CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD WELL-BEING: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

BY

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RESEARCH PROPOSAL & ETHICS

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I declare that this mini dissertation is my own original work. Where secondary materialis used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is, and I am aware of university policy and implications in this regard.

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ABSTRACT

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD WELL-BEING: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

STUDENT:	**ZANDILE FRANCINE MTSWENI**
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In 1989, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child which set out to have children's voices heard and included in decision-making processes affecting them (United Nations, 1989). The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. The study adopted the ecosystems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as a theoretical framework.

The study utilised a qualitative research approach, which had an exploratory and descriptive purpose. The research design was an instrumental case study. The study sample was purposively selected and snowball sampling used to recruit participants who composed of ten children between the ages of 8 and 12 residing in Bronkhorstspruit, Region 7 of the City of Tshwane. Data collection was done through one-on-one semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule and visual communication cards. Data was analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) six step thematic data analysis model. Trustworthiness of data was enhanced by applying the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependably and confirmability. The study adhered to ethical considerations and ethically cleared by the University of Pretoria.

The findings of the study revealed that participants have a clear understanding of what well-being means to them in relation to their own opinions and experiences. Participants regard positive relationships, access to quality education, adequate housing, access to material resources, income in the household, safe communities, and a clean environment as important contributors to their well-being. However, participants feel that their own perspectives are often overlooked by adults and therefore need

their voices to be heard in matters that are important to them. The study concluded that children's 's perspectives need to be heard and that they should be allowed to participate in matters affecting them. Furthermore, collaboration between different stakeholders including social workers is essential in enhancing child well-being to contribute to sustainable futures.

The study recommends that children's rights to participate must be protected and promoted across all levels of their development. Additionally, a collaborative, integrative and multidisciplinary approach by professionals should be used in addressing child well-being to promote their sustainable outcomes. By using developmental social work, social workers can plan and implement responsive programmes for children. In conclusion, child well-being measures should include both subjective and objectives measures to gain a holistic account of children's lives.

KEYWORDS

Child

Child well-being

Child participation

Sustainable development

Sustainable futures

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSG   Child Support Grant

DSD   Department of Social Development

NDP   National Development Plan

OECD   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

RSA   Republic of South Africa

SA   South Africa

SAHRC   South African Human Rights Council

SASSA   South African Social Security Agency

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

UNEP   United Nations Environment Programme

UNICEF   United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WCED   The World Commission on Environment and Development

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The well-being of children involves their physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual, and environmental welfare and significantly influences their development and future (Ben-Arieh,Casas, Frønes & Korbin, 2014:3; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). Additionally, well-being is related to a person's quality of life and includes subjective indicators (i.e., one's perception of happiness and quality of life and satisfaction) as well as objective indicators (i.e., health status, resources for education and household income (Statham & Chase, 2010:2). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was tabled to enhance the economic, social, and environmental development of all people. Although South Africa has made significant progress in regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for children, there are still considerable disadvantages experienced by South African children (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:3; UN, 2015:3). Many children continue to be exposed to social, economic and environmental issues such as incomplete families, HIV/AIDS, violent crimes, exploitation, malfunctioning communities and climate change (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:1; Peeters, 2012:287).

Social workers in South Africa play a pivotal role in promoting child well-being by utilising a developmental approach which focuses on promoting social change and the "well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities in their social context" (Department of Social Development, 2013:13; Patel, 2015:127). The social work profession understands that achieving child well-being is a protective factor against negative factors which can have lasting implications for children. However, to improve child well-being, the voice of the child needs to be heard. It is through children's active participation that policies and services become child-responsive and lead to positive lifelong outcomes (Save the Children South Africa, 2018:10).

Well-being, which is identified as a personal construct, underscores the importance of individuals being in the best position to determine their perspectives on well-being. However, children's perspectives are often confined and invisible because of policies, their age and the perceived need for protection that overshadows their active participation (Fattore & Mason, 2017:267; I'Anson, 2013:106). Although studies have been conducted on child well-being, research on children's perspectives on child well-being is limited (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:464) especially in South Africa. This study focused on how South African children conceptualise and perceive their well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures.

The key concepts relevant to the study are as follows:

Child: The Children's Act 25 of 2005 defines a child as "a person under the age of 18 years." In the context of this study, the term 'child' will refer to children between the ages of 8 and 12 years and thus, in the developmental stage of middle childhood (Louw, Louw & Kail, 2014:8).

Child well-being: Child well-being is a holistic concept that involves the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual, and environmental well-being of children and is characterised by an absence of psychiatric or psychological problems (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). Children's well-being influences their lives in the present and affects their development and future (Ben-Arieh *et al.*, 2014:1). Child well-being is measured according to different domains including living standards, social cohesion, home, family and friends, education, leisure time, material sources, the neighbourhood, connection to nature, cultural fulfilment, health as well as safety and security (Buck, Summers, Smith & Harwell, 2018:1254; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:463).

Sustainable development: The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987:43 as cited by Peeters, 2012:290) refers to sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Sustainable development is a path in which the social, economic, and environmental developments of the current generation take into consideration the needs of future generations and promotes the well-being of people and the environment without causing a decline in the well-being of future generations and their environment (Ahenkan & Osei-Kojo, 2014:163). Thus, development conducted sustainably leads to sustainable futures.

Sustainable futures: The term "sustainable futures" is defined as "a future that is about human dignity, social inclusion and environmental protection" (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). Within this study, sustainable futures will be defined as futures for children that are free from social ills such as poverty, inequality, lack of basic services as well as crime, and can be achieved if children's perspectives on child well-being are identified and incorporated into development and intervention plans. Savahl, Tiliouine, Casas, Adams, Mekonene, Dejene, Benninger and Witten (2017:39) emphasise: "The implication for policy is that governments need to take proactive measures to enhance the capacity of families to enable them to provide material and other basic needs for children and mitigate poverty and deprivation which has a significant impact on the well-being of children."

Child participation: Child participation is a fundamental right of children which involves the active participation of children in the decisions, processes, programmes and policies that affect their lives (Save the Children South Africa, 2018:09). In this study, child participation is defined as listening to

children's views on matters that concern them, and considering their views when adults make decisions on policies and services that aim to improve child well-being.

1.2 Rationale and problem statement

Children's physical, mental, social, cognitive, spiritual, material and environmental well-being have a substantial influence on their lives and their future (Ben-Arieh *et al.,* 2014:1; Minkkinen, 2013:4; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355; Newland, Giger, Lawler, Roh, Brockevelt & Schwenle, 2019:395). Children's well-being is a critical aspect in the mastery of their developmental tasks and helps them to adjust to and appropriately interact with their environment (Ayala-Nunes, Jiménez, Jesus, Nunes & Hidalgo 2018:812; Peeters, 2012:290).

Although South Africa has made notable progress with the implementation of the SDGs that are intended to promote the well-being of all people (Lombard, 2015:484), many children are still severely affected by societal problems such as poverty, violence, family disintegration, mental health problems, substance use, adverse childhood experiences and climate change (Ayala-Nunes *et al.,* 2018:885; Patel, 2015:291-292; Richter, Desmond, Hosegood, Madhavan, Makiwane, Makusha, Morrell & Swartz, 2012:3).

Social workers working from a developmental approach can play an important role in advocating for sustainable development and the well-being of children (Hawkins, 2010:69; Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83; Patel, 2015:127). Ayala-Nunes *et al.* (2018:813) emphasise the importance of promoting the well-being of children as follows:

> "Promoting and investing in the well-being and positive development of children and youth—especially for those growing up in adverse environments—is being increasingly viewed as a political priority and a means to break the cycle of disadvantage and to enhance social cohesion as well as to increase productivity in the economy and in society at large."

Many decisions related to children's well-being are based on social policies and the conceptions of adults, however, adult conceptions about child well-being may not be relevant to children (Ben-Arieh *et al.,* 2014:10; Buck *et al.,* 2018:1254). The participation of children in matters affecting them, as outlined in the Children's Act 38 of 2005, Article 10, can thus provide meaningful information that can be used by social workers to develop interventions that will contribute to the well-being of children. The aim of this study was thus to explore the perspectives of children in middle childhood on child well-being within a South African context.

The research question for the study was as follows: *What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?*

1.3 Goal and objectives

1.3.1 Research goal

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context.

1.3.2 Research objectives

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To conceptualise child well-being and participation within the framework of ecosystems theory and sustainability
- To explore children's understanding of child well-being
- To explore children's views on social factors that affect their current and future well-being
- To explore children's views on economic factors that affect their current and future well-being
- To explore children's views on environmental factors that affect their current and future well-being
- To describe the children's suggestions for enhancing child participation in matters that influence their well-being

1.4. Research methodology

An overview of the research methodology is provided in this section. A detailed discussion will follow in Chapter Three.

The study was qualitative in nature which enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information from the participants (Fouché & Delport, 2011:91) on how they perceive child well-being. The research paradigm most suitable and utilised for this study was interpretivism which views reality as a social construct that can be understood by studying people in their social settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:67). The study had both an exploratory and descriptive purpose (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95-96) and was relevant for social work practice and thus identified as applied research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:44). Furthermore, a case study design was a suitable research design as it permitted the researcher to explore the participants' perceptions of child well-being in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008:544-559; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:90)

The study population selected was children in middle childhood i.e., between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Non-probability sampling, specifically purposive and snowball sampling was utilised to recruit 10 children residing in Bronkhorstspruit, Region 7 of the City of Tshwane. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews guided by an interview schedule were used to collect data. The data analysis process was carried out using thematic analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:144). To obtain data trustworthiness,

the researcher employed strategies of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:3). The ethical considerations and limitations of the study are discussed in Chapter 3.

1.5. Division of the research report

Chapter 1 presents the general introduction of the study. It includes: the rationale and problem statement of the study, the research question, the goal and objectives of the study, a brief overview of the research methodology and the divisions of the chapters.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and includes a discussion of the developmental characteristics of middle childhood, legislative frameworks promoting and safeguarding children's well-being, the status of children in South Africa and the role of social workers as advocates for child well-being. It also includes the theoretical framework of the study, namely, ecosystems theory.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology of the study including the research approach, research type and design, the population of the study, the sampling method, data analysis, the pilot study and data trustworthiness. Finally, the ethical considerations as well as the limitations of the study are outlined.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical study and findings of the study.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter and presents how the aim and objectives of the study were achieved. The key findings of the study are presented alongside the relevant conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of child well-being is multidimensional and may include elements of happiness, prosperity, balanced living conditions and having rights as a pathway to creating opportunities for a good life (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011:463). The multidimensional nature of child well-being highlights the many interactions and experiences that children have during their development which are important for their well-being and sustainable futures (Marguerit, Cohen & Exton, 2018:6,8). However, children are often confronted by negative socio-economic and environmental conditions including poverty, dysfunctional communities and family structures, malnutrition, and exploitation which disrupt their well-being (Adams, Savahl, Florence & Jackson, 2019:552; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:1). Moreover, children are often left out of decision-making processes that impact their lives (I'Anson, 2013:106).

To meet the multidimensional needs of children as a pathway to their sustainable future, various legislative mandates including the rights-based Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) commit member states to promote and protect the well-being of children (UN, 2015) while the Convention on the Rights of the Child agreement calls for the inclusion of children's voices in decision-making processes that affect their lives (UN, 1989). To achieve sustainable futures for children, social workers utilise developmental social work to advocate for their clients (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83) and improve the well-being of children in their social contexts (Patel, 2015:127).

In this chapter of the study, the concept of child well-being will be presented and discussed. Thereafter, indicators of child well-being, factors that affect child well-being and the developmental characteristics of middle childhood, will be reviewed. In addition, relevant legislative frameworks that promote and safeguard child well-being as well as a contextual presentation of the status of children in South Africa in relation to their well-being will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a presentation of the role of social workers as advocates for child well-being.

2.2 Conceptualising child well-being

Child well-being is conceptualised as multidimensional and involving subjective and objective aspects as well as encompassing developmental aspects and negative life situations (Ayala-Nunes *et al.,* 2018:812; Casas & Frønes, 2019:2). There is also no single definition of child well-being as several scholars define it differently (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011 in Ayala-Nunes *et al.,* 2018:812). As observed over the years, there has been an increase in child-centred studies, however, few studies are framed

6

within children's perspectives (Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016:1; Norrby, Carlsson, Beckung & Nordholm, 1999:230). Therefore, there is a need to understand child well-being and its implication on children's lifelong outcomes (Bethell, Simpson & Solloway, 2017:s1; Ben-Arieh, Casas & Frønes, 2014:1). Linked to child well-being is the concept of well-being which is a personal construct requiring individuals to determine their own experiences of well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017:267).

Well-being, according to Minkkinen (2013:4-5), is conceptualised along four dimensions, that is physical, social, material and mental well-being. *Physical well-being* relates to optimal functioning at the physical level, including health and the absence of illness (Minkkinen, 2013:4-5). Apart from the child's personal well-being, genetics play a role in physical well-being. *Social well-being* is defined as the positive interactions and circumstances in which children exist with their significant others (Minkkinen, 2013:4-5). *Mental well-being* exists alongside a positive mental state and is supported by favourable emotional and cognitive well-being as well as the absence of mental disorders (Minkkinen, 2013:4-5). *Material well-being* refers to safe and supportive environments including food security, living conditions and other physical needs (Minkkinen, 2013:4-5). Therefore, child well-being is multidimensional and can be engaged in multiple ways. Furthermore, well-being can be understood within the duality of both the subjective and the objective.

2.2.1 Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is defined as personal appraisal, perception and overall evaluation of the emotional state of an individual (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:462; Ortuño-Sierraj, Bañuelos, Perez de Albeniz, Molina & Fonseca-Pedrero, 2019:1-2).There are several studies that have discussed a holistic conceptualisation of subjective well-being as an essential pathway to understanding the functioning of children as capable beings (Giman & Huebner, 2003 in Grass-Manos; Shimoni & Ben-Arieh, 2015:72) and the need to develop responsive intervention programmes to enhance their well-being (Heubner, Seligson, Valois & Suldo, 2006 in Grass-Manos *et al.*, 2015:72).In subjective well-being studies, within the context of children, children report on their level of life satisfaction, happiness in various life domains such as time use, the virtual world, social relationships, and political voice, among others (Casas & Frönes, 2019:4; McAuley, McKeown & Merriman, 2012:451; Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019; Rees & Main, 2015:12). In recent years, the inclusion of subjective well-being as a social indicator has gained significance and transited from its measurement (Casas, 2011 & Huebner, 1991 in Kaye-Tzadok, Ben-Arieh & Kosher, 2019:433) and adult-centric views about child well-being to child-centred frameworks (Ben-Arieh, 2008 in Nadan & Kay- Tzadok, 2019:345). This transition and evolution of focus areas of subjective well-being highlight the value of child-centred programmes as predictors for overall development and child well-being (Park, 2004 in Dinisman & Ben-Arieh, 2016:556). Furthermore, the transition of studies on child well-being is in alignment with the fulfilment of the CRC mandates (UN, 1989 in Dinisman & Ben-Arieh,

2016:556). Additionally, the study of subjective well-being from a social work perspective focuses on a basic triad of measures such as social well-being, economic stability, and environmental well-being (Coumpton & Hoffman, 2013:51; Fattore & Mason, 2017:276; Savahl *et al.*, 2017:31; Miller, Hayward & Shaw, 2012:23). Furthermore, child well-being can also be defined along an objective well-being lens.

2.2.2 Objective well-being

Objective well-being involves statistical indicators and expert information including aspects such as health, education, and the economy (Casas & Frønes, 2019:3). By extension, the concept of objective well-being may encompass observable aspects of well-being such as academic performance (Haq & Zia, 2013:998; Statham & Chase, 2010:5; Thompson & Aked, 2009 in Omar & Siti Hajar, 2017:8; Cornfield, Streuli & Woodhead, 2008 in Omar & Siti Hajar, 2017:8). In addition, objective well-being assists in assessing the availability and distribution of services as seen in a study measuring children's perceptions and experiences of deprivation conducted in Ireland. The study showed that children whose material needs were met had access to school, nutrition and constructive relationships with their families (Swords, Greene, Boyd & Kerrins, 2011:27). Therefore, maintaining and supporting the well-being of children requires the development of multidimensional indicators that include both objective and subjective constructs of well-being (Ross, Hinton, Melles-Brewer, Engel, Zack, Fagan, Herat, Phaladi, Imbago-Jacome, Anyona, Sanchez, Damji, Terki, Baltag, Patton, Silverman, Fogstad, Banerjee & Mohan, 2020:473). Indicators can be used to determine the current and future status of children and thus critical for social service practitioners as policy makers (Ben-Arieh & Frones, 2011:461).

2.3 Indicators of child well-being

There are various indicators that affect child well-being. These include the social, economic, and environmental indicators which will be further discussed below.

2.3.1 Social indicators

In its definition of well-being, the World Health Organization (1997) asserts the importance of social well-being and the social relationships of people in their environment (Feng, Altinay & Olya, 2019:6). This definition posits the complex nature of the environment and how a supportive social environment can improve social well-being (Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:194). It has also been found that negative social interactions may lead to negative outcomes like depression (Steunenberg *et al.,* 2006 in Feng *et al.,* 2019:7) whilst supportive interactions promote positive psychological well-being (Diener & Suh, 2003 in Feng *et al.*, 2019:7). Therefore, in order to improve well-being, it is important to fulfil people's basic needs (Coulthard *et al.*, 2011 in Feng *et al.*, 2019:7).

2.3.2 Economic indicators

The economic indicators of child well-being include material and monetary income and emphasise the necessity in making a living (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2; Casas & Frönes, 2019:2). Statistics South Africa (2018) reported that 62,3% of the child population aged 0-17 years lived in low-income households and that the likelihood of these circumstances increased for children in female-headed households. Household income supports the material needs of the family and there is a strong correlation between children's well-being and material resources as shown in a study by Main (2013) in Kaye-Tzadok, Ben-Arieh & Kosher (2019:348) which revealed that children between the ages of 8-12 years viewed having a cell phone, a television and the right clothes as important for peer relationships and fitting in which bolstered their self-esteem. As a phase of childhood development, peer relationships become important because children develop meaning and reason in relation to their environment. Therefore, opportunities of access or lack of material resources compromise their developmental and educational outcomes as well as their self-esteem, amongst other factors (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman 2014:360; Chaudry & Wimer, 2016:s24).

The same Irish study, measuring children's experiences of deprivation, links material resources and income and their influence on parental investment in children's educational resources, as a pathway to better life outcomes (Swords *et al.,* 2011:6). As evidenced by COVID-19, the pandemic exposed the existing digital divide where poor children and children from rural areas, compared to their urban counterparts, could not afford Internet services and gadgets to support their learning during the closure of schools during lockdown (UNDP, 2020:61). In South Africa, metropolitan and urban households are reported to have combined internet access of 20.8% while rural households lag with 0.8% (Statistics South Africa, 2020b:47). It is therefore important for researchers to evaluate the economic impact of different factors on child well-being such as the investments made by caregivers, family characteristics, successful members in the family, the socioeconomic position of parents, inter-generational transmission, and early-life circumstances as contributors to child well-being (Conti & Heckman, 2012:11). Furthermore, the well-being of children is also affected by environmental conditions in which they find themselves.

2.3.3 Environmental indicators

The environmental indicators of child well-being have been the focus of several studies, especially with regards to the importance of inclusion and consideration of the environment as a space wherein children spend the majority of their time (Adams *et al.*, 2019:547; Buck *et al.*, 2018:1263; David & Weinstein, 2013:4). McKendrick (2014:279) contends that where children live is fundamental to childhood experiences as an enabler of positive influence on child well-being. However, variations in

socio-economic statuses of communities can pose negative experiences on childhood experiences (Adams *et al.*, 2019:547). For example, disaster-stricken communities affect child well-being including families and children to which Alston (2015:357) contextualises the relationship between people affected by disasters and socio-economic rights by elucidating that such people are most likely already struggling to make a living or have unmet socio-economic rights (such as health care, poor living conditions, decent income, etc.).

Manyena, Fordham and Collins (2008:313) illustrate children's potential to contribute to building disaster-resilient communities stating that children's inputs help to plan for effective disaster management, improve resilience of communities, and advocate for policy change. In effect, there is a need to develop a robust mechanism of engagement and involvement of children in practices that exclude child participation and fail to recognise children's rights. Children should actively participate towards the "social, cultural, political and environmental sustainability of their cities" (Bridgman, 2004:338) as demonstrated by climate change movements resulting from children's advocacy and active participation on a global scale (Lombard & Viviers 2014:84). Such impact of advocacy has been witnessed among young people like Greta Thunberg who is well-known for speaking up on climate change on global stages (Kraemer, 2021). As discussed in this section, the environment in which children find themselves can either provide protection or produce risky conditions that affect their well-being.

2.4 Factors that affect child well-being

Factors that influence child well-being can be broadly categorised as either protective or risk factors which will be further discussed below.

