<p>hope. The theme excluded data that referred to spirituality providing consolation and/or tenacity to participants.</p>
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Appendix B: Ethical Clearance



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Education

Amendment

Ethics Committee

20 April 2021

Prof LC Theron

Dear Prof LC Theron

REFERENCE: UP 17/05/01 THERON

We received the proposed amendments to your existing project. Your amendment is thus **approved**. The decision covers the entire research process, until completion of the study report, and not only the days that data will be collected. The approval is valid for two years for a Masters and three for Doctorate.

The approval by the Ethics Committee is subject to the following conditions being met:

1. The research will be conducted as stipulated on the application form submitted to the Ethics Committee with the supporting documents.
2. Proof of how you adhered to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) policy for research must be submitted where relevant.
3. In the event that the research protocol changed for whatever reason the Ethics Committee must be notified thereof by submitting an amendment to the application (Section E), together with all the supporting documentation that will be used for data collection namely: questionnaires, interview schedules and observation schedules, for further approval before data can be collected. Non-compliance implies that the Committee's approval is null and void. The changes may include the following but are not limited to:
 - Change of investigator,
 - Research methods any other aspect therefore and,
 - Participants.

The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education does not accept any liability for research misconduct, of whatsoever nature, committed by the researcher(s) in the implementation of the approved protocol.

Upon completion of your research you will need to submit the following documentations to the Ethics Committee for your

Clearance Certificate:

- Integrated Declaration Form (Form D08),
- Initial Ethics Approval letter and,
- Approval of Title.

Please quote the reference number UP 17/05/01 THERON in any communication with the Ethics Committee.

Best wishes

Prof Funke Omidire
Chair: Ethics Committee
Faculty of Education