Social media, other opportunities for social support, and resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic

by

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Declaration

I, Lufuno Ravhengani (student number 21695980), declare that the mini-dissertation titled, social media, other opportunities for social support, and resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Educationis in Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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Lufuno Ravhengani

March 2023

Ethical clearance certificate

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

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To whom it may concern

This letter serves to inform you that I have done language editing and proofreading on the master's thesis

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Abstract

My secondary study is a sub-study of the Resilient Youth in Stressed Environment-Russia and South Africa (RYSE-RuSA) research project. The RYSE-RuSA project aims to identify the protective factors that enhance the capacity of young people to adapt constructively when their communities are experiencing multiple challenges. The purpose of my secondary study of limited scope was to explore how social media and other opportunities for social support have supported the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment (Zamdela) during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the purposes of my study and following the Social-Ecological Theory of Resilience (which framed my study), resilience in the face of significant adversity can be described as one's ability to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that support their wellbeing, as well as their ability to negotiate for these resources to be provided in meaningful ways. To fulfil the aforementioned purpose, I conducted a qualitative, exploratory study using a secondary analysis design. The participants included 43 adolescents aged 15 to 22 years old, who lived in Zamdela, were comfortable speaking English and were part of the RYSE-RuSA study. The primary data were generated by the participants using arts-based activities, such as the draw-and-write methodology. I used deductive thematic analysis to re-analyse the RYSE-RuSA data that I deselected. The following themes emerged from the findings that appeared to have supported the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic: electronic communication facilitates emotional and informational support; positive relationships facilitate emotional, informational and instrumental support; and faith-based activities facilitate emotional and informational support. My study highlights the social-ecological theory of resilience and contributes insights into how social media and other forms of social support such as positive relationships and faith-based activities supported adolescents' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key-terms: resilience, adolescents, COVID-19 pandemic, social media, social support

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List of Abbreviations

CNNIC	China Internet Network Information Center
COVID-19	Coronavirus 2019
CRAM	Coronavirus Rapid Mobile
LAC	Local advisory committee
RPFC	Resilience Protective Factors Checklist
RYSE-RuSA	Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments-Russia and South Africa
SETR	Social-ecological theory of resilience

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

My secondary study of limited scope falls within the larger Resilient Youth in Stressed Environments-Russia and South Africa (RYSE-RuSA) research project. The RYSE-RuSA project aims "to identify the protective factors that enhance the capacity of young people to adapt constructively when their communities are experiencing multiple challenges like socioeconomic constraints or violence" (Balshaw, 2020, p. 1). Essentially, my study was interested in exploring social media and other opportunities for social support that township-dwelling adolescents reported as supportive of their resilience during the Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, specifically, the township of Zamdela as this was the township that collaborated in the RYSE-RuSA study. While RYSE-RuSA had not intended to include pandemic-related challenges, the timing of the study (2019–2021) meant that pandemic-related challenges were added to those typically associated with townships. Overall, my small-scale research aims to support current efforts by resilience researchers to advance a thorough understanding of teenage resilience facilitators in a resource-constrained South African environment.

Resilience is the dynamic process that supports an individual's capacity to function normatively, for instance, showing mental health or remaining committed to education despite exposure to ongoing or extreme stressors (Bonanno, 2004; Chen & Bonanno, 2020; Masten, 2018; Skovdal & Daniel, 2012). This process draws on promotive and protective factors that have the potential to shield adolescents from the adverse consequences of being exposed to difficulties (Luthar, 2006; Ungar, 2013). The aforementioned include "personal, relational and community/contextual factors" (van Breda & Dickens, 2017, p. 264).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, resilience research showed that schools play a vital role in promoting adolescents' resilience and their learning progress (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in South Africa

(and elsewhere) had to be closed as part of the lockdown that was implemented to manage the virus (Fouché et al., 2020). Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) explain that many adolescents might have experienced psychosocial distress during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in instances of prolonged periods of school closure (Tso et al., 2020). One of the reasons for that distress is disrupted access to social support (Kazi & Mushtaq, 2021; Meade, 2021). After the implementation of the lockdown, the use of social media increased among many adolescents, probably because this allowed them to continue social interactions and maintain access to social support (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Social media refers to technology, websites or applications that support virtual social networking or interactions (Manning, 2014).

Having lived in the resource-constrained township of Manamani in the province of Limpopo and knowing how resource-constrained many township households are, I was curious as to the role of social media, if any, in the resilience of school-going, township-dwelling adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdown. While social media is a prominent source of support (and sometimes distress) overseas and in more privileged South African communities (Desai & Burton, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2020; Senekal et al., 2022), I suspected this might not be the case for young people in resource-constrained township contexts. For that reason, I was also curious about other opportunities for social support available to township adolescents during the lockdown. This curiosity motivated my study's purpose.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Social media was a source of information and news for South African adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic (Senekal et al., 2022). The use of social media has had a significant effect on their health and development. In fact, Senekal et al. (2022) reports that South African adolescents used social media more frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic for communication to maintain already existing relationships, and, as a result, much of their psychosocial development occurred on social media. After the implementation of the lockdown, the use of social media increased among many adolescents. This allowed them to continue social interactions (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). Although the use of social media has increased

among adolescents, the issue of whether this use promotes or hinders resilience requires greater understanding (Jurgens & Helsloot, 2018).

There are many resilience-enabling benefits to social media use. The use of social media has broadly demonstrated the capacity to reduce stress, keep adolescents connected through time and space, and nurture collaborative resilience which leads to problem-solving and adolescents' ability to make sense of a situation and cope with it (Jung & Moro, 2014; Prestin & Nabi, 2020; Scheffers et al., 2021). During the COVID-19-related lockdown, the use of social media might have supported the resilience of adolescents who had access to electronic gadgets and the internet as they could socialise with friends and family online. Put differently, during the COVID-19-related lockdown, social media was a form of communication which adolescents used to connect virtually with friends and extended family members, thereby curbing the infection rate but still offering access to social support (Ellis et al., 2020). Social support is broadly described as the resources provided by other people and can be conceptualised as an important function of an individual's network (American Psychological Association, 2018; Uchino et al., 2018). Furthermore, The American Psychological Association (2018) described social support as having friends, other people and family members you can turn to in times of need or crisis; they give you a wider perspective and can help you to develop a good self-image and effective problem-solving skills.

Still, there are disadvantages to social media. For example, overindulging in social media consumption threatened some adolescents' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. The threat related to mental health-related issues such as anxiety, depression and psychological distress, body image concerns, cyberbullying, and suicidal ideation associated with the overuse of social media (Hou et al., 2020).

During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), 40.4% of South African adolescents between the ages of 18–24 years old used social media (Lama, 2020). As of January 2021, it was discovered that South African female adolescents who were between the ages of 18 and 24 years old made up 12.7% of all social media platform users, similar to male adolescents in the same age bracket (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Furthermore, female adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 years

old made up 5.6% of South Africa's social media users, and male adolescents in the same age bracket made up 4.8%. The South African adolescents relied on social media for amusement, knowledge, support, and communication with others including family, friends, and school peers (Bakasa, 2020; Senekal et al., 2022). Social media gave adolescents a sense of community and an important chance for developing identities through online engagement, as physical contact was restricted due to the COVID-19 lockdown conditions (Bakasa, 2020; Senekal et al., 2022).

Chen and Bonanno (2020) argue that social media was not the only source of resilience support for adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other factors included personal strengths, social support from co-habiting families, finding new ways of having fun or exercising, and being able to maintain contact with loved ones and friends. These were mentioned in the few South African studies of how young people adjusted to lockdown (e.g. Gittings et al., 2021; Theron et al., 2021, 2022a). However, these South African studies made only passing mention of social media (and related access to social support). Before COVID-19, and as per the most recent systematic review of child and youth resilience studies in South Africa (van Breda & Theron, 2018), social support was believed to be one of the primary sources of resilience for South African young people; there was no mention of social media as resilience enabling.

My study responds to this relative inattention to what supported the resilience of adolescents in South African townships during COVID-19. I was curious about the resilience-supporting value of social media because this was an international trend during lockdown (Hamilton et al., 2021; Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Marciano et al., 2022) and in South Africa (Senekal et al., 2022). I was also curious about sources of social support that are not related to social media, as these have been reported as important for the youth and children's resilience in South Africa (van Breda & Theron, 2018). Resilience is important in an adolescent's life, as it can assist them in adjusting well when faced with adversities and significant stress. It is unlikely that the COVID-19 pandemic will be the last pandemic that we will face (Michie & West, 2021) and so it is important to explore how social media and other opportunities for social support might have supported the resilience of school-going, township-

dwelling adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic and to learn from those insights to better support adolescent resilience.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my secondary study was to use the 2020 data generated in the RYSE-RuSA study to explore how social media supported the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the resource constraints that many adolescents living in townships face, my study also explored other opportunities for social support that Zamdela adolescents experienced as supportive of their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

My study was informed by two research questions:

- How did social media support the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?
- What other opportunities for social support enabled the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The social-ecological theory of resilience (SETR) was selected for my study (Ungar, 2011). Ungar (2012) proposes the SETR that explains resilience as a process that relies on the mutual interactions between adolescents and the social-ecological systems they are connected to, such as family, school, culture and community. The SETR relies on four principles: “decentrality, complexity, atypicality and cultural relativity” (Ungar, 2012).

According to Ungar (2011), the decentrality concept supports placing less emphasis on the individuals themselves and more on the protective elements that help people cope with adversity. Complexity points to the fact that resilience is dynamic and changeable. Ungar (2012) indicates that complexity can be defined as the variable or unpredictable nature of the interconnections connecting a person and their environment that support resilience. They could be different, depending for example on a person’s developmental stage or situational factors (e.g. young women growing

up without fathers are unlikely to report paternal support as mattering for their resilience; Zulu, 2018). The atypicality principle suggests that the context of an individual will determine their experience of protective resources. In this regard, protective resources will not automatically fit with the mainstream or typical understanding of resilience-enabling resources (Ungar, 2011). For example, some adolescents who were street-connected engaged in high-risk sexual behaviours as a means of survival (Hills et al., 2016). Some adolescents also abused substances as a means of coping with challenging circumstances such as disrupted daily life activities which resulted in loneliness, stress, boredom, anxiety, and depression during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chacon et al., 2021; Emery et al., 2021). Finally, Ungar (2015) argues that cultural relativity frequently influences what supports adolescents' resilience. In other words, the traditions, norms and values practiced within a specific culture-sharing group can make specific protective resources more available and/or more valued. For example, Ubuntu (the humaneness between people within a society; van Breda, 2019), is often reported by African adolescents as resilience supporting (van Breda & Theron, 2018). In simple words, Ubuntu can simply be translated as "a person is a person through other people" (van Breda, 2019). In my study, African values such as Ubuntu are probably important cultural sources of resilience for adolescents, especially in promoting effective social support in resource-constrained environments.

With the help of these four principles, the use of SETR in my study supported a deeper, more systemic understanding of adolescent resilience (Gomo et al., 2017). Further, the SETR aligned well with the biopsychosocial-ecological perspective of resilience which frames the RYSE-RuSA study (Theron et al., 2019). Furthermore, the SETR has a contextual relevance to my study, as it has been used in previous South African studies as a systemic approach to understanding the concept of resilience and strategies used by adolescents to overcome challenges they face in their lives (Ebersöhn, 2007; Mampane & Bouwer, 2011; van Breda, 2019; van Breda & Dickens, 2017).

1.6 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

With regard to the purpose of my study, the concepts of resilience, social media, COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents, townships and social support are central and are therefore explained below.

1.6.1 Resilience

According to the American Psychological Association (2014) and Masten (2018), resilience is described as adapting successfully to significant risk. For example, adapting well to stressful conditions such as disasters, pandemics, death of loved ones and job loss and enduring while aiming for positive results. In my own words, resilience refers to the process of dealing successfully with obstacles. Due to my study being grounded in SETR (Ungar, 2011), that process of positive adjustment draws on intrapersonal and interpersonal resources as well as ecological ones. In particular, I was interested in how social media and other opportunities to access social support are a potential resilience-enabling resource.

1.6.2 Social media

Social media facilitates virtual interaction with other people (Manning, 2014). According to Wong et al. (2020), “social media is described as interactive computer-mediated or other device-mediated technologies that promote the development or sharing of information, ideas, professional interests, communication and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks” (pp. 255-260). Concerning my study, social media refers to the social interaction, communication or networking through online platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, blogging platforms, WeChat, Tik Tok and WhatsApp.

1.6.3 Social support

Betancourt and Khan (2008) describe social support as comprising instrumental, informational and emotional support. Instrumental support is any help and assistance offered to adolescents for them to carry out tasks that they must complete. It also refers to any form of material support. Informational support refers to information or guidance given to adolescents for them to carry out day-to-day activities successfully or plan for their futures. Emotional support is explained as caring and emotional

comfort received by adolescents from others. My study was interested in understanding what supported young people's access to instrumental, informational and emotional support during the COVID-19 pandemic. A review of the South African resilience literature (van Breda & Theron, 2018) suggests that any of the following could be a source of social support: families, peers, communities, school communities, faith-based organisations, mental health practitioners and social work professionals. However, it is possible that access to these sources of support could have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Gittings et al., 2021), hence the importance of considering what young people in the RYSE-RuSA study experienced, particularly if they had limited access to social media opportunities for social support.

1.6.4 Pandemic

Concerning my study, the pandemic refers to the COVID-19 pandemic, also known as the Coronavirus pandemic, which was declared a global pandemic early in 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Giandhari et al. (2021) and Schröder et al. (2021) report that the COVID-19 pandemic was declared a pandemic by the South African government on the 15th of March 2020 which resulted in a national lockdown. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged most South Africans financially and emotionally as the government implemented a nationwide lockdown to manage the spread of the virus. Due to the implementation of the lockdown, schools had to be closed, which affected many adolescents negatively (Duby et al., 2022; Reddy et al., 2022; Spaull & van der Berg, 2020).

1.6.5 Adolescence

Sawyer et al. (2018) explain adolescence as the phase of life between childhood and adulthood; these individuals are between the ages of 10–24 years old. Furthermore, a transition between childhood and adulthood includes major changes in the body and mind – affecting how individuals perceive the world. Concerning my study, adolescents refer to individuals between the age of 15 to 24 years as the RYSE-RuSA study excluded adolescents between the ages of 10 and 14 years.

1.6.6 Townships

Townships refer to underdeveloped, racially segregated urban areas (Bvuma & Marnewick, 2020). Township areas are linked by Johnson and Kane (2016) to higher rates of violence, structural disadvantages, and restricted access to opportunities and sociocultural capital. Township-related dangers are one type of adversity that South African study participants in RYSE (Matlali, 2019; Sithole, 2019; Theron et al., 2019; van Aswegen, 2019) and RYSE-RuSA encounter (Theron et al., 2022). In relation to my study, the township refers to the Zamdela area. The Zamdela Township is a resource-constrained environment situated in Sasolburg, in the Free State province, in an area that has poor infrastructure and poor service (see Section 3.2.2).

1.7 ASSUMPTIONS

In this study, I made the following assumptions: Firstly, I assumed that social media would provide social support and that this played a role in the resilience of adolescents in a resource-constrained township during the COVID-19 pandemic. I based this assumption on the study by Scheffers et al. (2021) which describes that social media can nurture collaborative resilience and facilitate problem-solving and sharing of ideas and provided comfort and supported adolescents' ability to make sense of the situation and cope with it during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also assumed that given the resource constraints that many adolescents living in townships face, direct interaction (i.e. not mediated by social media) with supportive adults and service providers would also offer social support and support the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. I based this assumption on my personal experience as I have lived in a resource-constrained township. A systematic review of the South African resilience literature showed that social support was the most important source of child and youth resilience and was typically provided by a range of human relationships (van Breda & Theron, 2018). Relatedly, I used Betancourt and Khan's (2008) explanation of social support and established three preconceived social support themes (emotional support; instrumental support; informational support) and searched the deselected data for references to social media or other opportunities that allowed adolescents to experience emotional, instrumental or informational support. Furthermore, I applied the six steps of deductive thematic analysis (see Nieuwenhuis, 2016) to the deselected Zamdela data in order to test my assumption.

1.8 METHODOLOGY

The methodology I used is detailed in Chapter Three. Importantly, my study was a secondary analysis. I describe the methodology of the primary study in Chapter Three. The methodology applied in my secondary study is summarised below.

1.8.1 Epistemological paradigm

I chose interpretivism as the paradigm for my study. According to Hammersley (2013), the interpretivist paradigm is based on the principle that methods for understanding information in the human and social sciences are distinct from those used in the physical sciences because people interpret their own environments and then behave accordingly. Since there is no objectively measurable reality, interpretivists adopt a relativist ontology in which phenomena may be interpreted in different ways. In Chapter Three, I discuss the factors that led me to choose interpretivism as the epistemological paradigm for my research, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of doing so (see Section 3.4.2.1).

1.8.2 Research paradigm

The research paradigm used for my study is qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Domegan and Fleming (2007) report that the qualitative approach is naturalistic and fits an exploratory research purpose, as it focuses on studying the phenomenon, perceptions or experiences of individuals in their natural environment or setting. Chapter Three details the factors that led me to select the aforementioned paradigm as well as its benefits and drawbacks (see Section 3.4.2.2).

1.8.3 Research design

I conducted an exploratory study using a secondary analysis design and applied it to the 2020 RYSE-RuSA qualitative data. The reasons for conducting a qualitative secondary analysis, as well as its advantages and disadvantages are reported in Chapter Three (see Section 3.4.3).

1.8.4 Participants who generated primary data and document selection

The participants who generated the original data shared a geographical context (Zamdela). They were recruited by the RYSE-RuSA team through purposeful sampling. In qualitative research, purposeful sampling is an approach used to identify

and select information-rich cases or participants (Patton, 2002). The RYSE-RuSA purposefully sampled 303 participants (see Section 3.2.3). For my secondary study, I used purposeful sampling to select relevant drawings and explanations from the RYSE-RuSA dataset. From the RYSE-RuSA dataset, I purposefully selected 193 relevant documents (i.e. those generated by adolescents from Zamdela Township). Furthermore, I immersed myself in the data and then selected 43 documents that fit the purpose of my study, which focused on how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment (Zamdela). The two stages employed when sampling relevant documents are discussed in Chapter Three (see Section 3.4.3.1).

1.8.5 Data generation

The original data was generated through the draw-and-write methodology. The draw-and-write methodology is viewed as a creative technique developed to resolve the drawbacks of techniques that require high levels of participant literacy or language skills (Mitchell et al., 2011). The reasons for the RYSE-RuSA team choosing a draw-and-write methodology as the primary data generation method as well as the advantages and disadvantages for this method are discussed in Chapter Three (see Section 3.2.4).

1.8.6 Data analysis and interpretation

I used a deductive thematic content analysis to re-analyse the RYSE-RuSA data that I deselected. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), deductive thematic content analysis is used when a researcher wants to determine how well a predetermined set of thematic codes fit a given data set. Chapter Three discusses the factors that led me to choose deductive thematic content analysis as well as the benefits and drawbacks of this method of analysis (see Section 3.4.3.2).

1.9 QUALITY CRITERIA

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), several quality criteria must be followed for research to be considered trustworthy. Credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability and authenticity are some of these criteria. These criteria are not presented in this chapter since they are discussed in detail in Chapter Three (see Section 3.5).

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My study formed part of RYSE-RuSA research project. RYSE-RuSA received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education, and University of Pretoria (UP 17/05/01). A copy of the ethics clearance certificate can be found in Appendix B. I also received approval from the Ethics Committee (UP 17/05/01 THERON 21-03) for my part in the RYSE research project. More detail is provided in Chapter Three (see Section 3.6).