2.4.1 Protective factors of child well-being

Protective factors are attributes that reduce the probability of having negative outcomes during adversity and increase the likelihood of having better-than-expected outcomes (Greene & Greene, 2009:1013). Children are mostly dependent and are affected by what occurs in their environments which implies that aspects such as policies, service delivery, education, and the family system, have a direct impact on child well-being—negative and positive alike. In a study by Newland (2014:1339-1340), findings indicated that the health of parents was essential to family well-being as their well-being affects the functioning of the whole family system. Additionally, the more protective factors a family has, the more it can mitigate the risk factors. For example, friendships and constructive family contexts have been reported to positively affect children's well-being as they contribute to the development of social skills (Rees & Main, 2015:65). In addition, Fattore and Mason (2017:278-279) revealed the importance of the family and distant relatives in children's lives as they provided care, trust, belonging and a sense of happiness.

There are other elements that can act as protective factors during adversity such as communities and culture (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008:145). The authors further assert that communities that provide a safe environment and have essential facilities for education or recreation can make a difference to a child's well-being for the purposes of intellectual and cognitive skills development. Within the framework of culture, societal norms, practices and rules of engagement, are important for child well-being because the functionality of communities and society affects children's current development, which in turn, affects the kind of members of society they will grow up to be (de la Poterie & Baudoin, 2015:2-3). Society, therefore, plays a central role in providing a platform for active participation of children with the overall benefits of developing their well-being and skills such as teamwork, self-esteem, and differing opinions (de la Poterie & Baudoin 2015:2-3). Without protective conditions, children may be exposed to risks.

2.4.2 Risk factors of child well-being

Regardless of protective factors that contribute positively to child well-being, there are also risk factors to consider. Boyden and Mann (2005:3) state that irrespective of challenges, children are considered vulnerable as they are the most affected due to their lack of social power and their age. This implies that the level of vulnerability of children's well-being depends on the prevailing immediate circumstances such as living in low-income households, affordability, unsafe communities that are plagued by violence, inequality, poverty and the lack of basic services (SOS Children's Villages, 2016:4; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014:17-18). The promotion of children's well-being is influenced by relationships around them which could either be positive or hostile, and these experiences go on to impact children's physical, mental, and emotional development. For example, children exposed to poor attachment relationships may develop insecure emotional stability while economic pressures in the household may lead parents to depression which can affect parent-child relationships and result in mental challenges for children (Harold & Hay, 2005:5).

Family instability is a risk factor that can impede a child's well-being as explained by Akram, Anjum and Akram (2015:177). For example, children living in an unsteady environment are susceptible to unhappiness and the need for adjustment because of the lack of care and affection which are often required for well-being. A healthy family system is crucial as it promotes the importance of child participation in conversations regarding their future, which is significant seeing as everyone has a different perspective regarding what can be considered a positive influence on children's growth and well-being. Manyena, Fordham and Collins (2008:312) assert that investing in children's well-being and resilience is equivalent to investing in risk reduction of child well-being for future generations.

The above protective and risk factors affirm the influence of the environment in which children grow up and are closely linked to children's overall development including their physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. These will be discussed further below.

2.5 Developmental characteristics of middle childhood

Middle childhood is a transitional stage of development from early childhood to adolescence which symbolises significant changes between the ages of 6-12 years when children's experiences influence their adolescent years (Harold & Hay, 2005:3; Parasuraman, Ghandour & Kogan, 2020:1; Louw & Louw, 2014:225). Stages of childhood development can be understood within the lens of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development as discussed below.

2.5.1 Physical development

In this stage of development, children begin to be aware and understand themselves as social beings. The concept of self emerges within the physical realm and influences children's psychological well-being as they begin to develop an appreciation for their own strengths and weaknesses and those of others (Harold & Hay, 2005:3). Consistent with rapid changes in their development, children in middle childhood display an improvement in their fine and gross motor skills, balance, strength, mobility, vision and eye-hand coordination while the brain reaches the size and weight of an average adult brain and enables children to take part in a wider range of activities during their early childhood (Berk, 2013:178; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32; Louw & Louw, 2014:226-227). Arnett (2016:300) describes middle childhood as the period "when children develop a better grasp of what the physical world is really like and what is and is not possible." Through this social learning process, children are capable of making decisions that influence their well-being (DelGiudice, 2018:97-98).

2.5.2 Cognitive development

Cognitive development is the ability to perceive, reason and understand one's world as influenced by their surroundings, thereby capacitating them to develop logical decision-making and navigate peer relationships and arguments in relation to the world around them (Harold & Hay, 2005:5; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman 2014:360). In this stage of development, children's thoughts become more logical, flexible, organised and more like the thoughts of adults, as described in Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Berk, 2013:249; Louw & Louw, 2014:299). As children's interactions increase, their childhood experiences make more sense to them (Denham, Bassett, Echeverria, Knox, & Wyatt, 2009:i40). From the age of 6 to 7 years, children begin to make associations between causes and motives to events and behaviours; they begin to distinguish between appearance and reality; and their thoughts become more systematic and logical (Arnett, 2016:300; Martorell *et al.*, 2014:276, 283).

Children in middle childhood begin to understand the complex concept of the nature vs nurture debate; their literacy, vocabulary and language skills increase; and they begin to understand reflexive speech and complex sentences (Harold & Hay, 2005:5; Louw & Louw, 2014:234; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman, 2014:291). Academically, children may begin to master or experience challenges in reading and writing (Parasuraman, Ghandour & Kogan, 2020:2). Furthermore, in middle childhood children experience significant development in their concentration, attention span and memory (Berk, 2013:6; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). Their cognitive development is strengthened as children experience an increase in peer, family, and community interactions. In this stage of development, there is a close correlation between children from close-knit families and developing good cognitive perceptions compared to children from dysfunctional families (Eriksen Hvidteldt & Lilleor, 2017:1086). However, children's cognitive development and skills may also be influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they grow up (Arnett, 2016:368; Martorell *et al*., 2014:379-381). Within the domain of cognitive development, children who experience dysfunctional care and unsafe environments may develop impaired functioning which can affect their well-being (Moore, Murphy, Beltz, Martin, Bartlett & Caal, 2016: 28).

2.5.3 Emotional development

Emotional development involves the capacity to facilitate and express both positive and negative emotions (Pontoppidan *et al*., 2017 in Fauziyah, 2021:64). During middle childhood, children develop the ability to understand complex emotions and the capacity to regulate emotions (Berk, 2013:419; Louw & Louw, 2014:233, 299). The ages between 6 and 10 years are crucial because children develop the ability to understand and regulate their emotions to achieve control of situations or develop problem solving skills (Berk, 2013:412; Martorell *et al*., 2014:395). Children can increasingly understand their own and other people's emotions; understand cues to the emotions of others; and understand and respond to other people's distress (Berk, 2013:417, 419; Martorell *et al*., 2014:395).

Emotional development between the ages 6 and 10 years enhances a child's competence in managing stressful situations. Therefore, emotional regulation becomes vital as failure to navigate it can induce anxiety, aggressive and risky behaviours (Harold & Hay, 2005:4; Carr, 2011:58). In a related study on bullying, children could either experience or perpetrate bullying. Children exposed to maltreatment fail to regulate their behaviours and develop bullying tactics or become victims of bullying (Parasuraman, Ghandour & Kogan, 2020:2,4; Harold & Hay, 2005:5). Bullying at this stage may be further perpetrated by children's poor reflection of other's intentions towards them and learning to define genuine acquaintances (Harold & Hay, 2005:5; Carr, 2011:58). This maladjustment of socio-emotional behaviour is said to be more pronounced in middle childhood (Lansford 2009, in Eriksen, Hvidteldt & Lilleor, 2017:1079).

13

As children navigate their social world, managing relationships, including relationships with caregivers, becomes important as they lay a foundation for emotionally well-adjusted children. The role of caregivers, whether positive or negative, has a bearing on child well-being outcomes. Parenting styles can either encourage or disrupt children's psychological development while poor discipline may lead to delinquency. Parental functioning, including unresponsive, hostile, and unresolved conflict, can potentially damage the psychological development of children (Harold & Hay, 2005:5; Denham *et al.*, 2009:i37). Liu, 2007 in Eriksen *et al.* (2017:1078) makes the distinction that a disruption like parental separation could be beneficial to a child in a dysfunctional family setting in cases where there was poor parenting. The quality of relationships that children are exposed to in their environment contributes to their development in emotional regulation which can influence their overall well-being, either positively or negatively (Harold & Hay, 2005:5).

2.5.4 Social development

Pontoppidan *et al.*, 2017 in Fauziyah (2021:64) define social development as the ability to navigate peer relationships and relationships in one's world. In this stage of development, children's worlds expand as their interactions increase and they gain a clearer concept of the "self" in relation to others, which is supported by the skillset required by their cultural contexts (Arnett, 2016:23; Louw & Louw, 2014:256-257, 299; Martorell *et al.*, 2014:395). According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, children develop the skills required to navigate their social, physical, practical, and academic environments, and adjust to a more mature world with that psychosocial phase of development being a stage of "industry and inferiority" (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:41).

Positive relationships with parents, siblings and peers are important because they enhance children's well-being (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:43). Parent's networks can influence their children's peer relationships as interactions increase especially in the schooling environment where group formations are established and children position themselves in hierarchies (Carr, 2011:59; Harold & Hay, 2005:5; Louw & Louw, 2014:299). Aspects of loyalty, faithfulness and peer acceptance become important in friendships as children assimilate into groups and develop their support systems while their capabilities of managing friendships is established (Louw & Louw, 2014:276, 299).

Fauziyah (2021:62) establishes in her study on the impact of COVID-19 on children that early diagnosis of socio-emotional development problems in childhood is pertinent and may have long lasting effects in later years. The author further elaborates that anxiety and depression were found to be prominent and children with depression were seen to exhibit aggressive behaviour, poor academic performance, and poor peer relationships whilst their anxiety inhibited their normal socio-emotional functioning and further compromised their daily functioning (Fauziyah, 2021:64-65).

As children develop, they undergo transitional periods of development that influence their daily lives and overall well-being including increased interactions, complex decision-making, and exposure to the world around them, amongst others. For children to thrive in their environments, they need to be protected and this can be achieved through promoting and protecting their rights which are anchored in several legal frameworks.

2.6 Legislative frameworks promoting and safeguarding children's well-being

There are several international, regional, and local legal frameworks that promote child well-being which are discussed below.

2.6.1 International frameworks

Child well-being in its totality is reflected in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) where the stipulated rights provide opportunities for enhancing children's well-being including their economic and emotional quality of life, their social, cultural, and material environments, their psychological state, as well as their development and potential (UN, 1989). The CRC in Article 12(1) recognises child participation, thus, furthering the case for prioritising children's voices in matters that affect them. Within the narrative of environmental degradation, there is an acute imbalance of resource use and redistribution which mostly affects poor communities (UN, 1989). By giving children a voice, they can be empowered and involved as co-builders of social contracts that offer alternatives against the dominant material and economic prosperity that depletes the environment (Peeters, 2012:290). By promoting the voice of the child, societies may achieve unparalleled sustainable impact and strengthen child well- being. To achieve this sustainable impact, it is therefore pivotal to listen to children, consult them, involve them in important decision-making processes that affect them, and make their participation meaningful.

Globally, child well-being can further be linked to *the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2030 Agenda) as the SDG framework is a pathway to sustainable development for people, the planet and prosperity (UN, 2015). Thirty-five of its 232 global indicators are directly linked to children under the custodianship of UNICEF (UN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda was tabled to propose social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development by eradicating poverty, protecting the planet from degradation and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity (UN, 2015). Children experiencing structural disadvantage are dispossessed of positive developmental outcomes (Young, 2015 in Theron, 2017:2) and according to socio-ecological theorists, children require sustainable and supportive environments to match their level of resilience (Ungar, 2011 in Theron, 2017:3). Through the SDGs, country-level commitment to end poverty is interlocked with other goals such as health, quality education and overall well-being (UN, 2015). Meeting the multidimensional needs of children is critical for them to having a sustainable future.

2.6.2 Regional frameworks

On the African continent, the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* (ACRWC) in its entirety, focuses on the holistic wellbeing, protection and development of the African child with regards to their socio-economic, cultural, traditional, and environmental contexts (African Union, 1990). The ACRWC is pivotal in safeguarding African children's well-being because there is limited African social work literature and heavy reliance on Western interventions that could compromise cultural norms and the well-being of African children (Mwansa, 2011:369). The ACRWC also address indigenous rights, knowledge gaps and promotes child well-being by embracing social issues built on sociocultural conditions relevant for African people. This includes the philosophy of Ubuntu which is based on collective support and has relevance for child well-being (Mwansa, 2011:370; Swanson, 2007 in Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwansa, 2019:22). For instance, the well-being of a child has a place within the dynamic family structures (Patel, 2009:20) and members of the community as opposed to rugged individualism (Khoza, 1994 in Mupedziswa, Rankopo & Mwansa, 2019:22). Therefore, the family and distant relatives are of importance in children's lives as they provide care and happiness as well as trust and belonging (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278-279).

The second regional mandate, *Agenda 2063, the Africa We Want*, centres growth and sustainable development in the interest of all of Africa's people (African Union, 2015:1). Aspiration 6 emphasises people-driven development in which the potential of all people will be developed with the active involvement of all citizens (African Union, 2015:7). The aspect of participation is also well established in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the CRC showing its importance in supporting children's well-being. Social workers use advocacy to realise people's social, mental, and societal needs (Hoefer, 2012 in Lombard, 2014: 274).

2.6.3 Local frameworks

The Constitution of South Africa heralds the best interest of the child in all matters pertaining to children. Section 28 of the Constitution provides additional rights for children which include *inter alia* the right to family care or parental care, protection from maltreatment, social services, basic nutrition, and shelter (RSA, 1996). These rights are implemented through a myriad of policy documents and services. For instance, the intersectoral policy framework National Programme of Action for Children (1996), expresses issues of nutrition, Early Childhood Development (ECD) and education, protection measures, child and mental health, amongst others (Department of Education, 2001:10). These aspects are essential for child well-being and protection and are implemented in various ways, for example, in school nutrition programmes, through NGO funding, social work services, and registration regulations such as registering childcare facilities and ECD programmes.

According to Section 2 of the Children's Act, 38 of 2005, children have a right to participate in matters that affect them (Children's Act, 2005). Child participation is fundamental to child well-being. The Children's Act gives guidelines on different areas of child well-being to promote and protect children (Children's Act, 2005). For example, in the case of divorce, the justice system provides for the children to express their views and challenge arrangements that may negatively affect them. This is important for child well-being because families provide a place of care and develop a sense of belonging amongst children (Fattore & Mason, 2017:279). In the case of exposure to violence, children's participation is required in any legal matter instituted to protect them (Save the Children, 2018:5). Social workers play a significant role in enforcing the Children's Act and promoting the agency of children which may include arranging alternative care, counselling, and intervening in relationship and parental issues.

The *National Development Plan* [NDP] is the country's vision to transform people's livelihoods to prosper (National Planning Commission, 2012). Amongst its priorities, quality education is crucial to address poverty and reduce inequality, especially in historically disadvantaged communities. Research reveals that children from poor backgrounds are more likely to be less educated and less productive (Grantham-McGregor, Cheung, Cueto, Glewwe, Richter & Strupp, 2007:67). The NDP proposes a comprehensive set of improved education interventions including investments in infrastructure, innovation and technology, quality schooling and psychosocial well-being, amongst others (National Planning Commission, 2012:263). The NDP is interlinked with several goals of the SDGs which support and encourage member states to develop comprehensive strategies to support overall well-being (Statistics South Africa, 2019:31; UNICEF, 2017:8). Education is a socio-economic right responsible for providing economic opportunities, promoting the worth and dignity of people, and providing equal opportunities (Hall, 2020b:178; Lombard, 2015:486). To achieve social change and promote child well-being, social workers can be involved in developing, analysing, and contributing to policy on all levels of the ecosystem (Ife, 2012 in Lombard, 2015:495).

The mandates of the international, regional, and local legislative frameworks are essential for child development and child well-being. These legal instruments present the overarching themes of inclusiveness and the promoting and protecting of children's rights to minimise any risks that may compromise their well-being and sustainable futures. Although these legal frameworks may differ in terms of scope and overlap in their purpose, they complement each other and commit to goals aimed at promoting child well-being. For example, the 2030 Agenda clearly states the importance of partnerships and South Africa is a relevant global player with its unifying and intersecting legislative frameworks. All the aforementioned legislative frameworks have a mandate to promote and protect children's wellbeing yet many children in South Africa continue to live in circumstances that are harmful to their wellbeing and hinder their ability to have sustainable futures, as discussed below.

2.7 The status of children in South Africa in relation to their well-being

Children in South Africa are confronted by various challenges that affect their well-being including poverty, lack of basic services, malnutrition, and maltreatment (Adams *et al*, 2019:552; Rees & Main, 2015:30; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5). Children's well-being is also affected by their lack of participation in decision-making processes that impact on their lives and despite government's intervention and investment in child-related matters, many children continue to experience multi-dimensional forms of deprivation (Save the Children South Africa, 2018:11). The researcher will now discuss some of the socio-economic and environmental conditions experienced by South African children in relation to their well-being.

2.7.1 Social security

Section 27 of the South African Constitution states that "everyone has the right to have access to social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance" (RSA, 1996). The provision of social security is government's mandate to ensure the protection and support of people's livelihoods and as an effort to realise children's right to social security, government's flagship programme coined the "child support grant" (CSG) was introduced in 1998 (DSD, SASSA & UNICEF, 2012:ii). By design, the CSG is an unconditional cash transfer to vulnerable families through a means test (Hall, 2020a:161; Köhler & Bhorat, 2020:3; Moore & Seekings, 2019:1). Through the means test, 71% of children in South Africa benefitted from the programme in the year 2020, making them the largest population group accessing grants (Köhler & Bhorat, 2020:4).

The CSG is crucial for promoting child well-being through its poverty reduction and social investment strategy (Patel*,* Knijn, Gorman-Smith, Hochfeld, Isserow, Garthe, Chiba, Moodley & Kgaphola, 2017:5). Over 12 million children receive the CSG in South Africa with an increase in uptake of 5.9% between the 2017/18 and 2020/21 financial years (SASSA Annual Report, 2021:26) and since its inception, the CSG has had a significant impact in reducing destitution and improving the life outcomes and opportunities of children (Samson, Lee, Ndlebe, Mac Quene, Van Niekerk, Ghandi, & Abrahams, 2004:2). Research shows that access to the CSG promotes positive educational, health and developmental outcomes and therefore as a commitment to the 2030 Agenda, social workers understand the interplay between social and economic inequalities and use developmental social work to address social injustices that hinder optimal child well-being (DSD, SASSA, & UNICEF, 2012:105-106; Lombard, 2014:276; UN, 2015). Despite the significant progress made in implementing the Social Assistance Act 13 of 2004, improving access, reviewing eligibility, and executing policy-related imperatives, many children continue to live in sub-standard living conditions (Delany, Ismail, Graham & Ramkissoon, 2008:19).

Access to the CSG has been identified as one of the challenges preventing children from benefiting from social security (Delany *et al.*, 2008:19). Research indicates that early access to the CSG plays a critical role in mitigating risky behaviours, improving well-being, and reducing poverty. However, many children are confronted with barriers to accessing the CSG which include the lack of prescribed documentation, lack of mobility, poor knowledge of rights by caregivers, policy barriers, complex administrative processes, service disintegration and a lack of knowledge by officials (SASSA & UNICEF, 2013:60). To address some of these structural challenges, the Department of Social Development (DSD) together with the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) responded to these challenges by increasing their footprint, capacitating their staff, increasing awareness programmes, establishing partnerships, improving birth registrations, and developing alternative policies for special cases (SASSA & UNICEF, 2013:7-8). Despite these efforts, many eligible children continue to live in poverty resulting in negative consequences for their well-being.

Therefore, there is a need to develop robust policies and interventions to achieve social change (IFSW & IASSW, 2013 in Lombard, 2014:274) with long lasting positive outcomes for children. There is a need for policy reforms to ensure that no child is left behind. Children have the right to participate in decisions for sustainable futures (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83). Moreover, children are central in the vision of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs which can be achieved by implementing and enforcing policies that protect them from hunger and poverty (UN, 2015).

2.7.2 Child poverty

Statistics South Africa (2020a:47) reports that children between the ages of 5 and 12 years, account for 63.4% of the national child poverty rate in South Africa and, 6 out of 10 children within that age group are found to be experiencing multidimensional poverty which is measured by the child well-being dimensions: information, child development, education, housing, health, protection, nutrition, and WASH (Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene). Evidence noted that children that had experienced 4 out of 7 deprivations were considered multidimensionally poor. Children between 5 and 12 years had scored higher in housing, education, health, and WASH (Statistics South Africa, 2020a:13,47). These high rates of poverty are influenced by poor school and healthcare infrastructure, thus compromising the developmental outcomes of children (Statistics South Africa, 2020a:48).

The socio-economic conditions in South Africa make it difficult for many children, particularly in poor communities, as many continue to live below the poverty line. This position of disadvantage was shared by Patel *et al.* (2017:6) who echoed that more interventions were needed to rescue children that continued to experience poverty and conditions of deprivation. The authors further pointed out that although progress had been made in addressing the basic needs of children, poverty would continue to disrupt children's potential to achieve optimal well-being. In order to achieve optimal child

well-being, commitment to institutional mandates should be strengthened to address the multidimensional vulnerabilities of children. Such mandates include the SDGs which envision the eradication of poverty in all its dimensions (UN, 2015). Social workers play a significant role in poverty reduction by implementing best practice interventions to create a safe environment for children and protect their human rights in the face of injustice (Patel *et al.*, 2017:4; Lombard, 2014:275). Furthermore, experiencing poverty has negative effects on many life outcomes including nutrition, as discussed below.

2.7.3 Nutrition

Food and nutrition are central to SDG 2 (end hunger) but the realisation of this goal is dependent on the realisation of other goals including ending poverty (SDG 1) and achieving good health (SDG 3), (UN, 2015). The Constitution of South Africa guarantees children the right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic healthcare services and social services, (RSA, 1996). However, due to socio-economic challenges including high levels of poverty and inequality, accessing food has become a challenge for many children. As a response measure to support the livelihoods of children, government introduced programmes targeting poverty alleviation, food security, social security, and the reduction in hunger statistics (Statistics South Africa, 2019a:19).

Data from the 2018 General Household Survey shows that 11% of children come from households that had reported hunger with significant differences in race. African children accounted for 12% of children coming from households that had reported hunger, followed by 7% of Coloured children and a combined 1% between Asian and White children. The survey further showed that children suffering from hunger are more at risk of obesity, malnutrition, micro-nutrient deficiency, and stunting (Sambu, 2020:170-171). Furthermore, malnutrition is associated with poor educational attainment, poor health and poses a threat to children's optimal development as cited by Mendez and Adair (1999) and Glewwe, Jacoby and King (1999) in SAHRC and UNICEF (2014:57).

South Africa has made noteworthy progress in improving child nutrition. However, the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic may have tarnished this progress as it has increased the vulnerabilities of many families, particularly families with children. Necessary lockdown measures negatively impacted household income, thereby deepening food insecurity and reducing food access for already vulnerable families whilst an estimated 9 million children were reported to have lost their most reliable and nutritious meal provided by the school nutrition programme (UNDP, 2020:47,50). In response to these challenges, the Department of Social Development partnered with civil society organisations and the private sector by raising funds and distributing over 780 000 food parcels nationwide by the 20th of May 2020. In addition, they increased the child support grant between June and October of 2020 and introduced the social relief of distress grant (UNDP, 2020:47-52). Moreover, child nutrition

is closely related to healthcare and the association between the two plays a critical role in child well-being.

2.7.4 Access to healthcare

The Constitution of South Africa expresses its obligation to provide accessible healthcare to all South Africans and further entitles all children the right to basic healthcare services (RSA, 1996). Despite these provisions, access to healthcare remains a challenge with 20% of South African children experiencing physical inaccessibility (UNDP, 2020:104). South Africa is a country characterised by inequalities along the urban and rural divide, further highlighting the disproportionate delivery of quality services and allocation of national budgets between the public and private sector. As observed in 2019, South Africa's expenditure on healthcare was 8,7% of its GDP and of which 43% was public expenditure covering 84% of the populace (UNDP, 2020:104). Even with a substantial budget, healthcare services in rural areas continue to be a challenge due to poor infrastructure, poor services, and the added burden of transport costs (Hall, Nannan & Sambu, 2020:167; Tsawe & Sususman, 2014:2).

The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UNCESCR) proposes that the achievement of the right to health should be measured with reference to four features namely, "availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of healthcare goods and services" (Pieterse, 2016:3). Despite these provisions, resources and infrastructure remain a predicament for children in rural settlements as they continue to experience challenges (Pieterse, 2016:3). In addition, within the SGDs, is the promotion of universal health coverage (UNICEF, 2017:35) to promote children's healthy development (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016: 23) as a pathway to their sustainable futures. For South Africa to achieve its goal of universal access to healthcare, policy reforms like the National Health Insurance were introduced and is aligned with a rights-based approach to development (Hall, Nannan & Sambu, 2020:167). Children have different needs for their development including healthcare and the lack of quality comprehensive services undermines their right to universal healthcare. Similarly, accessing quality education is necessary for supporting optimal child development.

2.7.5 Education

In line with the Bill of Rights, all South Africans have the right to education, and it is the mandate of the government to ensure access for the greater good (RSA, 1996). According to the General Household Survey, there were over 14,7 million children enrolled for schooling in 2020 with only 4,7% enrolled in private schools and thus revealing a disparity between public and private school education provision as well as existing inequalities (Statistics South Africa, 2020b:17). For example, poor

infrastructure such as a lack of access to running water and adequate toilets are a reality for many schools, particularly in the rural areas (UNDP, 2020:59-60).

Against the backdrop of unequal quality education, the 2018 Household General Survey revealed that South Africa had high enrolment and attendance rates with over 98% of children enrolled at a school. However, despite these high numbers, many children are still not in school due to institutional failures, financial constraints, and health-related factors (Hall, 2020b:178-179). For example, an estimated 1.1 million children had enrolled for grade 1 in 2010 but only 733 178 had enrolled for the 2021 NSC examination (Motshekga, 2022). Although acknowledging various reasons for the high dropout rate, the implication could have negative effects on child well-being especially the crucial role of education as a risk-mitigating factor.

Over the past years, South Africa has made significant strides in improving access to education by increasing public expenditure and yet, even with an increase in expenditure, the quality of education remains poor compared to other Sub-Saharan countries that spend less on education (Mlachila & Moeletsi, 2019:4; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014:66). These unfavourable outcomes are seen in the low literacy and numeracy levels showed by children enrolled in low quality schools and this disparity in access to quality services between urban and rural areas is a manifestation of structural injustice and the violation of children's rights (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014:70). Through advocacy, social workers engage macro level structures to achieve social justice in order to obtain a better future for children (Lombard, 2014:277). The return on investments in education are long established by various scholars who have identified the association between good educational outcomes with lifelong learning, low unemployment rates and better economic opportunities (Hall, 2020b:178; Amoateng, Richter, Makiwane & Rama, 2004:20).

To reflect on government's effort to improve the educational outcomes of children, the impact of COVID-19 has regressed the work already done as there has been increasing evidence highlighting the negative impact that the pandemic has had on the education sector (UNDP, 2020:61). Millions of children that were already confronted by poor quality education are likely to experience more challenges as necessary psychosocial services and school nutrition programmes were inaccessible to support the well-being of many children (Hall, 2020b:178). The school nutrition programme, for example, enhances the nutritional needs of children especially those from poor households and according the 2020 General Household Survey, 20.6% of households had limited access to food; therefore, threatening the livelihoods of children who also rely on their caregivers for care and protection (Department of Education, 2021:211; Makiwane, Gumede, Makoae & Vawda, 2017:50; Statistics South Africa, 2020b:52). A study on family contexts and child well-being in South Africa revealed that caregivers had an influence on the well-being of children which may include caregiver employment status and other socio-economic factors (Patel et al., 2017:59). Findings from the study

affirm the role of caregiver socio-economic circumstances as contributors to child well-being (Patel *et al.*, 2017:58).

2.7.6 Socio-economic status of caregivers

The National Development Plan seeks to realise sustainable living conditions for all families by ensuring a target unemployment rate of 14% by the year 2020 (NDP, 2012:90-91). According to the 2022 1st Quarter Labour Force Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa, there were 34.5% unemployed South Africans as compared to 32.6% in the same reporting period in 2021 (Statistics South Africa, 2022:13; Statistics South Africa, 2021a:13) which shows an increasing drift from the vision of the NDP in reducing unemployment. Data from the 2021 2nd Quarter of the Labour Force Survey further reveals that Black African women were the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of 41% and within the South Africa context, women hold the burden of care of their children even with no income and limited means and resources (Makiwane *et al.*, 2017:64; Statistics South Africa, 2021b). Lack of income in the household can compromise child well-being by destabilising children's development, education, health, and security (Hall, 2020a:159; UNDP, 2020:68).

Research confirms that children from poor communities that are confronted by the lack of household income, low levels of parental education or children that may have lost their mother, are most likely to have poor educational outcomes (Hall, 2020b:179). This position of poor socio-economic caregiver characteristics is supported by SAHRC and UNICEF (2014:68) who establish that having working parents or caregivers determines the quality and access to education that one may acquire, and which in turn, determines their labour market competitiveness (SAHRC & UNICEF, 2014:68). Therefore, household income is an important factor in determining the livelihoods of families including their access to adequate housing.

2.7.7 Housing

Section 26 of the Constitution of South Africa provides that "everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing", and Section 28 gives children "the right to … shelter" (RSA, 1996). Access to housing and shelter is a basic human right yet millions of children are exposed to sub-standard living conditions. In an analysis by Hall (2020c:184-185), it was reported that an estimated 1.7 million children were living in informal housing and 3.5 million children were living in overcrowded households which consisted of shacks or backyards which were mostly inhabitable. The condition of these structures was found to expose children and their families to gas poisoning, shack fires and overcrowding. The risk factors associated with overcrowding include lack of privacy, disrupted schooling, exposure to communicable diseases and the cumulative effects posed adverse challenges on the physical, mental, and cognitive well-being of children (Briggs, 2013:1207; Hall, 2020c:185).

These negative experiences pose a hinderance on the socio-economic and environmental well-being of children which is the aim of developmental social work; an instrument of fostering a harmonious relationship between people, the environment, and the economy (Patel, 2014:247; UN, 2015).

Children are a vulnerable group in need of care and protection and having a home provides that security. The function of a home is to experience love, nurturing and the development of unique identities of children (Dwomoh & Dinolfo, 2018:530) and yet, many children experience homelessness in South Africa. Children living in informal structures face the predicament of being homeless (Richer, 2019:2). In a study by Richer (2019:4-5), causes of homelessness amongst children were reported to be associated with domestic violence, lack of social support, financial constraints, and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Because of the substandard living conditions amongst the homeless, it was not uncommon for homeless children to experience behavioural, cognitive, physical, and mental problems which are significant contributors to poor social relationships, poor academic performance, and poor emotional self-regulation. Moreover, children from unstable environments were likely to miss key opportunities required for positive life outcomes (Dwomoh & Dinolfo, 2018:531). Through a human rights lens, children's developmental well-being may be improved as it is embedded in social justice (Lombard, 2014:275). Within the home environment, children live with significant others or dynamic family structures which contribute towards the development of child well-being.

2.7.8 Household composition

The General Household Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa found that 12.3% of the nation's children were orphaned in the year 2020 and nearly 19,7% of all children did not live with either of their parents while 34.2% lived with both parents (Statistics South Africa, 2020b:10-11). The data further revealed that 46.1% of children lived in single-parent families of which 41.7% of children were living with their mothers and only 4.4% were living with their fathers. Further disparities were observed in living arrangements in the rural areas where 48.8% of children were living with their mothers while 20.0% were living with both of their parents. In the urban areas, 42.9% of children were living with both parents while 37.7% were living with their mother only (Statistics South Africa, 2020b:10-11). The discrepancies in household composition have a significant impact on the developmental outcomes of children (Makiwane *et al.*, 2017:50).

The evolving pattern of family structures, particularly household composition, has significant implications for child well-being outcomes. The interface between household composition and child well-being is important because children exist within families and are shaped by family units for socio-emotional and physical well-being as well as their survival (Patel *et al.,* 2017:6; Statistics South Africa, 2020b:6). Historically, African households were dominated by the extended family (Virmad, 1993 in Amaoteng & Kalule-Sabiti, 2008:78). However, there seems to be a decline of this role as evident in

24

a study conducted in Mpumalanga which revealed that with growing urbanisation and migration, families were more likely to be sustained through voluntary community associations like churches and social networks (Makiwane *et al.*, 2017:66).

Furthermore, South African households were more likely to be constituted with diverse family structures subsequently altering the traditional extended and nuclear family patterns (Patel, 2009:20; Makiwane *et al.*, 2017:50). Other scholars posit that the domestic organisation of South African households is fostered by a combination of socio-economic opportunities which have resulted in an increase of the nuclear family (Wittenberg & Collinson, 2005 in Amoateng & Kalule-Sabiti, 2008:77). These "unconventional" families, particularly among the Black African population, have been a result of factors such as urbanisation, the impact of HIV/AIDS, migration and globalisation. Furthermore, the migrant labour system has also had a major impact on family structure (Amoateng *et al.*, 2004:16).

The family unit plays an important function in the primary socialisation of children, depositing appropriate values and behaviours used in childhood throughout adulthood. Subsequently, socialisation enables the development of stable and functional societies which care for one another ranging from care for children, the elderly, disabled people and other vulnerable groups (Amoateng *et al.*, 2004:4-5). Traditionally, the concept of care is interwoven with the cultural ethos of Ubuntu which stresses the collective over individualism (Moore & Seekings, 2019:5). The social development model of child and family well-being emphasises the role of the family in providing warmth, discipline, monitoring, and family cohesion (Patel *et al.*, 2017:8). Without quality care, families are at risk of abuse, poor educational outcomes, and extended periods of poverty which could lead to negative psychosocial development in children. Patel (2015) cited in Patel *et al.* (2017:7), indicates that through the provision of comprehensive family interventions like sustainable livelihood programmes, nutritional support, parenting programmes, financial support, and enhancing the psychosocial well-being of caregivers, positive child well-being outcomes can be realised. Furthermore, children are also affected by the environments in which they find themselves.

2.7.9 WASH

Poor environmental conditions are a threat to well-being, particularly poor communities (Kemp & Palinkas, 2015:3). The increasing threat of climate change poses concerns for food security, children's health and well-being (UNICEF, 2019:24). The impact of climate change is further aggravated by the disproportionate availability of clean drinking water, access to sanitation services and refuse removal, as they are essential for public health and poverty alleviation as well as a commitment to SDG 6 by member states to ensure universal access to safe and clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (UNICEF, 2017:58,59; UN, 2015). Through green social work, social workers opt to use holistic approaches to address poor living standards in poor communities and use advocacy

as a developmental social work tool to promote environmental sustainability (Dominelli, 2018:9; Lombard, 2014:47) which could also benefit children.

Data from the *Inequality Trends in South Africa, A Multidimensional Diagnostic of Inequality* report by Statistics South Africa shows stark differences between urban and rural areas with the latter experiencing the most interruptions in service delivery predominantly amongst Black African households, further highlighting the socio-economic inequalities that exist between dwellings (Statistics South Africa, 2019b:98-105). By applying the developmental social work approach, social workers "reaffirm social work's commitment to social justice and poverty eradication by promoting social change and human development for sustainable development outcomes" (Lombard, 2019:51).

There is no doubt that the future of children is linked to the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental (UN, 2015) and these are related to indicators of child well-being as discussed in section 2.2 of this chapter. Observing and recognising the connection and interdependence of the SDGs is crucial to promoting child well-being and it is fundamental to achieving the SDGs as a conduit of sustainable development (Nunes, Lee & O'Riordan, 2016:11). One framework for achieving sustainable development is developmental social work which is aimed at bringing about social change and promoting human development (Lombard, 2019:51). When working with children, social workers use developmental social work and adopt an advocacy stance to promote child well-being (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83). Thus, the role of social workers as advocates for child well-being will be discussed below.

2.8 The role of social workers as advocates for child well-being

Children are confronted by multiple injustices that hinder their optimal development and disrupt their sustainable futures. To support the development and well-being of children, social workers utilise developmental social work in line with the guidelines of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (Global Agenda) (Lombard, 2015:489). Midgely (2010) in Lombard (2014:275) supports the role of developmental social work in its association with social change, development, the use of strengths, empowerment, capacity enhancement, self-determination, client participation, social justice, and equality. Social workers therefore should harness the strengths and resources available to their clients and capacitate them to become change agents for their circumstances and the lead practice interventions (Lombard, 2015:490). In addition, the concept of participation is central in developmental social work practice as it underscores people's rights to participating in decisions that affect them (Androff, 2016:41). Children are rights holders protected by several legislative frameworks and violation of these rights may be addressed through advocacy and creating a safe environment to promote and protect children's well-being (Patel *et al.*, 2017:4).

26

In the face of adversity, social workers can protect children's well-being by linking their individual challenges with macro level interventions through advocacy practice and the use of generalist intervention strategies (Lombard, 2014:277; Patel, 2005:214). Social workers are holistic in their approach and there is therefore a need for solutions that will accelerate the achievement of child well-being through holistic, appropriate, and high-impact interventions that can break the cycle of structural disadvantage facing communities (Patel, 2005:214).

2.9 Theoretical framework

The reciprocal relationship between children and the environment in which they live, has implications for child well-being and child development. The well-being of children becomes a function of several systems that a child interacts with directly or indirectly; therefore, a change in one part of the system triggers a change in another (Miley, O'Meila & Dubois, 2009:38). This interdependence and reciprocal relationship between systems is conceptualised as the ecosystems theory and was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner. The ecosystems theory asserts the position of children within a dynamic and interactive system (Louw & Louw, 2014:29) that is influenced by socio-economic and environmental factors (Bradshaw, Martorano, Natali & Neubourg, 2013:620). Child well-being in this study was explored using Bronfenbrenner's multilevel system namely microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Neal & Neal, 2013:95).

The **microsystem** refers to the proximal ecological level consisting of the immediate environment of the child which may include the family, school, friends, and the immediate community (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:3; Louw & Louw, 2014:29). In this system, there is close interaction with peers and the family as children participate in various activities that may positively or negatively affect their physical, emotional, psychological, and social well-being (Ayala-Nunes *et al.*, 2018:814; Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:3; Newland *et al.*, 2019:398). As children engage in friendships, expectations of mutual understanding are reinforced. However, when these expectations are unmet, relationships may break down (Fattore & Mason, 2017:280). Therefore, to support and promote child well-being, it is crucial for social workers to understand children's most immediate interactions and implement relevant interventions (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33; Rothman & Mizrahi, 2014:91).

The **mesosystem** is defined by processes between microsystems and how they affect and influence each other (Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:4; Louw & Louw, 2014:29). For example, school activities that require parental support may need to align with family values and vice versa and in the instance of prolonged periods of poverty, the quality of care provided by parents may deteriorate and affect child well-being (Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:4). Through comprehensive parental support groups offered in the community, parenting practices may improve and consequently child well-being with the

27

involvement of social workers who are instrumental in building cohesive families through the use of information obtained during assessment (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33; Patel *et al.*, 2017:9).

The **exosystem** refers to the microsystems in which individuals are involved but not rooted (Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:4). In this scenario, children's well-being may be influenced by their caregiver's socio-economic position and the networks around them including the church, access to basic services and occupation (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Berk, 2013:28; Louw & Louw, 2014:29). For instance, children of unemployed parents and of low socio-economic status are more likely to be maladjusted, have low birth weight, and might be exposed to abuse (Ayala-Nunes *et al.*, 2018:812). By involving social workers, families experiencing economic hardship may improve child well-being and break the cycle of hardship, strengthen social cohesion, and increase economic productivity and social wellness (Adams *et al.*, 2019:557; Ayala-Nunes *et al.,* 2018:813).

The **macrosystem** consists of a set of predominant norms and beliefs, policies, ideologies, customs, and programmes reflected in the socio-cultural, religious, and environmental organisation of society (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:26; Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:5; Langer & Lietz, 2014:33-34; Louw & Louw, 2014:29). The macrosystem level influences child development by interpreting and filtering experiences and their implication on well-being. Evidence shows the relationship between parental economic status and children's ability to participate in a wide range of activities. Children of wealthy parents are more likely to engage in diverse activities as opposed to children of low socio-economic status (Ettekal & Mahony, 2017:5).

Bronfenbrenner extended his conceptualisation of the ecosystems theory to include a time dimension known as the **chronosystem** (Rus, Lee, Salas, Parris, Webster, Lobo, Ecaterina & Popa, 2020:240). The chronosystem asserts that children's development and well-being constantly change over their lifespan as influenced by their environmental realities (Berk, 2013:28; Louw & Louw, 2014:30). Through this process, children learn behaviours and situations and use that knowledge to adjust future behaviours and situations (Rus *et al.,* 2020:240). The changes may be triggered by parental separation, relocation, and school entry (Louw & Louw, 2014:30).

The ecosystems theory postulates that people are constantly immersed in direct or indirect complex interactions in their changing environments and that affects their quality of life. Healthy contexts are said to promote optimal development whilst substandard contexts compromise well-being (Rus *et al.*, 2020:239). The harmonious relationship and interdependence between people and the environment are the apex of the SDGs in achieving prosperity for all (UN, 2015) and therefore social work's commitment to the Global Agenda reinforces both frameworks for a just society (Lombard, 2015:497).