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This mini dissertation is structured into five chapters.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 deals with the following aspects of the study: introduction and rationale of the study, the purpose, problem statement, research questions, theoretical framework, assumptions, concept clarification, research methodology, quality criteria, and the ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 2 explores the literature on the COVID-19 pandemic-related risks associated with an adolescents' wellbeing such as school closures and related risks, livelihood threats and disrupted social connections. Factors that protect adolescents against the risk associated with the COVID-19 pandemic such as social media and social support are then explored.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 details the methodology, focusing on the description of the primary study, secondary analysis, quality criteria and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 4: REPORTING FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4. Each theme concludes with a brief discussion to show how the theme fits the literature review I reported in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the final chapter, the questions presented in Chapter 1 are answered using the findings of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the contributions of the study. It further addresses the assumptions and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

1.12 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the background and purpose of my research study and to discuss my motivation for conducting this research. Key concepts were clarified. I provided an outline of the selected paradigms, research design and methodology. I also summarised the quality criteria and ethical issues relating to this study. I provided an outline of the study. In Chapter Two, I will review relevant existing literature related to my study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature I reviewed explored the COVID-19 pandemic-related risks associated with an adolescents' wellbeing such as school closures and related risks, livelihood threats and disrupted social connections. Where possible, I focused on risk factors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic affecting adolescents' wellbeing in the South African context. Furthermore, I also explored the factors that protected adolescents against the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic such as social media and social support. Again, where possible, I reviewed literature that was specific to South African adolescents. I report on this reviewed literature next.

2.2 COVID-19-RELATED RISKS TO ADOLESCENT WELLBEING

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the lives of adolescents, worsening their prospects for social and financial advancement, especially those of vulnerable adolescents from a resource-constrained environment (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2021c). Furthermore, adolescents also experienced considerable risks in the fields of education and mental health. Accordingly, I have divided this section on COVID-related risks into three parts: school closures and related risks, livelihood threats and disrupted social connections.

2.2.1 School closures and related risks

According to Aborode et al. (2020) and UNESCO (2020a), the educational sector was drastically affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with schools abruptly shutting down to accommodate lockdown regulations. School-going adolescents had to stay at home as a way of managing the spread of the virus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many adolescents, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, experienced psychosocial distress related to the pandemic, decreased physical activity, emotional impairment and decreased social functioning, particularly in cases of extended periods of school closure (Baloran, 2020; Lee, 2020). Adolescents who worried excessively about the extended school closures, social isolation from classmates and peers and

the dread of losing out on schoolwork experienced anxiety and other mental health issues. In addition to disrupting learning, school closures were linked to malnutrition in adolescents and families who could not afford to eat healthy meals at home (i.e., when schools were closed, they could not benefit from school-based feeding schemes) (Abay et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). At the same time as decreasing learner access to basic resources such as food, school closures increased adolescent exposure to violence and exploitation (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Burzynska & Contreras, 2020).

The home learning environment is very important for continued learning in the context of school closures (Brooks et al., 2020; Shahyad & Mohammadi, 2020). Inequalities among adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted remote access to education, as many young people lacked resources, such as internet access, electronic gadgets, proper infrastructure/space and support to learn from home (OECD, 2020). Furthermore, the economic challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of student disengagement and dropout from educational sectors (OECD, 2020; Spaull et al., 2021). For example, 260 million students (both small children and adolescents) dropped out of primary and secondary schools (World Bank, 2021). This was a problem in South Africa as well – according to a survey done by the National Income Dynamic Study-Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM), which discovered that the number of children aged seven to 17 years who dropped out of school tripled from 230 000 to 750 000 in May 2021 (Spaull et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic essentially brought attention to the disparities between teenagers from privileged environments and those from poor circumstances (OECD, 2020). Teenagers from advantaged backgrounds were able to learn online and receive help from home, but those from disadvantageous backgrounds found it difficult to do both (Baloran, 2020; UNESCO, 2020a).

In South Africa, schools were closed from March to June in 2020, and then again in August. While partial reopening gave crucial grades, particularly Grade 7 and 12, more days of school (Munir, 2021; Nwosu, 2021), South African children lost a lot of learning time during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Even when schools reopened, public safety measures (like distancing) meant that not all pupils could be accommodated at once and so many lost learning time due to rotational attendance and/or days off for

specific grades (Statistics South Africa, 2022; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2021). The term 'learning loss' is described as a decline in adolescents' knowledge or skills, it emphasises the idea that learning deteriorates over time if pupils do not engage with learning regularly (Pier et al., 2021). To limit learning loss, teaching and learning shifted from physical classroom settings to online learning programmes (Burgess & Sievertsen, 2020). South Africa also shifted to online learning, but due to the diverse inequalities, the online strategy was not effective, considering that most adolescents and teachers did not have access to the internet, computers or any form of electronic device (Spaull & van der Berg, 2020). Moreover, the shift to online learning alone can never be enough to substitute the overall benefits of adolescents physically being in school, having fun and learning from peers and teachers and gaining life skills to build a better future for themselves (OECD, 2020; Spaull & van der Berg, 2020).

According to Reddy et al. (2022), adolescents' loss of contact learning time in South Africa has led to lower educational attainment, and these losses are higher in no fee schools (which comprise adolescents from families with low income and less or no resources to support online learning) than in fee schools. Spaull and van der Berg (2020) report that these learning deficits exacerbated overall inequalities in South Africa. During the pandemic, adolescents who were developing core abilities in the early grades, for example, fell behind in their reading progress; they had only learnt a quarter of what they would have acquired in their native language and half of what they would have learnt in English (Shepherd et al., 2021). Furthermore, the majority of parents and caregivers in the South African context are not trained or equipped to teach or they are not even aware of what is covered in the curriculum which made it difficult for them to assist with online learning (Spaull & van der Berg, 2020). Therefore, the lockdown plans for learning did not significantly mitigate the disruption in learning for adolescents who did not have access to proper technology enabled learning at home (Duncan-Williams, 2020). The study by Spaull and van der Berg (2020) reports that only 5% to 10% of adolescents in South Africa were able to continue learning at home because they had access to proper electronic gadgets and the internet.

Furthermore, not being at school may result in long-term consequences that go beyond learning loss, such as teenage pregnancy, child labour, substance abuse, emotional problems and reduced development of social skills (UNICEF, 2021). In the South African context, school closures have been associated with an increase in teenage mothers. According to Statistics South Africa (2022), there were about 35 000 teenage mothers in South Africa in 2020; during the COVID-19 pandemic, 33 899 teenage mothers who were 17 years old or younger gave birth. Molek and Bellizzi (2022) explain that early exposure to pregnancy and motherhood has created a greater risk in terms of forcing adolescent girls to prematurely take on an adult role that they are not prepared for. Moreover, many teenage mothers were unable to go back to school as they were supposed to look after their babies and some had to look for jobs to be able to provide for them (Govender et al., 2020).

As discussed in the section on disrupted social connections (see Section 2.2.3), because of school closures, many adolescents' wellbeing was affected negatively as they used to get emotional support from teachers, friends and classmates (Campbell, 2020). This was particularly problematic because the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant stress for many adolescents and/or increased symptoms of mental illness including depression and anxiety (Parola et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Livelihood threats

According to the OECD (2020), adolescent exposure to COVID-19 hazards was significantly influenced by poverty and income disparity. Poorer families appeared to be less resourceful and more susceptible to job and income losses. The OECD (2020) notes that adolescents in families affected by loss or drop in income fell into poverty/worse poverty as families had little or no savings to fall back on. Some parents and caregivers who experienced income reduction tried to apply for jobs as a way of enhancing their living conditions. When they remained unemployed with no source of income they had to stay at home, and this brought changes to what adolescents were used to at home (Shahyad & Mohammadi, 2020). Other parents had to shift to remote working from home, at the same time managing adolescents (Morelli et al., 2020). In addition, many adolescents who graduated during the COVID-19 pandemic found it difficult to get income or proper jobs, which hindered them from financial independence (OECD, 2020).

According to Zemrani et al. (2021), the most serious risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on adolescents are not those of the disease itself, but the collateral damage caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The aforesaid includes inadequate nutrition with risks of being overweight or underweight. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic's livelihood threats changed the eating habits of many families. For example, due to the lockdown measures access to nutrition assistance programmes that offered lunches and healthy snacks were interrupted. Furthermore, the financial struggles caused by the COVID-19 pandemic led many families into poverty and this forced families to ration food and make cheaper and unhealthy food choices to minimise the cost of living (Roelen, 2021).

According to Wills et al. (2020), a major contributor towards households running out of money to buy food or experiencing higher rates of hunger during the COVID-19 lockdown was the increase in job loss amongst parents. Hunger and food insecurity increased in South Africa because of the COVID-19 pandemic (van der Berg et al., 2020; van der Berg et al., 2021). The NIDS-CRAM study (Spaull et al., 2021) outlines that adolescents and their families in South Africa were exposed to a greater rise in food insecurity as the majority experienced hunger or ran out of money to buy food. For example, about 22% of South African adults who participated in the NIDS-CRAM mentioned that their households experienced hunger between May and June 2020. However, food insecurity was considerably lower in March 2021 than in April 2020 when there was a hard lockdown. Furthermore, while there was a decrease in households running out of money for food, many remained hungry or malnourished as food quality remained a major problem (van der Berg et al., 2021).

2.2.3 Disrupted social connections

The COVID-19 pandemic also impacted the social aspects of adolescent life (OECD, 2020). During adolescence, young people are typically very invested in social connections and are not used to spending most of their time at home (OECD, 2020; Spaull & van der Berg, 2020). Furthermore, their healthy social and emotional development was hampered by the lack of social engagement that is typically provided through play, peer connections and face-to-face contact. The COVID-19 lockdown regulation of staying at home meant that young people were forced into social isolation (Volkin, 2020). Additionally, when adolescents could not visit their classmates and

peers or participate in social activities, they were negatively affected (Spaull & van der Berg, 2020).

This lack of social engagement meant that many adolescents (and their parents) became disconnected from their support systems. Typically, support systems that included extended family, peers, childcare, schools, religious groups and other community organisations were disrupted (Kazi & Mushtaq, 2021; Meade, 2021). Detachment from these supports led to adolescents being vulnerable. For example, during lockdown, many adolescents were exposed to maltreatment and violence in their home setting, while the lockdown regulations reduced the opportunities for adolescents to go to school or take part in extra mural activities (OECD, 2020). This resulted in them not being able to connect with supportive adults at school and in the community. Similarly, it was difficult for some adolescents to access opportunities for care and support provided by professionals (e.g., social workers and psychologists) (van Tilburg et al., 2020).

A study by Padmanabhanunni and Pretorius (2021) highlights that lower appraisals of resilience were associated with increased loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic amongst South African young people. Loneliness was described as a significant global public health issue during the time of COVID-19 pandemic (Dymecka et al., 2021; Li & Wang, 2020; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021). Loneliness is defined as a psychological condition characterised by a perceived discrepancy between one's desired and actual levels of social involvement, as well as dissatisfaction with that discrepancy (Killgore et al., 2020). In the short term, loneliness influenced some adolescents to engage in risky behaviours, such as substance abuse, while long-term loneliness exposed some adolescents to mental health issues such as depression, obesity and high blood pressure (Volkin, 2020).

In addition to loneliness, the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with relational losses. According to Hillis et al. (2021), adults accounted for most of the COVID-19 mortalities. One tragic effect of these mortalities is that 5.2 million children and adolescents lost their parents and caregivers (Unwin et al., 2022). This has added to the global number of orphans and related challenges with 1.65 million children having lost a secondary caregiver, such as a grandparent and almost 3.5 million children

having lost a primary caregiver (Hillis et al., 2021). South Africa has been reported as one of the countries with the highest death rate of primary caregivers in the world (Hillis et al., 2021). In fact, Davey (2022), Macupe (2021) and Unwin et al. (2022) report that South Africa has the most COVID-19 orphans on the continent, with 134 500 children and adolescents who lost their parents or caregivers.

Adolescents who have lost their caregivers are more likely to experience mental health challenges, abuse (physical, emotional and sexual violence) and family poverty (Camarano, 2020; Danese & Smith, 2020; Kentor & Kaplow, 2020). Furthermore, adolescent wellbeing was compromised by how the COVID-19 pandemic threatened the wellbeing of the remaining adults in their lives. Many surviving parents and caregivers were stressed by the difficulties and pain related to having sick or dead relatives and related income reduction (Morelli et al., 2020; Shahyad & Mohammadi, 2020). Stressed parents/caregivers struggle to be emotionally available to the children they are raising (Shahyad & Mohammadi, 2020; Spinelli et al., 2020).

2.3 FACTORS THAT PROTECT ADOLESCENTS AGAINST THE RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

According to recent studies, social media and social support are often significantly and favourably related to adolescents' resilience to COVID-19 challenges (Han et al., 2019; Longest & Kang, 2022; Marciano et al., 2022). I am aware, though, that social media and other opportunities for social support are not the only resources that support adolescent resilience (Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020). The other resources are found in multiple systems, including those within the adolescents. An adolescent's biological system resources (e.g., a good immune system, good physical health) and psychological system resources (e.g., temperament; personality; psychological resources like flexibility, self-efficacy, hope, adaptability, optimism, future orientation, meaning in life; mental health) provide important support for resilience (Abaidoo et al., 2021; Acosta et al., 2021; Arslan & Yıldırım, 2021; Grazzani et al., 2022; Kanewischer et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2020; Pellerin et al. 2022; Ren et al., 2021). The adolescent is also connected to ecological systems (like the built environment or natural environment) and institutional systems that provide important resilience-support resources (e.g., a public library or green spaces that allow outdoor recreation opportunities) (Aerts et al., 2021; Korpilo et al., 2021; Lopez et al., 2021; Merga, 2021).

Still, given the focus of my study on social media and other opportunities for social support, the remainder of my literature review is split into two sections. The first section speaks to social media and adolescent resilience in facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second section, I focus on social support and adolescent resilience in facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3.1 Social media and adolescent resilience in facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

For many years, social media has had an impact on adolescents' daily lives. Hamilton et al. (2021) report that social media has been crucial to the social development of adolescents and this reality was magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, social media use was often associated with negative effects on adolescents' wellbeing. However, recent technological advancements like text messaging, app-based programmes and virtual reality were identified as strategies used to support resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022). Furthermore, social media typically enabled adolescents' resilience when used effectively without overindulging (Chen & Bonanno, 2020).

2.3.1.1 Forms of social media and adolescent resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic

Digital platforms, such as websites, mobile applications and other technological tools enable adolescents to produce and share information, especially for social networking purposes (Wong et al., 2020). These platforms include messaging apps, video sharing websites like YouTube, social gaming tools like Minecraft, and social network websites like Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. According to Hamilton et al. (2021), social media can be used by adolescents for a range of activities, including publishing pictures and videos, sending messages to friends, playing games and video chatting. Furthermore, the use of social media has helped adolescents cope with uncertainty and compensate for resources that have been lost or are no longer available. Due to the restrictions set up to prevent the pandemic's quick and dangerous spread, social media became a significant platform for networking and boosting social support (Mano, 2020).

Ahmad and Murad (2020), Chen and Bonanno (2020) and Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020) report that social media played a vital role in maintaining social interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown when direct contact was not possible. This was valuable to adolescents whose social lives were abruptly and protractedly disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Ellis et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021; Orben et al., 2022). In fact, Hamilton et al. (2021) and Jennings and Caplovitz (2022) report that the COVID-19 pandemic increased the prevalence and significance of peer interactions on social media. Social media provided possibilities for essential social connections during the COVID-19 pandemic and in many ways made up for the disruptions to adolescents' regular social experiences, such as visiting their friends and relatives, attending school or attending church services. In these ways, the social connections provided through social media were a protective factor against the harmful mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022; Magson et al., 2020; Prestin & Nabi, 2020). In addition, even when there was no "direct" social media interaction, many adolescents used social media to stay in the loop with their social network through viewing their peers' social media posts or updates on Instagram, Facebook or WhatsApp. According to Hamilton et al. (2021) and Taylor (2020), social media also assisted adolescents to stay connected with their local or global communities (e.g., through social media challenges on TikTok).

Longest and Kang (2022) report that greater awareness of social media as a source of informational and emotional support prolonged the use of social media amongst adolescents. Qi et al. (2020) and Lee and You (2020) explain that during the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents with high levels of online social support showed fewer mental health issues, such as symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. Moreover, the interconnectedness between social media use, coping and mood management was reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly as social media use and social isolation rose (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022; Reinecke & Kreling, 2022; Reinecke & Rieger, 2021; Wolfers & Schneider, 2020). Judicious social media use was not just associated with improved mood and other mental health benefits, it was also associated with hope and optimism (both of which are important for resilience) (Eden et al., 2020). Most adolescents who demonstrated resilience when facing the pandemic's challenges maintained or re-established familiar daily routines through social media, even though they were restricted to stay at home (Buzzi et al., 2020).

Furthermore, adolescents who could virtually assist one another and reaffirm the existence of their peers whom they had not seen in person, preserved peer culture (Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022). To do this, they used social media to engage in activities that that would normally be in person; for example, using video chats for academic activities, socialising with family and friends, continuing with extracurricular commitments such as piano lessons and "attending" youth group services/programmes (Buzzi et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021; Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022; Longest & Kang, 2022).

2.3.1.2 Social media and adolescents' compliance with public health messaging

According to Ngien and Jiang (2021) and Zhang et al. (2021), during the COVID-19 pandemic adolescents used social media to seek and share health information, obtain health support and make effective health decisions. Sharing health information helped to alleviate stress through reducing their sense of uncertainty and fatalism (Wong et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021). Also, social media was an effective tool used to raise public awareness about important disease mitigation measures through offering appropriate advice to adolescents on the measures they needed to implement to avoid being infected by the coronavirus (Al-Dmour et al., 2020; Zhong et al., 2021). According to Sobowale et al. (2020), social media was used by health care leaders and organisations to create powerful messages about risks and risk prevention, and these were used to raise awareness of public health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide health-promoting guidance. Relatedly, Nearchou et al. (2020) report that adolescents acquired health-supporting information using social media and that this information helped adolescents to adhere to most precautionary measures put in place in order to manage Coronavirus infection. In particular, online messages motivated adolescents to use precautionary measures such as washing their hands with soap and staying at home as a way of avoiding being infected by COVID-19 (Zhong et al., 2021). In addition, adolescents' exposure to peers' prosocial content on social media created a context for peer influence processes. For example, posts that encouraged more prosocial behaviours also promoted health and safety behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic (Oosterhoff et al., 2020).

2.3.1.3 Social media and online learning

According to Bol (2020) and van Lancker and Parolin (2020), the nationwide lockdown resulted in about 80% of adolescents around the world learning in fundamentally different environments, as schools were required to set up and introduce online learning overnight. Physical classrooms were replaced by social media-facilitated ones, particularly video chatting and Facebook/WhatsApp-mediated chats (Dubit Limited, 2021; Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022). For example, in Beijing, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia were considered as top media resources for academic related communication and support during the COVID-19 pandemic (China Internet Network Information Center [CNNIC], 2020). Similarly, Yu (2021) reports that in the United States of America, Greece and Sweden, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook were used during the COVID-19 pandemic to support learning from home for adolescents. However, as pointed out in the risk section of my literature review (see Section 2.2.1), adolescents without access to social media experienced disrupted learning (Baloran, 2020; UNESCO, 2020).

2.3.1.4 Social media and South African adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic

According to Senekal et al. (2022), having access to personal devices and the internet offered South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments an opportunity to use social media during the COVID-19 pandemic which positively influenced their psychosocial development. South African adolescents relied on social media for communication, entertainment, knowledge, support and interpersonal interactions with family, friends and peers from school during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bakasa, 2020; Desai & Burton, 2022; Duby et al., 2022; Senekal et al., 2022). The use of social media provided South African adolescents with a sense of belonging and a crucial chance for identity development through online engagement (Bakasa, 2020; Senekal et al., 2022). Social media was the central means used by South African adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic to interact with other people such as their peers and family and this helped adolescents to maintain already existing relationships (Senekal et al., 2022). Furthermore, the use of social media amongst South African adolescents created positive benefits such as networking online and meeting new people online, and gaining more knowledge and communication technology skills

(Senekal et al., 2022). In addition, social media provided South African female adolescents with an opportunity to seek and receive social support from peers online, which enhanced their wellbeing. Some South African male adolescents accessed professional help online which positively influenced their wellbeing (Senekal et al., 2022). In fact, Desai and Burton (2022) and Duby et al. (2022) report that social media provided South African adolescents between the ages of 15 to 24 with crucial psychosocial services and mental health interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, social media platforms were used to offer therapeutic programmes to South African adolescents during the COVID-19 lockdown, and online interventions were put in place to help adolescents lessen their feelings of anxiety and depression (Desai & Burton, 2022).