2.10 Summary

To gauge the status of children in relation to their well-being, it is essential for researchers to utilize relevant frameworks to develop child well-being indicators. These child well-being indicators should identify the interplay between present resources and how these affect future outcomes (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011:466). Such indicators include social, economic and environmental indicators which may encompass both subjective and objective measures (Ayala-Nunes *et al.,* 2018:812). For example, responsive parenting acts as a protective barrier in enhancing children's positive developmental outcomes whilst poor parental interaction may increase children's engagement in risky behaviour (Joronen & Astedt-Kurki, 2005:131; Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:11). Therefore, implementing programmes such as parenting skills can promote positive child well-being. However, such services amongst others, may not be accessible especially in marginalized communities thereby affecting child well-being.

Nationally, many children face intersecting forms of discrimination; be it the lack of access to quality health care and education, adequate housing, good nutrition and proper sanitation and vulnerability to poverty which impact every facet of their daily lives. The long-term effects of these unfavourable conditions have long-term developmental repercussions that compromise children's futures. To promote child well-being and achieve sustainable outcomes for children, it is imperative for social workers to adopt developmental social work to break systematic barriers and promote social change which is a core principle of the Global Agenda (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83; Lombard, 2019:51) Moreover, as children transition between different developmental stages, their needs change and so are the responses required to facilitate positive development. For this reason, social workers play a pivotal role in advocating for children's rights and promoting their participation in decision-making on issues affecting them (Patel *et al.*, 2017:4; Androff, 2016:41)

Exploring children's experiences and perceptions of their environments is pertinent as it constitutes a critical conduit for their development. Children are the future of society and thus, it is important to establish their well-being early on so that they can grow up to be individuals who will make meaningful contributions to society (Bammer, Michaux & Sanson, 2010:15). Child participation, understanding their developmental needs in relation to their developmental stages, and deploying adequate services and resources, can enhance their well-being. It is crucial to create an enabling environment and for social workers to leverage legislative frameworks to harness solutions to challenges, lobby for global inclusivity, provide holistic interventions to diverse challenges and bring about institutional and systematic change to ensure children's sustainable futures.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology underpinning the study. The research question that guided the study was as follows:

What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?

The chapter begins with a discussion on the research approach, followed by the research type and design that was utilised in the study. In the following section, the research methodology is discussed and includes the study population and sampling, data collection and data analysis methods, the trustworthiness of the data and the pilot study. The ethical guidelines are discussed thereafter and followed by an outline of the limitations of the study. The chapter is concluded with a summary.

3.2 Research approach

The study utilised a qualitative research approach in exploring children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. The qualitative research approach was best suited because it uses verbal descriptions to portray the phenomenon being studied (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59). In the study, the researcher was able to understand the participants' responses to the concept of well-being as a social and cultural construct that depends on a person's subjective views (Mashford-Scott, Church & Tayler, 2012:235; Minkkinen, 2013:4). Since there are few studies involving children on child well-being, utilising the qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to gather in-depth information about the participants' account of experiences and meaning. However, the qualitative research approach is criticised for its inability to generalise findings (Anney, 2014:272).

3.3 Research type

The researcher undertook applied research for this study. Applied research can focus on specific problems and policy challenges and provide solutions to policymakers and practitioners (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:44). Children in South Africa are affected by many societal challenges including social, economic, and environmental factors that affect their well-being and often, they are not consulted on decisions affecting their lives (Naidoo and Muthukrishna, 2016:1; Peeters, 2012:287; Save the Children South Africa, 2018:10). Therefore, the study undertook to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to their sustainable futures. It is envisaged

that the findings from this study will assist policymakers and practitioners to develop child-informed and sustainable futures for children.

3.4 Research design

A case study design was used which allows the use of the "how" and "why" questions (Nieuwenhuis 2019b:90). In this study, the researcher was able to explore how children conceptualise their well-being. Specifically, the instrumental case study design was used to gain insight into the participants' accounts of experiences and the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. Promoting child well-being by involving children is an under-researched topic and through this research design, the researcher was able to explore children's perspectives. The researcher conducted interviews in the participant's natural setting and listened carefully to their experiences and the information presented (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006:273-274) to help gain better insight into the case of child well-being within the South African context.

3.5 Research methodology

In this section of the chapter, a detailed account of the specific methods that were used in the study is discussed. This account will describe the study population, the sampling criteria, data collection, data analysis methods as well as how data trustworthiness was applied. Furthermore, an account of how the pilot study was conducted and the ethical aspects of the study will be outlined.

3.5.1 Study population

The study population was children in middle childhood (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:164). Specifically, the target population of the study was from Bronkhorstspruit, Region 7 of the City of Tshwane. Studying a whole population to investigate a phenomenon is often not feasible and therefore sampling allows the researcher to identify a subset of the population in order to draw conclusions (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2011:135).

3.5.2 Sampling and sampling techniques

The researcher utilised non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, to select participants for the research study. The study sample consisted of 10 children in middle childhood between the ages of 8-12 years who would assist the researcher in drawing conclusions on existing children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. The researcher used their knowledge to select participants best suited to fit the purpose of the study (Monette *et al.*, 2011:135) and yield rich information about the study (Neuman, 2014:274; Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). To achieve a balanced sample and rich data, the researcher

selected participants that would present an opportunity for further learning about child well-being (Stake, 2005:451).

The inclusion criteria included:

- Children between the ages of 8 to 12 years

- Children who could converse in English

- Children whose parents or guardians provided consent that the child in their care may participate in the study

- Children who provided their assent to voluntarily participate in the study

The researcher used snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study (Strydom & Delport, 2011:393). Additionally, the researcher contacted a parent whose child had a friendship with the researcher's own child, requesting to interview the parent's child and further refer her to other guardians who had children who were eligible to participate in the study. The researcher also ensured that no participants were recruited from her work environment or social work caseload. Through this approach, the researcher was successful in gaining access to parents and guardians who indicated their willingness to allow their children to participate in the study and agreed that their contact details be made available to the researcher. In addition, the children were required to provide their assent to willingly participate in the study and informed that their agency to decline participation would be respected. The sample for the study was 10 participants but during the interviews, the researcher encountered 2 participants with limited vocabulary and therefore, their data was not used in the study. The researcher then recruited 2 other participants to enrich the research findings.

3.6 Data collection

To answer the research question and objectives, the researcher used semi-structured one-on-one interviews as a data collection method. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview schedule (see Appendix A) which contained a set of open-ended and predetermined questions that were used to guide the discussions and allowed participants to share their perceptions without limitations (Mock, 2005 in Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018:40). Making use of a semi-structured interview schedule allowed the researcher to probe vague responses, provide clarity and the flexibility to explore and elaborate where information was required (Bless *et al.*, 2013:197; Greeff, 2011:351-252; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2010:167). The flexibility of the interview schedule assisted the researcher to adapt the sequence of the questions where responses overlapped and to better explain some of the questions where participants needed more clarification. This approach was important in keeping the interview focused and probing for additional information (Rubin & Babbie, 2007:123).

Another advantage of using semi-structured interviews is that they provided the researcher with time to prepare the questions that would be asked of the participants as well as the ability to produce reliable and rich descriptive data from participants (Adams, 2015:492-494). In preparing for the interviews, the researcher scheduled appointments with the individual participants to allow them sufficient time to prepare and all interviews were conducted face-to-face by the researcher for approximately 40 minutes. The interviews were digitally recorded with the researcher's cell phone and permission was sought out from parents and guardians before each interview. The opening questions included the researcher gathering the participants' biographical questions which were then followed by questions related to the study. As part of the data collection process, the researcher was able to take field notes which were used to probe questions and later during data analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:110; Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:404). To account for the differences in age, level of education and English comprehension levels, the researcher made use of visual communication cards (see Appendix B) to complement the interview schedule (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:103). These were useful in getting a full understanding of the participants' perspectives on child well-being. The visual communication cards contained pictures of the social, economic, and environmental domains related to child well-being as described in the literature. However, the researcher first used open-ended questions allowing the children to express themselves freely and thereafter introduced the visual cards as further prompts to ensure the different domains of child well-being were addressed.

During the interviews, the researcher crossed out pictures of domains that the participants had already discussed during the open-ended question session. By using this approach, the researcher was able to avoid repeating questions and keep the interviews focused. This was also beneficial for the participants as long interviews can easily impact their concentration span. The communication cards also served as a funnelling technique to gain information on more specific aspects related to child well-being (Greeff, 2011:352-353). The cards helped direct the exploration of information and keep the child's focus and attention without relying too heavily on questioning.

Data saturation was an important aspect of the study and the researcher felt that data reached saturation at the seventh interview process and that the remaining three interviews did not add any new information (Makofane & Shirindi, 2018:34). Worth noting is that the data collected was diverse, but some information was similar from interview to interview. Moreover, although data saturation was reached by the seventh interview, the study planned 10 interviews to yield rich data. In total, the researcher conducted 12 interviews as 2 of the participants had shortcomings in language comprehension. The study report, however, is based on the findings of 10 interviews that offered the best opportunity to answer the research question in-depth. All interviews were conducted in the participants' chosen setting which allowed both for quiet and comfort on their part. There was one

participant who relocated about 30km a week after obtaining permission from their guardian and the researcher travelled to their new place of residence.

3.7 Data analysis

The data analysis process was done using thematic analysis. This is a qualitative data analysis method of breaking down information into manageable themes, patterns, and relationships (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005:203). It is aimed at examining links between patterns and themes and thereby interpreting information. Following this process, the researcher adopted Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step model whose phases will be next discussed.

3.7.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation

To become acquainted with the data, the researcher transcribed the recordings; organised the data and field notes into files; listened to the audio recordings; and actively read the data at least twice in a critical manner to become familiar with the entire data set (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015:231; Nowell *et al.,* 2017:4-5; Schurink *et al.*, 2011:408-409). Using the transcripts, the researcher made note of how certain things were said and the tone and gestures made by participants as these were significant (Clarke *et al.*, 2015:229-230). The researcher thoroughly analysed the transcripts and notes taken during the interviews to obtain a general idea of the content of the data and made additional notes on thoughts, questions or initial interpretations while reading through the data (Bless *et al.*, 2018:342; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:5).

3.7.2 Phase 2: Coding

In this phase, the researcher engaged in a process of creating initial codes of interesting features and hidden messages in the data that were useful in answering the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). This process involved scrutinising the data and working through it systematically, revisiting it repeatedly, assigning codes to data in the form of short sentences, and reviewing the codes assigned (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:6). The researcher grouped the data into categories and used highlighters to colour-code each category (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:152). Coding and assigning a label to each code forms the foundation for the generation of themes in Phase 3 (Clarke *et al*, 2015:234).

3.7.3 Phase 3: Generating themes

Having generated initial codes and highlighted codes into different categories, the researcher used the transcripts to look for codes and patterns and grouped similar and relevant codes into initial or potential themes (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:8). Throughout this process, it was important to capture plausible data that would answer the research question and demonstrate a certain level of meaning or show a

34

pattern within the dataset (Braun, Clarke, Hayfied & Terry, 2019:844). The researcher then looked for associations amongst themes, established overarching themes and sub-themes, and created a table to visually demonstrate the identified themes (Braun *et al.*, 2019:844-845; Clarke *et al.*, 2015:236). A logical thematic table assisted the researcher to develop individual themes and search for relationships between themes (Clarke *et al.*, 2015:38).

3.7.4 Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes

This phase involved the researcher reviewing and refining themes and how they fit together with respect to the research question (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:9). Codes that were seen to overlap or had insufficient data to support them were restructured, combined, or deleted, or new code constructed (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:10). At the end of this phase, the researcher had developed an overall idea of what the different themes entailed and how they fit together to convey a coherent story (Braun & Clarke, 2006:92; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:9-10).

3.7.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes

This phase involves identifying, naming, and interpreting the identified themes. This phase aims to make sure that the uniqueness of each theme is captured (Braun *et al.*, 2019:846:). The researcher studied each theme and noted the relationship between themes. The researcher then gave the themes definitions that consisted of a short description explaining the scope and boundaries of each theme, and further assigned names that describe the essence of each theme (Clarke *et al.*, 2015:240). Each name was clearly defined, would make an immediate impression, and gave the reader an idea of what the theme was about (Clarke *et al.*, 2015:240; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:10). The process of expanding on each theme was important in preparing for the report writing phase (Clarke *et al.*, 2015:240).

3.7.6 Phase 6: Writing the report

Phase six involves the final analysis and write-up of the report which is an integral part of data analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). In this phase, the researcher brought together and edited the analysed writings which entailed going back between the phases (Clark *et al.*, 2015:241). The researcher engaged in the process of writing a concise, coherent, non-repetitive, logical, and interesting account of the data to provide a coherent story of the research study (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:10-11). Data from the literature were used together with the participants' quotes and discussion of the findings to enhance the merits of the study.

Thematic analysis can provide a rich, detailed, and complex account of the data; however, researchers must be aware that because of its flexibility, thematic analysis can lead to inconsistencies which make measures of trustworthiness important (Braun & Clarke, 2006:78; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:2-

3). Hence, the researcher had to apply certain measures to ensure data quality as an important aspect of the study.

3.8 Data quality

To enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher must give a truthful account of the participants' meanings and experiences (Bless *et al.*, 2013:236; Schurink *et al.*, 2011:419) of the subject under investigation. In this study, the researcher enhanced trustworthiness using the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3).

3.8.1 Credibility

To ensure credibility, the researcher presented an authentic and accurate meaning of the participants' perspectives in support of the research question and research methodology (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:419-420). The researcher was careful in managing their own bias by not influencing participants' responses and being continuously aware of their preconceived knowledge (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:191-192). The researcher applied peer debriefing by discussing the data with her supervisor (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3).

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability was enhanced through thick descriptions about the participants, context, and research design to compare the study with other contexts in practice (Anney, 2014:278; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:144-145; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). Although difficult to generalise qualitative research findings (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420), the criteria of transferability can be enhanced by promoting credibility and providing a comprehensive description of the research setting and findings (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195).

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability involves the extent to which researchers can replicate a study and obtain similar results. For this study, the researcher administered a similar set of predetermined questions through an interview schedule. The researcher had an audit trail which clearly and logically documented the entire research process so that others would be able to follow and judge the criterium for trustworthiness (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). The researcher also used peer debriefing to support the dependability (auditability) of the study (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:420).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to how the data was analysed without the researcher's biases and the research findings were corroborated and confirmed by others (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3; Lietz & Zayas, 2010:197). To achieve confirmability, the researcher made use of peer debriefing and member checking. In acknowledging their role, decisions and subjectivity in the research process, the researcher adopted

the strategy of reflexivity to remain aware and conscious of their involvement in the research process (Schurink *et al.*, 2011:42; Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintaz & Caricativo, 2017:427).

3.9 Pilot study

The researcher conducted a pilot study before commencing with the main study (Strydom and Delport, 2011:394). A pilot study is aimed at establishing "whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis are adequate and appropriate" (Bless *et al.*, 2013:394); thus, whether the chosen research methods are effective in producing data to answer the research question (Arain*,* Campbell, Cooper & Lancaster, 2010:2; Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018:41). Piloting the study allows the researcher to assess the feasibility of the study and make modifications where necessary (Strydom & Delport, 2011:395; Welman *et al.*, 2010:148). The pilot study was done with the first two interviews with participants who fulfilled the sampling criteria, and their data were considered as part of the main study. In qualitative research, researchers can use the data from the pilot study as part of the main study (Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2018:6). This process assisted the researcher in determining whether the interview questions were adequate and understandable for children aged 8-12 years; whether the data collection method was effective to obtain relevant data; the approximate duration of the interviews; and whether changes needed to be made to the research methods (Strydom & Delport, 2011:394-395). The two participants involved in the pilot study had no challenges in answering the questions, however, in the main study some participants had challenges understanding some questions and thus the researcher had to re-phrase some questions (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:111). In Section A, question 2 on gender was changed to "Would you describe yourself as a boy or girl or other?". Question 5 was rephrased to "Who makes money in your household?". In Section B, the rephrasing of question 2 was changed to "Which people can help a child to be happy, healthy, and successful?". Finally, question 7 was rephrased to "Sometimes parents make the decisions about the things that happen in your life, how can parents involve you in the decisions and plans that they make about your life?". The researcher also utilised visual prompts (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:104).

3.10 Ethical considerations

Research should be conducted in an ethically correct manner. Ethical considerations empowered the researcher with the moral principles, procedures and methods that must be adhered to when addressing complex ethical issues with research participants (Strydom, 2011:114). This process is important in keeping researchers accountable and ensuring the well-being of participants (Mills, 2014:24). The researcher adhered to the following ethical considerations:

3.10.1 Permission for the study

Obtaining institutional ethical approval before research begins and maintaining high ethical standards throughout a research project is important in conducting scientific research (Mogorosi, 2018:7). Before

37

conducting the study, the researcher sought permission and was granted ethical clearance by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria (see Appendix C).

3.10.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent and assent

All participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process and would not suffer any negative consequences (Maree, 2019:48). This aspect was important as the participants in this study were children between the ages of 8-12 years. Signed informed assent (see Appendix D) was obtained from participants and signed informed consent (see Appendix E) was obtained from guardians before interviews were scheduled. The contents of the consent letters described the goal, procedures, and scope of the study to assist both participants and guardians in making informed decisions about participating in the study (Bless *et al.*, 2013:30; Maree, 2019:48; Strydom, 2011:117). On the day of the interview, the researcher read the informed assent letter emphasising participants' voluntary participation and the right to decline at any point.

3.10.3 Avoidance of harm

The research study population consists of children and as a vulnerable group, the researcher had to ensure no physical and/or emotional harm was inflicted upon them (Bless *et al.*, 2013:33-34; Strydom, 2011:115). The focus of the study was on the participants' perspectives of child well-being and not their experiences associated with it, however, the researcher was mindful to identify and minimise any potential emotional distress as participants discussed aspects related to child well-being. To achieve this, the researcher enlisted the help of guardians during the recruitment phase to identify and exclude children that were deemed vulnerable to participate in the study (Babbie, 2017:63; Strydom, 2011:115). At the start of the data collection interviews, the researcher thoroughly informed participants about the impact of the study and their right to withdraw without facing negative consequences (Babbie, 2017:66; Strydom, 2011:115). The researcher was vigilant during the interviews and offered to refer them for free professional counselling services to participants displaying emotional distress (Maree, 2019:49). Although it was available for participants, no participant required counselling services.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore special measures needed to be taken to ensure the safety of the participants and the researcher. The following measures were adhered to:

- The researcher and participants wore protective face masks that always covered their mouths and noses.

- A personal distance of two meters was maintained.
- Hands were sanitised when meeting and during the interview, as needed.
- Interviews were conducted in an area with good ventilation and with no other persons in the immediate environment.
- Both the researcher and each participant had their visual communication cards to avoid sharing.
- The work surface was disinfected before and after each interview.

The above measures were also stipulated in the letters of informed consent and assent.

3.10.4 Privacy and confidentiality

Privacy was upheld by allowing the participants to decide what information they wished to share or not share during the interviews (Strydom, 2011:119) and interviews were conducted in a private space. Further to that, the interview recordings were downloaded and deleted from the researchers' cell phone and stored in an access-controlled folder on the researcher's laptop. Following ethical considerations, confidentiality was upheld by using pseudonyms for the participants, including their transcripts which did not contain any real names. The researcher ensured that no identifying documents of the participants were accessed by persons other than the researcher (Maree, 2019:48, Strydom, 2011:119). No identifying details were included in this final research report and only the researcher will be able to link responses to a specific participant (Strydom, 2011:119). Upon completion of the study, all raw data would be securely stored for 10 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology in line with the stipulations of the University of Pretoria.

3.10.5 No deception

Deception is deliberately withholding information and misleading participants (Struwig & Stead in Strydom, 2011:118). The researcher was transparent and ensured that the participants and their guardians had a true picture of the study to make an informed decision to participate and that no deception occurred (Bless *et al.*, 2013:34). All relevant information was provided, and the researcher did not withhold or misrepresent any information to coerce research subjects to participate (Strydom, 2011:118-119). The researcher used debriefing to monitor whether any misunderstandings occurred (Bless *et al.*, 2013:34).

3.10.6 Debriefing of participants

Debriefing participants presents a learning opportunity for both the researcher and participants (Strydom 2011:122). The researcher ended each interview by asking participants about their experience in taking part in the study and addressing questions that any participant may have had (Babbie, 2017:71). This was done to rectify misconceptions that might have occurred and monitor

whether the participants experienced any discomfort due to their participation in the study (Babbie, 2017:71; Strydom, 2011:122). Moreover, the study population consisted of children, and it was important to ensure that they were not left feeling negative about their performance in the study (Bless *et al.*,2013:35) as their concept of self and sense of mastery are important during this stage of life (Arnett, 2016:23; Louw & Louw, 2014:257; Martorell *et al.*, 2014:395).

3.10.7 Actions and competence of the researcher

Researchers have an ethical obligation to be competent, adequately skilled and have the integrity to conduct research (Strydom, 2011:123). Researchers should always respect the dignity and rights of participants (Bless *et al.*, 2013:31). The researcher is a qualified social worker with previous experience in conducting research during her undergraduate years, including her current work environment. The researcher attended an advanced module in research methodology as part of her masters' degree. The researcher is a registered social worker and abides by the social work values stated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions [SACSSP], (SACSSP, 2019) namely respect for the human rights, dignity and worth of all human beings, competence, and showing concern for the well-being of others. The researcher conducted a thorough literature study on the research topic and was engaged in supervision with an experienced and competent research supervisor throughout the study (Strydom, 2011:123). The researcher presented findings truthfully, did not plagiarise and acknowledged other people's work (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011:123).

3.10.8 Publication of findings

The ultimate purpose of research is to release the findings to the public and enrich the research field by adding new knowledge to already existing knowledge. The research findings were compiled in a research report and made accessible to the public through the library of the University of Pretoria. The research report contains an accurate overview of the study, with no manipulation of the findings (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011:126). This was achieved by being truthful in the research and stating all the drawbacks and problems encountered during the research study. Participants and guardians were informed beforehand of the publication of the research findings in the letters of informed assent and consent. Participants' anonymity was maintained to protect their confidentiality.

3.11 Limitations of the study

A limitation of qualitative research is that the research findings cannot be generalised (Anney, 2015:272). The study was conducted in Bronkhorstspruit with a limited number of participants and therefore it cannot be assumed that participants' perspectives represent those of the wider population of children. Moreover, the researcher used snowball sampling and therefore providing background information about the study site had no bearing on research results of the sample population.

Participants also came from different socio-economic backgrounds and thus their experiences and meanings may not represent those of all children.

3.12 Summary

The chapter presented the research methodology of the study, including the research approach, type, research design, population, and sampling. Purposive criteria were utilised to select a snowball sample from adolescent children between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview guide and the data analysis process adopted Braun and Clark's (2006) six-step model. To ensure data trustworthiness, the researcher used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A pilot study was conducted, and the ethical considerations of the study were discussed. Finally, the limitations of the study were presented.

CHAPTER 4

EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings of the study. The research question that guided the study was as follows:

> *What are children's perceptions on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?*

The chapter starts with an outline of the biographical information of the participants followed by a discussion of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. The chapter concludes with a summary.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

The biographical information of the participants included their age, gender, school grade, total number of members in the household and their source of income. The biographical findings of the participants are summarised in Tables 4.1 and 4.2 below and should be read complementarily.

Table 4.1: Biographical profile of participants: Age, gender, grade, number of household members and sources of income

Participants	Age	Gender	Grade	Total number of household members	Sources of income
P1	8	Female	3	3	Salary
P2	11	Female	6	4	Salary
P3	11	Female	6	4	Salary
P4	11	Male	6	4	Salary
P5	11	Male	6	4	Salary
P6	9	Male	4	5	Salary
P7	11	Male	7	7	Salary
P8	11	Male	5	6	Salary
P9	8	Male	4	6	Salary
P10	12	Male	6	4	Salary from precarious work + 2 child support grants

As indicated in Table 4.1, participants' ages ranged from 8 to 12. Most of the participants were 11 years old while the average age of the participants was 10.3 years. Seven (7) of the participants were males and three (3) were female. The participants' levels of education ranged between grades three and seven. Household members ranged between 3 and 7 with an average of 4.7 persons per household. The households of participants P1 – P9 rely on salaries of a member(s) while participant 10 depends on an income from precarious work and two support grants.

In Table 4.2, participants' family structure, their household members and contributors to the household's incomes are discussed.

Table 4.2: Biographical profile of participants: Family structure, household members and income contributors

Participants	Family structure	Household members	Contributors of income
P1	Nuclear	Mother, father	Mother, father
P2	Single parent	Mother, brother	Mother
P3	Nuclear	Mother, father, brother	Mother, father
P4	Nuclear	Mother, father, sister	Mother, father
P5	Single parent	Mother, aunt, sister	Mother, aunt
P6	Nuclear	Mother, father, brother, sister	Mother, father
P7	Extended	Mother, father, brother, grandmother, uncle, two cousins	Mother, father
P8	Nuclear	Mother, father, two sisters, brother	Father
P9	Nuclear	Mother, father, two sisters, brother	Mother, father
P10	Single parent	Mother, brother, sister	Mother

Table 4.2 depicts the type of family structure of which 6 participants come from nuclear families, 3 participants come from single-parent households and 1 participant is from an extended family. Participants 1, 4, 6, 8 and 9 live with both parents full-time; participants 2, 5 and 10 come from single-parent households whilst participants 3 and 7 have both parents and live with their mother full-time but only see their fathers on the weekends due to distant work. In terms of income, the main source of income in 90% of the households is from the salaries of both caregivers (participants 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9), including participant 5 whose income comes from the mother and aunt. Participants 2 and 8 are single-income households from the mother and father, respectively. Participant 10 is a single income household supported by the mother's income and two child support grants.

4.3 THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings will be discussed in this section. The findings will be supported by direct quotes from the participants and verified by the literature. The themes and sub-themes from the findings are summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Themes and sub-themes

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1 Children's understanding of child well-being	1.1 Emotional wellness 1.2 Social wellness 1.3 Health wellness 1.4 Environmental wellness
2 Social factors that affect child well-being	2.1 Peer relationships 2.2 Relationships with significant others 2.3 Relationship with parents 2.4 Education 2.5 Housing 2.6 Crime in the environment 2.7 Access to services and resources that promote safety and protection
3 Economic factors that affect child well-being	3.1 Monetary income 3.2 Material resources
4 Environmental factors that affect child well-being	4.1 Clean environment 4.2 Recreational facilities 4.3 Environmental protection
5 Role of participation in child well-being	5.1 Child participation in the home setting 5.2 Child participation in the community

4.3.1 Theme 1: Children's understanding of child well-being

Participants' general understanding of well-being was defined along the aspects of behaviour, their relations with others, experiences of love and care, physical appearance, and items that they possessed or had access to. These aspects were consolidated into the sub-themes of emotional, social, health, physical and environmental wellness, which will be discussed next.

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Emotional wellness

The findings highlight that participants understand emotional wellness as a state of happiness, excitement, knowing what to do, and when children are not physically harmed by parents. The appearance of wounds or scars could be an indication of abuse while a smile mirrors happiness or contentment. The narratives below capture children's perception of emotional wellness.

P1: *"... they don't have any wounds or scars coz [because] that says that their parents are not beating them and not doing child abuse."*

P6: *"... you should … if you see they are happy, they're excited for the day and they know what to do this day."*

P5: *"... maybe when she's smiling."*

The years between childhood and adolescence are critical for children's growth. It is the period of growth when various brain structures and neurosystems are rapidly maturing in terms of brain development which has effects on social interactions, motivation, mood control, and cognitive performance (Uzefovsky, Döring & Knafo-Noam, 2016:483). Two aspects of mental health are described in another evaluation: the positive (well-being and coping with challenges) and the negative (symptoms and disorders). Positive mental health is typically viewed as having a strong foundation in emotional well-being. Indicators of positive mental health include characteristics such as happiness, self-esteem, and balanced emotions in addition to the absence of symptoms such as anxiety or sadness (Osterhaus & Koerber, 2021:1874).

The findings on children's views on emotional wellness as experiencing feelings of happiness or negative emotions correlate with the observations of Fattore, Mason and Watson (2007:18). The authors assert that happiness is an integral part of children's well-being and that it can be achieved through diverse experiences, including participation in activities that make children happy, and contribute to their competence and managing daily experiences. In addition, well-being can encompass negative situations such as experiencing physical abuse in the home environment despite it being perceived as a place of warmth. As a result, children experiencing abuse can later manifest defiant behaviours that can compromise their development and well-being (Uwazurike, Ajileye &

Onwubiko, 2020:434-435). This is further supported by Ashiabi and O'Neal (2015:4), who state that children who grow up in underprivileged areas are more likely to have unfavourable outcomes such as conduct disorders, internalising and externalising behavioural issues, delinquency, mental health problems, and delays in their cognitive and social development.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Social wellness

Participants defined well-being according to the state of relationships that they have with people around them, including the home and community environment. They considered positive relationships as essential for their well-being. Participants considered the family as a unit of care and an environment of love. They indicated that having both parents treating them well and having friends contributed to positive social well-being. Participants also identified material assets such as clothes, proper shoes, lunch for school, having access to private transport to school and having food, as social well-being. Furthermore, the government's food security and grant interventions were perceived as contributing factors to social well-being. The following views reflect participants' understanding of social well-being.

P1:   *"… they have lunch and clean clothes and proper shoes."*

P4:   *"… you can see by their behaviour and how he is like to dress up."*

P5:   *"… they have both parents and they like other people"*

P7*:*   *"… he gets fetched from school every day".*

P8:   *"… his family is taking care of him or her and loving him."*

P9:   *"… the one that can make people … make the kids happy …is friends*."

The finding that friends contribute to children's happiness and that the family provides care is consistent with Moore and Lynch (2018:133,135) who assert that children value companionship as it contributes to their happiness while the family fulfils the role of providing care and security. In instances where a family cannot meet the needs of a child, there is a likelihood of the child developing socio-emotional challenges and often, children experiencing parental absence may be exposed to anxiety and abandonment, which destabilises brain development (Uwazurike *et al.*, 2020:441,442). The role of the family is therefore crucial for child well-being, and it is worth noting that the evolution of the demographic context of family life has produced dynamic family structures comprising stepparents, cohabiting and single-parent households in contrast to the traditional marriage with biological children (Thomson & McLanahan, 2012:45,46). These evolving family structures may affect child outcomes including emotional, educational, cognitive, and behavioural benefits which have been

identified with children living with two biological and married parents in comparison to children living with stepparents (Sweeney, 2010:672). Sweeney (2010:673) however, does not disregard the parental benefits of children living with stepparents by adding that a stepfather, for example, may add towards child rearing by allowing the biological mother more parenting time while he fulfils other roles within the household.

The findings on the importance of material and economic resources are aligned with Main and Besemer (2014:1449) who assert that access to material resources assists one to achieve a certain lifestyle that positively influences well-being. Hence, a lack of material resources such as shoes can affect children's everyday interactions and may lead to social exclusion, sadness and social constraint, which affect their well-being. This goes against the principles of environmental justice which assert that all nations have a right to exploit ecological resources, yet due to past and present environmental consequences, not all nations bear the same level of responsibility (Peeters, 2012:8). This may negatively affect the well-being of the child in the long-term leading to deteriorating health, which is further explored in sub-theme 1.3 below.

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Health wellness

Findings indicate that health wellness can be achieved when having access to necessities, including hospitals, healthcare professionals and medication. The findings are supported by the following quotes:

P7:   *"… Hospital...they save people's lives and they make people healthy and they give them medicine".*

P9*:*   *"… then people that can make kids healthy is doctors".*

P10:   *"… its only doctors and nurses."*

Access to health care services such as hospitals and doctors is difficult for many South African children, particularly those living in rural communities, even though the South African Constitution affirms children's rights to basic nutrition and access to healthcare (Hall, Nanaan & Sambu, 2020:167). The issues are frequently influenced by a lack of healthcare professionals, staff attitudes, lengthy waiting times and a lack of medication which affects low-income families who are already experiencing poverty and inadequate nutrition, which compromises their well-being (Hall *et al.*, 2020:167; Tsawe & Susuman, 2013:2;).

Regardless of the challenges faced within the South African health system, health is a function of well-being that is influenced by the facilities and resources that a person has in the environment, which in turn lays a foundation of values and resources that a person has in the community and how

47

it influences their well-being (Rus *et al.*, 2020:241). Access to nourishing food, a place to stay and sleep, clean and safe living circumstances, and a place to play and exercise are all necessary for physical health and well-being. Realising children's rights and supporting their growth is necessary for their full participation in a country's existence as well as for competitive labour markets, sustainable economic growth, enhanced governance, and thriving civil societies. Moreover, the development of capacities and skills that enable people to better manage their lives through sustainable consumption, energy conservation, and healthy food preparation, is encouraged by the ecological systems approach (Peeters, 2012:13)

4.3.1.4 Sub-theme 1.4: Environmental wellness

Participants regarded a clean environment which is free from pollution as a contributing factor to their well-being. They viewed litter as contributing to air and water pollution and stated their concerns about air pollution caused by power station emissions. Participants emphasised the importance of recycling as an environmental preservation measure, and they added that responsible community members take care of the environment and keep it clean. They further cited the importance of trees as producers of oxygen. The following quotes confirm the views of participants on environmental well-being:

P1: *"… there mustn't be anything in the water, there mustn't be trash, paper towels, plastic bags, tissue rolls and if you don't recycle your plastic water bottles there could also be some in the water [ ] if you have a plastic bag and you throw it on the floor and it's very windy it will fly and it might end up in the sea and sea animals will eat and die".*

P2: *"… a good community...uhm a clean environment."*

P5: *" … the electricity station makes the air not clean".*

P9: *"… there cannot be bad smell, there can be a nice smell … and there must also be trees so we can breathe."*

The findings on the environment are anchored in SDG target 6.3 which calls for no water contamination; target 11.6 which advocates for air quality and waste management as well as target 12.5 which advances a reduction in waste generation through prevention, reduction, reuse, and recycling as interventions aimed at promoting a clean and safe environment (UN 2015).

Ghorani-Azam, Riahi-Zanjani and Balali-Mood (2016:2) assert that pollution can result in compromised physiological development in children and threaten animal life. This is caused by toxic air pollutants that cause mild or severe illnesses including coughing, sneezing, premature deaths, and

respiratory and cardiological problems while compromising oxygen in water and thus killing marine life, including plants and animals (Ghorani-Azam *et al.*, 2016:3-4).

While the South African Constitution guarantees everyone the right to an environment that is safe and companies subscribe to the Air Quality Act 39 of 2004 which regulates company emissions, communities such as Mpumalanga continue to produce high emission volumes through Eskom which negatively influence the environment (RSA, 1996; National Environmental Management Air Quality Act; Myllyvirta, 2019:10). In addition, air pollutants threaten tree life due to a reduction of carbon assimilation in trees (Fares *et al.,* 2013 cited in Ghorani-Azam *et al.*, 2016:3) which can be mitigated by planting trees on a large scale (Ghorani-Azam *et al.*, 2016:7).

Adding to the burden of environmental degradation is the challenge of plastic pollution in the oceans of which studies have revealed the massive impact it has on marine life and the risks to human life and well-being (UNEP, 2021:14). Furthermore, waste pollution can cause starvation and death in marine life whilst the risks to humans may include diseases through seafood ingestion and inhalation of burnt plastics (UNEP, 2021:14). Therefore, without effective waste management practices that are directed towards recycling and keeping communities clean, the effects of environmental pollution could cripple the ecosystem's resilience to climate change (UNEP, 2021:13-14). Environmental wellness can be achieved through a joint effort from community members which links to the social factors that affect child well-being (see theme 2 below).

Social factors connect to an ecological perspective because ecological justice maintains that all nations have a common obligation to protect the environment, but not all nations share that responsibility due to past and present environmental impacts (Peeters, 2012:8). First, implementing the responsibility for protecting the environment entails addressing environmental pollution and resource depletion (health, insufficient food and water, poor habitat); rising food, energy, housing, and mobility prices (hunger, debts, and homelessness); declining farmland quality or shortages (migration and refugees); and other problems (Peeters, 2012:12).

4.3.2 Theme 2: Social factors that affect child well-being

Participants viewed social factors affecting their well-being as the quality of interactions and relationships with people around them. Participants shared the value of having positive peer relationships and the importance of receiving care and support from significant others who contribute to their well-being but do not necessarily live with them at their primary residence. They further emphasised the role of their parents in providing a warm and caring environment which contributed to their positive experiences. Education was viewed by participants as a pathway to learning and subsequently contributing to their futures whilst housing was considered essential for providing safety,

shelter, and a sense of dignity. Participants considered crime as having a negative influence on their lives whilst access to services and resources that promoted safety were considered protective factors. The findings will be discussed below in sub-themes.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Peer relationships

Participants viewed peer relationships as important for socialising, fitting into groups, protecting one another and showing kindness towards each other. They mentioned the value of reciprocal peer relationships in fostering and maintaining relationships in addition to the function of friendships as buffers against loneliness. The following quotes confirm the views of the participants:

P2*:*   *"… you get rejected from clubs because you don't have friends or groups."*

P5:   *"… because they know when we have something to do, we do it together and we don't fight."*

P6:   *"… They're very kind, they stand up for me and make me happy every day."*

P7:   *"… I have friends like, I have one friend who likes soccer and we work together when I like don't understand something I go to him and he comes to me when he doesn't understand like a page then we help each other."*

P9:   *"… because if you don't have friends you're lonely and if you're lonely you're sad."*

P10:   *"… friends … to play."*

Literature indicates that having friends with whom to play and participating in play activities are significant contributors to children's happiness and well-being (Moore & Lynch,132:133). The authors add that there are emotional benefits to having friendships which also offer companionship and support (Moore & Lynch, 2018:135). Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli, Lucidi, Girelli, Cozzolino, Galli and Alivernini (2021:1017,1019) found that peer relationships and acceptance play a significant role towards social inclusion into peer groups. The influence of peer relationships is further impactful when children are offered the opportunity for recreation and encouraging, helpful and stable companionships which are fundamental aspects of friendships and an important source of relief against loneliness (Antonopoulou, Chaidemenou & Kouvava's, 2019:347; Ginsburg, 2007:183).

Early peer relationships affect a child's development throughout the ages. Additionally, studies have demonstrated that the younger children know how to form wholesome peer relationships, the better they carry this ability into adulthood (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz & Buskirk, 2015:423). This is supported by the ecological theory which asserts that the biopsychological active human organism

interacts with its peers in its immediate external environment in ever more complicated reciprocal processes that result in human development. The interaction between peers needs to take place frequently over long periods of time for it to be effective, which leads to the development of a variety of important social-emotional skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving techniques, in the context of peer interactions (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:2).

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Relationships with significant others

In the context of this study, the researcher defined significant others as important relationships that participants have other than their parents. These significant others were people outside the family but influenced participants' behaviours, attitudes, and livelihoods; people that contributed to the well-being of the participants.

According to participants, significant others included support systems such as individuals who looked after them and provided care including psychologists who offered mental health services. The role of extended family members was well mentioned by participants who viewed them as willing to share the responsibility of care and made themselves available to shelter them during school days because their own houses were too far from their schools and their parents also worked far away. Participants added that some people in the community such as librarians served as role models.

P1:   *"… If like … parents if your parents go like on a business trip or if they can't take care of you cause they're going to work you can your parents to ask your friends parents if you could stay over."*

P3:   *"… I got support from my school psychologist. You can get support with mental health and if you're going through family issues and you have no one to talk to it about you can visit a psychologist."*

P7:   *"… I stay with my grandmother, my uncle and my ... how can I say it …my cousin [ ] because my father works very far away so when I'm in my grandmother's house it's easier to travel to school because my father runs out of petrol... then on Fridays my mom and father comes and we go home."*

Participant's awareness of living with family members to manage socio-economic activities resonates with the view of Amoateng, Heaton and Kalule-Sibita (2007:45) who cite that decisions on living arrangements are often based on economic cooperation and social support which may be influenced by activities such as schooling and pursuing employment. Participants further elaborated on the willingness of their friends' parents in assuming the role of care corroborating with Patel *et al.,* (2017:47) who cite that social networks including neighbours play a pivotal role in embracing the

responsibility of the care of children, especially in instances where children's caregivers are engaged in employment activities. This shows that the role of care of children particularly in South Africa incorporates connections with other social support systems like the extended family and community members and subsequently influences child well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2007:279; Rahdarzadeh & Adibisedeh, 2016:194).

Overall, the study confirms that child well-being may be enhanced by positive experiences of shared responsibility of care, social cohesion through community networks and having access to mental health services (Collizi, Lasalvia & Ruggeri, 2020:5; Moore & Seekings, 2019:5; Patel *et al*., 2017:8). In addition, realisation of human potential necessitates an intervening mechanism that connects the inner with the outer in a two-way process occurring over time as highlighted by Eriksson, Ghazinour and Hammarstro¨m (2018:419) who assert that human development involves interaction between the biological and psychological person and his or her environments.

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Relationships with parents

Positive family experiences and the quality of relationships with parents have been identified by participants as important aspects of their well-being. They indicated that parents who are considered fun, loving, and warm, who cook healthy food, and encourage them to actively participate in school projects contributed positively to their well-being. Participants appreciated modelling positive behaviour from parents as well as being protected from bullying or when in trouble. Participants also acknowledged that parents may be disappointed if they display negative behaviours.

P1: *"… my mother is the person who takes care of us and most of the time cooks dinner for us… second of all, my father, my father is the funny one but so is my mother and my father helps me with stuff like my homework and my projects."*

P4: *"… and my mother also told me that if you smoke or drink alcohol you will disappoint me if I'm still young, you will very disappoint me."*

P6: *"… uhm because … uhm because … being loved is important because if you're not loved your parents won't protect you all the time when you're in trouble, when you're being bullied they won't be there to help you and they won't be there when you're in trouble."*

P7: *"… they are friendly, they don't like being disrespected, they are kind and they are fearful of God."*

P8: *"… they are good people and they take care of me and they love me."*

52

P9:   *"… parents so that they can support them in their lives. …they encourage me to do well."*

The findings confirm that the advantage of good parenting is linked to welcoming homes, enjoyable parent-child interactions, open communication, parental involvement, and monitoring of children during play, all of which support children's positive developmental outcomes (Joronen & Astedt-Kurki, 2005:131). Being present, giving them full attention, and developing trust are the cornerstones of a successful connection with children (Scharp & Thomas, 2016:36). Strong, caring, and good relationships with parents and other caregivers are the finest foundations for a child's learning and development. Positive relationships between parents and their offspring ensure that children can learn about the world through having healthy interactions with their parents and other caregivers (Dermott & Pomati, 2016:129,130).