2.3.2 Social support and adolescent resilience in facing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

According to OECD (2020), adolescents who experienced distress because of the COVID-19 pandemic were able to recover when they received adequate social support. Similarly, Li et al. (2021) report that as adolescents faced an onslaught of stressors associated with the disruption of their lives resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the social support available to them was central to how well they adjusted. Betancourt and Khan (2008) describe social support as comprising three types of support: instrumental, informational and emotional. In what follows, I review each separately, with attention to what is known about these forms of support and adolescent resilience in facing COVID-19-related challenges.

2.3.2.1 Emotional support

Betancourt and Khan (2008) report that emotional support is about caring and emotional comfort. This includes interactions that provide love, a sense that one matters and encouragement. For example, adolescents engaging with other people who are supportive helps them to feel that they matter and are cared for.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many adolescents received emotional support from their families, peers and religious organisations (Aziz, 2021; Bukchin-Peles & Ronen, 2021; Gayatri & Irawaty, 2021; Pavarini et al., 2022; WHO, 2020). This had many enabling effects. For example, the negative effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic were buffered by supportive relationships with parents, caregivers, peers, schools and organisations (Rome et al., 2020). In fact, Rome et al. (2020) report that when adolescents from high-income countries had strong parental support and family cohesion, encouragement from peers and pleasant school experiences, their mental health and wellbeing increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, adolescents who come from families with healthy and strong relationships which are based on love, trust, acceptance, warmth and good conflict resolution were believed to be more resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic (Grazzani et al., 2022; Longest & Kang, 2022; Waters et al., 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents got to spend quality time with their immediate family members, especially those who were non-essential workers. In fact, Ellis et al. (2020) report that the COVID-19 lockdown played a positive role in granting adolescents an opportunity to stay at home and spend quality time with their families, something which was not always possible when adolescent/parent schedules are hectic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents often looked to their peers for emotional support; emotional support from peers was associated with improved wellbeing (Pavarini et al., 2022). Amongst others, adolescents were helped by their peers to deal with situational challenges and related frustrations and fears caused by the COVID-9 pandemic such as the implementation of lockdowns (Pavarini et al., 2022). For example, adolescents who were struggling with being isolated at home were encouraged by having open conversations with their peers about their feelings. Sometimes they played games together online. This support helped adolescents to deal with feeling lonely, bored and overwhelmed.

In addition to family and friends, access to a faith-based community allowed many adolescents to experience emotional support. In fact, Aziz (2021) explains that religion and the church supported the resilience of adolescents who were religious or active in faith-based practices with coping mechanisms during the COVID -19 pandemic, such as offering hope to adolescents and a place where they felt accepted and cared about.

Furthermore, faith-based organisations assisted adolescents who were religious or active in faith-based practices in dealing with unforeseen and difficult situations like the COVID-19 pandemic through offering guidance and encouragement which enhanced positive emotions and strengthened their hope (Gang & Torres, 2022). According to Braun-Lewensohn et al. (2021) and Counted et al. (2020), faith-based organisations provided adolescents with love and support, which positively influenced their emotional wellbeing and offered tools they needed in order to succeed in their goals, deal with disappointments, make informed decisions and have an optimistic outlook on life. Furthermore, spiritual and religious practices gave meaning and purpose and provided support to adolescents who were religious or active in faith-based practices during the COVID-19 pandemic (Saud et al., 2021). Spirituality and religion were described as a source of emotional comfort, support and meaning which instilled the idea of a sense of belonging and existential interconnectedness, promoting adolescents' emotional wellbeing (Coppola et al., 2021; Saud et al., 2021).

2.3.2.2 Instrumental support

Betancourt and Khan (2008) report that instrumental support is any help or assistance offered to adolescents for them to carry out necessary tasks or meet their basic needs, like food, shelter, education or clothing. In a broad sense, instrumental support is described as the provision or sharing of material resources to assist adolescents in resolving crises or dealing with stress (Zia et al., 2021). Relatedly, Masten et al. (2021) report that in the United States, parents and caregivers provided basic necessities like food, housing and medical care, which gave adolescents essential support they required to develop into healthy, useful and resilient adolescents. Similarly, in the United States, families and communities buffered adolescents from harm by providing basic needs in order for them to adapt positively to adversities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bartlett & Vivrette, 2020). In particular, parents' ability to provide food was an essential protective factor which positively influenced the United States adolescent's wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bartlett & Vivrette, 2020; Traoré et al., 2022).

2.3.2.3 Informational support

Betancourt and Khan (2008) report that informational support is information or guidance given to adolescents for them to carry out day-to-day activities successfully. For example, empowerment programmes offer informational support by providing advice and guidance to adolescents in order to help them talk about their life challenges and experiences. In a broad sense, informational support is described as the gathering/sharing of human resources to assist adolescents in resolving a crisis or dealing with stress (Zia et al., 2021).

Social support systems such as relationships with other people, school systems and community-based and other organisations offered advice, information and solutions to vulnerable adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic as a way of reducing the risks of uncertainty (Liu et al., 2021; OECD, 2020; Xu et al., 2020). The aforesaid sources supported adolescents by sharing information either in person or online that offered advice and motivation on how to enhance their wellbeing. In order to enhance adolescents' wellbeing, many youth organisations offered access to educational, peer-to-peer mental health advice and other programmes (OECD, 2020). In COVID times, innovative ways had to be found to continue these sources of informational support. For example, like many other governments, the Irish Government provided adolescents with advice and suggestions of online and offline activities that adolescents could use during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to enhance their wellbeing (OECD, 2020). Similarly, European adolescents kept themselves active through the information and advice provided by the Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth. According to Volkin (2020), the Hopkins Center for Adolescents' Health in Youth Development, provided guidance and motivation through their youth programme during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the mentoring programme moved online, and this helped adolescents and their mentors to communicate frequently. In addition, a study by Liu et al. (2021) reports that adolescents from China shared their stories and engaged in discussions with other people online who experienced similar challenges, as a way of seeking and providing social support. Furthermore, social support provided through information and advice geared towards adolescents from China, helped them to cope with COVID-related uncertainty and reduced stress at the same time positively influencing their wellbeing.

2.3.2.4 Social support and South African adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic

As per the systematic review by van Breda and Theron (2018), the South African resilience literature prior to the COVID-19 pandemic emphasised the importance of social support to adolescent resilience and that it is provided through a range of relationships and institutional support. For example, with regard to emotional support, adolescents received support, care, love and encouragement from caring individuals like parents, family, peers and teachers. This enabled them to deal with adversities as they felt valued and cared for (Brittian et al., 2013; Ebersöhn et al., 2017; George & Moolman, 2017). Regarding instrumental support, access to schools and community and peer support provided some street-connected adolescents with basic necessities like clothes, protection and food which enabled them to function well during distress and overcome adversities (Hills et al., 2016; Malindi & Machenjedze, 2012). Likewise, informational support was provided. Social support systems like family, friends, teachers and community organisations provided the necessary advice and information which enabled adolescents to effectively deal with adversities and positively enhance their wellbeing (Botha & van den Berg, 2016; Collishaw et al., 2016; Goliath & Pretorius, 2016).

Subsequent to the van Breda and Theron (2018) review, studies of South African adolescent resilience continued to report the importance of social support. For example, with regard to emotional support, orphaned and vulnerable adolescents received comfort and support from their families, mentors and peer groups. This enabled adolescents to deal with adversities, as being part of their family or peer group made them feel that they were valued and belonged to a social system (Kuo et al., 2019; Sitienei & Pillay, 2019; Sorsdahl et al., 2021). Regarding instrumental support, amongst others, a community-based organisation and orphanage in Soweto, South Africa provided orphaned and vulnerable adolescents' families with financial support, specifically to pay rent and provide food (Sitienei & Pillay, 2019). Furthermore, families and religious organisations provided some orphaned and vulnerable adolescents with school uniforms, educational materials, food hampers and tuition fees – this helped adolescents to positively adapt when dealing with adversities (Malo et al., 2022; Regal, 2022). Likewise, various South African adolescents received informational support. Support systems like family, friends, teachers and community organisations (such as

life skills training centres) provided orphaned and vulnerable adolescents with opportunities that allowed them to share their experiences and views on issues affecting them as well as receive adequate advice and information necessary to meet their developmental needs (Baron et al., 2020; Berejena Mhongera & Lombard, 2020; Shenderovich et al., 2021).

The importance of social support to the resilience of South African adolescents seems to have persisted during the challenging time of COVID-19 lockdowns. According to Duby et al. (2022) and Gittings et al. (2021), South African adolescents adopted positive coping strategies, such as seeking assistance and social support when necessary, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, adolescents who received social support from their family members, friends, communities, schools and religious organisations were able to deal with the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The South African adolescents who received instrumental and informational support from family, teachers and peers showed resilience as they managed to cope in healthy ways and retain hope in their lives, despite the various challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Duby et al., 2022). Other South African adolescents were able to comply with the COVID-19 regulations put in place as they received informational support in the form of public health information (Gittings et al., 2021). Similarly, some South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments (like townships) were able to overcome COVID-19 related risks through the emotional, informational and material support received from families, peer networks, neighbours and educational institutions (Theron et al., 2021, 2022a).

Parents and caregivers of South African adolescents living in vulnerable environments alleviated financial and material challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic by doing their best to provide resources which were vital (Traoré et al., 2022). Sometimes, this was made possible by social welfare support. In fact, Sonjica (2021) and Zembe-Mkabile (2020) report that the majority of South African adolescents and their families living in resource-constrained environments received social relief grants which helped in addressing hunger and poverty during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the social relief grant helped vulnerable parents to meet the basic needs of South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments – this helped adolescents

carry out necessary tasks during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sonjica, 2021; Zembe-Mkabile, 2020).

2.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I described the patterns I found in the research on the COVID-19 pandemic risk factors for adolescent wellness in situations with limited resources, both in South Africa and internationally. I also went into detail about the ways that social media and other forms of social support could shield teenagers from the dangers linked with the COVID-19 pandemic, as seen in South African and international literature. Notably, I deduced from the material I read that both in South Africa and internationally, there has been extensive study describing the risk factors linked to the pandemic and adolescent welfare. However, from the literature I studied relating to factors that protected adolescents against the risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, I saw that only a few studies considered what supported resilience. I realised that only a few studies provided insight into how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic in the South African context (e.g., Bakasa, 2020; Desai & Burton, 2022; Duby et al., 2022; Gittings et al., 2021; Padmanabhanunni & Pretorius, 2021; Senekal et al., 2022). As a result, my review identified a gap in the literature on South African resilience, which I plan to fill with my current research. Furthermore, closing this gap is crucial for us to fully understand how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environment during the COVID-19 pandemic; these insights will be useful if there are future pandemics (as has been predicted) (Ding et al., 2022; Writer, 2022; Yanovskiy & Socol, 2022). I addressed this gap by conducting a secondary qualitative study, as explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

My study was a secondary analysis of the qualitative data generated in the RYSE study follow-on, entitled RYSE-RuSA. RYSE-RuSA was a bilateral or two-country study (Russia; South Africa) that replicated the design and methods of the RYSE study originally conducted in Canada and South Africa (Ungar et al., 2021). Both the RYSE and the RYSE-RuSA study focused on the resilience of adolescents living in stressed communities. Both studies generated a large amount of data. In the RYSE-RuSA study, quantitative and qualitative data were generated three times in the course of 2020–2021. I chose to do a secondary analysis of the qualitative data generated in 2020 (i.e. the Time 1 or baseline data).

According to Jordan (2021), secondary analysis enables researchers to acquire and make use of data that they might not otherwise have access to owing to a lack of time, money or ethical approval. The aforementioned was crucial in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic since social exclusionary measures restricted fieldwork and the gathering of primary data (Jordan, 2021). In my case, the University of Pretoria placed a moratorium on in-person research, and this made it difficult for me to generate data. Therefore, I chose to do a secondary data analysis because the existing data from the RYSE-RuSA project allowed me to complete the research requirements that were part of my professional Educational Psychology degree, despite the measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and my university. It is possible to examine new or additional research questions using secondary analysis. As an alternative, it can be used to back up the findings of an earlier study (Heaton, 2008).

The aforesaid helped me to explore questions previously unasked of the RYSE-RuSA dataset, namely: How did social media support the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020? What other opportunities for social support enabled the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020?

Using a secondary data analysis for my study had certain benefits. According to Blog (2020), reachable data can be easily accessed for secondary research, especially with the advent of the internet and other various secondary data sources. However, for my study, the existing data was easily accessed through my supervisor who is part of the RYSE-RuSA project as the principal investigator. Furthermore, in my case, secondary research was both cost-effective and time-efficient (Bhat, 2023; North et al., 2014; Smith, 2008) as I was not directly involved in the time-consuming and expensive data collection procedures. According to Ruggiano and Perry (2017), using secondary data analysis also had the benefit of allowing me to explore new insights from the existing data, such as how social media and other opportunities of social support had supported the resilience of adolescents living in resource-constrained environments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

There were also some disadvantages. As the researcher, I was not able to return to participants and conduct further interviews to clarify or validate thematic findings. However, I liaised with the larger RYSE-RuSA research team to clarify findings or insights.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIMARY STUDY

3.2.1 Purpose and design of RYSE-RuSA

According to Theron et al. (2019), the purpose of the bilateral RYSE-RuSA study focused on explaining how multiple, interconnected systems like individual, social and environmental systems supported South African and Russian adolescents who faced stressors associated with carbon-intensive extraction and production industry to function adaptively over time. This purpose responded to the worldwide need to better understand resilience in order to improve the health and wellbeing of adolescents (Theron et al., 2019). As in other resilience studies, RYSE-RuSA used continued engagement in education to denote adaptive functioning.

To achieve this purpose, the RYSE-RuSA study employed a concurrent mixed methods design (Theron et al., 2019). The purpose of a concurrent mixed methods design is to gather both qualitative and quantitative data in one phase (Curry et al., 2013; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The data is then examined independently before being compared or combined. For example, a researcher may collect data via

a survey and an interview at the same time and then analyse each individually. The outcomes are then compared. The concurrent mixed methods design is used to verify, cross validate or confirm findings. It is also frequently used to compensate for a method's shortcoming by using the advantages of another. It also aids in the expansion of quantitative data by allowing for open-ended qualitative data collection (Curry et al., 2013; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). The RYSE-RuSA team used this design in stressed South African and Russian communities to generate data at three time points in the course of 2020–2021. As my study was limited to the South African qualitative data generated in the 2020 Time 1 study, I now describe the South African study and related 2020 qualitative data generation.

3.2.2 Context of the South African RYSE-RuSA study

In South Africa, the study was conducted in a township known as Zamdela and the adjacent town of Sasolburg, in the municipality of Metsimaholo (translated as Big Water), in the Free State Province. As a result of a housing need among oil refinery workers at a refinery in Metsimaholo, Sasolburg was established. Zamdela, which means despise or undermine, was established to house Black workers from the refinery. According to Statistics South Africa (2022), Sasolburg has a population of about 30 699 which is predominantly White and Afrikaans speaking, while Zamdela has a population of 82 399 which is predominantly Black and Sesotho speaking. In the Sasolburg population, around 30,9% have a tertiary education qualification, while in the Zamdela population, only 5,7% have tertiary education (Statistics South Africa, 2022). Environmental degradation is a problem at both sites (Theron et al., 2019). Residents in both sites are vulnerable to high levels of crime (Grobler, 2020; Molosankwe, 2021; Pijoos, 2020), and Zamdela residents are frequently exposed to violent protest action (Marinovich & Lekgowa, 2013; TimesLIVE, 2021; Xaba & Monama, 2013). Figure 3.1 and 3.2 show pollution in Zamdela streets.

Figure 3.1: Pollution in Zamdela (photo courtesy of RYSE-RuSA project)

Figure 3.2: Pollution in Zamdela streets (photo courtesy of RYSE-RuSA project)

3.2.3 Participants

A local advisory committee (LAC) supported the recruitment of participants through the use of context-relevant strategies, such as the use of advertisements on social media and at schools and community centres in Sasolburg and Zamdela. The LAC was made up of adults who worked with children (e.g. social workers at a community-based organisation; religious leaders; teachers) and youth. They used a purposeful sampling technique.

According to Patton (2002), in qualitative research, purposeful sampling is an approach used when identifying and selecting information-rich cases or participants. This requires identifying and choosing individuals or groups of individuals who are knowledgeable or experienced regarding the topic being explored in the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The necessity of being available, eager to participate, and having the capacity to explain, express and reflect on experiences and ideas are stressed by Bernard (2002). In the RYSE-RuSA study, participants were purposefully recruited based on the following selection criteria: (1) 15–24 years old; (2) comfortable speaking English and can read and write in English; (3) live in the town of Sasolburg or Zamdela – Free State; (4) are affected (negatively or positively) by the petrochemical industry; and (5) responded to an advert about the project which they saw/was given to them by someone in their community (i.e. a LAC member). As participants responded and volunteered to be part of the study, they were invited to recruit their peers who fit the inclusion criteria (i.e. the study also made used of snowball sampling; Kirchherr & Charles, 2018; Sharma, 2017).

These methods of recruitment resulted in 303 adolescents consenting to be part of the qualitative study in 2020. Of these 303 adolescents, 302 agreed to produce drawings. Their age range was 15–23; mean average age of 18 years for girls and 19 years for boys; girls n = 177 and boys n = 125. Of these, the total number of participants who lived in Zamdela was n = 193, with girls n = 104 and boys n = 89. The breakdown of school grades from the Zamdela sample is as follows: Grade 8 n = 10, Grade 9 n = 15, Grade 10 n = 56, Grade 11 n = 7, Grade 12 n = 102, and unknown n = 3.

3.2.4 Qualitative data generation

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative methods of generating data can include visual and narrative methods. The qualitative RYSE-RuSA data were generated using an arts-based approach, specifically the draw-and-write methodology. This method entails participants producing drawings (visual data) in response to a specific prompt and then explaining (narrative data) those drawings in writing (Angell & Angell, 2013). The draw-and-write methodology is viewed as a creative technique developed to reduce the drawbacks of techniques that require high levels of participant literacy or language skills (Mitchell et al., 2011). Angell et al. (2015) indicate that the draw-and-write methodology encourages active participation and accommodates those who may lack English vocabulary. Furthermore, the draw-and-write methodology also provides a visual presentation of what participants know about the research question (Angell et al., 2015).

Liebenberg and Theron (2015), who support the use of visual, artistic methods in resilience research, are in favour of the employment of an arts-based approach. Additionally, it has been suggested that South African resilience studies use arts-based methodologies (Ebersöhn, 2012). Ogina and Nieuwenhuis (2010) and Punch (2002) report that arts-based approaches are participant centred and this helps in encouraging adolescents by giving them the opportunity to manage what they want to share in relation to what matters to them. Additionally, because the teenagers are able to clarify their drawings by discussing or writing about them, an arts-based approach can lessen power disparities between the researcher and the participants as well as the chance that the researcher will misinterpret the participants' drawings (Angell et al., 2015; Ogina & Nieuwenhuis, 2010).

Regarding the primary data that I conducted a secondary analysis on, participants were given the following prompt: “What has helped you to do well in life/be OK when life is hard? Please draw what helped you to do well in life/be OK when life is hard. Remember, it is not about how well you draw, but about what you draw”. After that, the following prompt was used: “Please help us to understand what your drawing means by writing a couple of sentences explaining what it means”.

In February and early March (pre-COVID-lockdown), 164 participants completed their drawings and explanations in person. The RYSE-RuSA team gave them the necessary materials (i.e. paper, pencils). When lockdown started and in-person research was disallowed by the University of Pretoria, the drawings needed to be done virtually. To do this, participants received a prompt sent via WhatsApp (which all the participants were using). Participants then made their drawings and wrote the explanation. They took a photograph of each and sent them to the research team via WhatsApp. For those who had access to email, they scanned the drawing and explanation and emailed them to the research team. After receiving the photos/scans, the RYSE-RuSA research team manager uploaded them to a password-protected project repository.

3.2.5 Qualitative data analysis

The primary qualitative analysis explored how adolescents in South Africa and Russia were able to adapt constructively (i.e. show resilience) to the stressful environments in which they lived (Theron et al., 2019). The RYSE-RuSA team was particularly interested in which resources were more protective and less protective of mental health when participants reported lower and higher levels of stress (L. Theron, personal communication, January 11, 2021). To this end, they asked: “Which resources do adolescent participants report as resilience-enabling and how do the reported resources differ – if at all – relative to the levels of risk young people report being exposed to?” (Theron et al., 2022b). They applied reflexive inductive thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to the complete qualitative data set from 2020–2021 (*n* = 676) to answer this question.

3.3 ETHICS

The RYSE-RuSA study received ethical clearance from the ethics committee, Faculty of Education (UP 17/05/01 THERON 21-03). The following ethical principles were observed: informed assent/consent; written assent for those younger than 18 and written parental/caregiver consent; written consent if already 18; incentives for those who participated (a supermarket voucher to the value of R100).

3.4 THE SECONDARY ANALYSIS

3.4.1 Purpose of the secondary analysis

The purpose of my secondary study was to use the qualitative data generated in the RYSE-RuSA study to explore how social media and other opportunities for social support supported the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Therefore, the aim of my study was exploratory. According to Kumar (2019), exploratory research aims to explore issues about which little is known. According to Davies et al. (2011), the benefits of an exploratory study include cost effectiveness, laying the groundwork for more thorough future research and determining whether the issue is worth investing time and resources in at an early stage. Though many studies have been conducted in South Africa on what enables the resilience of adolescents (see systematic review by van Breda & Theron, 2018), very few (i.e. Duby et al., 2022; Fouché et al., 2020; Gittings et al., 2021; Senekal et al., 2022) focused on resilience during COVID-19, let alone how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, my decision to do exploratory research was fitting. According to Kumar (2019), due to its theoretical nature, exploratory research is subject to judgemental and prejudiced interpretations. Furthermore, exploratory study can also yield inconclusive results. To avoid judgemental and prejudiced interpretations, I applied the quality criteria (see Section 3.5). The absence of conclusive evidence had no influence on my research because the purpose of my secondary study was to explore how social media and other opportunities of social support had supported the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, not to come to a final conclusion.

3.4.2 Paradigmatic perspective of the secondary analysis

3.4.2.1 Epistemological paradigm

For my secondary study, I chose interpretivism as the epistemological paradigm. Interpretivism is described as a primary sociological method used to interpret the meaning that people reflect in their lives and understand their experiences in particular contexts (Hammersley, 2013; Kelly et al., 2018). Furthermore, interpretivism places a

strong emphasis on understanding human experiences and relies on participants' perceptions of the topic being explored (Cohen et al., 2011; Thanh & Thanh, 2015). Instead of attempting to generalise the base of understanding for the entire population, researchers frequently seek a deeper understanding of the event and its complexity in its specific context when employing an interpretivism paradigm (Creswell, 2007). Researchers are urged by interpretivism to comprehend the various perspectives participants have on the research issue they are interested in (Hammersley, 2013). In this regard, interpretivism supported the purpose of my study as it acknowledges the potential of multiple realities (Kelly et al., 2018). Furthermore, the interpretivism paradigm is very common with secondary data research (Myers, 2008).

Using the interpretivism paradigm for my study had certain benefits. According to Hammersley (2013), the benefit of interpretivism paradigm is that it allowed me as a researcher to better understand the phenomenon that I was interested in in its social context by using a variety of perspectives generated by adolescents from Zamdela. Their perspectives helped me to explore and interpret how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment. The primary data that I selected to re-analyse was generated by more than one participant. This meant I had multiple perspectives, and this helped me to gain a deeper understanding of how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to Cohen et al. (2011), one of the limitations of the interpretivism paradigm is that it tends to focus on gaining a deeper understanding and knowledge of phenomenon within their complex contexts rather than generalising their findings to other people and their contexts. As a result, some people could question the trustworthiness of research findings that have been reported by studies using an interpretivist approach. To manage this limitation I took steps to advance the rigour or quality of my study as explained in Section 3.5.

3.4.2.2 Methodological paradigm

Several resilience researchers, including He and van de Vijver (2015), Rutter (2001), Ungar (2003), and van Breda and Theron (2018), reported that a qualitative approach

to resilience research is appropriate and sufficient on its own. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was employed in my study, even though the greater study of RYSE-RuSA that mine is part of used concurrent mixed methods. The qualitative approach, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003) and Domegan and Fleming (2007), is naturalistic and fits exploratory purposes since it focuses on researching phenomena, perceptions or experiences of individuals in their natural context or setting (or in the case of my study, that were generated in a natural context). In addition, qualitative research collects non-standard data and analyse words and images rather than numbers and statistics in order to focus on subjective meaning or the social construction of conditions or events (Flick, 2014). This allows researchers to focus on how people interpret something in their lives. Therefore, the potential value that the qualitative research approach held in my study is that it assisted me to explore how adolescents living in Zamdela experienced and interpreted the resilience-promoting value of social media and other opportunities of social support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Qualitative research, according to Chalhoub-Deville and Deville (2008) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), was helpful because it offered thorough and rich data concentrating on participants' experiences, opinions and feelings. However, there are several potential limitations to using qualitative research. Because of the amount of data gathered, qualitative research takes a long time to analyse and understand (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I managed this limitation by establishing a realistic timeline in order to ensure that I analysed the primary data within the allocated time and I also worked closely with my supervisor. I also chose a narrower focus (specifically social media and opportunities for social support; township-dwelling adolescents) and this helped me to exclude a lot of the RYSE-RuSA data and make my work more manageable. This was important as research is only one part of my demanding professional Master's in Educational Psychology.

3.4.3 Methodology of the secondary analysis

As per various secondary analyses that have been published (e.g. Heaton, 2008; Kadri et al., 2018; Kummer et al., 2019; Long-Sutehall et al., 2010; Ruggiano & Perry, 2017; Tate & Happ, 2018), I will use the sections that follow to explain how I selected data for my secondary analysis and how I analysed that data.

3.4.3.1 Documentation sample

The sampling technique that I used to select relevant drawings and explanations from the 2020 RYSE-RuSA dataset is purposeful sampling. In this regard, I purposefully selected drawings and explanations generated by adolescents from a resource-constrained township (Zamdela). I did this because it fit with the purpose of my study which was to explore how social media and other opportunities of social support had supported the resilience of adolescents who lived in a resource-constrained environment. For the process of sampling relevant documents for my secondary study, I employed two stages. In the first stage, I reduced the documents (drawings/explanations) generated by the RYSE-RuSA study from 302 to 193 considering only those documents generated by school-going participants from Zamdela township. Secondly, I immersed myself in the data and searched for data that was relevant to my study's focus (i.e. how social media and other opportunities of social support have supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment during the COVID-19 pandemic). The aforesaid process helped me to select relevant documents that fit the purpose of my study. Only 43 documents included data relevant to the focus of my study. These were produced by 43 adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela, with more girls (n = 29) than boys (n = 14). Their age range was 15–22. They were all school-attending and the breakdown of school grades are as follows: Grade 8 n = 3, Grade 9 n = 1, Grade 10 n = 16, Grade 11 n = 2, Grade 12 n = 21. According to Shenton (2004), qualitative research uses small numbers of participants which makes it challenging to apply the findings to a broader population. However, a researcher can support transferability if they provide a detailed description of the participants. I did this in Section 3.2.3 as I have described the adolescents' age, gender, context and grade. Also, smaller sample sizes sometimes raise questions about saturation levels in qualitative studies. Data saturation is usually reached when there is enough data to allow for a replication of the study or when no new themes or insights result from additional data or further coding (Guest et al., 2020; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Thematic saturation, especially a priori thematic saturation, relates to there being enough data to "exemplify" (Saunders et al., 2018, p. 1896) or illustrate pre-chosen thematic constructs (e.g. those relating to social support in the case of my study).

Therefore, I believe that the themes I discuss in Chapter Four are saturated (i.e., there was sufficient data to illustrate my pre-chosen constructs).

3.4.3.2 Data analysis used in the secondary analysis

According to Flick (2018), qualitative data analysis provides an in-depth understanding of data through systematically organising the data and then explaining what the data means in relation to the research question directing the study. Babbie and Mouton (2012) report that data analysis is the breaking down of data into understandable themes or patterns to answer the research questions. I too identified themes or patterns in the data. More specifically, the data analysis method I chose to analyse the data is deductive thematic content analysis. According to Elo and Kyngäs (2008), deductive thematic content analysis is used when the analysis is conducted based on previous knowledge. Deductive analysis is best described as an approach used to see how well a pre-existing set of codes or theory fit a data set (Gabriel, 2022; Gill & Johnson, 2010). I used the types of social support as pre-existing codes.

I focused on social support because of my assumptions (see Section 1.7). In my analysis, I used the definition of social support as described by Betancourt and Khan (2008). This definition informed the thematic codes I used when analysing data. According to Betancourt and Khan (2008), social support includes emotional, instrumental and informational support provided for adolescents (see Section 1.6.3). Therefore, I established three preconceived themes (emotional support; instrumental support; informational support) and searched the deselected data for references to social media or other opportunities that allowed adolescents to experience emotional, instrumental or informational support. In simple words, I used these deductive thematic codes to test my research assumption that social media would allow adolescents to experience social support. Furthermore, from a social-ecological resilience perspective (Ungar, 2011), I assumed that in addition to contextual (e.g. social media) sources of social support, relational (e.g. with family or peers) and religious resources (e.g. faith-based activities) could support resilience by providing social support.

Using deductive coding for my secondary study had certain benefits. Zhang and Wildermuth (2009) report that one of the benefits of using deductive thematic analysis is that it can be used when addressing insights or questions generated from other

studies. In regard to my study, using deductive coding based on a pre-existing understanding of social support (i.e. Betancourt & Khan, 2008) helped me to identify how social media and other opportunities of social support supported the resilience of the adolescents in the RYSE-RuSA study (i.e. adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic). Furthermore, another benefit of using deductive thematic analysis to analyse secondary data was that it was less time-consuming (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). However, there are several potential limitations to using deductive thematic analysis. These include that using deductive thematic analysis can lead to the researcher being biased or blindsided (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). In order to avoid being biased, I applied the six steps of deductive thematic analysis to the deselected Zamdela data as outlined by Nieuwenhuis (2016), but also checked the deselected data to see if there was any uncoded data that could usefully answer my research questions if I used inductive thematic codes (i.e. codes that were not predetermined but that paraphrased the data; Braun & Clarke, 2006). These six steps are explained next.

(i) Immersing myself in the data

During this phase I familiarised myself with the data in the 43 documents that I had sampled. I read through the transcripts several times and also took notes to familiarise myself with the related visual data. Prior to analysing the data, I reread what social support entailed as described by Betancourt and Khan (2008) in order to familiarise myself with the codes I would be assigning.

(ii) Applying the deductive thematic codes to the data

During this phase I made use of the Atlas.ti 9 software in order to label sections of the text/parts of drawings that answered my research questions. In this regard, I looked for relevant data and assigned a thematic code/s (i.e. instrumental, informational and/or emotional support). I was guided by the following inclusion and exclusion criteria as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**

Emotional support	Any data referring to adolescents receiving care, support and emotional comfort from social media, others (e.g. interactions that provide adolescents with love, a sense that one matters and encouragement) or institutions (e.g. faith-based organisations).	Any data referring to young people caring for themselves emotionally (e.g. doing something to comfort themselves).
Instrumental support	Any data referring to the provision or sharing of material resources to assist adolescents in resolving crisis or dealing with stress (e.g. assistance offered to adolescents by others in order for them to carry out necessary tasks or meet their basic needs, like food, housing, education or clothing). The source of this support could be any relationship, social media or any institution.	Any data referring to adolescents being able to provide for themselves (e.g. adolescents generating an income and buying food for themselves).
Informational support	Any data referring to information or guidance given to adolescents by any institution, social media or other people in order for them to carry out day-to-day activities successfully (e.g. advice and empowerment programmes provided to adolescents by others).	Any data referring to adolescents gaining information or guidance that was coercive, false, or not supportive (e.g., fake news about COVID-19 remedies; messages encouraging people to avoid vaccines).

In each code, I also added what the source of that support was (e.g. social media; a mother; friends; faith-based community; etc.). An extract of this initial application of the codes can be found below.

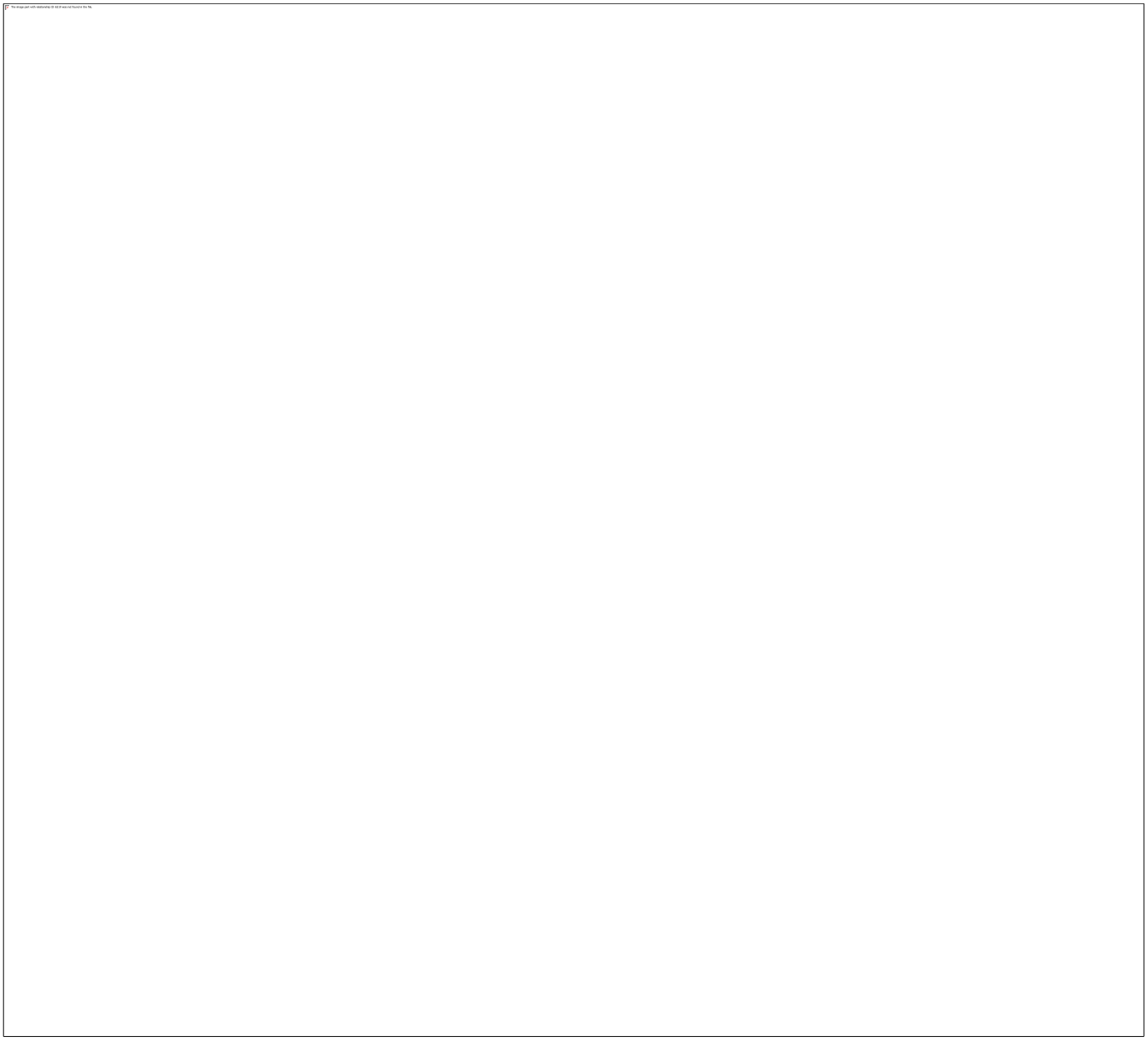

Figure 3.3: Screenshot from ATLAS.ti9 illustrating emotional support – (e.g. electronic communication provides emotional support)

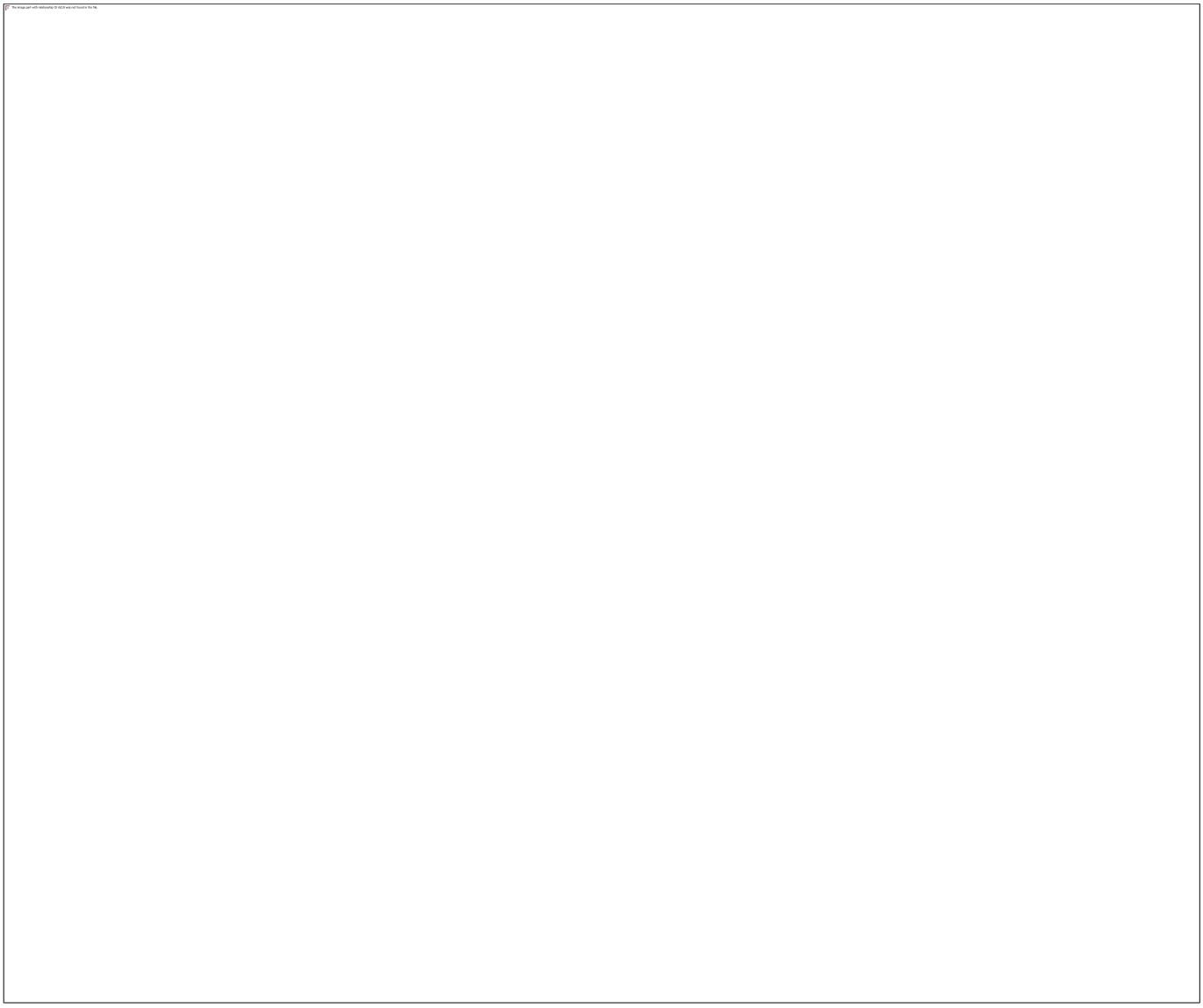

Figure 3.4: Screenshot from ATLAS.ti9 illustrating instrumental support – (e.g. mother provides instrumental support)