The relationship between parents and children is paramount because it fosters the child's physical, emotional, and social growth (Scharp *et al.*, 2016:33). Every child and parent may cherish and grow this special link because a child's personality, choices in life, and general behaviour are all built on the foundation of this bond which may affect their social, physical, mental, and emotional health (Nicholls, Lewis, Petersen, Swinburn, Moodie & Millar, 2014:7). In line with Bronfenbrenner's theory, more parent-child engagement is better for lowering girls' risky social behaviours (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:11).

4.3.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4: Education

Participants revealed that the school environment and learning contributed to their well-being in different ways, including influencing their prospects of success. Having access to resources such as books, schools, libraries, and teachers, improves their well-being, develops their knowledge, and encourages them to pursue tertiary education. Having access to libraries assists them in doing their homework whilst teachers educate them and provide them with knowledge. Participants indicated that through education, they could have money to support their livelihoods and that of their children. Through education and the reading of books, they could learn about their country's past, and the sacrifices made to have the lives that they have today. Participants additionally voiced that going to university facilitates the process of securing a job in the future.

P3:   *"… Uhm education is very important to a child because uhm education can change a child's uhm life, like it can make a child's life very successful".*

P5:   *"… teachers … because they educate them."*

P6:   *"… books are very very important so that you learn a lot so you know a lot of things that you were in the past and that are gonna happen now, stories, math books and everything."*

P9:   *"… cause there you can go learn and when you're done learning you can go to university and get your job that you wanted."*

P10:   *"… the library … It helps us and sometimes we are struggling with the homework…. before the library we were struggling …."*

The findings of the study support the literature that tertiary education is associated with improved employment prospects and higher earnings and hence, people's employment opportunities are critical for their social inclusion as well as economic and social well-being (Bradshaw, Hoelscher & Richardson, 2006:29-30). However, for children to achieve good educational outcomes, they need to be supported through the provision of books and libraries which are critical for the development of literacy and cognitive skills as well as accessing relevant materials to complete homework (Celano & Neuman, 2001:3-4; Maepa & Mhinga, 2021:277). These findings resonate with the Programme for International Student Assessment's 2012 education report which indicated that education plays a critical role in the developmental outcomes of children, especially when supported with opportunities for learning, high-quality materials, human and financial resources, and it can contribute to enhanced economic outcomes in later life (OECD, 2013:34). Therefore, education has a direct influence on people's lives and by having and using the necessary amenities such as libraries, people stand to benefit from enhanced intellectual and cognitive abilities which influence their well-being (Rus *et al.*, 2020:241; Norris *et al.*, 2008:145).

The primary source of knowledge that children encounter in school offers them the ability to learn about other areas of education, including people, literature, history, arithmetic, politics, and more (Budiharso & Tarman, 2020:102). The cultivation of the mind is aided by this (Horner, Sugai & Fixsen, 2017:27). The school is therefore a component of the exosystem, a social milieu that the child is not in direct contact with but that nonetheless has an impact on them, through the modelling of teachers or staff members (Espelage, 2014:258; Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:2). Moreover, a child's first opportunity to make friends is at school which instils social skills such as empathy, companionship, engagement, and support, which are crucial as they become adults (Horner *et al.*, 2017:27).

4.3.2.5 Sub-theme 2.5: Housing

As reflected in the narratives, participants are aware of the importance of a house in providing shelter, safety, and dignity. In their view, a house is needed for sleeping and protecting one during rainy weather conditions. Participants added their concerns about the risks of being homeless and its

impact on their future. They also mentioned how poor housing can affect their dignity and esteem, which is indicated below.

P1:   *"You need somewhere to sleep"*

P4:   *"I will need a house and feel happy mam… I need a house and feel safe... if I live on the streets I will … (stammering) how will I have a better future? I don't want to say when I'm grown up I say this is my house I grew up in this house (expressing embarrassment), no, I want it to be like a real family house."*

P6:   "*A house is important because you have a roof under you to protect you like when it's raining"*

P10:   "*You must stay warm and you must not stay in the streets"*

The findings in this study show children's perceptions of their home environments particularly the value of having housing. Literature shows that it is important to provide children with protection in the form of adequate housing to enhance their feelings of safety, security, and happiness (Fattore *et al.*, 2007:18). Whilst the South African Constitution provides the right to access adequate housing (RSA, 1996), some children still live in poor housing conditions with leaking houses that expose them to damp and the cold, all of which can affect their health and breed diseases in the home (Clair, 2019:611; Ridge, 2009:31; Rumbach & Shirgaokar, 2017:712).

The home environment serves as a place of socialisation with friends, however, children living in unconducive housing experience anxieties and stigmas about the state of their house which can affect their social well-being (Ridge, 2009:31-32). Rice (2006) as cited in Ridge (2009:33) further adds that living in the street poses a threat to children's immediate and future outcomes such as compromised social and psychological well-being which includes poor health outcomes, disruption in social relationships, and moving away from home. The ecological perspective emphasises the effect of resources within our environment by stating that children are embedded in systems that have direct, indirect, and dynamic effects on their development and behaviour (Espelage, 2014:257).

4.3.2.6 Sub-theme 2.6: Crime in the environment

Participants considered crime as a negative aspect affecting their lives. Criminals that come into their homes make them feel unsafe. Participants shared how they feel unsafe in the streets because of the fear of being pick-pocketed as well as being kidnapped.

P4:   *"… not be like, when I see you passing there I say like 'come' here and then I search you and take your stuff and then I say go, that's not what I want. I don't want that."*

P5:   *"… children are being kidnapped and they take them to another place where they cannot find them."*

P10:   *"... for these people to come and steal are a danger….. they come the first time then they steal the microwave then they come the second time they steal the TV, then my mother and father they come and buy a new gate."*

Issues of child safety are well highlighted in the CRC's call to protect children from all forms of violence and similarly accentuated in SDG 11 which calls for safe communities to enhance people's well-being (UN, 1989; UN, 2015). Studies reveal that fear and insecurity have a negative influence on children's well-being, particularly the fear of becoming a victim of crime, and hence, feeling protected is crucial to well-being (Fattore *et al.*, 2007:18). The exposure to and experience of crime such as pickpocketing and theft, as experienced by participants, support Adams and Savahl's (2015:205-206) findings that threat to personal safety affects well-being and challenges their daily lives while Fattore *et al.* (2007:18) add that exposure to crime makes one fearful of being alone. Participants' perceptions of child kidnapping as a criminal activity validate Orset's (2008:4) findings that unsafe communities increase children's vulnerability to being targeted and abducted in places like parks or in the streets. In these instances of abduction, children are forcefully removed for extortion and other uses thereby exposing them, the family, and the community to trauma (Orset, 2008:4,2).

Highlighting children's perceptions of safety in their communities reveals the extent to which South African children feel unsafe in their communities. The participant's feelings of unsafety resonate with the findings of Rees *et al.,* (2020:76) who indicated that South Africa was ranked 27 out of 33 countries that had participated in the 2020 Children's World Report. Therefore, in this respect, Mijanovich and Weitzman (2003) highlighted in González-Carrasco, Casas, Ben-Arieh, Savahl and Tiliouine (2019:330) the importance of understanding the risk variables connected to feelings of unsafety since these feelings have the potential to harm one's sense of competency which can lead to poor academic performance, depressive symptoms, and other types of psychological discomfort.

It is therefore important to examine the impact of crime in children's lives as it influences their perceptions of people around them and ultimately affects their attitudes and behaviours in the future (Adams *et al.*, 2019:560). Additionally, an ecological approach necessitates the development of circumstances that aid in problem-solving and strive to establish the parameters of a sustainable future, which entails fostering social capital and resilience (Peeters, 2012:14).

4.3.2.7 Sub-theme 2.7: Access to services and resources that promote safety and protection

Participants associated access to services and resources that promote their safety as important for their well-being. They talked about the role of firefighters in cases of fire and pointed out the importance of having access to a police station to report crime. Participants added that professionals like social workers could protect them from abuse whilst having patrollers in the community could increase feelings of safety. Having access to a cell phone was viewed as important to call the police and their parents in cases of danger. The following excerpts highlight participant's views in this regard:

P1: *"… if there's a fire and you have nobody to call, you call the fire fighters."*

P4: *"… I can get people like who are patrolling like these ones are patrolling in that area. Let's say they leave and after they go and do something, 1 hour they come back to check and then go back they are patrolling mam."*

P5: *"… social workers … cause they make sure that everything is ok and when you are abused, they take you to another family."*

P6: *"… Uhm and cell phones are very useful so that you can call police if you're in danger, your parents and anybody who can help you... people would need a police station to report all crimes committed."*

The findings on the role of social workers in child protection services are supported by Azzi-Lessing (2010:256) who indicates that children in vulnerable situations need protection and social workers play a pivotal role in placing them in alternative care such as shelters. In this regard, the CRC affirms children's rights to protection from abuse and provides access to quality services alongside developmental social work by advocating for the provision of childcare services that improve child well-being (González-Carrasco *et al.*, 2019:315; Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:3; UN, 1989).

Concerning having cell phones, participants highlighted the importance of being able to connect with their parents, the police, and firefighters in instances of danger. This is consistent with the finding of Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019:469) that cell phones enhance children's feelings of safety and protection because it allows them to maintain contact with their parents or authorities that can help them in risky situations. The authors further establish that access to cell phones also creates awareness among children as they become engaged in educational resources related to issues of safety (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:468).

Participants' account of their social realities regarding issues of safety, accessing police stations, and having patrollers, affirms September and Savahl's (2009:29,35) findings that inadequate policing

services threaten children's feelings of safety and increase their anxieties and fears. In addition to the inadequate policing services, South African children participating in the Children's World Report expressed their dissatisfaction with the local police stations which negatively impact their feelings of protection and safety (Rees & Main, 2015:90). Essentially, countries that invest towards children's services, including the development of child-friendly policies, are more likely to improve child well-being and feelings of safety (Savahl *et al.*, 2017:32).

4.3.3 Theme 3: Economic factors that affect child well-being

Participants revealed that their own experiences of life and their living conditions, monetary income in the household, access or lack of material resources, were factors that influenced their economic well-being.

4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Monetary income

Participants indicated that their primary caregivers received an income and they all came from stable income households except one participant whose caregiver relied on precarious work and two state grants.

P1:   "… *(Income) … my mother and my father."*

P6:   "… *My parents."*

P8:   "… My mother and father."

P10:   "… *(Income) My mother. Sometimes they are saying she must stay at home because they said they will call her.*

The findings reveal that household income plays a significant role in children's outcomes in the sense that financial resources may contribute to better living conditions whereas unstable or fluctuating parental income may cause strain to families and propel them to making changes and adjustments that could disrupt children's lives (Casas & Frönes, 2019:2; Copper & Steward, 2013 in Main, 2014:6; Mayer, 2002:23). Thus, to support the livelihoods of families without income, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) makes provision through a cash-transfer programme to qualifying individuals (Hall, 2020a:161).

Beyond what families can afford, greater earnings can protect children. For instance, parents with higher salaries tend to be less stressed and depressed, which improves their capacity to provide responsive parenting (Washbrook, Gregg & Propper, 2014:759). Increases in family income significantly lessen disparities in academic performance and enhance broader facets of a child's well-

being. The best improvements in cognitive growth and academic performance come from earning more money (Oldfield, Humphrey & Hebron, 2016:23).

4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Material resources

Participants indicated that material resources enhanced their well-being in different ways including having books to learn, a bed to sleep on, toys with which to play and proper shoes to prevent them from getting hurt from rocks and thorns. Participants shared that having the right uniform made them look neat and lacking a proper school uniform exposed them to bullying and affected their peer relations and participation in certain activities at school. They also shared the importance of having clothes as it gave them dignity and protected them during different weather patterns. Participants shared the importance of having gadgets such as cell phones to watch videos, to communicate with their parents and friends, and to connect with other people online. Participants added that having a TV and gaming equipment was also seen as important and contributing to their happiness while access to YouTube aided them with aspects of their homework. The following excerpts capture participant's views.

P2: *"… Well, if you don't wear your school uniform you get picked at and you get rejected from clubs…if you have television like YouTube you can go onto it and look for things to help you with your Maths, English and how to spell this and that."*

P5: *"… Because when it's cold you can wear them and when its hot you can wear other things but it's important to have clothes because you can't go without clothes."*

P6: *"… School and uniforms and shoes. You need school uniforms so that you look very neat when you're at school and you need shoes so you can walk nicely on the pavement, your feet don't get hit by thorns or rocks. Books are very very important so that you learn a lot so you know a lot of things."*

P7: *"… Yeah phones, pencils to write and beds to sleep in and toys. They are important so they can make children happy, like when they are crying they take their toys. And a computer they can play like a game or watch a movie online or you can connect with someone from where you don't know online."*

P9: *"… it's phones and computers and PlayStation and Xbox… because they make children happy (smiling broadly). I watch videos … also text my mom and dad sometimes. And clothes so that they can dress and not be cold and shoes."*

Children's ambition to learn is greatly influenced by financial assistance from the family. When their parents are proud of and applaud their accomplishments and performance, learners become more

59

driven (Washbrook *et al.*, 2014:762). To ensure that their children do not lack access to basic resources, parents must ensure that they are employed, have adequate housing, and provide their children with allowances (Oldfield *et al.*, 2016:24). Parent-child interactions must also be prevalent as underpinned by the ecological theory because it improves with decreased family and parental stress, which in turn, influences children's positive behaviours (Ashiabi & O'Neal, 2015:10,11).

Hence, the availability of material resources to children and families cannot be viewed as independent of income because income is one of the main means behind securing such resources (Main, 2014:22). As indicated in the study, participants viewed having resources like clothing as important and this finding corroborates with Mayer's (2002:15) suggestion that children lacking certain resources may feel alienated or uncomfortable and may not wish to participate in school activities or lack the appropriate clothing which may expose them to bad weather and affect their well-being. Furthermore, a study by Main (2013) cited in Kaye-Tzadok, Ben-Arieh and Kosher (2019:348) and exploring material deprivation, showed that children viewed cell phones as important for "building relationships, fitting in and having fun" whilst having a television was necessary to participate in conversations with peers.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Environmental factors that affect child well-being

Participants expressed their views on the importance of living in a clean environment citing the negative consequences resulting from human behaviour. They indicated how the deteriorating environment affects both human and animal life and issues of sustainability. Participants voiced their opinions on practising environmental justice to have a clean environment as a pathway to protect the environment and subsequently protect the earth's resources. Participants pointed out that having access to recreational facilities like parks and swimming pools in the community contributed to their opportunities to play and develop friendships. Through these activities, they have the opportunity to experience the outdoors as opposed to staying in the house throughout the day. Furthermore, electricity was viewed as an important resource by participants, but they also expressed their concerns on gas emissions that cause harm to the environment and their health. Participants shared their concerns about environmental degradation like irresponsible use and disposal of chemicals, the cutting down of trees and plastic use. According to participants, responsible human behaviour is important for keeping a clean and safe environment to enhance social and environmental well-being.

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Clean environment

Participants noted the presence of air and water pollution as detrimental to their health and the environment. Participants understood the consequences of unclean water and air and their harmful effect on their health. They also acknowledged the importance of electricity provision by the City of

Tshwane Municipality and its use in cooking and providing lights, however, electricity generation through power station emissions contributed to air pollution ultimately affecting their health.

> P7:   "…*It is important so that we may have the lights on, or you can cook.*"

> P4:   "…And also Tshwane mam. I can believe at sometimes because they make us to be with water and electricity.

> P5:   "… *Because the electricity station makes the air not clean. Because a dirty place makes other people sick and maybe other people have allergies and then they will get sick of them.*"

> P1:   "…*There must be no air pollution and no water pollution cause air pollution and water pollution can be very dangerous. For air pollution you might not be able to breathe properly and for water pollution all of the water in the tap won't be proper.*"

> P6:   "... *You need clean water because clean water makes you healthy and dirty water is not good for you because it can make you sick and it can make you vomit. And we need clean air because if we have dirty air we would be coughing all day and clean air is very good because we smell good air in our lives and clean air is good because it comes from trees.*"

Participants viewed electricity as an important resource to have in their homes and communities, however, recognising that its generation through power stations may affect the environment. Despite being a relatively safe and clean form of energy when it is utilised, electricity generation and transmission have an impact on the environment (Cristóbal, Guillén-Gosálbez, Jiménez & Irabien, 2012:370). The environment is impacted by almost all types of electric power plants although some have more of an impact than others and may result in respiratory conditions affecting the health of the population (Cristóbal *et al.*, 2012:374; Thakur, Rout & Chakraborty, 2014:115). Certain vegetation communities may be harmed by the air pollutants and water vapour that power plants release into the atmosphere as fog while some pollutants harm or destroy plants by spreading illnesses or being toxic (Guillerm & Cesari, 2015:889).

The lack of clean water as a contributor to health was a concern to participants. In line with this study's findings, water is one of the most pertinent natural resources required by human beings to survive and is increasingly becoming scarce in both quality and quantity (Appannagari, 2017:152). Through the involvement of green social workers, issues of environmental degradation affecting children's well-being are addressed through advocacy and lobbying to enhance their functioning and promote their sustainable futures to achieve environmental protection and human well-being (Dominelli, 2018:13).

Littering was also cited as a concern by participants stating its negative effects on their religious practices. Participants also shared concern about the deliberate neglect of the environment even with the provision of infrastructure such as signage by the municipality. Participants explained community behaviour and its impact on the environment as follows:

P4: "... *at Tshwane they put no littering sign, let's say here is the library at the back they put no littering sign there is space there like this and people just litter ... Because sometimes when we go at the river at the church we find stuff lying around. Let's say mam we wanted to pray and you find stuff lying around and sometimes they leave their old stuff there, so now you are not going anymore at the river.*"

P6 "*.... You should throw it in the dustbin and not outside .... Ehm you shouldn't drag it otherwise the plastic might tear and the trash will fall out. It will start smelling and affect the environment. We should pick up papers and bottles so that we don't make our environment dirty and .... (inaudible) bottles can cut you.*"

P7 "*.... when you see something that needs to go to trash you must pick it up so that even when are around its must be clean.*

The finding supports the notion that pollution from littering poses a serious threat to the ecosystem and is a growing source of worry in many nations (Appannagari, 2017:151). Many people are unaware of or underestimate the harm that littering causes to the environment. People assume that their personal choices will not harm society. Adams and Savahl (2013:203) elaborate that even though community members see the visible damages such as pollution in their natural environments, they still fail to practice environmentally conscious behaviours and this culture of inconsideration puts the livelihoods of communities at risk, hence litter harms the ecosystem. Toxic substances or chemicals in the litter can be blown or washed into rivers, forests, lakes, and seas, and eventually can harm waterways, soil, or aquatic habitats (Guillerm & Cesari, 2015:892). Another danger to the environment and its inhabitants is plastic litter. Both marine and land animals frequently mistake it for food. Since they cannot be digested, when ingested by animals, they restrict the stomach capacity and finally cause death (Fijalkowski & Fitzmaurice, 2017:78).

Ecosystems provide a pathway for cultural services like the practising of spiritual beliefs. However, the contamination of ecosystems may harm human experiences (Thakur *et al.*, 2014:107). Moreover, through the involvement of children in religious activities, there is an opportunity to protect children from engaging in risky behaviours and instead promote the development of norms and values for behaviour supportive of positive lifelong outcomes (Moore *et al.,* 2016:50).

Participants also shared about the role of the community in keeping the environment clean for everyone's benefit.

> P7:   "... *You have people who keep neighbourhoods clean so that you may live in a clean environment that there is no dirt, trash so that they can clean the place so that you can go free.*"

> P9:   "... *It must be clean so children don't pick up trash and eat it.*"

Peeters (2012:293) encourages communities to adopt environmentally considerate practices including the responsible use of resources and keeping the environment clean. Enforcing stringent litter rules ensures that no trash is dumped, flung, or dropped into open or enclosed spaces. These regulations aim to make illegal dumping and littering illegal. Lombard and Viviers (2014:83) add that the active participation of children in promoting environmental preservation may lead to sustainable communities important for well-being. According to Peeters (2012:12), advocating for equal rights and access to necessities can alleviate issues such as environmental pollution, resource depletion (health, insufficient food and water, poor habitat), rising food, energy, housing, and mobility costs (hunger, debts, and homelessness), and declining farmland quality or shortages (migration and refugees).