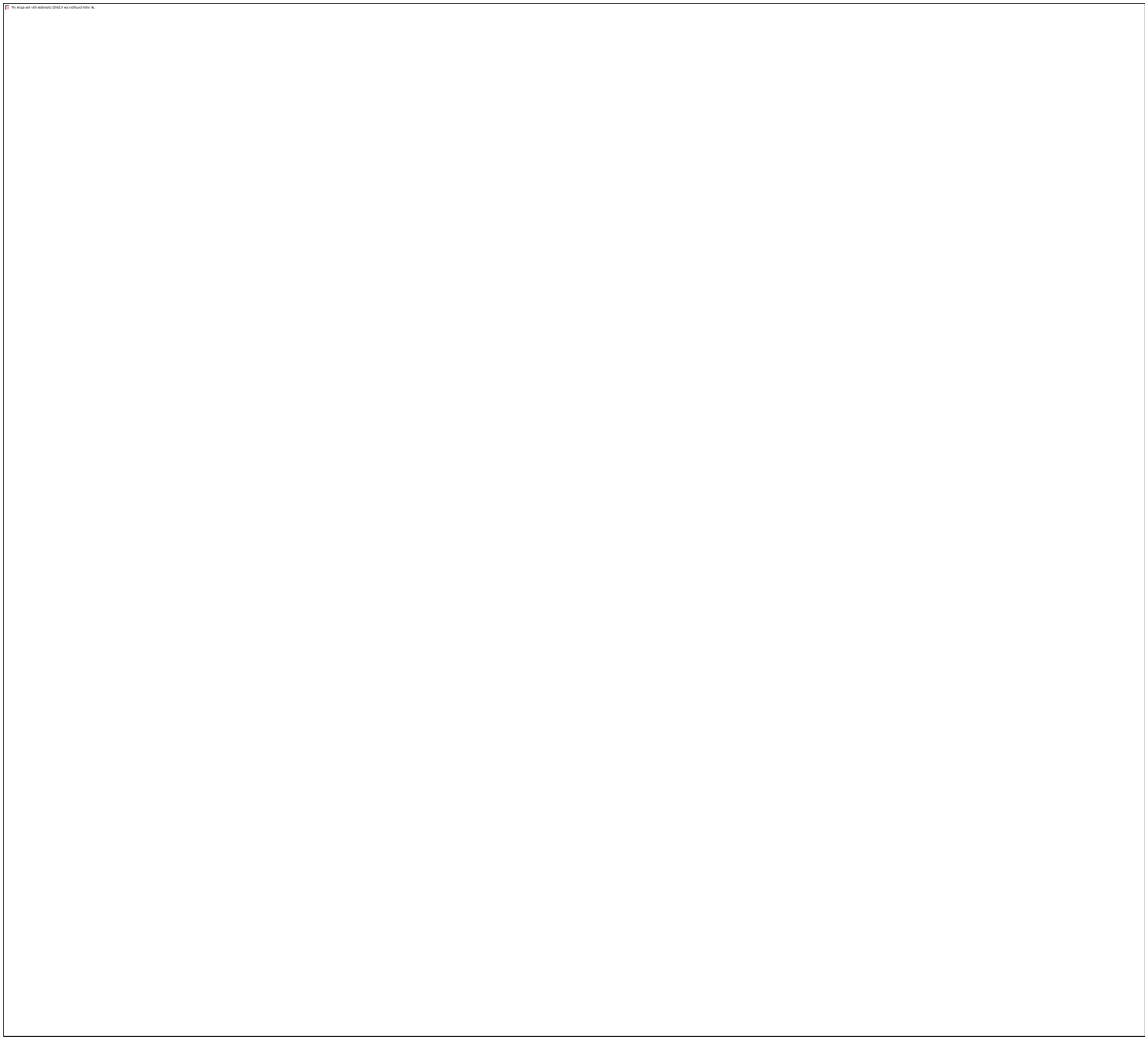

Figure 3.5: Screenshot from ATLAS.ti9 illustrating informational support – (e.g. victorious girl's foundation provides informational support)

(iii) Verifying codes and considering the need for inductive ones

This step involved double-checking the thematic codes that I had linked to the data that I deselected. To do that, I made use of a table where I used the three predetermined social support themes (i.e., emotional, instrumental and informational social support as described by Betancourt & Khan, 2008). I exported the data from Atlas.ti9 into a research report and copied and pasted the data into the table and then

verified the predetermined code I had assigned by ticking that column before inviting peer review from a fellow master's student working with the same data set (but using a different resilience-focused question). This table is included as Appendix A.

Next, I double-checked the data I had deselected to see if any uncoded parts could maybe answer my research question if I used an inductive code rather than my predetermined ones. This check showed me that my predetermined codes had actually covered all the relevant data. To be sure, I had a discussion with my peer who was also using the RYSE-RuSA 2020 dataset for her dissertation and so knew the data I had deselected well. She confirmed that the deductive codes I had chosen were appropriate and that no inductive codes were needed. I suspect they worked well because social support is a major enabler of resilience among South African youth (van Breda & Theron, 2018).

(iv) Structuring thematic categories and developing a visual representation

This step involves tracing the connections between the thematic codes and showing these connections through the use of tables or diagrams (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). I was interested in understanding how social media and other opportunities for social support supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. When I reviewed the coded data, it made sense to me to group the social support codes into three categories (social media, positive relationships and faith-based activities) as these were the prominent sources of social support. For each, I would be able to show what types of social support (emotional, instrumental and informational) they provided. I represent this in a diagram (see Figure 4.1).

(v) Data interpretation

According to Gabriel (2022), the data that have been analysed into deductive thematic categories must be compared to current theories and pre-existing relevant literature. This shows how the findings fit with, or possibly contradict or extend, what was previously known about the research phenomenon. To do so, I reported on how my findings linked to the literature I summarised in Chapter Two or how they did not. This is done in Chapter Four.

(vi) Conclusion and findings

In Chapter Five of my study, I go over the conclusions I came to. As recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018), my conclusions were informed by the theory that framed my study, namely the SETR (Ungar, 2011).

3.5 QUALITY CRITERIA

My study aimed to provide sound findings. To that end, I had to show what steps I took for the results to be trustworthy (Creswell, 2014; Morse, 2015). Therefore, I adhered to a variety of quality criteria, including credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability and authenticity. These criteria are discussed next.

3.5.1 Credibility

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016), one of the primary criteria addressed by researchers is internal validity (credibility in qualitative terms), which aims to ensure that the study measures what it intended. Furthermore, credibility put its focus on dealing with the question of how congruent the findings are with reality. Guba and Lincoln (1994) and Shenton (2004) report that credibility is one of the most important components to consider when establishing trustworthiness in a study. Furthermore, credibility is described as a measure of the true value of the qualitative study, or whether the study's findings are accurate or correct (Shenton, 2004).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Treharne and Riggs (2015) report that there are strategies used in establishing credibility such as triangulation, longer engagement with participants and negative case analysis. Furthermore, peer debriefing and member checking can be used to support credibility. For my secondary study, I used peer debriefing to support credibility. According to Morse (2015), peer debriefing is when a peer critically considers the data, the data analysis and the data interpretation. Questions and comments from the peer help to confirm or improve credibility. A fellow master's student and I exchanged ideas about how I had coded the data. We created codes for the themes individually and then discussed our findings. These discussions helped me to see where I had missed something. For example, my fellow master's student explained how faith-based activities such as youth services provided social support to adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment, which helped me

to code more credibly. I had similar discussions with my supervisor. The aforesaid process helped me as a researcher to produce a credible set of findings.

3.5.2 Dependability

According to Babbie and Mouton (2012), dependability can be described as the extent to which the research methods and approaches used can result in reliable findings allowing other researchers to follow, audit and critique the research process. Furthermore, the research is viewed as dependable if it can give consistent findings if it was to be conducted again using the same research methods and approach. Sharan (2009) reports that the responses of participants are dependable if the responses were not manipulated by the researcher; instead, the responses should be subjective experiences of each participant. In my study, the results are dependable as the original data were generated by participants who were willing to share their subjective experiences about the studied phenomenon; their responses were not manipulated by the RYSE-RuSA team who interacted with them or by me. For my study, I have provided a detailed description of the secondary data analysis process so that other researchers can follow/audit what I did, including detailing the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Section 3.4.3.3). I also invited my peer who was also using the RYSE-RuSA 2020 dataset for her dissertation and so knew the data well, to check the social support codes (informational, emotional and/or instrumental) that I had assigned to segments of the data that answered my research questions. I include a copy of the table that I used for this purpose (see Appendix A) so that any reader can audit the meaning I made (i.e., I have provided an audit trail).

3.5.3 Transferability

Connelly (2016) and Shenton (2004) report that transferability can be described as the extent to which the findings from the research can be applied to other social situations or populations. A detailed description of participants and their context is an essential method for supporting transferability (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). I have provided a detailed description of their context (see Section 3.2.2). I have also described the basic demographics of the participants who generated the original data, including the 43 documents I deselected (see Section 3.4.3.1). I did this to make sure that other researchers reading my study from different contexts could determine whether the results applied to their studies or practice (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). Given this description,

I think my study provided findings that could be transferable or applicable to other adolescents who stay in a resource-constrained township, like Zamdela. Still, not all adolescents in all townships have identical experiences, therefore, my findings should be cautiously transferred (Sharan, 2009). I also liaised with the research psychologist who was the RYSE-RuSA project manager, to confirm who, when and how the data was generated during the lockdown and this helped me to understand how useful/usable the data was for my secondary study.

3.5.4 Confirmability

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), Morse (2015) and Shenton (2004) report that confirmability is described as a process where the researcher shows that findings and interpretations are based on evidence rather than the researcher's purpose, interests and bias. To confirm the findings of my study, I have included quotes from the documents and examples of the drawings created.

I presented my findings at the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) 2022 conference (13 October 2022) and the audience (researchers and clinicians) commented that the examples I used fit well with the themes I was reporting. In other words, they thought that the examples I used to illustrate the themes confirmed them. The RYSE-RuSA team (including my supervisor) also considered my findings and the quotes/drawings I was associating with the themes and confirmed them.

3.5.5 Authenticity

Connelly (2016) and Lincoln et al. (2011) report that authenticity is described as the extent to which researchers fairly and completely exhibit a range of diverse realities at the same time while realistically conveying participants' lives. During the process of discussing my findings, I have included extracts and drawings from a variety of participants to show that my conclusions were a true reflection of their perspectives. The findings would not accurately represent the knowledge of the participants if I had frequently resorted to the insights of the same individuals.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My study formed part of the RYSE-RuSA research project. RYSE-RuSA received ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee, Faculty of Education (UP 17/05/01). A

copy of the ethics clearance certificate can be found in Appendix B. I also received approval from the Ethics Committee (UP 17/05/01 THERON 21-03) for my part in the RYSE-RuSA research project (this is included in the front matter of my mini-dissertation). While I did not work directly with the participants, as an Educational Psychology student, I still adhered to the guidelines for ethical research conduct as stipulated in the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2011). All the participants who generated the primary data for the RYSE-RuSA study had all consented and their consent included permission for secondary analysis. Researchers' ability to comply with the ethical regulations of research and the rights of participants, can play a critical role in supporting research outcomes that do not stereotype participants in negative or disrespectful ways (Sharan, 2009). For example, if I as a researcher report the data and findings using sexist, racist and similarly biased language, it could lead to harm if participants have access to the results. Resniik (2011) suggests that one of the disadvantages of qualitative research is the possible exposure of participants to sensitive issues which might lead to psychological harm. Also, I would not like to produce findings that can in any way perpetuate the many negative stereotypes that challenge us as South Africans and get in the way of us being a nation that respects the dignity of all persons (The Bill of Rights, 1996). Therefore, I avoided the use of sexist, racist and similarly biased language when reporting my findings.

3.7 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology employed for my secondary study. The aforesaid was discussed with consideration of the benefits and challenges of the methodological choices I made. I also reported how I achieved quality criteria and the ethical considerations relevant to my study. The next chapter will focus on the presentation of findings which resulted from the methods discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: REPORTING FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In answering the questions in my study: (i) How did social media support the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic? and (ii) What other sources of social support enabled the resilience of adolescents living in Zamdela?, three themes emerged, as summarised in Figure 4.1 below. The themes are: electronic communication facilitates emotional and informational support; positive relationships facilitate emotional, informational and instrumental support; and faith-based activities facilitate emotional and informational support.

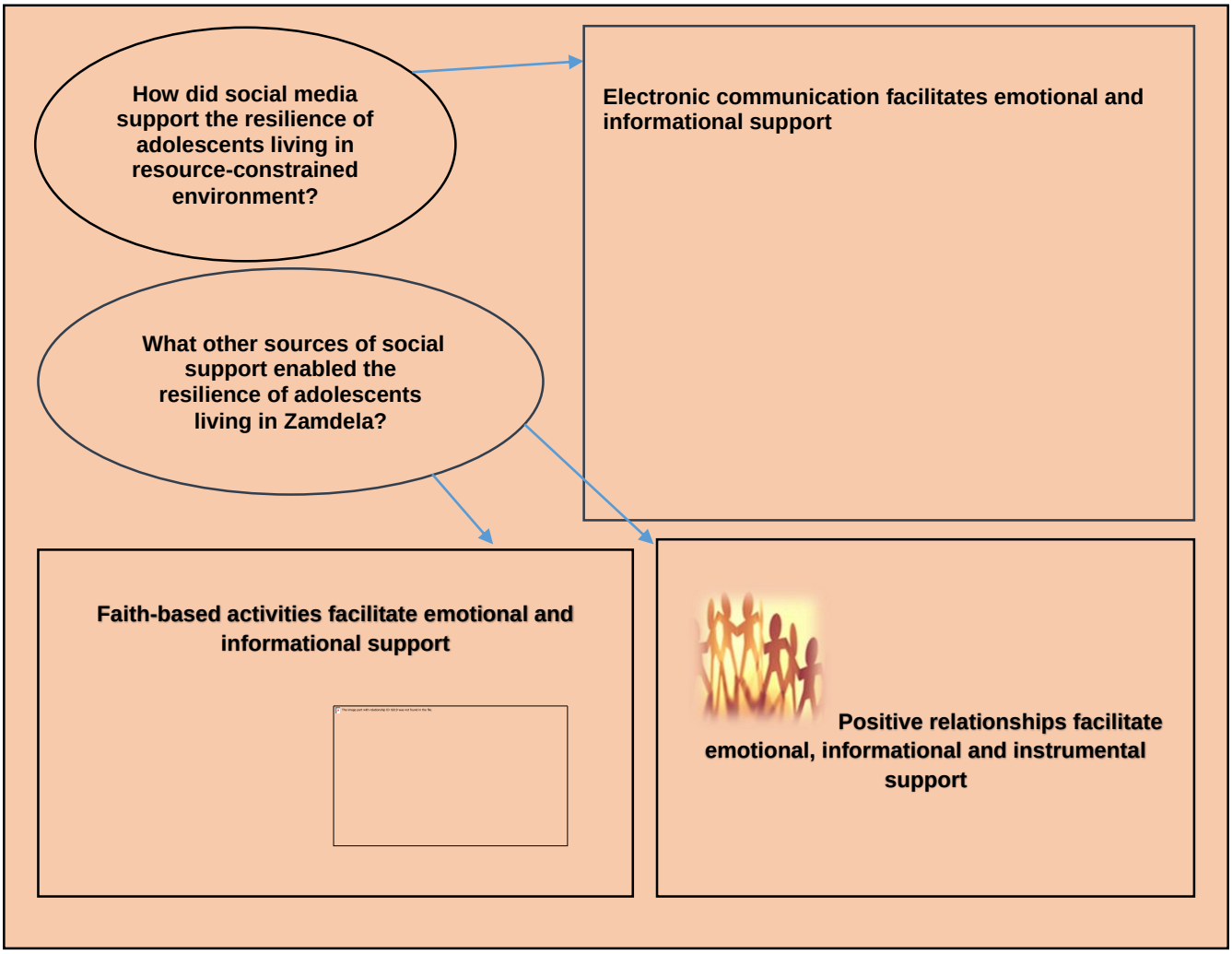

Figure 4.1: A visual summary of my findings

4.2 THEME 1: ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION FACILITATES ADOLESCENTS' EMOTIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT

In this theme, electronic communication means any form of online communication (e.g., a website or app that is used for networking or gaining information or opportunity to talk with others). Typically, electronic communication requires access to technology or a technological device. In the documents I deselected, very few of the participants who generated the documents (6 of 43) reported that they had access to a technological device. Most typically, the device was a cellular phone.

Five of the six participants drew a cellular phone and explained how having access to a technological device supported their resilience because it facilitated connecting with other people and/or gaining informational and emotional support from online sites or music apps. Most linked the value of this to having the opportunity to gain emotional support (to be inspired or comforted), either by searching for motivational messages (typically on social websites like Facebook or Instagram) or on their contacts' WhatsApp profiles or updates. For example:

> During my hopeless moments, I take my phone and search inspirational messages and motivations and I feel okay (Participant V118, female, 19 years old).

> My cellphone helps me from everything that bothers me in my home. I listen to music when I am sad; it lifts me up. I contact my friends and tell them how I am feeling. I get on social media and get to know other people (Participant V146, male, 18 years old).

> I also tend to find peace when socialising with my friends and peers in social media, more especially on Facebook (Participant V210, female, 19 years old).

In addition to emotional support, two participants referred to online communication opportunities as being helpful because they allowed them to access useful information. Participant V252, a young man (age 20), explained: "My cellphone helps me to de-stress, when I'm not feeling well. I listen to music, social network or search most things in Google. I have study books on my phone, notes and most important things". Similarly, Participant 129 (male, 19 years old) wrote: "My cellphone helps me when

I'm down; either I call someone, tell him/her how I feel or a listen to music. It helps me to study, I watch videos about certain topic, I listen to news".

Only one participant referred to how electronic communication allowed him to provide social (mostly informational) support to others. This participant V070 (male, 16 years old) drew a cellular phone (see Figure 4.2) and explained that electronic communication helped him to stay in contact with other people and provided an opportunity to share information with them. He explained: "The drawing that I have drew helps me with lots of things. I can design posters. It helps to get hold of people. I can help people with phone errors or update their system".

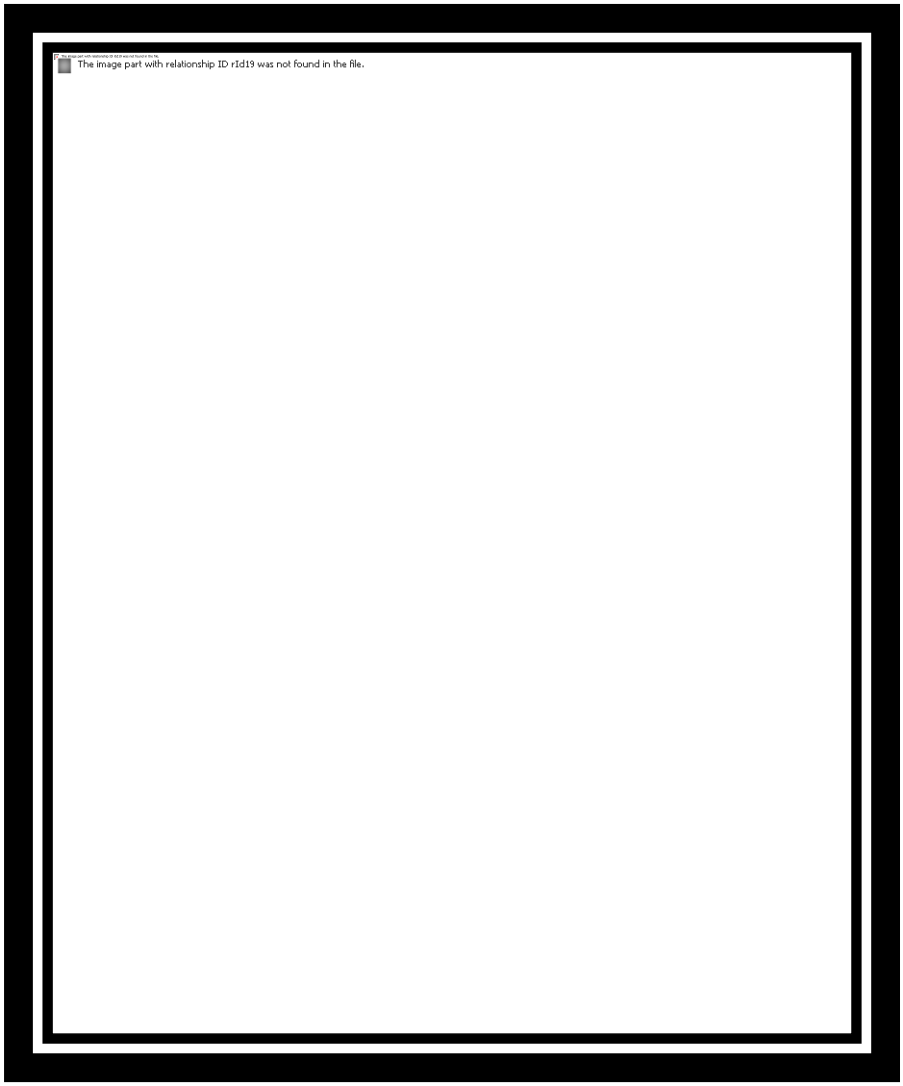

Figure 4.2: Participant V070's illustration of a technological device (a cellphone)

4.2.1 Making meaning of theme 1

The theme of access to electronic communication facilitating emotional and informational support has been well-established as supportive of positive adolescent outcomes in the resilience literature in the African context (e.g., Ei Chew et al., 2011; Mackey, 2016; North et al., 2014; Shava & Chinyamurindi, 2018) and international context (e.g., Barth, 2015; Jung & Moro, 2014; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Sarriera et al., 2011). Similarly, at least 30 studies have reported on access to electronic communication and social media access supporting the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 26 studies from the international context (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Al-Dmour et al., 2020; Buzzi et al., 2020; Chen & Bonanno, 2020; Cnnic, 2020; Eden et al., 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021; Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022; Longest & Kang, 2022; Magson et al., 2020; Mano, 2020; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Nearchou et al., 2020; Ngien & Jiang, 2021; Orben et al., 2022; Prestin & Nabi, 2020; Senekal et al., 2022; Sobowale et al., 2020; Taylor, 2020; Wolfers & Schneider, 2020; Yu, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2021) and four studies from the South African context (Bakasa, 2020; Desai & Burton, 2022; Duby et al., 2022; Senekal et al., 2022).

According to Chen and Bonanno (2020), Hamilton et al. (2021), Jennings and Caplovitz (2022), Magson et al. (2020), Mano (2020), Masten and Motti-Stefanidi (2020), Orben et al. (2022), and Prestin and Nabi (2020), opportunities for electronic communication and social media access supported adolescents' resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, during the pandemic it facilitated emotional support as it reduced adolescent's psychological distress through connecting with other people online to enhance positive psychological wellbeing (Bakasa, 2020; Cnnic, 2020; Desai & Burton, 2022; Eden et al., 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021; Longest & Kang, 2022; Prestin & Nabi, 2020; Senekal et al., 2022). With regard to informational support, during the COVID-19 pandemic, adolescents received opportunities to engage in academic activities online, attend extracurricular activities such as piano lessons and youth services and obtain health support and relevant information which enabled them to deal with adversities (Bakasa, 2020; Cnnic, 2020; Desai & Burton, 2022; Duby et al., 2022; Longest & Kang, 202; Senekal et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2020; Yu, 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2021). My study's findings emphasise emotional

support with lesser reference to informational support and none to instrumental support.

Further, in one study by Jennings and Caplovitz (2022), social media enabled adolescents to assist each other online by offering the necessary support. In my study, one document suggested that social media served as a source to offer assistance to other people and promote their own creativity during difficult times. In this way, social media resources offered social support.

For adolescents staying in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela, it appeared that only six (14%) documents reported that social media supported their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This might be explained by Spaull and van der Berg (2020) as the study reported that South Africa shifted to online learning but due to the diverse inequalities, the online strategy was not effective, considering that the majority of adolescents and their teachers did not have access to the internet, computers or any form of electronic device. In fact, Senekal et al. (2022) report that only those South African adolescents who had access to personal devices and the internet had an opportunity to use social media as a source of emotional and informational support. Furthermore, South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments indicated that lack of access to personal devices and the internet were key issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they experienced educational and social disruptions (Duby et al., 2022). Therefore, the lack of access to personal technological devices and the internet among South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments can explain Theme 1's limited findings.

4.3 THEME 2: POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS FACILITATE EMOTIONAL, INFORMATIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORT

Positive relationships can be any relationship shared between individuals that result in any form of social support (van Harmelen et al., 2017). An individual can have a positive relationship with members of their nuclear family, extended family members, friends or other people in the community (Hall et al., 2021; Powell et al., 2020). In my study, most of the documents I deselected (32 of 43) referred to positive relationships with family and other people (such as friends, teachers and elders in the community). These relationships provided instrumental, informational and emotional social support.

4.3.1 Emotional support

Sixteen participants reported that positive relationships enabled their resilience because they facilitated emotional comfort and emotional care (e.g., a sense of being loved or understood; a source of encouragement or a sense that someone believed in them). Examples of such emotional support are included below. As can be seen from these examples, mothers and other family members were prominent as those who provided emotional support:

> The sun as you can see has a female figure. It resembles my mother because she always showers me with her love, smile and she sings for me so that I can feel better (Participant V049, female, 16 years old).

> What has made me to do well in life are my mother's words of encouragement. The motivational words that she speaks to me makes me to want to do more about life (Participant V051, male, 17 years old).

> Me talking about things that did not sit well with me, also helped me, venting out to my friends and family really helped (Participant V072, female, 16 years old).

> The picture I drew simply means that whenever, I have any problem I go to someone whom I feel comfortable talking to or trust then I tell the person what's wrong (Participant V076, female, 16 years old).

> My drawing simply means in every bad or sticky situation, my parents are always there for me. Even though my environment or society is not friendly I always depend on my parents (Participant V083, male, 17 years old).

> My mom always gave me care from when I was young and from when I was a big teenager. She always made me feel good all the time. She was with me during hard days she was always by my side (Participant V098, male, 21 years old, see Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Participant V098's illustration of a positive relationship with his mother facilitating emotional support

My mother is my everything! She stands by me when times are difficult, she is my shoulder to cry on. She motivates and tell me not to lose hope when times are tough (Participant V118, female, 19 years old).

My mom and dad are always there for me. They love and support me. They give me strength to see life as meaningful as it is (Participant V130, male, 19 years old).

If I talked to that people I become encourage and motivated. Sometimes things in life bothers me a lot but my family encourages me (Participant V133, female, 20 years old).

I like spending my day with my family and best friend. My secrets I tell my best friend. What I like [is] she understands me. The thing I like about my parents is that they care about me and my two siblings. The always make sure I am happy (Participant V223, female, 16 years old).

> Family because of they have always supported me throughout difficult times and they help me mostly to do well in life (Participant V251, male, 22 years old).

> My mother, she supported me more than everything, she encourages me to not give up in life (Participant V253, female, 19 years old).

> My family has always been there for me, through all the difficult journey I have been through they are there to support and guide me (Participant V257, female, 19 years old).

> Being surrounded by sisters who believe that you can actually make it are the best (Participant VO-068, female, 17 years old).

> This is me and my family, having them in my life brought nothing but happiness in my life (Participant VO-073, female, 15 years old).

> My sister has always encouraged me to do well in my studies and she made me feel like I'm the most special girl ever (Participant VO-083, female, 16 years old).

4.3.2 Informational support

Thirteen participants explained that positive relationships enabled their resilience because they facilitated informational support (often in addition to emotional support). Mostly, informational support meant that relationships provided access to advice or to stories/information/messages that capacitated participants to adjust well to hardship and to aspire to a better life. Again, it was often mothers, grandmothers or other family who provided this informational support. Examples included:

> My grandmother was always there to give support and advises be there also as both mother and father figure (Participant V084, female, 16 years old).

> This drawing or picture it shows my family. In life I realised that when times are hard my family will always be there for me and they support me a lot. I am so happy that I have most supporting family who always motivate me and advise me (Participant V094, female, 17 years old).

When life is hard, I try to talk about it to my mother, she always has got the best advice and I believe she will never mislead me as she always wants what's best for me (Participant V104, female, 18 years old).

My drawing is about my grandmother who always advise me and let me know if I have done wrong. She encouraged me to continue writing poems and drama because she believes that I am good at that (Participant V131, female, 19 years old).

I have a supporting mother, she's my heroine, she is always there when I need her the most, so when life is hard I always get the greatest support and best advice from her, she's a great adviser. When life is hard, I always confide to my friends, they are the best and they are always there for me when I need them (Participant V226, female, 17 years old).

My brother has always inspired me. His running a spaza in the yard has made me see the importance of working hard and believing in ourselves can be one of the things that help one to make it in life. My brother has been through the worst things in life but he has always been able to persuade his dream as he's running a spaza and studying. He has made me see even if we cannot afford certain things, the little things we have, we have. We can work toward them [things they cannot yet afford] to make both our parents happy and proud of us (Participant VO-050, female, 16 years old).

It was my parents. There always told me that I must work hard so that I can be successful (Participant VO-070, female, 16 years old).

My parents, they always tell me I must work hard so that I can be a millionaire (Participant VO-072, male, 16 years old).

My mom has been there for me when everybody had turned their backs on me. She always encourages me to do better in life. She loves and supports me. She always asks me if I am okay, if not she asks me, what is the problem. Even though I wanted to drop out at school, she told me to never give up because education is a key to success. She told me that in order to become a better person I have to finish school and go to tertiary and find a good job. I love my

mom so much and I want her to be proud of me (Participant 231, female, 20 years old; also see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4: Participant V231's illustration of a positive relationship with her mother facilitating informational support

The family were not the only people who provided informational social support. Other sources of informational social support were elders, teachers, mentors, friends and anyone who had a motivational/helpful story to share. Examples included:

> Speaking with others and hear their stories [helps me] (Participant V153, female, 18 years old).

> What helped me to do well is to always listen to my elders when they are reprimanding me of something wrong that I did (Participant V089, female, 16 years old).

When life is hard, I go to old people or my teachers so that they could give me advice on how to approach a situation. My teachers they help me the most of the time (Participant V255, male, 20 years old).

The picture (see Figure 4.5) is all about girls who are motivated by one of the speakers. They are listening to the motivational speaker who is talking about empowering girls in their life. This helped me not to gossip about other children, and to take care of myself and not to allow boys to use me in a certain time and respect my parents (Participant VO-013, female, 17 years old).

Figure 4.5: Participant VO-013's illustration of a positive relationship with the Victorious girl's foundation facilitating informational support

4.3.3 Instrumental support

Only two participants explained that positive relationships enabled their resilience because they facilitated instrumental support (help and assistance which addressed basic needs like food, security or education). In both cases, emotional support (to be inspired or comforted) was also reported. Participant V124 (female, 19 years old),

explained: “My drawing explains the support and the love that I get from mother. She is always there for me, she supports me during hard times, and she supports me academically”. Similarly, Participant V230 (male, 21 years old) wrote:

> Mom has always cared for me; she has always been there for me during difficult times. She supported me when everyone abandoned me. She gave me warmth, love since I was born. She always makes sure that I am happy all the time. She makes sure that I don’t sleep with an empty stomach.

4.3.4 A mix of emotional, instrumental and informational support

Only two participants explained that positive relationships enabled their resilience because they facilitated instrumental, informational and emotional support. Participant V136 (male, 20 years old), drew a female human figure representing his sister and explained:

> That’s my sister, she helps me to understand when I feel like am lost; she always finds a way out to give me solutions for my problems. The best thing about her is that she is caring, supportive and she is telling the truth, like doesn’t hide everything from me. She always providing for me.

Similarly, Participant V260 (female, 18 years old) drew books, a school building, male and female human figures holding hands (her parents) and her three friends (see Figure 4.6) and wrote:

> My parents help me to be better in life like buying me things that I don’t have, they want the best for me. In school, teachers advise us to be respectful and to be courageous. If obstacles come, you have to be calm and if you failed you have to try again. Friends we indulge together, playing together and advise each other.

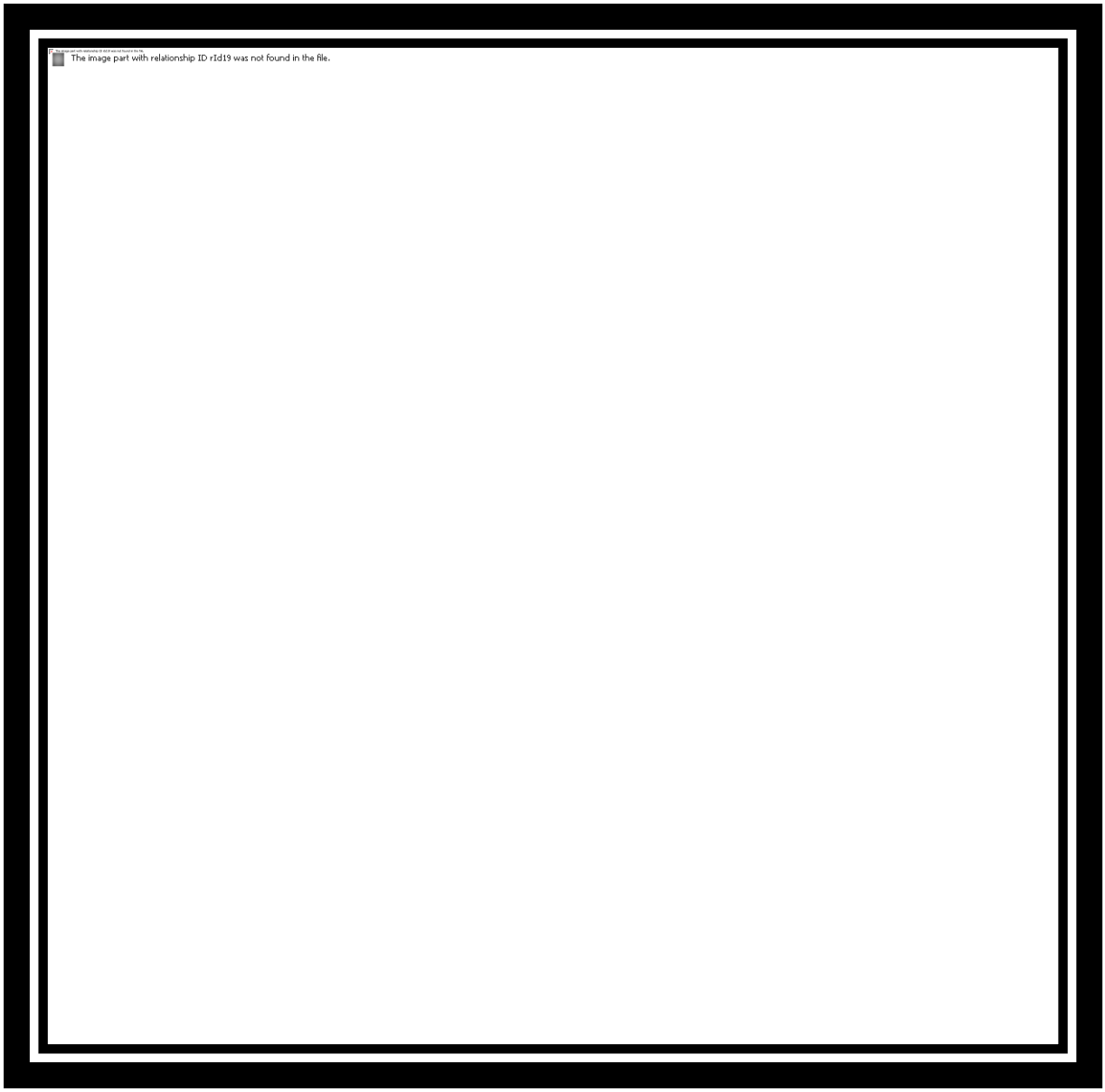

Figure 4.6: Participant V260's illustration of positive relationships facilitating emotional, informational and instrumental support

4.3.1 Making meaning of theme 2

Positive relationships have been well-established as supportive of positive adolescent outcomes in the resilience literature in the African context (e.g., Crowley et al., 2021; Kuo et al., 2019; van Breda & Theron, 2018) and international context (e.g., Hidayat & Nurhayati, 2019; Tian et al., 2018; van Harmelen et al., 2017). Various studies outline how positive relationships supported the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic in the African context (e.g., Duby et al., 2022; Gittings et al., 2021; Sonjica, 2021; Zembe-Mkabile, 2020) and international context (Bartlett &

Vivrette, 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Grazzani et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2021; Longest & Kang, 2022; Masten et al., 2021; Pavarini et al., 2022; OECD, 2020; Rome et al., 2020; Traoré et al., 2022; Volkin 2020; Water et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2020; Zia et al., 2021). My findings fit well with this literature.

According to Bukchin-Pele and Ronen (2021), Ellis et al. (2020), Grazzani et al. (2022), Longest and Kang (2022), Pavarini et al. (2022), Rome et al. (2020), and Waters et al. (2020), positive relationships with family, caregivers, peers, schools and organisations facilitated the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic; for example, offering emotional comfort and care in the form of love, encouragement and a sense of belonging helped adolescents to positively enhance their mental health and wellbeing when dealing with COVID-19 related risks (Ellis et al., 2020; Grazzani et al., 2022; Longest & Kang, 2022; Pavarini et al., 2022; Rome et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2020). Furthermore, positive relationships with other people and organisations facilitated informational support during the COVID-19 pandemic as youth organisations provided adolescents with access to information, peer-to-peer mental health advice and other programmes to support adolescents' wellbeing and help them cope with adversities (Liu et al., 2021; OECD, 2020; Volkin, 2020). With regard to instrumental social support, during the COVID-19 pandemic positive relationships with family, caregivers and communities facilitated instrumental support as adolescents received basic necessities such as food, housing and medical care which helped them effectively deal with adversities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bartlett & Vivrette, 2020; Masten et al., 2021; Traoré et al., 2022). As explained next, my study's findings are well aligned with this literature.

Overall, 74% (32 of 43) of the Zamdela participants reported that positive relationships facilitated social support. However, my study's findings emphasised emotional support and informational support, with lesser reference to instrumental support. Van der Berg et al. (2021) could perhaps explain this. Their study showed that many parents lost their jobs and remained unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, they were forced to stay at home which brought about alterations to the routines that adolescents were accustomed to. For example, food insecurity among South African adolescents and their families increased as the majority went hungry or ran out of money to buy food.

Often, the Zamdela participants referred to positive relationships with their immediate family members, such as their mothers, parents, grandmothers and siblings. The family was more prominent than other support systems like elders, teachers, mentors, friends and other people during the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be explained by Spaull and van der Berg (2020). Their study showed that due to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, South African adolescents were forced to stay at home and this often led to social disengagement with non-family as adolescents were disconnected from other support systems outside their immediate family. Furthermore, the COVID-19 lockdown regulations led to school closures which might have affected adolescents' access to other resilience-enabling relational resources. Therefore, I think that disrupted social connections caused by the COVID-19 lockdown regulations explain my study's emphasis on family members.

4.4 THEME 3: FAITH-BASED ACTIVITIES FACILITATE EMOTIONAL AND INFORMATIONAL SUPPORT

Faith-based activities refer to the religious activities which enabled participants' resilience by providing emotional and informational social support. Five (of 43) documents reported that faith-based activities such as going to church, attending youth programmes at church and consulting with the pastor enabled social support for participants during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among these, faith-based activities were typically associated with informational social support (participants were provided with information, guidance and advice as a way of assisting them to function well) and emotional social support (to be inspired or comforted).

Two participants explained that faith-based activities enabled their resilience because they facilitated emotional comfort and guidance which encouraged them (emotional support) and advised or motivated them (informational support). Participant V085 (male, 17 years old) drew a church building and explained: "I drew a church because it is a place where I find peace and I get to unite with many Christians. My church has helped me with many things like being faithful and showing respect to others." Similarly, Participant V096 (female, 17 years old) drew a church building and her friends (see Figure 4.7) and wrote:

I once lost hope and I wanted to give up in life. My friends came to me and asked me to join them at church after I told them my problems. So, after going to church I've realised that it wasn't the end of the world I've learnt not to give up until I reach my destiny.