With the primary purpose of launching anti-litter campaigns and organising neighbourhood clean-ups, community programmes and groups should be established with friends and neighbours, including children. Campaigns speak frequently and offer pertinent information about the costs of littering to the environment, eventually addressing some of the larger issues (Fijalkowski & Fitzmaurice, 2017:83). Environmental protection also forms part of the development of recreational facilities, which is discussed below.

4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Recreational facilities

Having recreational facilities in the community emerged as a point of discussion for participants. The need for a park, sports activities, a swimming pool, and a gym was identified as key contributors to facilitating friendships, being physically active and their general well-being. Participants mentioned the importance of playing as a stimulating factor as opposed to staying indoors and watching TV the entire day.

> P3:   "... *Uhm it's mainly for a child, a lot of children like to play and it's also good to go to a park once in a while just to get some fresh air. It is also good for the system in your body to get fresh air.*"

> P4:   "... *Because if your children, if you don't play sports you will be on the couch all day. You will be on the couch watching TV because you don't have something to do, that*"

63

is why we at my house we don't sit too long at my house. Let's say from the morning we get out from then we go out and play and come back because you cannot sit at the couch all day mam."

P6:   *"... And the park is important because you … you … (stammering) can … you can play on the swings so you ... you can feel like you're going high in the sky and you also can get a fit from running around A swimming pool… to swim on a hot day and sandpit to make sandcastles."*

The above quotations illustrate the value participants attribute to accessing recreational facilities, participating in sports, and engaging with their peers. This finding resonates with Sen and Nussbaum's capability approach which argues that people's quality of life is influenced by their agency and opportunities available in their societies to support their well-being (Schlosberg, 2007:30). For a community to be lively and healthy and for its residents to benefit from that community's health, parks and recreation facilities are crucial. These community or leisure centres offer chances for locals to get active and socialize with others as they are areas of agreement where inclusivity is the main concern, and they support the development of a culture of health and well-being in the communities they represent (Putra, Ahmad, Anggita, Milenia, Ilmiyah, Wijaya & Hiyasti, 2020:15). This links with the chronosystem level, the top level of the ecological framework which requires the occurrence of continuity or change of the individual and the environment throughout the course of a lifetime to enhance well-being (Espelage, 2014:261).

These neighbourhood establishments contribute significantly to one's health and fitness by fostering a happy environment which lessens the need for expensive social services like healthcare (Appannagari, 2017:158). In addition to boosting the local economy, parks and recreation can also aid in the development of the global economy (Putra *et al.*, 2020:15). Social interaction, volunteerism, civic pride, and beauty, all play a role in the social relationships that individuals form at community recreation centres. This then leads to substantial benefits such as enhancing lives and assisting in the development of strong, safe, and inclusive communities (Fijalkowski & Fitzmaurice, 2017:98).

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Environmental protection

Participants expressed their views on the consequences of cutting down trees to support human plastic use, the implications of air and water pollution on health as well as the effects of littering and destroying soil quality through chemical use. Participants also mentioned the concerns about the extinction of animals and how future generations would have to rely on photos to know of animals that once existed. Participants proposed a fundamental shift in human behaviour including picking up litter; cleaning up as communities; planting trees; and using dustbins to protect the environment.

Participants' responses showed an intrinsic need to preserve nature and promote environmental sustainability.

P1: "… *Plastics are made out of trees and if you keep on using plastics, we have to keep on cutting down trees and cutting and cutting them and then we won't have any oxygen… We can also use bags made from fabric. If you keep on throwing junk on the floor like if you throw something like chemicals on the floor and if you put a seed on the floor and a tree grows, the fruit on the tree probably won't be healthy cause of all the stuff that was in the ground... When you go to the zoo, cause when you grow up and have children you want to take them to the zoo but there won't be any animals so you will have to show them pictures and they can't see animals in real life.*"

P2: "*…Plants … they keep the environment tidy and protect the soil.*"

P3: "*... the forests is mainly filled with trees when uhm we mainly get our uhm oxygen from trees and uhm the pollution and no pollution meaning if there is no pollution it won't affect the way our body works for that same as clean water and clean neighbourhood is also very important for humans and animals yes.*"

Environmental well-being is a global concern and over the years issues, sustainable development and environmental degradation have taken centre stage in addressing ecosystem changes for human well-being as seen in documents such as The Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development of 1987 , Agenda 21 of the Rio Declaration of 1992, the Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development of 2002 and the 2030 Agenda (Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; UN, 1992; UN, 2002; UN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda recognises the commitment to environmental sustainability and commits countries to reducing pollution to improve water and air quality as well as practice environmental consciousness through reduction, prevention and the re-using and recycling of waste materials. The 2030 Agenda further provides for sustainably managing forests and ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (UN, 2015).

Participants also perceived their neighbourhoods as threatening and unsafe, therefore, there was a need to have safe and crime-free communities that would allow children to fully engage in the natural environment. Participants' responses reflect the meaning that they give to the environment and their interaction with it.

P5: "*... Community … we need to be safe because many children are being kidnapped and they take them to another place where they cannot find them.*"

The finding is consistent with studies by Wals (1994) and Simmons (1994) in Adams and Savahl (2015:199) exploring children's perception of the environment which revealed that unsafe neighbourhoods restrict children's opportunities to explore and discover the outdoors and nature. Simmons' study revealed that appreciating open spaces, trees and the availability of water was an important factor for child well-being.

Dermott and Pomati (2016:137) assert that children in precarious environments are more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder, engage in alcohol and cigarette use, and take greater risks with their sexual health than their peers who live in safer conditions. Chronic stress brought on by living in a dangerous area might hasten aging and be harmful to one's health (Dermott & Pomati, 2016:137). Living in a dangerous neighbourhood is associated with greater risks of preterm births and low birthweight babies. It can also lead to nervousness, depression, and stress (Fijalkowski & Fitzmaurice, 2017:115). Moreover, fear of violence might cause people to stay inside and avoid their neighbours which can be addressed by placing effective measures to effect positive change in communities (Putra *et al.*, 2020:17). According to Christensen (2016:26), it is important to understand how the various systems overtly affect the individual and how they grow because both the individual and the environment change through time.

4.3.5 Theme 5: Role of participation in child well-being

Findings indicate that children can be active participants in issues that influence their well-being by contributing within a family setting and the community. The role of child participation was a recurrent theme amongst participants. Participants recognise their role in decision-making processes including having their voices heard to share their experiences; combining their ideas with those of their parents; having their parents communicate with them; and participating in the upkeep of the home environment. Participants recognised their role in reducing and mitigating environmental risks in the community as part of environmental preservation. These are discussed below as sub-themes.

4.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1 Child participation in the home setting

Participants alluded to the value of having their parents communicate with them and listen to their ideas. This was important for participants as they felt that they could also make decisions regarding their lives and that therefore, decision-making processes should include their own perspectives and result in a joint decision. Moreover, participants felt that if parents incorporated their views in the decision-making process, knowing the kind of life that they would prefer, it could result in better planning for their future. Overall, participants believed that it was important for their parents to include them and plan with them.

P2:   *"... communicate with us, listen to our ideas. Because sometimes …. (long pause) we have our experiences …."*

P3:   *"... maybe when it comes to a decision that I can also make as a child uhm they can consider my decisions or my point of view so that I also feel like I was maybe a part of the decision and if we agree on something I can't say I didn't agree on that cause I was part of the decision."*

P4:   *"… because she must know what life I would prefer."*

P6:   *"… so that they can mix our ideas with theirs so that they can make a very good plan for our future."*

P8:   *"… by just talking about you … with you."*

The above quotes illustrate the value of actively engaging children's lived experiences such as listening to their views; asking and understanding what is important to them; and collaborating with them when making decisions about their lives. Through this partnership and deliberate act of actively engaging children's voices, there is an opportunity to consciously incorporate children's own perspectives of child well-being as opposed to relying on adult-centric views of child well-being (Estola, Farquhar & Purolla, 2013:11). The findings reveal that children want to be heard in order to enhance the quality of their lives.

The act of actively listening to children is in line with the CRC as participants view their active participation as fundamental, especially on aspects that have an impact on their life (Nolas, 2015:159). Children and young people have the right to express their opinions in a free and open forum, and adults have a responsibility to hear what they have to say and to make it as easy as possible for them to participate in decisions that affect them in their families, schools, local communities, public services, institutions, governmental policies, and legal processes (Save the Children South Africa, 2018:9).

Nolas (2015:161) further express that children develop self-expression, empowerment, and ultimately higher self-esteem through participation. Children are a heterogeneous group; thus, it is good to engage children of both sexes as well as children of different ages, abilities, origins, and ethnicities in the consultation process. Hence, children must feel safe and respected to feel free to share their thoughts which is further enhanced by considering the people who are present, the physical setting, and the method used to gather information (Horgan, Forde, Martin & Parkes, 2017:275).

Participants further proposed that they must be informed of challenges experienced by the family that are affecting their functioning and they should also be helped to understand these challenges for them to reach a state of wellness. Participants are aware that disputes between their parents may cause

disruption in family life which could affect them and therefore parents should be open and engage them on changes and challenges that occur in the home. Participants also felt that keeping things from them only causes uncertainty which could be avoided by talking to them and subsequently settling their emotions and feelings.

> P2: *"… when my father left it was like a very hard time and I was so young, I didn't know what was going on but I feel like they should have helped me to understand because after a few days I asked my mum where was dad then she told me, so I feel like she should have told me sooner. I think … ahhh … forgiving him would make me feel better and I know that I don't have to worry about him hurting me anymore and I should just forget about it, forgive and forget."*

Children are highly resilient and as future adults, involving them in matters that concern them serves as an investment in their childhood leading to dividends to their life-long outcomes. Therefore, parents and caregivers can all benefit from hearing what children have to say to improve their well-being (Buck *et al.*, 2018:1251; Casas & Frones, 2019:10). This position from the authors is aligned with the findings of the study which revealed that the participant wished to be informed of the father's departure sooner as well as the reasons as to why he had left as it would have helped formulate a pathway on how to move on from the situation for her own well-being. Due to a dearth of studies on subjective well-being in South Africa, in-depth qualitative research is required to explore the psychological factors that affect children's subjective well-being; an approach that will enable children to define their own definitions of happiness and life satisfaction since subjective well-being assessments are a subjective phenomenon (Coumpton & Hoffman, 2013:51,52; Savahl *et al.*, 2017:39).

Often, generational inequality subdues children's participation and thus, their participation needs to be accompanied by concomitant change from systems that presumptuously justify paternalism towards children to those that instead see children as competent beings who are capable of making decisions about issues that affect their lives (Hunner-Kreisel & März, 2019:427).

Participants listed various ways in which they can contribute to the functioning of family life by completing chores, including cleaning the house, cooking, being frugal with money and saving money. Participants also view a chore and eating timetable as essential as well as running errands such as going to the shops.

> P1: *"… well… you can help your parents clean the house, you can help them cook, you cannot spend a lot of money, you can save money."*

> P4: *"… help with like cleaning and sometimes I clean, it's my chore [ ] like they set up a day chore they put it there and a list which say and on Monday we are eating that*

and on Tuesday we are eating that and then the chore list shows that today I have to do this and that mam."

P5:   *"… uhm they can ask me to go to the shop to buy something and help them with cleaning the house and making other things like cooking."*

The findings draw attention to Rende's (2021:3,4) research on the advantages of assigning chores to children at different developmental stages for their social, physical, and cognitive functioning. The author suggests a link between working together on household activities and the development of children's social abilities, such as taking part in group decision-making and brainstorming with others, while physically-demanding chores curb sedentary behaviour.

Children have the ability to assist around the house with chores such as cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping. Moreover, doing chores offers the learning opportunity of taking responsibility, instilling discipline, developing an improved ability to follow directions, and the encouragement of independent learning through trial-and-error experiences (Nakahori, Sekine, Yamada & Tatsuse, 2016:194). By doing chores, children are given the opportunity to acquire values and attitudes that can be transferred for the benefit of society at large and develop the values of serving others as an expression of care (Rende, 2021:4).

In another study comparing the collaborative work of indigenous and cosmopolitan families, it was found that indigenous families involved children in shared activities as a means of relating individual autonomy with the greater good, whereas cosmopolitan families engaged children in mandatory solitary chores, which may reduce their willingness to collaborate and reduce learning opportunities such as social values that are crucial as a member of society (Mejía-Arauz, Correa-Chávez, Ohrt & Aceves-Azuara, 2015:40-42). Child participation is therefore important for grooming the social and cognitive skills of children.

4.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2 Child participation in the community setting

Participants identified their participation in the community setting as vital to contributing to environmental protection. Participants recognised the importance of mitigating environmental risks by planting trees, recycling materials, protecting animal life, and creating awareness of environmental protection as part of environmental sustainability.

P1:   *"… You could recycle the tissue rolls and plastic bottles or you either don't use tissue or plastic bottles and when you go to the shops you don't use plastic bag cause if you have a plastic bag and you throw it on the floor and it's very windy it will fly and*

it might end up in the sea and sea animals will eat and die. Also, if you leave it on the floor but it's not windy a bird might eat a piece of it and it might choke and die."

P2:   *"… Plant trees."*

P5:   *"… Pick up the papers in the street."*

The environments in which children find themselves characterise their relationships with society and transcend the physical area that they inhabit to a social space with cultural norms where children develop their experiences and social relationships (Akkan, Müderrisoglu, Uyan-Semerci & Erdogan, 2018:446). Participants' concerns corroborate the International Association of Schools of Social Work's (2016) view that natural resource depletion, rapid climate change, and the negative effects of environmental degradation and pollution, all have an impact on people's lives in general and hinder communities' capacity to expand and flourish (IASSW, 2016).

Community-level problems are therefore addressed through efforts geared towards environmental protection which is a global agenda foregrounded on the SDGs and achieved by involving individuals and communities to engage in opportunities to holistically address environmental concerns and simultaneously empower the community (Mketo, Ringo, Nuhu & Mpambije, 2022:1,2; UN, 2015). Dominelli (2012:150) elaborates on the conversation stating that the natural resources essential to human survival are beginning to deteriorate as a result of the harm humans are causing to the environment. Therefore, sustainable development should take centre-stage by promoting environmental justice, improving livelihoods, eliminating unhealthy communities, and empowering people.

Community involvement is essential because it allows people to influence society, community viewpoints, and school culture. Children can benefit significantly from participating in community-led projects, whether they are carried out at school, in a nearby community centre, or even farther away (Horgan *et al.*, 2017:278). Many of the abilities acquired through community service or labour can be applied to other contexts or future careers. For instance, keeping local villages and towns clean requires learning how to quickly dispose of garbage and cooperate with one another. In addition, children form new connections and relationships as they learn from others, interact with new people, and work on their emotional and physical growth (Wager, 2014:315).

Participants cited the importance of creating awareness of environmental protection as a developmental activity to safeguard sustainable environmental protection and cleaning initiatives.

P3:   *"… I should keep the area that I'm in clean and convince others to keep it clean as well."*

P7: "… *you can text someone to tell them like if you see something like this you must pick it up…*"

This finding is consistent with Otto and Pensini's (2017:92,93) suggestion that environmental education and intrinsic motivation can be indispensable tools towards environmental preservation and promoting ecological lifestyles. Through education and knowledge of cultural norms and values, children learn to appreciate the human-nature relationship which may transfer to the wider community (Bang, Marin, Medin & Washinawatok, 2015:306).

Participants also revealed the importance of collaborative work and helping others in the community.

P9: "*… they can help each other with everything that they need and also help people that pick-up trash that our community can be clean …. going to people to paint their houses to earn money."*

These findings underscore those of Mejía-Arauz *et al.* (2015:36) where the authors showed how the practical skills that children acquire at home can be applied in the community, where children can observe others, learn to take charge, and provide knowledgeable assistance when needed. The authors illustrated how a 5-year-old child learned new abilities by being spontaneously engaged in doing little activities while watching their caregiver manage the family business and wanting to participate more in community practices (Mejía-Arauz *et al.,* 2015:36).

4.4 Summary

The chapter presented the findings of the empirical study. Participants' biographical information was outlined, and five themes emerged from the collected data on children's perspectives. The themes included children's understanding of child well-being, social factors that affect child well-being, economic factors that affect child well-being, environmental factors that affect child well-being, and the role of participation in child well-being. Literature from previous studies and the theoretical framework of the ecosystems theory, corroborated the findings. The main findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter concludes the research report by firstly, outlining the extent to which the research goals and objectives were met. The next section presents the key findings and conclusions drawn from the findings and is then followed by the recommendations based on the study.

5.2 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context.

The goal was achieved by means of the following objectives:

Objective 1: To conceptualise child well-being and participation within the framework of ecosystems theory and sustainability.

This objective was accomplished in Chapter One (see key concepts in 1.1) where Nahkur and Kutsar (2019:355) defined child well-being as a comprehensive notion that encompasses children's physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual, and environmental well-being, as well as the absence of psychiatric or psychological issues, as a hallmark of child well-being. The objective was further realised in Chapter Two (see sub-section 2.2, 2.21 & 2.2.2) where it was demonstrated that child well-being is a multidimensional concept that includes one's assessment of their lives as well as observable elements and expert information described as subjective and objective well-being respectively (Ayala-Nunes *et al.*, 2018:812; Casas & Frønes, 2019:3; Fattore & Mason, 2017:278; Haq & Zia, 2013:998).

Within the aspects of child well-being, children have a reciprocal relationship with the environments in which they find themselves. Therefore, the objective was further expanded using the ecosystems theory (see sub-section 2.9). Child well-being was illustrated across the multilevel ecosystems namely microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (Neal & Neal, 2013:95). According to the ecosystem theory, people constantly engage in intricate direct or indirect interactions with their ever-changing environments which have an impact on their quality of life. It is believed that unhealthy environments hinder well-being whereas healthy environments encourage optimal growth (Rus *et al.*, 2020:239).

The objective of child participation and sustainability was achieved in Chapter Two (see sub-section 2.6.1, 2.6.2 & 2.6.3) by discussing the international, regional, and local legal frameworks that promote and safeguard child well-being as well as their link to child participation protecting children against social, economic, and environmental risks, and enhancing their prospects. By recognising the social, economic, and environmental factors that affect the ecosystem, promoting children's participation empowers them to be co-builders of society and social workers can participate by advocating for social change and making policy contributions at all ecological levels (Ife, 2012 in Lombard, 2015:495; Peeters, 2012:290). Furthermore, Chapter Four, (see sub-theme 5.1 & 5.2) highlights the role of child participation and its contribution to sustainability.

Objective 2: To explore children's understanding of child well-being

This objective was accomplished in Chapter Four (see sub-themes 1.1-1.4) where participants summarised their understanding of child well-being to include emotional, social, health, environmental wellness. Within the domain of emotional wellness, participants understood emotional wellness as a feeling of joy, enthusiasm, knowing what to do, and the absence of parental physical abuse (see sub-theme 1.1). Participants described social wellness as having good relationships around them both in the home and community environment (see sub-theme 1.2). Participants added that through these relationships, they could access different forms of support, services and resources within the home, the community and through government interventions like grants. Participants further identified health wellness as pivotal to accessing healthcare services and professionals in the community (see sub-theme 1.3) whilst environmental wellness was essential to living in clean environments free from pollution (see sub-theme 1.4). They also shared concerns on the attitudes and behaviours of community members that could lead to the depletion of natural resources and environmental degradation.

Objective 3: To explore children's views on social factors that affect their current and future well-being

This objective was realised in Chapter Four (see sub-themes 2.1-2.7) where findings revealed that participants typically related the social elements that affect their well-being to the calibre of their interactions and connections with those around them. Peer relationships were a significant contributor to social well-being as participants described them as valuable for friendship, group cohesiveness and kindness (see sub-theme 2.1). In addition to the role of friendships as insulators against loneliness, participants discussed the importance of reciprocal peer interactions in building and maintaining friendships. Participants identified relationships with significant others i.e., relationships outside the immediate primary caregiver realm to include the extended family and other professionals in the community environment, as crucial support systems responsible for providing different forms of

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care including shared parenting and psychological support (see sub-theme 2.2). They saw parents as the main subject of interaction responsible for providing positive family experiences, encouragement and role modelling, as well as protection from harm (see sub-theme 2.3). Furthermore, participants described education's contribution to their prospects as having access to education, related resources and services, and added the role of housing in the provision of shelter, safety and dignity (see sub-theme 2.4). Crime in the environment was considered as an inhibitor because it led to unsafe communities (see sub-theme 2.6) while they saw the importance of accessing services and resources that promoted safety and protection as part of social well-being (see sub-theme 2.7).

Objective 4: To explore children's views on economic factors that affect their current and future well-being.

The objective was realised in Chapter Four (see sub-themes 3.1-2) where participants described the role of monetary income and access to material resources as influencing their current and future well-being. Both parental monetary income (see sub-theme 3.1) and access to material resources (see sub-theme 3.2) determined the living standards of participants, especially with increased earnings. Having access to some material resources also enhanced participant's dignity and self-esteem.

Objective 5: To explore children's views on environmental factors that affect their current and future well-being.