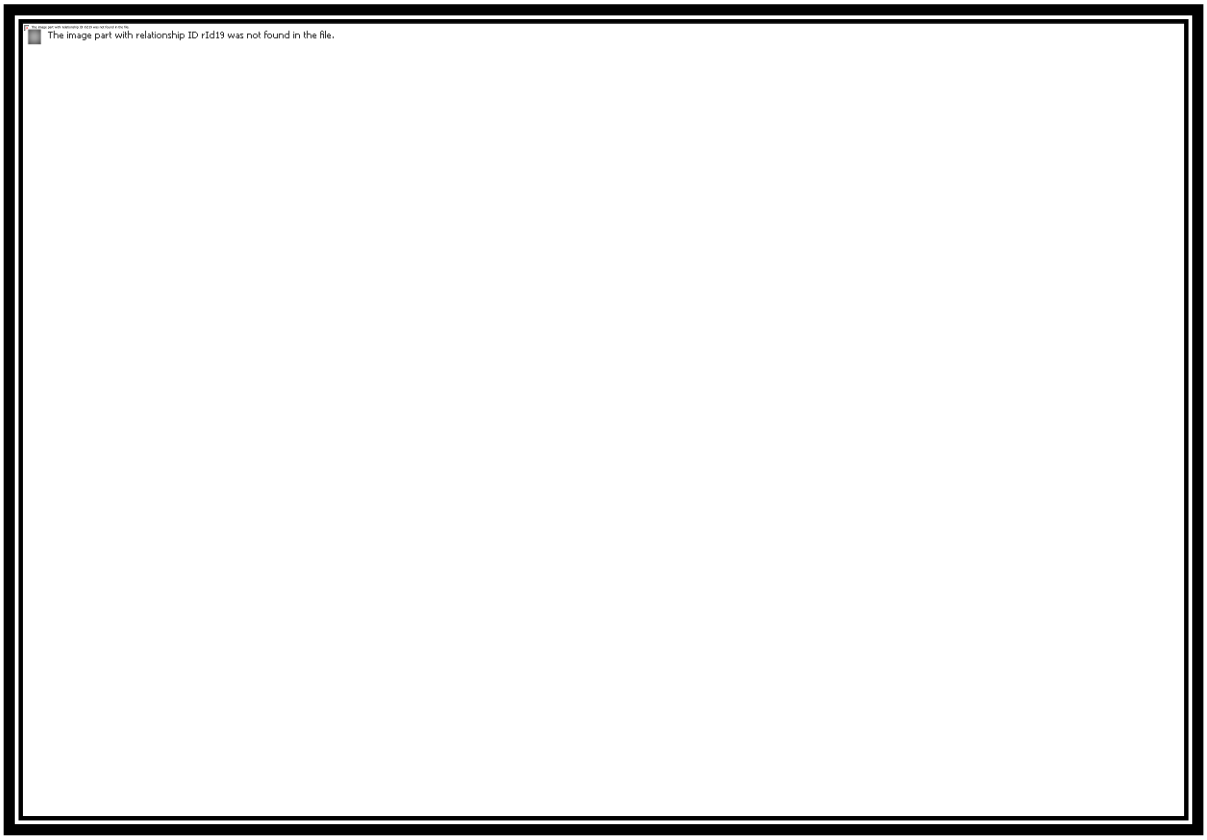

Figure 4.7: Participant V096's illustration of a church and her friends

Two other participants explained that they attended empowerment programmes at a local church which provided informational support that they believed enabled their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participant V075 (female, 16 years old), explained: "What helped me to do well when life is hard is my bible and church. They offer sessions for the youth to talk about their life challenges and experiences". Similarly, Participant V090 (female, 16 years old), wrote: "once a month I attend a Victorious girl's foundation and the speakers really motivate me and they help me to improve my self-esteem".

One participant reported how faith-based activities and church-related spaces facilitated emotional support which helped her to function well. This participant (V088,

female, 19 years old) drew a church and a Bible and explained: “I go to the Bible study room, then after church I talk to the pastor, then I feel better”.

4.4.1 Making meaning of theme 3

Faith-based activities have been well-established as supportive of positive adolescent outcomes in the resilience literature in the African context (e.g., Brittian et al., 2013; Gunnestad & Thwala, 2011; van Breda & Theron, 2018) and international context (e.g., Estrada et al., 2019; Greeley & Hout, 2006; Haslam et al., 2018; Kord & Biadar, 2019; Lifshitz et al., 2019; Villani et al., 2019). At least 11 studies have reported on faith-based activities supporting the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Aziz, 2021; Bryson et al., 2020; Coppola et al., 2021; Dunbar, 2021; Garssen et al., 2021; Gittings et al., 2021; Grcevich 2020; Mashaphu et al., 2021; Okruszek et al.,2022; Saud et al., 2021; Walsh, 2020; Yildirim et al., 2021).

According to Aziz (2021), Bryson et al. (2020), Coppola et al. (2021), and Mashaphu et al. (2021), faith-based activities played a crucial role in addressing an adolescent’s challenges, such as lack of purpose, feeling of being lost and psychosocial stress, at the same time giving them hope in light of the adversities they were faced with during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, faith-based activities facilitated emotional support during the COVID-19 pandemic as adolescents received emotional comfort and support which instilled the notion of a sense of belonging and existential interconnectivity. This provided adolescents with better ways of coping with adversities, serving as a bridge between their past and future through providing a setting that allowed them to be who they truly are during the COVID-19 pandemic (Bryson et al., 2020; Coppola et al., 2021; Mashaphu et al., 2021; Okruszek et al., 2022; Saud et al., 2021). With regard to informational social support during the COVID-19 pandemic, faith-based activities played a vital role in assisting adolescents on how to manage stressful situations through engaging in fellowships – this provided a supportive mechanism by organising sessions where adolescents managed to sit and talk about their adversities in a safe space (Aziz, 2021; Bryson et al., 2020; Coppola et al., 2021; Mashaphu et al., 2021; Walsh, 2020; Yildirim et al., 2021).

While my study’s findings fit with the above-mentioned literature, they emphasise emotional support and informational social support with no reference to instrumental

support. This can perhaps be explained by Aziz (2021) and Kgatle (2020). Their studies showed that the COVID-19 lockdown regulations that prohibited gatherings had a significant impact on several churches. For instance, during the lockdown, most churches were unable to collect as many offerings as they typically do. The COVID-19 lockdown posed difficulties for the churches in terms of both their finances and, in some cases, their outreach initiatives. For instance, churches in South Africa were prevented from distributing food parcels and other necessities since doing so would have violated the COVID-19 lockdown regulations and because of financial constraints.

For adolescents staying in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela, it appeared that only five (12%) documents reported that faith-based activities supported their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This low number may be explained by Ozili's (2020) reference to all religious services being prohibited in South Africa for most of 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations. Therefore, I believe this led to South African adolescents not being able to access religious activities. In fact, Kgatle (2020) reported that due to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, religious organisations were not allowed to congregate; as a result, some religious organisations in South Africa used live-streaming via social media. However, this was not effective for adolescents and people living in resource-constrained environments as the majority could not live-stream, either because of a lack of proper devices or internet access (Kgatle, 2020). Therefore, I theorise that the COVID-19 lockdown regulations, which led to religious organisations being closed and South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments (like Zamdela) not having access to personal technological devices and internet to join live-streaming sessions, can explain the limited reference to emotional and informational support in the context of faith-based organisations in my findings.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The three themes that I reported in Chapter Four aligned with the trends in the findings of current South African resilience literature on what enabled the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Desai & Burton, 2022; Duby et al., 2022; Gittings et al., 2021; Senekal et al., 2020; van Breda & Theron, 2018; Theron et al., 2021, 2022a).

However, the aforementioned studies made little reference to the role of social media in facilitating a social support environment for adolescents living in resource-constrained environments before or during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings of my study also fit well with international literature that showed that positive relationships were an important source of resilience-enabling social support during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Bukchin-Peles & Ronen, 2021; Ellis et al., 2020; Grazzani et al., 2022; Longest & Kang, 2022; Pavarini et al., 2022; Rome et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2020). However, given how few participants reported social media as a support, my findings did not fit with the international literature saying that social media was an important resilience-enabling resource for adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Chen & Bonanno, 2020; Hamilton et al., 2021; Jennings & Caplovitz, 2022; Magson et al., 2020; Mano, 2020; Masten & Motti-Stefanidi, 2020; Orben et al., 2022; Prestin & Nabi, 2020). In that way, my study is an important reminder that context matters when suggesting what resources are helpful during extraordinary times like the COVID-19 pandemic. In resource-constrained contexts, like Zamdela, people were more readily available sources of social support compared to social media which requires data and internet access (both of which are expensive in South Africa).

In the next chapter, I will discuss how the findings of my study relate to SETR (i.e., the theoretical framework of my study). I use this discussion to make recommendations for those working with young people on how social media and other opportunities for social support enable the resilience of adolescents living in resource-constrained environments.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I conclude my secondary study. I discuss how my findings addressed the research questions of my study in the context of the theoretical framework. I also reflect on my study, consider its limitations and suggest recommendations for future research and educational psychologists.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION REVISITED AND FINDINGS DISCUSSED

The two research questions that directed my secondary study of limited scope were: How did social media support the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020? What other opportunities for social support enabled the resilience of school-attending adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020? Figure 5.1 illustrates my findings and their key connections to the decentrality, complexity and cultural relativity principles of SETR, which served as the theoretical framework of my study.

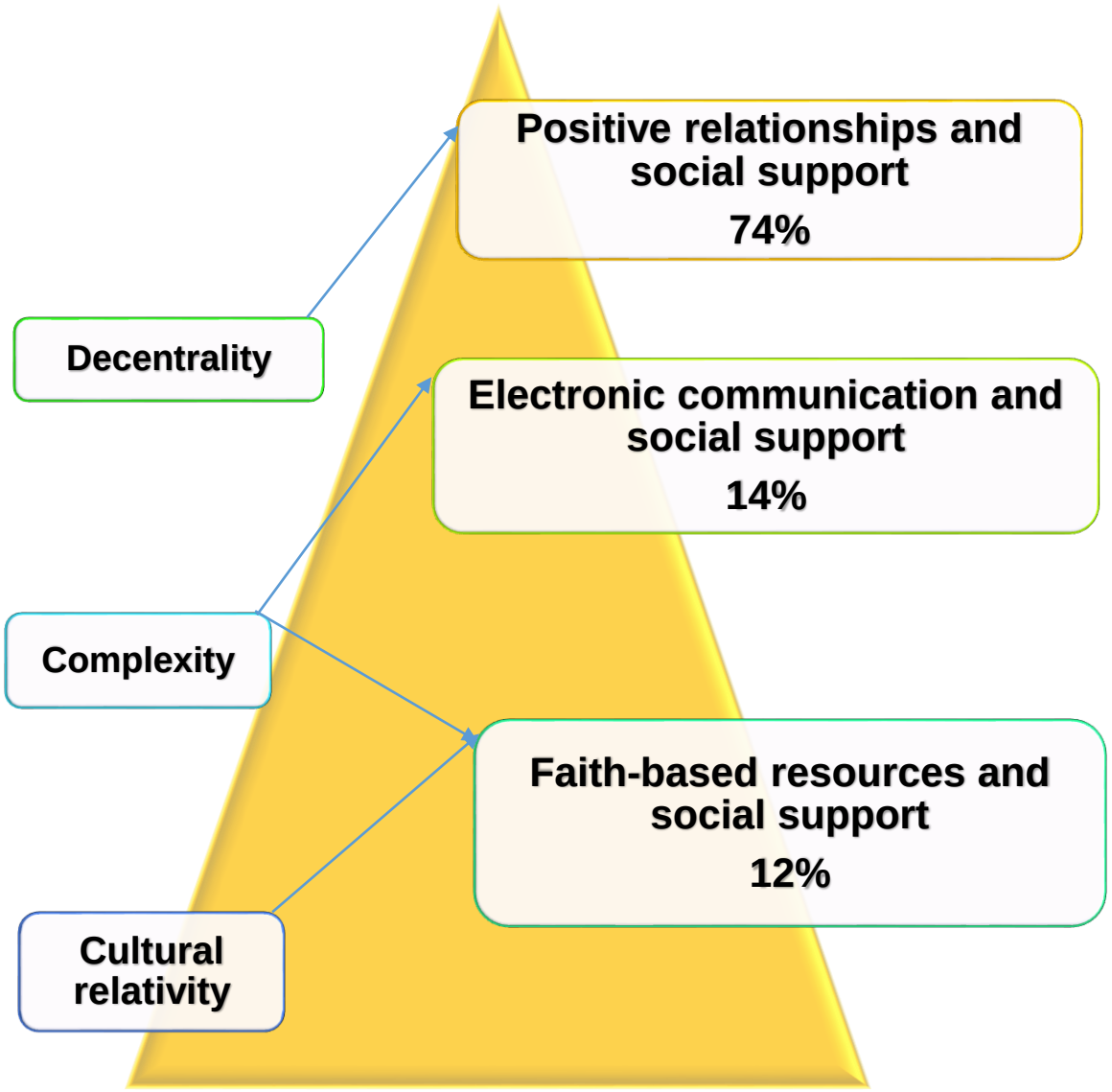

Figure 5.1: An overview of my study's findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework used

The findings of my study emerged from the 43 documents generated by adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment known as Zamdela, who formed part of the RYSE-RuSA research project. As indicated in Chapters Three and Four, I identified three thematic categories in the data which focused on how social media and other opportunities for social support supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment (Zamdela) during the COVID-19 pandemic. In

my study, adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment (Zamdela) identified that electronic communication facilitated emotional and informational support; positive relationships facilitated emotional, informational and instrumental support; and faith-based activities facilitated emotional and informational support.

The least prominent theme reported in my study during the COVID-19 pandemic was that faith-based activities facilitated emotional and informational support – it was reported by five of 43 (12%) documents. Although existing South African resilience studies report on the value of faith-based activities in enabling adolescents' resilience during adversities (e.g., Brittian et al., 2013; Estrada et al., 2019; Gunnestad & Thwala, 2011), there was limited reporting in my study on how faith-based activities facilitated emotional and informational support has supported the resilience of adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns well with a review of South African resilience studies, which found that religious resources were not as prominent compared to relational and personal resources (van Breda & Theron, 2018). This might have been even more so during the pandemic, due to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations which restricted movement and access to organised faith-based activities/communities (Kgatle, 2020).

In my study, it was evident that electronic communication facilitated emotional and informational support, but only for a limited number of participants. In other words, this was apparently not a prominent source of resilience for adolescents living in Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, only six of 43 documents (14%) mentioned that electronic communication facilitated emotional and informational support. This low number aligns well with African studies (Senekal et al., 2022; Spaull & van der Berg, 2020) I reported in Chapter Two, as they mentioned that most adolescents living in resource-constrained environments did not have access to the internet and personal electronic devices. Similarly, Desai and Burton (2022), Duby et al. (2022) and Senekal et al. (2022) reported that South African adolescents living in resource-constrained environments lacked access to personal electronic devices and the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic and encountered disruptions in their educational and social lives. Therefore, it is more likely that only adolescents that had access to the internet and personal devices were able to use social media as a source of emotional and informational social support during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In contrast, the findings of my study indicated that positive relationships facilitated emotional, informational and instrumental support and were the most prominent source of resilience among adolescent participants living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, 32 of 43 documents (74%) mentioned that positive relationships facilitated emotional, informational and instrumental support that supported resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. This aligns well with the existing resilience literature in the South African context, which found that positive relationships as a source of social support were key enablers of the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment before the pandemic (van Breda & Theron, 2018) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Duby et al., 2022; Gittings et al., 2021). Notably, these 32 documents reported that positive relationships that supported their resilience were mainly adolescents' immediate family members like mothers, parents/caregivers, grandmothers and siblings. The aforesaid might have been due to the COVID-19 lockdown regulations where there were restrictions on movement and access to other social resilience enablers (Spaull & van der Berg, 2020).

The theoretical framework for my study was Ungar's (2011, 2012, 2015) SETR approach to understanding resilience. The SETR emphasises the value of mutual interactions between adolescents and the social-ecological systems they are connected to, such as family, school, culture and community. In Figure 5.1, I illustrated the three SETR principles that related to the findings of my study which are decentrality, complexity and cultural relativity. However, the principle of atypicality was not well represented in the results of my study. I will now discuss these principles further.

According to Jefferis (2016), the decentrality principle highlights the fact that resilience should not be understood as an individual's personal tendencies or traits. Instead, resilience happens when individuals engage or interact meaningfully with their environment. Further, for individuals to be able to overcome risks, their social ecology must provide resilience-enabling resources in order to counteract the risk (Ungar, 2015). The findings of my study align with the decentrality principle. As indicated in Figure 5.1, positive relationships (mostly immediate family members like their mothers, parents, grandmothers and siblings) facilitated emotional, informational and

instrumental social support that enabled the resilience of adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adolescents living there repeatedly reported that the emotional comfort, care, encouragement, advice, information, guidance, motivation and provision of basic necessities they received from their family, and to some extent peers and community, enabled their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. In other words, their personal resources were not central to how they explained their resilience; relational resources were central, with some social support also coming from faith-based structures and social media.

The principle of complexity highlighted that what used to promote resilience at one point in time might not promote it at a later stage as individuals grow and their environments change (Jefferis, 2016). Similarly, what is reported as resilience-enabling in one context, might not be reported in a different context (Masten, 2018). As a result, the process of resilience is complex. It does not only rely on the resource's availability, but also on the context and development/temporal meaning of the resource to effective (Ungar, 2011). The phenomenon of social media and faith-based activities not being highly reported in my study as an enabler of the resilience of adolescents living in Zamdela, a resource-constrained environment, during the COVID-19 pandemic brings to light the complexity of resilience. It was interesting to see that only a few documents mentioned that social media (14%) supported the resilience of participants. In comparison, various studies reported that social media was a prominent source of social support (and sometimes distress) overseas and in more privileged South African communities (Desai & Burton, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2021; Magson et al., 2020; Senekal et al., 2022). Therefore, this lack of reporting of social media as an enabler of resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic among adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela may be linked to their context. In Zamdela, as in other resource-constrained communities, there is limited access to the internet and to technological devices (Senekal et al., 2022). In this context, a resource (social media) that effectively supported adolescent resilience elsewhere would probably not be equally useful because it is not easily accessible. This may be significant for educational psychologists working in resource-constrained communities in South Africa. They should not assume that widely reported resources,

like social media, will be helpful, as the usefulness of resilience-enabling resources is likely dependent on the situational context.

A situational context is not the only factor that can influence resource usefulness. According to Ungar (2015), the principle of cultural relativity is a reminder that culture frequently influences what supports adolescents' resilience. In other words, the traditions, norms and values practiced within a specific culture-sharing group can make specific protective resources more available and/or more valued. For example, Ubuntu (the humaneness between people within a society; van Breda, 2019) and faith-based resources are reported by African adolescents as resilience supporting (van Breda & Theron, 2018). My study's reporting of faith-based resources may be significant for educational psychologists working in South Africa, as this is a reminder that spirituality/organised religion is valued in African culture (Brittian et al., 2013; Estrada et al., 2019; Gunnestad & Thwala, 2011; Mashaphu et al., 2021). Still, relatively few documents referred to faith-based resources. As mentioned earlier, that could be because of COVID-19 impacts such as restriction of religious gatherings in South Africa for most of 2020 (Ozili, 2020). In that way, this theme is also a reminder that resilience is complex. In times of disaster, such as pandemics, it is possible that some resources will not be available.

One of the SETR principles was not represented in my findings – atypicality. According to Ungar (2011), the atypicality principle emphasises non-typical or risky ways that individuals use in order to cope with adversities. For example, some adolescents who were street-connected engaged in high-risk sexual behaviours as a means of survival (Hills et al., 2016). In the context of my study, I did not find any document that reported adolescents using risky behaviours or other atypical coping mechanisms to support their resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. I think this might be because they were scared that they might be judged by the research team, or perhaps they shared the device that they communicated on with the research team with their family members and did not want them to be aware of such behaviours. In other words, it is possible that the participants did use atypical coping mechanisms but were silent about these.

5.3 REFLEXIVITY

Reflexivity is described as a researcher being aware of how their subjectivity could affect the research process and outcome (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). Reflexivity on the part of the researcher entails considering how their thinking developed, how their prior knowledge changes as the study proceeds, and how this in turn affects the research (Finlay, 2002). According to Creswell (2014), factors such as gender, race, personality traits, language, sexual orientation and views have an impact on how researchers are positioned in the study. Positioning describes the researcher's attitude towards participants' age, culture, religion, gender and sexual orientation (Ratele, 2019). According to Varpio et al. (2019), the researcher and participants of the study influence one another continuously throughout the research process and the researched need to be aware of this.

In my case, I used my knowledge and experience as an African, Tshivenda speaking young woman who grew up in a resource-constrained environment to engage with the data. I acknowledge that this could have shaped how I made meaning of the data, but I was careful not to let my positioning and knowledge of social media and other opportunities of social support distort how I immersed myself in the dataset or how I analysed the data, even if it had an impact on how I approached the study. Relatedly, I established three preconceived themes (emotional support; instrumental support; informational support) and looked carefully for mention of social media or other opportunities that gave adolescents access to emotional, instrumental or informational social support in the deselected data. I worked with a peer, whose positioning was very different from mine to double-check the meaning I was making. I also declared my assumptions. According to Pitard (2017), assumptions researchers make before engaging with the data can affect how they ask questions and analyse data.

In reflecting on the assumptions I made in my study (see Section 1.7), I can see that not all these assumptions were confirmed by the findings of my study. I assumed that social media, supportive adults and service providers would have offered social support and support the resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the documents of the adolescent participants reported that positive relationships (mostly immediate family members like their mothers, parents, grandmothers and siblings) facilitated emotional, informational and instrumental social

support during the COVID-19 pandemic, they did not include service providers or emphasise social media as I had expected. This has broadened my understanding of the challenges South African adolescents face and their impact on the resources they draw from when faced with adversities such as COVID-19-related risks. As an educational psychologist in training, my study highlighted the importance of exploring (rather than making assumptions about) resources that the client might draw from while faced with adversities while also considering the client's context.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

In reflecting on my study, I noticed several limitations. These included the following:

- I conducted a qualitative secondary study and I did not engage in the process of data generation with adolescents from Zamdela. Despite not being able to engage in the process of data generation, I had access to the documents (drawings and explanation) generated by Zamdela adolescents through the RYSE-RuSA research team which provided enough data to answer my research question. Still, not engaging with the participants themselves was a limitation because it was not possible for me to probe for more information, particularly information related to my research questions.
- I only worked with documents produced by school-attending adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela, and their insights informed this study's findings. Considering that some adolescents living in resource-constrained environments are not school-attending (Mokoena & van Breda, 2021; Statistics South Africa, 2022), if non-school adolescents were included, I wonder if the results of my study would have been different (Grazzani et al., 2022).
- Given that I only worked with the Time 1 dataset, my study provided a time-limited understanding of how social media and other opportunities for social support supported the resilience of adolescents living in a resource-constrained environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Any study of resilience would benefit from a longitudinal design as resilience being complex (Masten, 2014). According to van Rensburg et al. (2015), the use of cross-sectional designs is problematic as they limit understanding of the pathways of resilience and how these change over time.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.5.1 Recommendations relating to future research

I recommend that more geographically and age-diverse groups of adolescents living in resource-constrained environments be included in future studies. Specifically, future studies need to replicate this study in other resource-constrained environments using a larger sample to explore whether social media and other opportunities for social support are enablers of the resilience of adolescents living in resource-constrained environments, also in crisis or disaster times that are similar to the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research should also include adolescents who have dropped out of school, in order to explore how relevant social media and other opportunities of social support are to this specific group of young people. Ideally, these future studies should be longitudinal. According to van Rensburg et al. (2015), longitudinal studies are preferable, as resilience-enabling resources such as social support systems relate dynamically to the resilience of adolescents.

5.5.2 Recommendations relating to educational psychologists

The findings of my study can be applied to similar contexts. As a result, my findings are potentially useful for educational psychologists who champion the resilience of adolescents living in resource-constrained communities in South Africa. In particular, the findings of my study emphasise the significance of positive relationships in enabling the resilience of adolescents living in resource-constrained environments when they are faced with life adversities. Knowing that social support from people (rather than via social media) is a prominent resilience-enabler may also influence the type of intervention offered by educational psychologists; for example, exploring the available support systems within an adolescent's life and supporting adolescents to make good use of these supports. It would also be useful to educate families and communities about the importance of positive relationships to the resilience of adolescents and to encourage them to be as supportive as they can.

5.6 CONCLUSION

Ryunosuke Satoro, a poet, states, “Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.” In the context of my study, “Together” may refer to social support systems such as positive relationships, faith-based resources and social media that enabled the resilience of adolescents living in the resource-constrained environment of Zamdela during COVID-19. Satoro’s words serve as a reminder to educational psychologists that adolescents are social beings. Therefore, it is important to explore their support systems and create collaborative relationships between different systems in their life. The findings of my study indicate that even when faced with the COVID-19 related risks, adolescents living in resource-constrained environments were able to manage challenges through the social support offered through positive relationships. In other words, social support matters for adolescent resilience even in the most trying times. To this end, educational psychologists should collaborate with adolescents and their social support systems as a way of using such systems to support the resilience of adolescents living in resource-constrained environments, like Zamdela, in times of crisis, such as pandemics.

https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/479992-individually-we-are-one-drop-together-we-are-an-ocean

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Table for verifying codes

Social support

Betancourt and Khan (2008) describe social support as comprising instrumental, informational and emotional support. **Instrumental support** is any material help and assistance offered to adolescents in order for them to carry out necessary tasks. **Informational support** refers to information or guidance given to adolescents in order for them to carry out day-to-day activities successfully. **Emotional support** is explained as caring and emotional comfort received by adolescents from others.

Table 3.1: Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Emotional support	Any data referring to adolescents receiving care, support and emotional comfort from social media, others (e.g., interactions that provide adolescents with love, a sense that one matters, and encouragement) or institutions (e.g., faith-based organisations).	Any data referring to young people caring for themselves emotionally (e.g., doing something to comfort themselves)
Instrumental support	Any data referring to the provision or sharing of material resources to assist adolescents in resolving crisis or dealing with stress (e.g., assistance offered to adolescents by others in order for them to carry out necessary tasks or meet their	Any data referring to adolescents being able to provide for themselves (e.g., adolescents generating an income and buying food for themselves).

	basic needs, like food, housing, education or clothing).The source of this support could be any relationship, social media, or any institution.	

Informational support	Any data referring to information or guidance given to adolescents by any institution, social media or other people in order for them to carry out day-to-day activities successfully (e.g., advice and empowerment programmes provided to adolescents by others).	Any data referring to adolescents gaining information or guidance that was coercive, false, or not supportive (e.g., fake news about COVID-19 remedies; messages encouraging people to avoid vaccines).

PARTICIPANT NO.	QUOTE/EVIDENCE QUESTION 1 & 2	INSTRUMENTAL SOCIAL SUPPORT	INFORMATIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT	EMOTIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT
V049_F_16_24-10-2020	"The sun as you can see has a female figure. It resembles my mother because she always showers me with her love, smile and she sings for me so that I can feel better.			✓
V051_M_17_24-10-2020	"What has made me to do well in life are my mother's words of encouragement. The motivational words that she speaks to me makes me to want to do more about life."			✓

V070_M_16_06-11-2020	"The drawing that have drawed (sic) helps me with lots things. I can design posters. It helps to get people on hold. I can help people with phone errors or update their system."		√	
V072_F_16_06-11-2020	"Me talking about things that did not sit well with me, also helped me, venting out to my friends and family really helped."			√
V075_F_16_06-11-2020	"What helped me to do well when life is hard is my bible and church. They offer sessions for the youth to talk about their life		√	

	challenges and experiences."			
V076_F_16_06-11-2020	"The picture I drew simply means that whenever, I have any problem I go to someone whom I feel comfortable talking to or trust then I tell the person what's wrong."			√
V083_M_17_24-10-2020	"My drawing simply means in every bad or sticky situation, my parents are always there for me. Even though my environment or society is not friendly I always depend on my parents."			√

V084_F_16_24-10-2020	“My grandmother was always there to give support and advises be there also as both mother and father figure.”		√	√
V085_M_17_24-10-2020	“I drew a church because it is a place where I find peace and I get to unite with many Christians. My church has helped me with many things like being faithful and showing respect to others.”		√	√
V088_F_19_24-10-2020	“I go to the bible study room, the after church I talk			√

	to the pastor then I feel better."			
V089_F_16_24-10-2020	"What helped me to do well is to always listen to my elders when they are premending (sic) of something wrong that I did."		√	
V094_F_17_24-10-2020	"This drawing or picture it shows my family. In life I realised that when times are hard my family will always be there for me and they support me a lot. I am so happy that I have most supporting family who always motivate me and advise me."		√	√

V096_F-17_24-10-2020	“I once lost hope and I wanted to give u in life. My friends came to me and asked me to join them at church after I told them my problems. So after going to church I’ve realised that is wasn’t the end of the world it was just the beging (sic). I’ve learnt not to give up until I reach my destiny.”		√	√
V098_M_21_03-12-2020	“My mom always gave me care from when I was young and from when I was a big teenage (sic). She always made me feel good all the time. She was with me during hard days, when			√

	friends has abandoned me she was always by my side."			
V104_F_18_03-12-2020	"When life is hard, I try to talk about it to my mother, she always has got the best advices and I believe she will never mislead me as she always wants what's best for me."		√	
V118_F_19_04-12-2020	"During my hopeless moments I take my phone and search inspirational messages and motivations and I feel okay." "My mother is my everything! She stands by me when times are difficult,			√

	she is my shoulder to cry on. She motivates and tell me not to lose hope when times are tough."			√
V124_F_19_04-12-2020	"My drawing explains the support and the love that I get from mother. She is always there for me, she supports me during hard times, and, and she supports me academically. "	√		√
V129_M_19_04-12-2020	"My cellphone helps me when I'm down it either I call someone tell tell him/her how I feel or a listen to music. It helps me to study, I watch videos about certain topic, I listen		√	√

	to news, when in emergency I call someone. “			
V130_M_19_04-12-2020	“My mom and dad are always there for me. They love and support me. They give me strength to see life as meaningful as it is. “			√
V131_F_19_04-12-2020	“My drawing is about my grandmother who always advice me and let me know if I have done wrong. She encouraged me to continue writing poems and drama because she believes that I am good at that. “		√	√

V133_F_20_04-12-2020	"If I talked to that people I become courage (sic) and motivated. Sometimes things in life bothers me a lot but my family incourages (sic) me. "			√
V136_M_20_04-12-2020	"That's my sister, she helps me to understand when I feel like am lost she always find a way out to give me solution of my problems. The best thing about her is that she is caring, supportive and she is telling the true like doesn't hide everything from me. She always providing for me."	√	√	√

V146_M_18_25-03- 2020	“My cellphone helps me from everything that bothers me in my home. I listen to music when I am sad it lifts me up. I contact my friends and tell them how I am feeling. I get on social media and get to know other people.”			√
V153_F_18_09-12-2020	“Listening to lyrics of some songs like gospel and going to church motivates me to do better. Writing down what’s bothering me and burn it. Go to the park or somewhere quite make me happy and calm. Speaking with others and		√	√

	hear their stories. Being active or playing.”			
V210_F_19_09-12-2020	“I also tend to find peace when socialising with my friends and peers in social media more especially on Facebook.”			√
V223_F_04-12-2020	“I am a good person I love people. I like spending my day with my family and best friend. My secrets I tell my bestfriend. What I like about me she understand me. I am happy about my life. The thing I like about my parents is that they care about me and my two			√

	sibling. The always make sure I am happy."			
V226_F_17_09-12-2020	"I have a supporting mother, she's my heroine, she's (sic) always there when I need her the most, so when life is hard I always get the greatest support and best advices from her, she's a great adviser. When life is hard, I always confide to my friends, they are the best and they are always there for me when I need them."		✓	✓
V230_M_21_09-12-2020	"Mom has always cared for me she has always been for me during difficult times. She supported me	✓		✓

	when everyone, abondened (sic) me. She gave me warmth love since I was born. Mom has the most love that can not (sic even measured for me. She always make sure that I am happy all the time. She makes sure that I don't sleep with an empty stomach."			
V231_F_20_09-12-2020	"My mom has been there for me when everybody had turned their backs on me. She always encourage me to do better in life. She love and supports me. She always ask me if I am okay, if not she asks me what is the problem. Even though I		√	√

	wanted to drop out at school, she told me to never give up because education is a key to success. She told me that in order to become a better person I have to finish school and go to tertiary and find a good job. I love my mom so much and I want her to be proud of me."			
V251_M_22_09-12-2020	"Family because of they have always supported me through out (sic) difficult times and they help me mostly to do well in life."			✓
V252_M_20_09-12-2020	"My cellphone helps me to de-stress, when I'm not			

	feeling well. I listen to music, social network or search most things in google I have study books on my phone, notes and most important things."		√	√
V253_F_19_09-12-2020	"My mother, she supported me more than everything, she encourages me to not give up in life."			√
V255_M_20_09-12-2020	"When life is hard I go to old people or my teachers so that they could give me advices on how to approach a situation. My teachers are the ones I go to them every time I have a difficulties in life and they		√	

	help me the most of the time."			
V257_F_19_09-12-2020	"My family has always been there for me, through all the difficult journey I have been through they are there to support and guide me."			√
V260_F_18_09-12-2020	"My parents help me to be better in life like buying me things that I don't have, they want the best for. In school teachers advises us to be respectful and to be courageous. If a obstacles come you have to be calm and if you failed you have to try again. Friends we indulge together, playing	√	√	√

	together and advises each."			
VO-012_15_F_27-04-2020	"The picture above is about girls that are playing netball, this sport has helped me a lot because I managed to forget about everything that have happened in my life."			√
VO-013_F_17_12-05-2020	"The picture is all about girls who are motivated to one of the speaker. They are listening to the motivational speaker who is talking about empowering girls in their life. This helped me not to gossip about other children, and to take care		√	

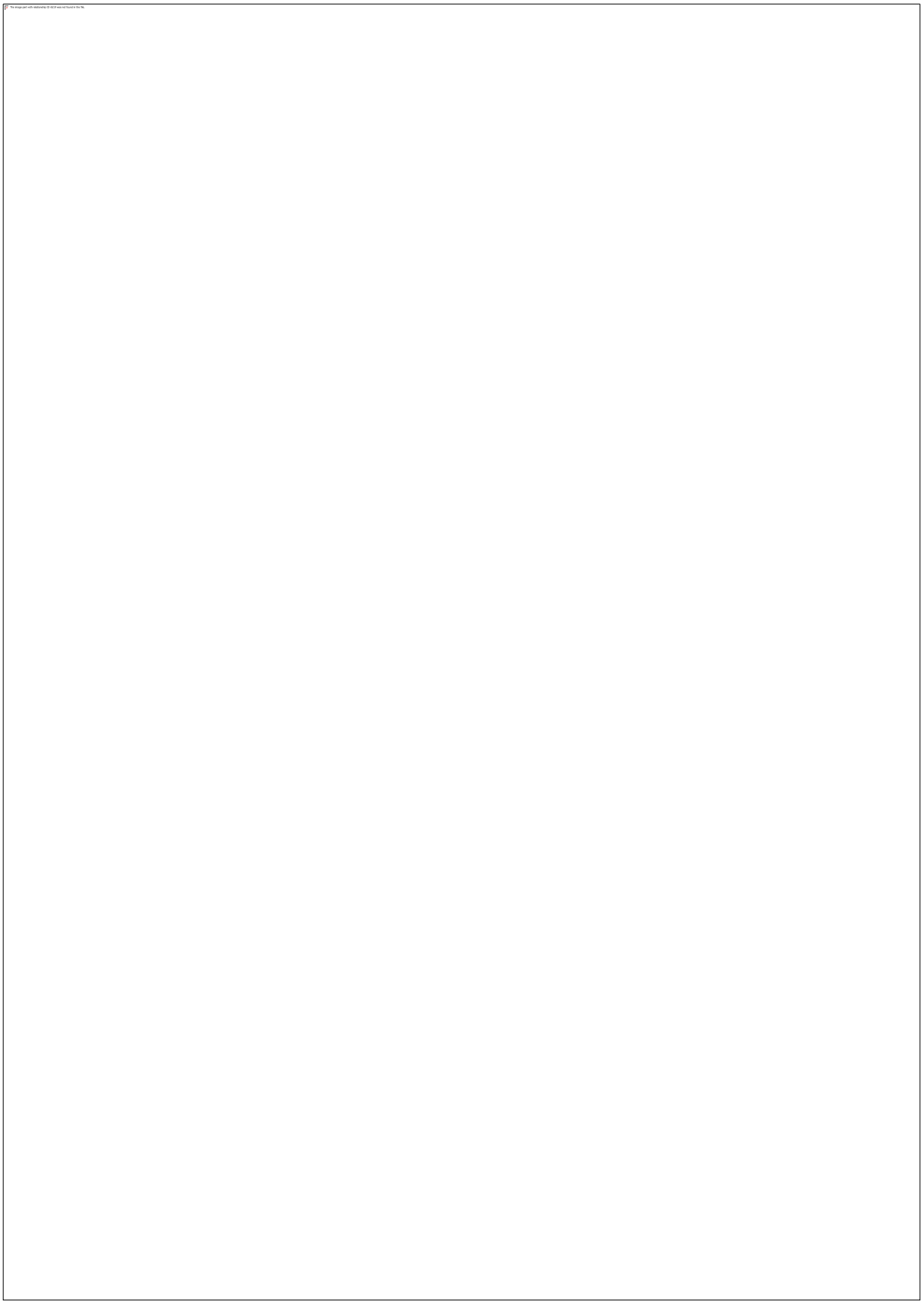
	of myself and not to allow boys to use me in a certain time and respect my parents."			
VO-031_F_16_07-07-2020	"The picture that I drew is of people/things I have had and still have that helped me through so bad times/helped me to do well in my life. And this things/people are, my teachers, my mom, my love for music, my friends and cello."			✓
VO-050_F_16_30-09-2020	"My brother has always inspired me in him running a spaza in the yard has made me see the importance of working hard			

	and believing in ourselves can be one of the things that help one to make it in life. My brother has been through the worst things in her life but he has always been able to persuade his dream as his running spaza and studying. He has made me see even if we cannot afford certain things the little things we have we have we can work toward them to make both our parents happy and proud of us."		√	
VO-068_F_17_27-07-2020	"Being surrounded by sisters who believe that			√

	you can actually make it are the best. “			
VO-070_F_16_05-08-2020	“It was my parents. There always told me that I must work hard so that I can be successful.”		√	
VO-072_M_16_04-08-2020	“My parents, they always tell me I must work hard so that I can be a millionaire.”		√	
VO-073_F_15_28-07-2020	“This is me and my family, having them in my life brought nothing but happiness in my life.”			√
VO-083_F_16_12-08-2020	“My sister has always encouraged me to do well in my studies and she			√

	made me feel like I'm the most special girl ever."			
VO-090_F_16_25-08-2020	"It simply means that whenever I feel like I'm not worth it, once a month I attend a Victorious girls foundation and the speakers really motivate me and they help me to improve my self-esteem."		√	

APPENDIX B: Ethical clearance for the greater study



APPENDIX C: Ethical clearance for my study

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA
Faculty of Education

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	CLEARANCE NUMBER: **UP 17/05/01 THERON 21-03**
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd Social media, other opportunities for social support, and resilience of adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Lufuno Ravhengani
DEPARTMENT	Educational Psychology
APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY	21 June 2021
DATE OF CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	03 October 2022

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE: Prof Funke Omidire

CC Mr Simon Jiane
Prof Linda Theron

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

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