The objective was accomplished in Chapter Four (see sub-themes 4.1-4.3) where participants developed the importance of a clean and habitable environment for both human beings and animal life to achieve sustainable outcomes. Participants alluded to clean environments and their contribution to health outcomes and general well-being (see sub-theme 4.1), the benefits of accessing recreational facilities (see sub-theme 4.2) to facilitate friendships and engage in physical activities, as well as environmental protection (see sub-theme 4.3) as a vehicle to mitigate and prevent environmental degradation.

Objective 6: To describe the children's suggestions for enhancing child participation in matters that influence their well-being.

The objective was attained in Chapter Four (see sub-themes 5.1-5.2). Participants advocated for their voices to be heard and to collaborate with their parents in the decision-making processes in the home setting (see sub-theme 5.1). They wanted their parents to ask for their input on decisions regarding their lives and to further participate in the upkeep of the household such as running errands and completing chores. Within the community setting, participants recognised their role and ability to

mitigate environmental degradation, enhance sustainable natural resource use and collaborate with community members by creating awareness of environmental protection (see sub-theme 5.2).

5.3 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The key findings of the research and the conclusions drawn are presented in this section:

- ❖ The literature review revealed that there are multiple definitions of child well-being across different disciplines, thus, making it difficult to meaningfully compare studies in different contexts. Moreover, the fluidity of the concept of child well-being has implications on policy responsible for planning child-focused programmes and interventions.

- It can be concluded that although there has been an increase in child-centred studies, the concept of well-being has a poor theoretical foundation. Fattore *et al.* (2007:11) notes the limitation in well-being conceptualisation in relation to well-being being a social construct that evolves with time and place. As a consequence, children's social and cultural realities may be different from those of expert adults who inform policy agendas on matters concerning their lives. This suggests that adult-centric views may conflict with what is meaningful to children and thereby compromise their well-being. Additionally, with increased child involvement, meaningful information may be gathered to develop interventions that enhance child well-being.

- ❖ The findings showed that participants have a clear understanding of what constitutes well-being and integrate both objective and subjective measures of well-being as influencing their present and future lives.

- It can be concluded that children are capable of conceptualising well-being. Therefore, child-informed interventions and childhood boundaries constituting well-being should be set by children through their active involvement as a pathway to sustainable futures. Furthermore, there should be a balance between both objective and subjective indicators and measures of well-being.

- ❖ The findings revealed that participants regarded positive relationships as integral to their functioning and that these relationships transcend the family environment to include relationships with social workers, peers, teachers, and psychologists. The findings further revealed how harmful relationships such as experiencing physical abuse can have harmful consequences on a child's well-being.

- It can be concluded that positive relationships propel children to thrive whilst negative relationships and the absence of support interventions compromise child well-being. Children's well-being is strengthened by supportive, loving, and responsive parenting as well

as receiving effective community support. Through observation, children develop attitudes and expectations on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, thus, shaping their social skills, behaviours and emotional competence. Similarly, peer relationships have shown to be closely linked with developing children's emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioural well-being. In the context of negative relationships and the absence of support services in communities, children may suffer abuse and maltreatment which affect their development and well-being.

- ❖ The findings revealed that access to education and educational resources broadened participants' perspectives, prospects, and opportunities for future success. Through education and good grades, participants foresee that they could enroll in institutions of higher learning, proceed to acquire jobs and earn an income to support their livelihoods and that of their families. Children could then be better positioned to make better life choices.
- It can be concluded that access to quality education and related resources plays a significant role in determining children's outcomes for a better future. Benefits may include employment, increased earnings, protection from economic risks, the acquisition of skills and knowledge and the enhancement of well-being. Moreover, education plays a pivotal role in developing self-esteem which children could harness to participate in matters affecting their lives.

- ❖ Furthermore, the findings highlighted that a lack of adequate housing posed a threat to participants' safety and could compromise their health outcomes. Additionally, a lack of adequate housing posed a threat to participants' development and could lead to homelessness. The provision and access to adequate housing was shown to enhance children's dignity.
- It is concluded that adequate housing is linked to safety, security, and general well-being. Housing serves as a place of primary interaction for the family which promotes social, economic, and cultural development of family members. Furthermore, housing increases the protection of children from violence and harm. Without housing, families disintegrate and are prone to homelessness and increased health risks.

- ❖ The findings highlighted participants' concerns about safety and crime in the community which compromise their sense of security and ability to freely interact with peers and services in the natural environment. To counter unsafe environments, the findings revealed the benefits of accessing services and resources that promote safety and protection for children.
- It can be concluded that there is a need to promote safe communities to enhance the physical and environmental well-being of children. Safe communities are linked to participation in leisure, a reduction in violence and crime, and improve the quality of life of communities.

- ❖ With regard to economic factors, the findings also highlighted that household income contributes to participants' living conditions, access to material resources and gaining acceptance among peers. Most household income came from primary caregivers whilst the role of the state was also included in the provision of grants to eligible families.
- It can thus be concluded that the economic well-being of children is influenced by their parents' employment and earnings. Households with sufficient income are better positioned to support children's needs and yield better life-long outcomes. Additionally, income assists in fulfilling the material needs of children, improves peer relationships in relation to owning material resources that promote social inclusion, and ultimately influences children's self-esteem and lifelong outcomes.

- ❖ With respect to environmental factors, the findings demonstrated participants' awareness of factors influencing environmental degradation and the implications thereof for people, animal and plant life, and the environment. The role of human activities was highlighted for its contribution to environmental degradation and conversely, the need to implement mitigating measures to enhance environmental protection and sustainability.
- It can thus be concluded that there is a close association between safe, clean, and sustainable environments and children's overall development and well-being. Mitigating the imminent threat of environmental damage requires an integrated approach that recognises the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, and develops meaningful partnerships and community engagement to promote environmental justice for sustainable communities. Communities must therefore be mobilised to rethink their lifestyles in order for environmental justice to achieve social justice.

- ❖ On the aspect of child participation, the findings highlighted participants' role in having their own voices heard, their active involvement in decision-making processes, and collaboration in matters affecting their current and future lives. Participants revealed that they had unique experiences that could promote their well-being and sustainable futures if they are engaged.
- It can be concluded that child participation enhances children's well-being. By adopting a collaborative approach, placing children at the centre of their development, and listening to their perspectives, they are given an opportunity to lead on issues that pertain to their well-being (Fattore *et al.*, 2007:6). Moreover, children's right to participation is protected and promoted in several legal frameworks. Therefore, denying them the right to actively participate in matters that concern them has a bearing on their well-being and prospects. Social workers are key role players in the promotion of sustainable communities and in advocating for child participation.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.4.1 Recommendations for findings

The following recommendations were made based on the key findings and conclusions of the study:

- ❖ **Allocate funding and resources to support services for children**

  Access to services and resources is integral to improving child well-being outcomes including education, health, and recreation. This should be facilitated by funding policies and programmes. Often children in disadvantaged communities are left behind but through investment in children by using a human rights lens, child well-being outcomes may be enhanced. Social workers can facilitate resource identification, influence policy by effectively disseminating information where there are opportunities to participate and interact with structures that promote or hinder child well-being outcomes.

- ❖ **Strengthen and promote positive relationships**

  The quality of relationships that children have with their peers, parents and their immediate environment has implications for children's subjective well-being. Therefore, there is a need to develop protective factors that promote positive interactions. This can be done through parenting programmes to build capable and cohesive families and strengthening intervention services for children. Several policies such as the Children's Act of 2005 and the National Programme of Action for Children (1996) set out principles for the protection and care of children including parental responsibilities, early intervention services and adoption services which are aimed at monitoring and promoting child well-being. Therefore, there is a need to support child-responsive policies through periodic reviews assessing the extent to which they meet the needs of children in diverse contexts. This exercise of reviewing policies should include social workers, childcare practitioners and professionals who must lobby both community participation and engagement as well as establish intersectoral and multidisciplinary collaborations to promote inclusive change.

- ❖ **Strengthen partnerships between organisations to promote safe environments**

  Every human being requires a safe environment and children are more vulnerable to experiencing unsafe environments which are abusive and expose them to violence and crime. It is therefore recommended that there be cooperation and collaborative efforts by different sectors that promote and advocate for the protection of children from unsafe environments. Such sectors include policing services and NGOs in the community, government departments and the private sector. Additionally, social workers must use an integrative approach and partner with environmental practitioners and experts in the field, facilitate dialogues and

78

conduct awareness campaigns with communities, as well as mobilise community strengths to facilitate development.

- ❖ **Promoting child agency and participation**

  Children are often not consulted on matters affecting their lives whilst the CRC guarantees the right of children to participate in decision-making processes that have an impact on their lives (UN, 1989). Children are perceived as vulnerable and in need of care and protection, yet children are capable and have a right to influence matters affecting their lives. Therefore, children's participation may be promoted through the provision of age-appropriate and relevant information, further capacitating professionals working with children, creating awareness on children's right to participation, and engaging in research to address gaps and challenges. Reflecting on the concerns of ecological damage, the scale of environmental degradation has highlighted the language of transformation in which children can actively participate from a young age in promoting pro-environment behaviours and attitudes in their families and communities. It is recommended that children's participation in issues of environmental sustainability be explored especially in South Africa. Within the mandate of developmental social work is the aspect of addressing injustices to achieve environmental justice. Thus, social work practitioners and other professionals should empower children and enhance the participation of disadvantaged groups to take charge of their environment and future as engaging them has a greater impact than imposing strategies on them (Lombard, 2014:50; Lombard, 2015:490).

- ❖ **Improving the theorisation and operationalisation of child well-being**

  Multiple definitions of child well-being across different disciplines create difficulties in meaningful comparisons between studies of child well-being and dimensions of well-being. It is recommended that further research on child well-being consider the child developmental stages including the natural environment, social background and age category in order to apply the best definition of child well-being to achieve the desired objectives. Moreover, well-being should be measured by how meaningful people's lives are. Finally, seeing as child well-being is conceptualised as a social construct that evolves with time, it is therefore recommended that existing child well-being literature be periodically reviewed and new knowledge developed as child well-being contexts change over time.

- ❖ **Integrate developmental social work in planning services for children**

  Social workers are at the centre of improving child well-being and they can achieve this through developmental social work. Social workers can use developmental social work to address child injustices by connecting them with macro systems through advocacy, resulting

in more integrated and sustainable results (Lombard, 2014:275). Social workers can leverage child-responsive policies to improve services for children and contribute to their sustainable futures.

❖ **Recommendations for further research**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations for future research can be considered:

- The study used a small sample of children from Region 7 of the City of Tshwane, thus findings cannot be generalised to the entire child population. As a result, this study may be replicated in other parts of South Africa with larger and more representative samples to obtain a more representative view of children across diverse settings in South Africa.
- The study presented a snapshot of children's current lives, therefore, it is recommended that a longitudinal study is conducted to assess the long-term child well-being outcomes of the same population sample at different developmental stages.
- The literature revealed that expert information is often used to determine child well-being. It is thus recommended that more studies should focus on the voice of the child to promote child-informed interventions and programmes. As children find themselves in a new environment of play and interaction, it is important not to impose adult-centric views on child well-being but support the evolution of child development.
- Future studies must develop a workable definition and comprehensive theoretical base of child well-being such that they can operationalise and theorise well-being in a way that conveys all the dimensions of child well-being across different contexts and includes both subjective and objective measures of child well-being.

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81

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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD WELL-BEING

Thank you that you are willing to take part in this study. As I mentioned earlier, I am interested to get your views on what is important for children's well-being, therefore for them to be happy, healthy, and successful in life. I would like to ask you a few questions. Please take your time to think about the question and your answer. There are no right or wrong answers as all information is important to me. We will also make use of pictures when we talk about things that you may see as important for child well-being.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. How old are you?

8	9	10	11	12

2. How do you describe your gender?

GENDER	
Male	
Female	
Other (that you may want to choose)	
Prefer not to say	

3. In what school grade are you?   Grade …..
4. How many people live in your household? (e.g. parents, siblings, extended family such as grandparents, uncles/aunts, nieces/nephews) Number: …… Adults: …… Children: ……..
    Please tell me about them.
5. Who contributes to the income in your household?
    (childcare grant; old age grant; formal / informal jobs)

SECTION B: QUESTIONS ON CHILD WELL-BEING
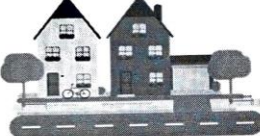
1. How will you know if it is going well with a child?

    (e.g. emotions, health, physical wellness, positive development, doing well at school, care by parents)

2. Who (which people) should be in a child's life for a child to live well?

    (e.g. family, parents, grandparents, extended family, siblings, teachers, friends, pets …)

    What must they be like?

3. What must children have for them to live well?

    (a home, family income, parental work, money, clothing, food, pocket money, TV, cell phone, internet access, transport, safety …)

4. What places and services in their community will help children to live well?

    (house, school, clinic, hospital, park, church …)

5. What must children's environment look like for them to live well?

    (clean water, clean air, green spaces, clean environment …)

6. What can children do in their homes, in their community and for the environment to improve their own well-being?

7. How can adults involve children in their plans and programmes to improve children's well-being? Struggle

I would like you to look at some pictures about child well-being. We have already talked about information for some of the pictures, but please see whether there something in the pictures that you would like to add to what we already discussed.

Thank you for sharing your views with me. It is important that we engage children as it will help us to plan programmes and services that will improve the well-being of many children in South Africa.

104

APPENDIX B: VISUAL COMMUNICATION CARD

Safety	Sport	School uniforms and shoes
Fire station	Anything else that you can think of?	

WHAT MUST THE WORLD/ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE WELL?

Clean neighbourhood	Clean water	Clean air
No pollution	Forests; clean rivers and oceans	People who keep their neighbourhood clean
Anything else that you can think of?		Thank you!

3

WHAT MUST CHILDREN HAVE TO LIVE WELL?

House	School	Clinic/hospital
Church	Park	Shop
Food	Clothes	Books
Electricity	Water	Sanitation / toilets
Transport	Television	Cell phone, laptop

The images are available on the open platform Online Pictures, and licensed under CC BY-SA-NC

2

APPENDIX C: UP ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotho

14 September 2021

Dear Miss ZF Mtsweni

Project Title:	Children's perspectives on well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures
Researcher:	Miss ZF Mtsweni
Supervisor(s):	Prof A Lombard
Department:	Social Work and Criminology
Reference number:	20717467 (HUM002/0821)
Degree:	Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 26 August 2021. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

Prof Karen Harris
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: tracey.andrew@up.ac.za

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Department of Social Work & Criminology

Researcher:	Zandile Mtsweni (20717467**)**
Degree:	MSW Social Development & Policy
Contact details:	064 907 4116

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT FORM

Dear participant

My name is Zandile Mtsweni and I am doing a study to find new information about something, and I am known as the researcher. For this study, I will talk to children about how they understand the well-being of children and will ask them questions about things they think can help children to live a good life, now and in the future. The title of my study is as follows: *Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures.*

The reason for the study

Children's well-being is important for them to grow up to live a good life. There have been research studies on this topic, but there are not enough studies to find out what children's own views on their well-being are. Information from children themselves can help social workers to develop plans that will best be able to support children's well-being.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be a research participant and I, the researcher, will talk to you about your ideas about things that can help with children's well-being. We will talk for about 45 to 60 minutes. I will make a voice recording, if it is fine with you, to remember all the information that you share. All the information will be handled confidentially, meaning that no one but I will know what you said in our discussion

You do not have to answer a question or questions if you do not want to. You can also stop taking part in the study at any time, if you wish. No one will be upset with you if you do not answer a question or if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

To stay safe, we will follow the following rules for COVID-19 during the discussion:

- We will both wear face masks that cover our mouths and noses at all times
- We will disinfect our hands when we meet and during the discussion, if needed
- We will keep a distance of 1.5 to 2 meters between us
- We will have the discussion outside or in a room with an open window or door, with no other persons close to us
- We will not share any materials and the researcher will provide you with a pencil, paper and set of communication pictures.

Your rights during the study

Your parents will know that you will take part in the study because they had to give their permission. They will also know that it is important that you yourself decide if you want to join in the study or not. Please say it clearly if you do not want to take part in the study or if you want to stop taking part in the study at a later time. No one will be upset with you if you do.

You will not get any money or gifts for taking part in the study. But the information that you give can help social workers to develop programmes that will benefit children in South Africa.

All the information will be handled with strict confidentiality, meaning that only I, the researcher, will know what you said during the discussion. My teacher at the University will also look at the information. Your name will not be known to anyone and will not be mentioned in the report that I will write about the study. Your information will be safely stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years. If the information will be used later for other studies, it will still be confidential.

If you become upset because of taking part in the discussion, you can tell me or your parents. I will ask a social worker or psychologist to talk to you to help you feel better.

What if you have questions?

If you have any questions, you can contact me, the researcher, at cell number 064 907 4116 or send me an email to u20717467@tuks.co.za. You will also get a chance to ask me questions about the study before our discussion as well as at the end of our discussion.

My decision

After reading through this letter together with the researcher and having the opportunity to ask questions that I had about the study, I decided the following:

☐ Yes, I would like to join the study.

☐ No, I would not like to join the study.

Because I chose to join the study, I write my name and today's date below to show that I decided to take part in the study. The researcher gave me a copy of this letter.

_____	_____
Name of participant	Date
_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date

110

Researcher: Zandile Mtsweni (20717467**)**
Degree: MSW Social Development & Policy
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INFORMED CONSENT BY PARENT/GUARDIAN

1. **Title of the study**

Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures.

2. **Goal of the study**

The goal of the study is to explore and describe children's perceptions on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future. In doing so the researcher will gain information on children's understanding of child well-being; thus, what makes children to be happy, healthy and successful in life. The well-being of children has a significant influence on their lives and on their future. Limited South African studies have been conducted on children's own perspectives on the topic, with the result that interventions to enhance children's well-being are mostly based on the views of adults. Listening to children's voices on the topic can assist social workers and other professionals to develop suitable interventions that will support the well-being and positive development of children in South Africa, at present and in the future.

3. **Procedures**

Your child will be requested to take part in a personal interview with the researcher, in which they will talk about your child's views on factors that can contribute to the well-being of children. The interview is expected to last about 45 to 60 minutes and the researcher will audio-record the interview to make sure that he/she captures information correctly. All the information will be handled confidentially. Your child's real name will not be used, and his/her identity will not be made known in the researcher's report.

COVID-19 guidelines for interpersonal contact will be followed during the interview. The researcher and your child will both adhere to the following guidelines during the interview:

- Wearing protective face masks that cover their mouths and noses at all times
- Disinfecting their hands with a suitable disinfectant when they meet and during the interview, as needed

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- Keeping the required personal distance of 2 meters between them
- The interview will be conducted outside or in a room with an open window or door, with no other persons in the immediate environment
- No writing materials, communication pictures or other objects will be shared, and your child will be provided with a pencil, paper and set of communication pictures.

4.   Possible risks

The interview with your child will focus on his/her views of factors that can enhance child well-being in general, and not on his/her personal experiences related to the topic. Therefore, there are no risks foreseen in terms of your child's participation in the study. If your child, however, experiences emotional distress because of his/her participation in the interview, he/she will be referred for telephonic counselling free of charge with a suitably qualified professional person such as a social worker or psychologist.

5.   Benefits of participation

Your child will not receive any payment or gifts for taking part in the study. However, participation in the study can provide a meaningful experience for him/her to help social workers to develop interventions that can support the well-being and positive development of children in South Africa.

6.   Rights as a participant

I am aware that participation in the study is voluntary and that my child must not feel under any obligation to take part in the study. I understand that my child will have the right not to answer any question or questions that make him/her feel uncomfortable and that he/she can withdraw from the study at any time without having to explain why. In both instances, there will be no negative consequences for your child and the researcher will respect his/her decision.

7.   Confidentiality

The researcher will type out the audio-recording of the interview. The recording and the typed document will be handled with strict confidentiality and will be safely stored by the researcher. Only the researcher and her supervisor at the University will have access to this information. After completion of the research, all the documents will be safely stored according to the guidelines of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. If your child decides to withdraw from the study, his/her information will be destroyed.

The researcher will write a report on the study. Your child's name or personal details will not appear in the report. Your child can ask the researcher to get access to the information that he/she provided during the interview, if he/she wishes.

I am aware that the information provided by my child will be stored for 15 years in the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, as stipulated in policy.

9.   Data usage

The findings of this study will be used in a research report and possibly for professional publications and conference papers. The findings may also be used for further research. If used for further research, the information will still be regarded as confidential, as described above.

10.   Contact details

If I need more information about this research, I can contact the researcher at her e-mail at u20717467@tuks.co.za or her cell number as provided above.

11.   Permission for participation in the research study

I, the undersigned, understand the information provided above. I understand what the research is about and why it is being done. I had the opportunity to ask the researcher questions about the study and all my questions have been answered satisfactorily.

I understand my rights as a parent/guardian of a child participant, as well as my child's rights as a participant in the study. I give my permission that my child can voluntarily participate in the research study. I have received a copy of this letter.

Parent/guardian:_____   Date: _____

Researcher: _____   Date: _____